

## NEUROLINGUISTIC PROGRAMMING IN SPORTS

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### Abstract

In this article, we examine the literature presented on the use of neurolinguistic programming (NLP) in the world of sports. The techniques have been applied with success in a number of occasions at different skill levels to improve performance. NLP operates on the principle that human beings have the capacity to set and achieve their goals, and gives a framework in which these objectives can be attained. These principles have been observed in both a theoretical and practical way in relation to sports. In the first part of the article, we review the theoretical literature on the topic. From a theoretical standpoint, scholars have asserted that the perception of reality through the senses plays an important role, and this perception can be influenced by the language we use. Clear communication in teaching is vital for training athletes to reach their potential. In the second part, we look at applications of NLP in different spheres of sports and the way it is applied to real athletes with certain obstacles hindering their progress. We attempt to summarize this literature and present a potential path for future research. There have been criticisms of NLP, so it is important to consider them in an unbiased way, giving thought to what can be done in the future to give answer to them.

**Key words:** Neurolinguistic programming, sports, performance, interventions, communication, language.

### Introduction

Neurolinguistic programming (NLP) is a psychological approach used by individuals to attain their objectives in life. The process involves adopting strategies from others who have already been able to reach a high level of success and applying these strategies to achieve personal goals. This approach analyzes thoughts, language, and behavior patterns acquired through experience and then relating them to life in order to attain specific results. Neurolinguistic programming coaching techniques are potentially powerful tools and are only to be used to be beneficial to all people involved (Lazarus, 2010: 3–6). For the proponents of NLP, all human affairs are positive. Hence, if the outcome turns out to be what was not expected, the results are interpreted as neither positive nor negative, but they are taken simply as a learning opportunity for those involved. Neurolinguistic programming is a model of interpersonal communication primarily focusing on the relationship between successful behavior patterns and subjective

experiences (Savardelavar and Bagheri, 2012: 1922). Neurolinguistic programming is a system of alternative therapy. Its main objective is to educate people on self-awareness, how to be effective communicators, and to alter their mental and emotional patterns. In short, proponents of neurolinguistic programming feel that there is a connection between neurological processes, the language we use, and the behavioral patterns we develop. This connection can be changed using NLP in order to help achieve desired outcomes in life. There are several psychological techniques that make up neurolinguistic programming, and they are all geared toward enhancing the lives of the people involved in the program.

Neurolinguistic programming may also refer to the connection between the patterns of behavior, language, and the neurological processes that have been acquired through experience. This connection is organized in a way that enhances the achievement of specific individual life goals. Neurolinguistic programming relies on several other disciplines, and hence it is a life coaching technique model. Neurolinguistic programming improves the coaches, psychologists, and other important stakeholders to categorize and respond appropriately to the athlete's experiences in his or her sport. Neurolinguistic programming can become an integral part of sports psychology. It incorporates the concepts of both a humanistic approach and cognitive-behavioral perspectives.

The purpose of NLP in sports is to enhance individual performance in their respective fields. Just as individuals in other fields, athletes set goals and hope to achieve certain objectives. Neurolinguistic programming helps the sportsmen and women remain focused on their goals while managing and controlling their emotional states appropriately. A competitive environment is often a very emotional environment, so this control takes paramount importance. In sports coaching, NLP is aimed to produce specific desirable outcomes. Neurolinguistic programming is vital in sports as it is employed to deal with different kinds of phobia and enhance the motivation of the athletes. The sportsmen and women are exposed to a range of experiences, and because of this, they can choose from a variety of alternatives. Many researchers have dedicated themselves to study the field of neurolinguistic programming in sports. These include such researchers as Jeremy Lazarus, Meisam Savardelavar, and Vlad Grosu. These researchers have based their studies on several principles, including the flexibility of individual behavior change and the belief that human beings have the inherent potential to act to achieve their goals. Another principle held by proponents of NLP in sports is that the response directly determines communication success. If an individual communicates well, he or she will get better answers than before. Those who practice NLP maintain that an individual are in charge of his or her own mind, and therefore they have taken control of their lives.

Several methods can be employed in neurolinguistic programming research. These study methods include internal maps of the world, which focus on the interaction of the mind, body, and the language of an individual to form a particular perception of the world. Modeling is another method of study, and it involves adopting the behaviors, beliefs, and strategies of another successful person and trying to emulate what they do. The Milton-model is another research method employed in NLP, and it entails the use of language to induce the activation of an individual's hidden personality potential (Zeb and Hameed, 2021: 197). Still another technique is representational systems that focus on the senses as essential tools for acquiring information stored in mind. Lastly, neurolinguistic programming employs meta-programs that involve an analysis of an individual's habitual patterns. This analysis is, in turn, used to decide which of the athlete's perceptions should be given the most attention in the employment of NLP. Combined, these methods offer sportsmen and women greater opportunity to reach their goals.

The **Topicality** of the research is the application of NLP in sports and how methods belonging to NLP can be applied in the realm of athletics. In addition, the **aim** is to examine the research done on the topic in an effort to determine the most effective manner that coaches and athletes can incorporate NLP into their training so that each athlete's ability can reach its maximum potential.

The **Tasks** of the research are:

- Assess the work done in the field in a general sense, through the overall lens of Neurolinguistic programming.
- Identify specific approaches that have proved to be the most effective in applying NLP to the realm of sports.
- Identify shortcomings that could be addressed in future research.

The **object** of this research is the theories and methods behind Neurolinguistic programming. The **subject** is the examination of these methods in specific instances whereby they are applied and most effectively utilized in the athletic world.

The **practical application** is the obtaining of a firmer grasp of what methods have proven to be effective and to understand the most logical direction of future examination by identifying the lack in the current research.

## Communication in Teaching

Neurolinguistic programming (NLP) is considered a field of knowledge and practice essential for professionals in different fields to attain their objectives, and it is intricately connected to communication (Bashir and Mamuna, 2012: 216). Neurolinguistic programming employs psychological interventions based on believing that everyone can achieve excellence in their respective fields and become an outstanding performer. As a model of excellence, NLP rides on the assumption that human beings possess innate potentials that can be activated to improve their performance in the various fields. Neurolinguistic programming is an integrated discipline as it can be applied in any professional field, including sports, to improve performance. Proponents of NLP hold that excellence is not a matter of talent but something that anyone can achieve. To excel in any field, the person must first free him or herself from negative thought processes and simply focus on their goals.

NLP employs certain principles of linguistics in its therapeutic approach that helps individuals to emerge as excellent performers (Bashir and Mamuna, 2012: 218). The significance of language in the phenomenon of communication and change cannot be over-emphasized. In a study done by Shiva Ahmadzadeh, it was established that human behavior is not random, but it has a well-formed structure that can be studied (Ahmadzadeh, 2019: 6). Neurolinguistic programming helps people to excel by learning the language patterns of outstanding performers and modeling them. An individual's behavioral patterns can be traced directly from their language patterns, which is what NLP focuses on. The process of observing and learning from others is referred to as modeling. Modeling entails focusing on the skills that one wishes to learn from an excellent performer. One acquires the relevant skills through modeling and practicing them.

Language is crucial to human beings as it is through this medium that people learn, communicate, think, and can acquire understanding on a vast range of topics (Bashir and Mamuna, 2012: 218). Though some knowledge is acquired through sensation, it can only be transmitted through language. Generally, language has a great capacity to

dominate and influence human behavior. Someone's thought process has the potential to change the state of that person completely. By listening to their own or even other people's words, human beings get motivated, bored, ready to learn, and prepared to act. Language can evoke strong feelings and actions, and hence NLP interventions are critical in boosting performance. Humans cannot survive without the use of language because communication takes place every day. Neurolinguistic programming takes advantage of the power of language, and hence, in applying NLP techniques, it is important to learn the art of language.

Neurolinguistic programming can be applied very effectively in a "teaching-learning" environment. Of course, this includes most settings in the sports world since athletes work in coordination with coaches. This association between the coach and the athlete is a relationship that is based on consistent feedback (Bashir and Mamuna, 2012: 219). Without this feedback, the athlete cannot accurately know where he has reached a high level of performance and what areas still need improvement. An effective coach must learn the best ways in which to communicate information to the athlete. The most successful means of communication are not the same for every athlete, so a coach must also learn to adapt his style to meet the needs of the athlete. To do this, the teacher must be cognizant of the fact that behaviors, attitudes, and linguistic patterns used in giving feedback are critical to the success that the athlete can attain in his sport (Bashir and Mamuna, 2012: 220).

Neurolinguistic programming has shown that it facilitates the improvement of individuals' lives by enabling them to communicate more effectively with both others and themselves (Bashir and Mamuna, 2012: 220). Neurolinguistic programming enhances interpersonal relationships and professional performance. It helps individuals to attain their goals as it allows them to remain focused. It has few limits, and, thus, it is relevant to professionals in any field. Individuals and organizations can develop and improve their performances through the NLP interventions. People get motivated, which in turn contributes to improved performance. Learning processes and performance in other fields such as sports depend heavily on neurolinguistic programming. Human behavior, beliefs, skills, and values are acquired through learning. NLP helps in the process in which internal representation and sequences of acts are developed and modified. Neurolinguistic programming has undoubtedly great potential for almost all professions that entail the use of language. There are various techniques and strategies that NLP employs in its interventions to promote outcomes in different occupations. Important qualities such as beliefs and skills are acquired through NLP techniques (Bashir and Mamuna, 2012: 220). Sports personalities promote their mental skills and improve their performances through NLP interventions. Athletes are enabled to learn from outstanding performers in the field and model them. NLP strategies and techniques help sports coaches be more resourceful and attain their professional goals more efficiently.

### **Reality Through the Senses**

The senses are an integral part of applying Neurolinguistic programming in different spheres of life. Sporting performance is improved by applying mental training techniques special techniques of neurolinguistic programming (NLP). The importance of sensation in the application of sports is emphasized in a study done by Vlad Teodor Grosu, as reality is perceived through the five senses (Grosu, 2015: 8). This study focused on subjective experience, which tends to use one reason more than the others. Neurolinguistic

programming individualizes representational systems depending on the preference of the individual (Grosu, 2015: 8). For the NLP interventions to manifest the desired outcomes, they must focus on conscious acts. Conscious acts must be distinguished from unconscious actions, and the former must be controlled acts. Neurolinguistic programming interventions in sports require the participating individuals to get into the habit of looking clearly at what they are seeing, listening to what they fear, and feeling what they do. Mental training entails optimizing the nervous system to form sensations and analyze reality. It is only through the senses that the central nervous system receives information about the outside actuality. External reality is always related to the individual's previous experience and knowledge of the past.

Neurolinguistic programming interventions require that self-talk must be positive and constructive (Grosu, 2015: 8). These make an impact on the individual's capability for critical thinking, decision-making, and fine motor skills even in a competitive environment. Furthermore, according to Draeger, there are four pillars of mental toughness that are identified and studied: setting goals, mental visualization, positive self-talk, and arousal control (Draeger, 2013: 42). Using these, an athlete can establish short-, mid-, and long-term goals in their application of NLP interventions (Draeger, 2013: 29). These interventions significantly impact the athletes' performance as it alters their body functioning, causing it to reach an optimal level. Neurolinguistic programming training is applied by focusing on the sensorial sub-modalities. In the study performed by Grosu, the participants had to imagine various movement activities and joint sensations, depending on the different sports in which they were participating. After undergoing the NLP interventions, there were notable improvements in the sports performance of the participants (Grosu, 2015: 14–15). Focusing on mental training through NLP techniques, the outcomes of sports performance improved considerably. Ideomotor representations are the basis of cognitive training, and this emphasizes the importance of sensory sub-modalities.

### **NLP Interventions for Better Decision Making**

According to research, successful personalities have been found to possess certain beliefs and attitudes that have helped them excel in their different fields. These findings formed the basis of studying the impacts of NLP interventions. NLP is pegged on two aspects, namely: the principles of success and the fundamental mindsets (Lazarus, 2010: 38). Successful application of the fundamental NLP principles leads one to excel in their field. To be successful, one must be aware of what they want and know what is happening around them. Flexibility is a prerequisite for success as well as building and maintaining a rapport. The individual must be focused on succeeding and preparing to take the necessary steps to achieve their goals. For instance, in sports, one must know, first of all, what one wants to achieve and be aware of both internal and external circumstances (Lazarus, 2010: 40). The athlete will also be required to show flexibility in their actions and decisions and cultivate a rapport with the coach and the other team members. Regular practicing is essential as the person focuses on the achievement of his/her goals.

Before beginning their activity, NLP requires the athletes to work on establishing exactly what they want to achieve. This includes reflecting on the specific tasks that one needs to perform in order to attain these goals (Lazarus, 2010: 42). Athletes should have a clear mind about their particular targets during every training session. They also need to know how these sessions would help them attain their goals and objectives. It is also

important for the athletes to notice what type of training is working and what is not working. This feedback helps them make the necessary adjustments in their training to achieve the desired results. Listening to others also plays a vital role in the improvement of performance. NLP has tools that enable one to assess if their message is being received as intended and whether it makes the necessary impact. Communication and feedback from the sports coaches are essential NLP interventions for sportsmen and women who want to improve their performance (Bashir and Mamuna, 2012: 220).

Depending on the feedback that one gets after an intervention, flexibility is necessary as one may be required to make some adjustments to achieve the desired outcomes (Lazarus, 2010: 41). One ought to know what they need to do differently and dedicate their time and effort to making these changes. For example, in sports training, one may be required to use another approach to achieve the set goals and objectives. One should be flexible enough to adapt to the needed changes easily. Neurolinguistic programming uses the term “rapport” to refer to a feeling of mutual trust between two people or two groups (NLPWorld, 2018). A deeper connection translates to a deeper relationship and the possibility of working together for a common goal. Athletes must perceive their coaches and instructors as people who are supporting them to accomplish their goals. They must trust them and do everything they request them to do, especially during the training sessions. Positive thinking and the adoption of the appropriate body movement and posture play a vital role in NLP. This is what NLP terms the psychology and physiology of excellence. It is very difficult to overemphasize the connection and relationship between the body and the mind. When one has a positive mindset, the body is triggered by the brain to perform as required. Athletes must pay close attention to the psychology and physiology of excellence during their training sessions. To attain the desired results, one must also be ready and willing to take action because it is in actions that goals are accomplished (Lazarus, 2010: 45).

Neurolinguistic programming makes some necessary presuppositions that play a significant role in the attainment of success (Lazarus, 2010: 46). It recognizes that different people possess various attitudes, beliefs, and experiences and, thus, calls for the respect of other people’s opinions. Foundations of cooperation are formed by recognizing various thoughts held by different individuals and showing respect to these diversities. Though one may not always agree with the other's point of view, respecting such beliefs helps cultivate harmony between the two individuals or even in groups. One also learns from others' experiences, considering that NLP advocates modeling the people who have previously excelled in each given field and working toward emulating these successful individuals. Effective communication is a vital NLP intervention that helps to promote and cultivate mental skills and to improve performance. Notably, knowledge is acquired and transmitted through communication using a language. Feedback is received through communication, and because of this, it is difficult to overemphasize the role of communication in NLP interventions.

Decision-making is a key aspect of NLP in sports. The participants are supposed to make the best choices out of the options available to them. Decision-making plays a pivotal role in goal setting and in working to achieve those goals. One must decide on the best approach to follow to attain their desired objective. However, if one chooses to follow a certain procedure and fails to yield the desired outcomes, they should be flexible enough to change their decisions and adopt another approach (Lazarus, 2010: 44). In NLP, this is not viewed as a negative thing, but it is simply an opportunity for the athlete to learn. Neurolinguistic programming proposes that modeling excellence leads to improved performance. Athletes should have models who are essentially people who have excelled

in their particular sport. Neurolinguistic programming works on the presupposition that human beings have innate capabilities and potential. The athletes should concentrate both their bodies and their minds on doing their best in the particular fields, which leads to excellence. In the world of sports, many competitors' performance is altered when they are in situations with increased pressure. Considering that pressure is created in the mind of an individual, it emphasizes the importance of concentrating both the body and the mind to achieve the set goals (Lazarus, 2010: 44). Reality is created from one's past experiences and beliefs, and, as a result, NLP is focused on helping individuals change their mindset and make better choices.

### **The Language Aspect**

Neurolinguistic programming (NLP) is a process that uses language to achieve an individual's specific and desired results on a consistent basis. The approach of NLP recognizes the prominence of the five external senses in the perception of the reality around us (Walter and Bayat, 2003: 83). The experiences acquired through the senses are coded and stored in the mind so that they can be communicated through the use of a language that may be either verbal or non-verbal. NLP is simply an instrument that helps individuals understand the coded programs in their brains and use them to achieve their goals. At first, NLP was used as psychotherapy, and through it, therapists were able to achieve their desired outcomes consistently (Adlam, 2015). In addition, NLP entails applying psychotherapy approaches in a broader sense for the achievement of one's goals and objectives. However, it is essential to note that NLP is distinct from psychotherapy. The NLP process has been applied to excellent model outcomes in different fields such as sports. For instance, sports coaching uses NLP techniques to model excellence and to help individuals visualize their success. NLP employs non-verbal language to communicate, which has proved to be very useful in attaining the desired outcomes. Neurolinguistic programming contributes to effective communication, which in turn impacts all other aspects of human life. Communication affects one's relationship with the people around them and helps an individual model the top performers in the different fields. Linguistics, as the word suggests, also plays a vital role in communication. The sub-languages in verbal communication are determined by how one would wish to experience the world through the external senses (Walter and Bayat, 2003: 83). The sensation is essential in the comprehension of verbal communication.

Neurolinguistic programming requires that one understands the sub-languages in speech patterns to improve communication and build and maintain rapport with those around them. Using effective communication is essential in all aspects of both personal and professional life. Sportspeople, for example, must communicate with their colleagues and their coaches during their training sessions. Feedback is received through this communication, and this helps one to know precisely what they need to do differently to improve their performance. As the athletes set their goals, this communication plays a significant role as they need to be well-informed in their decision-making. Neurolinguistic programming helps the participants to sharpen their mental skills and to improve performance in their respective fields.

An extensive theoretical framework has been laid upon which the practical applications of Neurolinguistic programming can be built. There are certain principles that must be considered as one examines the methods of NLP in a deeper measure. One of these principles is that language is an extremely powerful tool and can evoke strong

feelings in people. These feelings can then spur an individual to action. Because this tool is so effective, it is important to recognize the power of language in applying the techniques of NLP.

Another principle that is closely related to the power of language is the connection between the coach and the athlete. This is related to the power of language in the sense that it is through language that these individuals must communicate. The coach, possessing the knowledge of what must be done to improve, must clearly convey this knowledge to the athlete, the one who desires to reach their full potential.

Decision making is an essential step in reaching one's goals. At every point in the process, an individual is presented with options. Sometimes, these decisions that athletes make must be made in competitive, stressful environments. Neurolinguistic programming is an extremely beneficial tool in enabling someone to make the best decisions, even in these stressful situations. Keeping these principles in mind, can help us understand the theory behind the practical methods applied to NLP in the sports world.

### **Overcoming Emotional Hardships**

Neurolinguistic programming is able to be used as a psychological intervention in sports as well as in other fields. Sometimes, things happen that are beyond an athlete's control and these things can affect their emotional condition. In a study done by Meisam Savardelavar, two athletes were examined in order to determine if NLP could be useful in face these challenges. One way that NLP can be especially effective is in enhancing alterations of various neurological processes relationships and restructuring an individual's cognitive faculty and impact his/her behaviors (Savardelavar, Kuan, 2017: 49). Neurolinguistic programming is essential to sports personalities as its therapeutic nature helps sportspeople experiencing emotional hardships that are a result of physical injuries. This study's objectives were to examine NLP interventions' impacts on two basketballers suffering from competitive state anxiety after their rehabilitation program following severe physical injuries. This research was conducted using a case study approach, and the focus was to support the two players change their dysfunctional thoughts and memories following the injuries they had incurred. It had been established that these two players suffered from anxiety due to a series of negative thoughts in their minds. Before the NLP intervention, these players felt emotionally incapacitated to perform both in training and competition. After undergoing neurolinguistic programming sessions, the interventions positively contributed to helping the players overcome their competitive state anxiety. The NLP interventions successfully enhanced the athletes to cope and overcome the negative thoughts and the emotional strain and stress they suffered (Savardelavar, Kuan, 2017: 49).

The NLP interventions used in this study were able to help the athletes change their thought systems and focus on the positive aspects of their lives and performances. The athletes felt differently as a result of the interventions, and they now had confidence that they could perform in both training and competitive matches (Savardelavar, Kuan, 2017: 57). The NLP interventions successfully addressed dysfunctional thoughts and emotional anxiety, including thoughts about further injury. The NLP interventions were employed in the form of psychological and emotional counseling. These interventions focused primarily on internal sensations such as memory and emotions. The interventions also concentrated on physical sensations to address competitive state anxiety and eliminate dysfunctional thought systems (Savardelavar, Kuan, 2017: 52). The NLP interventions



found that language and non-conscious thoughts play a significant role in how individuals comprehend mental and physical events and react to such events. For instance, when individuals experience negative reviews, they will always experience negative reactions even if they try to focus on positive behavior (Savardelavar, Kuan, 2017: 52).

Neurolinguistic programming is remarkably effective in sports and also other settings, including clinical and educational settings. These NLP psychological interventions have been successfully used in physiotherapy, especially in rehabilitating athletes suffering severe physical injuries. The interventions have been found to relieve chronic pain and facilitate healing. Neurolinguistic programming interventions are also essential in investigating the emotional and psychological challenges related to sports injuries. When athletes suffer injuries, they are affected in their emotional and psychological faculties as they continue to imagine re-injury and a further failure in performance. The athletes appear to be more reserved even during training due to negative thoughts about injuries. Neurolinguistic programming interventions are essential in sports as they help such players recover emotionally and utilize their potentials to the maximum extent. They help an athlete in dealing with anxiety that comes as a result of injury and there is a resulting improvement of performance in sports.

Athletes need to be helped to cope with emotional hardships related to sports injuries. It is a rare athlete that can face this kind of thing on their own. Injured athletes require tailor-made interventions, and this has proved beneficial as it facilitates a successful re-entry into training and competitive matches (Savardelavar, Kuan, 2017: 56). The NLP interventions need to be adjusted specifically for the athlete depending on the particular needs to be helpful and effective. Neurolinguistic programming interventions in sports have shown that physical healing is often connected to higher emotions and the individual's thought system. When an injured person experiences positive thoughts and is emotionally stable, then the chances of recovery are much higher than if there are negative thoughts. Neurolinguistic programming remains an important psychological intervention in sports.

### **Interventions to Improve Cognition**

Although there are things, such as injury, that athletes cannot control, there are also many things that they are able to control. The mental skills required to focus fall under this wide umbrella. The NLP psychological interventions are significant in promoting mental skills and improving the performance of an athlete. Neurolinguistic programming impacts positively on the mental status of athletes and the result of this is an enhancement of their optimal performance. A study was conducted by Shiva Ahmadzadeh to gauge NLP interventions' effectiveness on shooters' cognitive skills and how they improve shooting performance. The research was quantitative and semi-empirical, whereby a group of 24 shooters was engaged (Ahmadzadeh, 2019: 1). After the study, the results showed that neurolinguistic programming interventions positively impacted the shooters' performance. Their mental skills and general performance both under normal conditions and while under pressure were tremendously improved. The study concluded that NLP interventions are critical in enhancing and promoting the participants' mental skills and performance (Ahmadzadeh, Badami and Aghaei, 2019: 6). To be a successful shooter, the person must have physical, technical, and mental capabilities. All three factors are essential as they play prominent roles in enhancing performance in the sport. There have been several studies on the effectiveness of psychological interventions in sports performance.

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The study showed that psychological interventions impact heavily on mental skills and general performance (Ahmadzadeh, Badami and Aghaei, 2019: 4).

Neurolinguistic programming interventions have been used for several years to boost performance in sports. It studies subjective experiences and the art of communication and personal excellence. These interventions help the participants organize their feelings, thinking, and language to attain optimum performance (Ahmadzadeh, Badami and Aghaei, 2019). Neurolinguistic programming revolutionizes the development of human and personal relations. It also enhances the mental resources while the verbal aspect facilitates access to the set objectives. These NLP interventions can be used to describe the relationship between the mind and the language; and how the two elements affect the body and the behavior of an individual (Ahmadzadeh, Badami and Aghaei, 2019). Neurolinguistic programming interventions use the infrastructure of relational therapy. Neurolinguistic programming can resolve diverse challenges either directly or indirectly in its interventions to help an athlete improve sports performance.

This study's findings were consistent with the previous studies that have examined the effectiveness of NLP interventions in improving mental skills and promoting performance in sports (Mahoney, et al 2015: 199–215). Neurolinguistic programming was found to be essential in addressing psychological issues such as anxiety and depression. Neurolinguistic programming interventions also promote sports self-awareness, the power of decision-making, and focusing on attention. Neurolinguistic programming interventions promote emotional growth and the development of effective communication skills. The study found that NLP helps shooters to set particular goals and helped them to remain focused to hit their targets in both a figurative and literal sense. The shooters were able to actualize their inner potential, which, in turn, enabled them to reach their desired end. This study's participants gained goal-setting skills as the NLP interventions enabled them to break the goals down into smaller short-term goals that could be more easily achieved (Ahmadzadeh, Badami and Aghaei, 2019). Each athlete was able to perform according to their capabilities using NLP interventions.

Neurolinguistic programming goal-setting techniques are based on the principle of necessity and importance of activities. The urgency of the various tasks also must be considered for the effective achievement of goals. In this study, the participants acquired skills to prioritize matters based on their importance and urgency. The right decision-making ability played a significant role in improving the shooters' performance and promoting their mental skills (Ahmadzadeh, Badami and Aghaei, 2019). Neurolinguistic programming interventions played an important role in enhancing the shooters' internal acceptance and commitment in achieving their objectives. The athletes worked with dedication and motivation, which helped them to attain their goals. Neurolinguistic programming interventions contributed to fostering the shooters' self-awareness and confidence (Ahmadzadeh, Badami and Aghaei, 2019: 6). According to sports psychologists, self-motivation plays a crucial role in enhancing performance in sports. The athletes are facilitated to actualize their inherent abilities to overcome the challenges they may face in attaining their goals. Neurolinguistic programming interventions help address psychological issues such as fatigue, pain, aches, and fear, which can adversely affect sports performance. In addition to this, the interventions also regulate the psychological factors faced by athletes, thereby leading to their optimal performance. Improvement in self-awareness and self-confidence contributed significantly to fostering mental skills and improving general performance in the sport.

## **The Mental and Physical Connection**

Athletes focus on results. It is important for them to feel good physically and to be sharp mentally, but if that does not result in measurable better performance on the playing field, then these things are in vain. Performance in sports can be improved by employing mental training techniques through neurolinguistic programming. In Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP), there is always a relationship between sensory sub-modalities and the results. In a study done by Vlad Grosu, et al, the term neuro was used to refer to the mutual influence between physiological indices and the body's internal state. Programming referred to the models and behavior programs and thinking that an individual follows to attain the desired outcomes (Grosu, 2015: 7). Mental training is an essential process that enhances performance in sports and other professional activities, and it is connected with results on the field. Language plays an important role in cognitive training for sportspeople. The role of language in improving sports performance is evidenced by the many slogans that have been used in sporting activities over time. These sports slogans often highlight the model that the participants of NLP interventions would want to model (Grosu, et al 2015: 8).

The term “modalities” was used in this study to refer to the symbolic systems, and they are related to the sensation (Grosu, et al 2015: 9). Effective communication plays a significant role in athletes’ mental training, enabling them to promote their cognitive skills and improve performance. The feeling is vital in NLP interventions such that if the optical channel stimulates an athlete, then images that increase the level of attention should be used more. Communication is crucial as it enables understanding of the representative system preferred by the team undertaking NLP interventions to make communication more personal and effective. The concept of modality is examined depending on how they are represented in the athlete's mind. The features that characterize each singular experience were classified as the sub-modalities in this study (Grosu, et al 2015: 9).

To achieve the desired results, the athletes undertaking NLP interventions must give the goal their undivided attention. The individual athletes must be present and strive to avoid any distractions from interfering with their activities. Mental training takes place when the brain is conscious and receptive. The brain then keeps a record of all the happenings. All sensory sub-modalities are essential in achieving the benefits of mental training (Grosu, et al 2015: 9). The NLP principles provide the necessary tools for the modification and optimization of the subjective experience. Every experience is treated as unique, and sensation plays a vital role in acquiring personal experiences. Neurolinguistic programming interventions attain the desired outcomes when participants understand the uniqueness of every adventure, realizing that the experience is another opportunity to learn (Grosu, et al 2015: 9). The importance of feeling cannot be overemphasized as it plays a significant role in subjective experience. The sensory sub-modalities are critical in attaining ideomotor representations underlying the significance of neurolinguistic programming.

### **Individual Styles**

Clear, open communication between athletes and their coach is of utmost importance in the application of NLP. In the modern world, communication has changed greatly as it now much more multimodal than it was in the past. Communication has

always been a key aspect of NLP, so it is essential to identify the athlete's preferred mode of communication. By utilizing questionnaires, a correlation was identified between visual sensations and kinesthetic sensations of 25 athletes on the national judo team of Romania (Grosu, Rusu and Grosu, 2013: 212). The athletes were female and were split into four different age groups. From the results of these questionnaires, it can be concluded that it is of great benefit for coaches to understand and incorporate the best means of communication for individual athletes (Grosu, Rusu and Grosu, 2013: 212).

Senses are the means by which the brain gets information from the world. In using NLP, one must understand the concept of ideomotor response, an unconscious motion or automatic muscular reaction. Often these motions are not even noticed by the one performing the motion, but if the athlete is made aware of the ideomotor representation, then it is possible to identify the sensory submodalities that are responsible. Once identified, submodality shifts can be used to alter habits, beliefs and to motivate an individual (Grosu, Rusu and Grosu, 2013: 213).

The NLP techniques incorporated in this study had not previously been applied in such a way in the athletic arena (Grosu, Rusu and Grosu, 2013: 213). In identifying the preferred form of communication of the athletes, reality can be understood more distinctly. The inferences a sportswoman makes, called attributions, and self-efficacy in this establishment of reality play a key role in her ability to be in a positive psychological state. Neurolinguistic programming offers many ways in which she can improve her performance and even the upper limits of performance. In answering the questions presented, the athletes' main communication channel was made clear after analysis. These questions were divided into three different areas: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic (Grosu, Rusu and Grosu, 2013: 213). After this information was known, it was possible to see the effect of the change of a communication submodality.

The visual submodalities researched were numerous and included, "brightness, acuity, distance, static image, size, moving image, shape, associated, position, dissociated, direction, three-dimensional depth, contrast, flat image, clarity, framed/unframed, color, and other quality" (Grosu, Rusu and Grosu, 2013: 213).

The athletes were clearly told the definition of each of these submodalities, however there can be a struggle to understand these differences. This is not because of the athletes' inability to perceive them, but it is in the restraints of language to describe them (Grosu, Rusu and Grosu, 2013: 213). Using statistical analysis, it was determined which athletes preferred visual submodalities.

Auditory submodalities were another aspect of communication channels that the researchers investigated. Often these are not considered beyond the aspect of volume, but when looking at these submodalities from an NLP perspective, it is clear that they are quite diverse. The submodalities researched were "sounds, vocal, timbre, words, internal, position, external, frequency, direction, tone, tempo, voice, volume, distance, duration, and rhythm." Although communication is often thought of as spoken communication, the research showed that only one athlete preferred these auditory submodalities in her communication.

The last submodalities researched were those of the kinesthetic variety. As with the auditory submodalities, the kinesthetic submodalities are an area in which it would be beneficial for the team to work. The athletes were asked to consider these distinctions, to identify the emotions associated with the, and to identify what type of distinction it was. The submodalities were defined in these ways: "internal, proprioceptive sensation, external, shape, position, temperature, weight, movement, duration, intensity, size,

humidity, pressure, consistence, frequency, rhythm, tactile sensation, and balance” (Grosu, Rusu and Grosu, 2013: 213).

Only two athletes, one in the children group and the other in the cadet group, showed a preference for kinesthetic sensations (Grosu, Rusu and Grosu, 2013: 216).

The study brought into view a positive correlation between kinesthetic sensations and both visual and auditory sensations. This means that when an athlete is stimulated in both a visual and auditory way, this will also affect the kinesthetic channel. A further conclusion made from this study was that it is vital for a coach to clearly recognize an athlete’s preferred modality because this effective communication will enable her to attain her maximum potential. Furthermore, NLP training methods are the most effective in using auditory sensations and these results are maximized in younger athletes (Grosu, Rusu and Grosu, 2013: 217).

### **A More Specific Approach**

At times, it is necessary to focus on a specific aspect of NLP in order to get a better idea of the effectiveness of a particular method. Studies can show that the overall method brings improvement, but it is possible that some of the techniques are more important than others. It is also possible that NLP would benefit from expansion, from looking at it through a broader lens. In applying NLP techniques to cricket players in South Africa, a study done by Dawn Saunders shows that the use of a larger psycho-educational framework can be beneficial to increased performance (Saunders, 2009). There were two groups of cricketers used, enabling observation of both an experimental group and a control group. The experiment was designed so that only the experimental group was educated in the use of NLP, but both groups were given the same tests pre- and post-experiment (Saunders, 2009). The ten skills identified are as follows: Performing from one’s highest intention, working hard, setting goals, trusting and inner knowing, distinguishing between self-confidence and self-esteem, dealing with setbacks, managing anxiety and confidence, using language effectively in self-talk and communication, preparing mentally, and managing flow state (Saunders, 2009: 76–77).

The mental and psychological aspect of sports has come to the forefront of the coaching world more and more in recent years. Modeling is one of the basic techniques used in NLP. Elite athletes use certain skills to reach their maximum potential and ten of these skills were identified for further examination through an NLP lens. Although it is necessary to consider these separately, it also must be considered that they are connected and each one contributes to an athlete’s success (Saunders, 2009: 130). Work was done with the athletes so that they could be aware of these skills and of the possibility to consistently perform these skills at a high level (Saunders, 2009: 131–132). In addition, through the modelling of these skills, a pattern could be created for others to emulate. In this study, the goals were to both develop an NLP program to affect the ten identified skills and then to attempt to quantitatively measure the efficacy of the program (Saunders, 2009: 132).

The program was developed by following a plan which involved situational analysis, goal setting, selecting strategies, and providing feedback (Saunders, 2009: 132). Situational analysis involved the strengthening of the players’ mental toughness. The athletes were made aware of different aspects of this through clear communication with the coach. The goal setting portion of the study incorporated benchmarking certain skills

through the “Cricket Self-concept” (Saunders, 2009: 134). This was an evaluation that was done on the players’ own view of themselves as individuals and as cricket players. The statements made were considered both pre-test and post-test and compared with the control group to see if NLP provided a positive result. Many different NLP strategies were applied in working with the cricket players. The strategies were selected and used in different sessions over the twelve-week period. Finally, the results were analyzed and feedback on the outcome of the program was given.

Of the different skills evaluated, the most obvious measure of the program’s success is seen in the improvement of the players’ batting and bowling ability (Saunders, 2009: 188–190). In these areas, there was significant improvement across the experimental group when compared to the control group. In addition to the comparison between the groups, it was also noted that those in the experimental group were promoted to a more competitive league. Despite this, there were still significant gains in their results. In terms of batting, the experimental group increased from 0.25 to 0.34, while the control group was relatively steady at 0.17 and 0.18. The bowling averages decreased from 0.20 to 0.15 (a decrease is a good result) while the control group went from 0.27 to 0.26 (Saunders, 2009: 188–190). Thus, the study provides grounds that the NLP strategies implemented give a significant steppingstone to the realization of an athlete’s potential.

### **Shortcomings**

The area of neurological learning and cognition has been researched extensively. Sports coaches, while possibly aware of these advances, have not shown significant awareness (Bailey, et al 2018). It has been found that evidence-based theories of the brain play a significant role in enhancing learning and coaching. Many sports coaches maintain that understanding of the brain enabled them to make efficient plans and help them deliver their coaching sessions. Coaches believe that goal setting is a useful strategy in teaching, and the most efficient way of passing information is using an individual's preferred learning style (Bailey, et al 2018: 3). In recent years, tremendous advancements have been made in understanding human cognition, in large part because of advances that have been made in imaging techniques (Bailey, et al 2018: 1). It is important that coaches are made aware of which methods have real scientific data behind them and which ones are based on pseudoscience.

Neurolinguistic programming is a brain-based coaching approach that, according to its supporters, enables trainees to achieve their targets more consistently. Those who support it believe that one can learn excellent skills from an expert by identifying and coding their unconscious thought processes. Though the scientific status of NLP is controversial, the process has proved successful in improving a participant's performance in many different fields. Through the modeling of a high-achieving performer, one can promote mental capabilities and encourage performance, especially in sports. Coaches employ different NLP approaches to make their trainees achieve specific goals and objectives. If a particular NLP approach has failed to yield the desired results, changing the process and adopting another has often proved to be successful. Athletes and coaches are supposed to be flexible enough to adapt in the manner required in order to lead to an improvement of their performance. Neurolinguistic programming approaches offer the potential help one to activate their innate potentials for the achievement of their objectives. Despite this, it is important to be clear about what kind of evidence a coach should value when looking at research into human behavior and cognition. In some cases, NLP and

other methods applied in coaching tend to rely on anecdotal evidence rather than examination of data using a scientific approach (Bailey, et al 2018: 2). Moreover, coaches should be wary of any study that avoids peer review and seeks to confirm a hypothesis rather than disprove it (Bailey, et al 2018: 2). There has been criticism leveled at the NLP community for approaching research into the methods in this way. Thus, it is of vital importance that those who are continuing research be sure to adhere to the most rigorous standards of scientific inquiry.

## Conclusions

An athlete can be affected in many ways as they seek to attain their objectives. Sometimes, they can be affected psychologically and other times physically. Neurolinguistic programming allows both athletes and coaches access to tools that allow them to overcome the obstacles put before them. Although, physical injury is often something that cannot be controlled, NLP has shown in research to be an effective way to combat the psychological effects that come when an athlete suffers an injury.

There have been strides made in understanding the connection between the mind and the performance of the body in athletic endeavors. In order for athletes to perform at their best, this connection must be optimized. Neurolinguistic programming offers an avenue for doing this. To understand this research and these connections more, it might be necessary to take a specified approach to have hard data on which to build further examinations into the subject. Despite some work being done in the realm of NLP that has not been built on sound scientific inquiry, scientists are more and more building a practical foundation on which to continue research. The data suggests that athletes can benefit from coaches who understand and effectively utilize NLP in their training.

Neurolinguistic programming (NLP) is extremely useful to many who are in the world of sports. Athletes and coaches are able to make use of NLP interventions to achieve their desired outcomes consistently. Neurolinguistic programming is a model of interpersonal communication and relationship, and it is concerned with the connection between successful behavior patterns and subjective experiences (Savardelavar and Bagheri, 2012: 1923). It enables individuals to alter their behavior patterns through both effective communication and self-knowledge. Neurolinguistic programming is based on the assumption that all human beings are born with innate potential and that these potentials can be actualized to achieve success. In the sports world, NLP recognizes the connection between the body and the mind and acknowledges that the mind motivates the body to perform specific tasks, perhaps even those that previously seemed beyond the athlete's ability. Neurolinguistic programming makes use of both verbal and non-verbal means of communication. Though experiences are acquired through the senses, these experiences can only be shared and communicated using a language.

Sports psychologists have long recognized the importance of positive self-talk in helping athletes achieve their potential experiences (Savardelavar and Bagheri, 2012: 1924). It is agreeable that all those who take part in any competitive sport face some challenges in one way or another as they strive to excel in their fields. Some of the difficulties experienced by sportspeople may include fatigue, physical pain from injuries, poor conditions, adverse environmental conditions, and strong opponents. Consequently, an athlete must have robust sense of determination and a set of beliefs to overcome the adversities set before them. Coaches and sports psychologists have realized the importance of communication as, undoubtedly, self-talk is a powerful tool used by athletes to achieve

success in competitions. Neurolinguistic programming techniques are employed to restructure athletes' self-talk so that they would be best suited to perform excellently in their respective fields. Again, NLP interventions in sports enable the participants to boost their confidence which is critical in facing an opponent. Fostering mental skills and improvement of performance are the essential significance of NLP in sports.

Neurolinguistic programming techniques are critical psychological interventions for promoting mental skills and the improvement of performance in sports (Ahmadzadeh, Badami, and Aghaei, 2019: 5). Cognitive factors play a vital role in the progress of an athlete's optimal performance. The effectiveness of NLP techniques in sports has been established and confirmed by several studies in the area. NLP techniques have been proven to promote and improve both the mental skills of an athlete and his/her performance in sports (Ahmadzadeh, Badami, and Aghaei, 2019: 6). Success in any sporting field requires physical, mental, and technical capabilities, and NLP has been proven to have the capacity to promote all three. Neurolinguistic programming works to alter the adaptive behaviors of an athlete to boost performance in sports.

Neurolinguistic programming is used to enhance performance in sports by enabling individuals to regulate their emotional state and focus on what they need to achieve in life. The various NLP techniques are designed to yield specific outcomes in an athlete's life. Sports coaches and psychologists employ different NLP techniques to enhance success in their work. Goal setting, changing of beliefs and mindsets, and creative visualization are important NLP techniques. Language plays a vital role as all communication is made using language. An athlete succeeds by modeling an excellent performer in the field using NLP techniques. Neurolinguistic programming interventions require two individuals or teams in order for them to be effective. Doing NLP alone may not yield the desired outcomes as feedback plays a crucial role. These interventions change one's life by allowing the user to evolve and change their behavior patterns to how they desire them to be. The positive impacts of NLP are helpful in the world of sports and play a role in the holistic development of an individual. It is essential for one to communicate efficiently and clearly, reach out to others, and make changes to improve oneself. Neurolinguistic programming helps achieve effective communication, allowing an individual to achieve their goals in life (Bashir and Mamuna, 2012: 217).

There has been considerable research done in this sphere, both on a theoretical level and on a practical level. The trend is turning more toward research done with true scientific inquiry. This is an essential step that NLP must make toward being able to support claims made with hard data. The next step is to expand case studies into experiments and to repeat experiments over a longer period. This will establish NLP as a building block that can be effectively implemented by coaches and trainers in a variety of sports.

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