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Impact of Self-Talk among University Futsal Player in University of Putra Malaysia: A Qualitative Approach

ABSTRACT: One of the approaches often used by athletes in order to improve psychological ability is self-talk. Self-talk is the internal language of self. Psychologist states that self-talk can influence factors such as confidence, enthusiasm, diligence, concentration, and strength, as well as reduce anxiety. The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of positive self-talk on performance among futsal players in University of Putra Malaysia. All of the eight respondents were males age between 21–24 (22.13 ± 1.13) years of age, who agreed to participate in this qualitative study. Each of the subject agreed to be interviewed and to have their interview sessions recorded using an audio recorder. For the data interpretation, each of the recording was transcribed and coded by three researchers to determine the main themes of the attributes of self-talk among futsal players. As a result, there are five main themes that were generated from the whole interviews, namely: motivation, focus, effort (hard work), anxiety control, and encouragement. As a conclusion, the main effect of using self-talk among university futsal players is not only to increase motivation, encouragement, and anxiety control, but also to gain the spirit of hard work and improve focusing.

KEY WORD: Self-talk, qualitative study, futsal players, motivation, focus, hard work, anxiety control, and encouragement.

INTISARI: "Kesan Kata Kendiri diantara Pemain Futsal Universiti di Universiti Putra Malaysia: Satu Pendekatan Kualitatif". Salah satu pendekatan yang kerap digunakan oleh ahli sukan untuk meningkatkan keupayaan psikologi adalah kata kendiri. Kata kendiri adalah bahasa dalam diri. Ahli psikologi menyatakan bahawa kata kendiri boleh mempengaruhi faktor-faktor seperti keyakinan, semangat, ketekunan, tumpuan, dan kekuatan, serta juga mengurangkan keresahan. Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji kesan kata kendiri secara positif terhadap prestasi dalam kalangan pemain futsal di Universiti Putra Malaysia. Kesemua lapan responden adalah lelaki berumur antara 21-24 (22.13 ± 1.13) tahun, yang bersetuju untuk mengambil bahagian dalam kajian kualitatif ini. Setiap seorang daripada subjek bersetuju untuk ditemubual dan sesi temubual mereka dirakam menggunakan perakam audio. Untuk tafsiran data, setiap rakaman disalin dan dikodkan oleh tiga penyelidik untuk menentukan tema utama berkenaan kata kendiri di kalangan pemain futsal. Hasilnya, terdapat lima tema utama yang dihasilkan daripada keseluruhan temubual, iaitu: motivasi, fokus, usaha (bekerja keras), kawalan keimbangan, dan galakan. Kesimpulannya, kesan utama menggunakan kata kendiri antara pemain futsal universiti bukan sahaja untuk meningkatkan motivasi, dorongan, dan kawalan keimbangan, tetapi juga untuk mendapatkan semangat kerja keras dan meningkatkan tumpuan.

KATA KUNCI: Kata kendiri, kajian kualitatif, pemain futsal, motivasi, fokus, bekerja keras, kawalan keimbangan, dan galakan.

INTRODUCTION

One of the approaches often used by athletes in order to improve psychological

ability is self-talk (Chang *et al.*, 2014). Self-talk is the internal language of self. Psychologist states that self-talk can

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influence factors, such as confidence, enthusiasm, diligence, concentration, and strength, as well as reduce anxiety (Hatzigeorgiadis *et al.*, 2009; Parvizi, Daneshfar & Shojaei, 2012; and Jabbari, Rouzbahani & Dana, 2013).

Some people use self-talk verbally or external, while others may use it in a non-verbal way or internal (Parvizi, Daneshfar & Shojaei, 2012; and Kahrović *et al.*, 2014). An athlete may speak to himself or herself as much as 200 words per minute. What come out of these 200 words are some incredibly potent words that can improve confidence and reduce anxiety (Kahrović *et al.*, 2014).

Self-talk consists of beneficial words and ideas that come out of the mind and can provide direction and motivation to the self. These ideas can be categorized into two types, namely positive or negative self-talk. Mohsen Afrouzeh *et al.* (2014) stated that the mind's thoughts are manifested physically. Thus, negative thoughts will normally cause a drop in performance (Hatzigeorgiadis & Biddle, 2008); while positive thoughts will give new powers to performance (Zetou, Nikolaos & Evaggelos, 2014).

For example, in an event, an athlete's negative thinking, such as "the opponent is too strong", will surely lead to a drop in his or her performance, rendering him or her to lose. Conversely, if an athlete thinks such positive thoughts as "I can beat the opponent", then they will be more likely to work harder to win and improve their performance. Obvious difference can, thus, be discerned between negative and positive self-talk and this will have an impact on the end results of a competition.

Self-talk as a mental skill was detected in a variety of sports, such as *softball* (Chang *et al.*, 2014); *cricket* (Miles & Neil, 2013); *basketball* (Dana, Mousavi & Mokhtari, 2012); *handball* (Afrouzeh *et al.*, 2014); *water polo* (Hatzigeorgiadis, Theodorakis & Zourbanos, 2004); *football* (Johnson *et al.*, 2004); *tennis* (Gammage, Hardy & Hall, 2001); *darts* (Zourbanos *et al.*, 2013); and *open and close skill sports* (Ong *et al.*, 2010). However, there have been limited studies that examined the application of self-talk in a

futsal game.

Although all athletes use self-talk in a variety of sports, it is still difficult to identify the extent to which the application and impact of self-talk of an athlete is relevant, especially in futsal games. In this qualitative study, the effects of using positive self-talk was reviewed as a psychological tool for influencing performance in futsal games among players in one of the universities in Malaysia.

Futsal is a mini soccer game (indoor football) that is increasingly in global popularity (FIFA, 2012). This game had been recorded in Uruguay as early as the 1930s (FIFA, 2004). Futsal is a game which seems like football, and is played indoors or outdoors. There has been little difference between futsal and the normal game of football. The main differences, that can be easily identified, are related to the play area and number of players involved, which is smaller in futsal.

As the ball is kind of low bounce, the efficiency of the ball control employed by players is imperative. The skills to play the game, physical fitness, and mental strength are very much needed. This is because futsal is categorized as a high intensity sport that requires a high fitness level, speed, agility, and also a high degree of mental capabilities (Barbero-Alvarez *et al.*, 2008).

The application of self-talk among futsal players in Malaysia is still uncertain in terms of its authenticity. Previous studies have indicated that self-talk can improve the performance of athletes (Chang *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the effects of positive self-talk among the futsal players in UPM (University of Putra Malaysia) in Serdang, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia.

METHOD

Subjects. The subjects of this study were futsal players in one of the universities in Malaysia, namely UPM (University of Putra Malaysia) in Serdang, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia. A total of eight subjects agreed to be interviewed. All of them were men between the ages of 21-24 years (22.13 ± 1.13). The subjects have all been involved

Table 1:
The Main Themes of the Effect of Using Self-Talk

Main Themes	Sub-Themes	Statements of Players
Motivation	4	11
Confidence	4	10
Anxiety Control	2	2
Total	10	23

in futsal and have represented the university for at least 1.5 years of involvement in futsal. The highest level of their involvement is the inter-universities' games, which takes place among the universities in Malaysia.

Instruments. This qualitative study was conducted using a semi structural questionnaire. Interview techniques were used to collect information on the effects of positive self-talk among university futsal players.

Examples of interview questions used in the study are: (1) Can you provide some information regarding your involvement in futsal?; (2) In general, what is your understanding of self-talk?; (3) For you, what is the purpose of self-talk?; (4) How do you apply self-talk in this sport?; (5) Can you give examples of the kinds of self-talk that you have always used?; (6) What are the situations that lead you to use self-talk?; and (7) Are you convinced that self-talk improved your performance?

The validity of the interview questions was tested by interviewing futsal players (not from among the respondents) to assess the quality of the questions. It was also to find out of any point or issues that players felt were crucial and might have been missed. All problems and weaknesses in the interview questions were refined and modified by the researchers to suit the purpose of the study. Based on the pilot test that has been done, it shows that the results were consistent with the previous study, which was done by James Hardy, Kimberly L. Gammage & Craig R. Hall (2001). This indicates that the reliability of this study is good.

Data Collection and Analysis. The interview with the subjects started on 11th October 2012, right after the 2012 inter-universities' futsal games. Before the interview, informed consents to participate

in this study were obtained from all the eight subjects. All of them also agreed to be interviewed by researchers.

The interview questions were given to all subjects a day before the interview session. This was done to provide early preparation and give them a time to reflect on the experience and the knowledge they have acquired. Each of the interview session was recorded using an audio recorder for further analysis purposes.

Each of the interview recordings was transcript by the researchers. The purpose of this transcript process was to write down or copy what was said by each of the subjects. Furthermore, the transcript was given to the subjects for the modification of any sentence structures, or additions and amendments. This served as a confirmation and provided credibility to the interview process. Each transcript was then carefully coded. In addition, content analysis was applied after the coding process and categorise the self-talk of the futsal players recommended by Satu Elo & Helvi Kyngas (2008).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the content analysis, a total of 23 different statements regarding the impact of positive self-talk among university futsal players were recorded. See the figure 1. These statements were grouped into 11 categories and finally into three main themes, namely: motivation, confidence, and anxiety control.

Table 1 shows the main themes of using positive self-talk, namely: motivation, confidence, and anxiety control, along with the frequency of second raw data and raw data. It can be stated that the motivation theme had the biggest impact on the futsal players, followed by confidence and anxiety control.

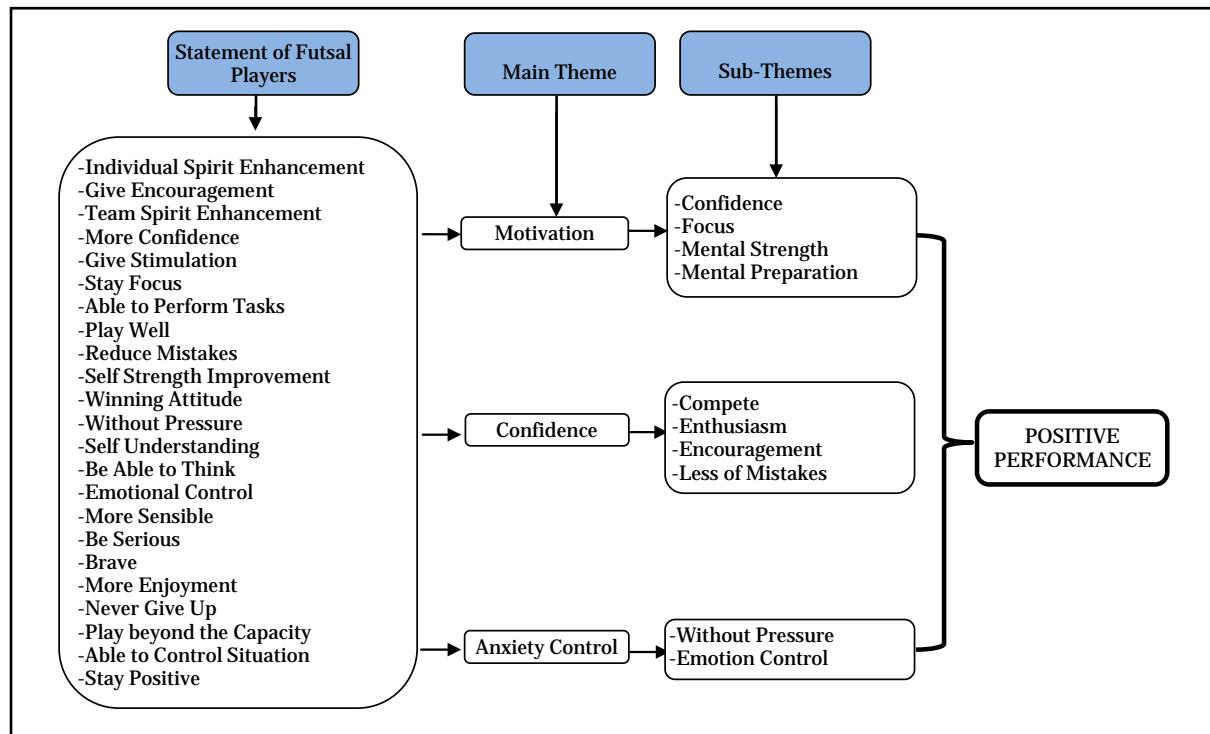


Figure 1:
 Positive Self-Talk among University Futsal Players

Table 2:
 Factors that Contribute the Theme of Motivation

Main Theme	2 nd Raw Data
Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Confidence ▪ Mental Strength ▪ Mental Preparation ▪ Focus

On the Motivation. The result of self-talk among university futsal players shows an increase in motivation. In this study, there were four sub-themes that contribute to motivation theme, more specifically mental strength, focus, confidence, and mental preparation.

According to James Hardy, Kimberly L. Gammage & Craig R. Hall (2001), the function of motivation is associated with mental strength, focus, confidence, and mental preparation. These four factors were important in helping athletes to be more motivated as well as help them to continue the momentum to achieve goals (Hardy, Gammage & Hall, 2001). See table 2.

First, Confidence. Through the use of self-talk, players will feel confident and

increase in motivation, which will in turn affect the way they play. From these findings, it can be stated that all the respondents believed that the use of self-talk will increase their confidence to play. In this study, some respondents indicated that the use of self-talk would increase self-confidence; and, thus, contribute to self-motivation. This was contained in statement from one of the respondents.

To give confidence. If we talk to ourselves for example, "I can do this thing", or "I can help my team to win", it will give more confidence while playing (interview with Respondent A, 11/10/2012).

Second, Mental Strength. The second sub-themes contributing to motivation

Table 3:
Factors that Contribute the Theme of Confidence

Main Theme	2 nd Raw Data
Confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enthusiasm ▪ Encouragement ▪ Competitiveness ▪ Make Fewer Mistakes

was mental strength. Mental strength, or sometimes called mental toughness, is a natural or developed construct that enabled mentally tough performers to cope with the demands of training and competing better than their opponents. Specifically, these athletes were more consistent and superior at remaining determined, focused, confident, and in control under pressure (Jones, Hanton & Connaughton, 2007).

Here was the statement of one respondent regarding mental strength:

For me, I always use self-talks for psychological reasons. It provides a lot of benefits to me, because indirectly when using self-talk, it will increase performance and provide mental strength to play futsal (interview with Respondent B, 11/10/2012).

Third, Mental Preparation. Mental preparation was one of the sub-themes that contribute to self-motivation. Mental preparation, or mental readiness, is a situation that a player should think specifically, spoke a positive words, positive imaging, and feelings to makes the mind fully prepared (Houston, Dolan & Martin, 2011). This means that when players are mentally prepared, their motivation will increase, which will eventually affect the way they play.

In this study, the respondents said that self-talk increases the mental preparation before the match and eventually contributes to self-motivation. Here was a statement made by a respondent regarding mental preparation:

With self-talk, it can prepare my mental to doing tasks in all situations and more effective. For example, before a futsal game, I can mentally be prepared by practically using of self-talk (interview with Respondent C, 11/10/2012).

Fourth, Focus. Another factor contributing to motivation was focus. According to Antonis Hatzigeorgiadis, Yannis Theodorakis & Nikos Zourbanos (2004), water polo players and throwing athletes use self-talk to improve their attention and focus in the game.

In this study, a few respondents indicated that the use of self-talk increases their focus and thus contribute to self-motivation. Here was a statement made by a respondent regarding focus:

In a game situation, whether being ahead or down a score, I must stay focus until end of the game. So, by using self-talk, it assists me to be more focus and always think "Do not lose focus in this game" (interview with Respondent D, 11/10/2012).

On the Confidence. The second theme resulting from using self-talk among university futsal players was improving their confidence. It is already proving that athlete with high level of confidence can produce positive performance, while the less confidence athlete associated with anxiety, depression, and dissatisfaction (Hays *et al.*, 2009).

In this study, there are four sub-themes that improved confidence: competitiveness, enthusiasm, encouragement, and low number of mistakes or make fewer mistakes. According to Antonis Hatzigeorgiadis *et al.* (2008), self-talk is a cognitive strategy that could impact the confidence and performance improvement. See table 3.

First, Enthusiasm. Through self-talk, players were able to enhance their enthusiasm and indirectly it produced a better self-confidence. Enthusiasm can be described as a self-spirit or a feeling of energetic interest in playing better. Here was part of an interview related to the effects of self-talk on player's enthusiasm.

To me, self-talk is a word of encouragement for a player not only in futsal game, but also in other sports. Self-talk is a word of enthusiasm for myself. Self-talk provides motivation, and as we know the motivation is very important for athletes, because it gives a new spirit to do something better (interview with Respondent E, 11/10/2012).

Second, Encouragement. The second sub-theme that contributes to confidence in futsal players was encouragement. Through self-talk, players are able to encourage themselves by using words or behavior to gain confidence and also to performing well.

Here was part of an interview related to the effects of self-talk on the stimulation and encouragement of self-respondents.

Before the game, I would use self-talk such as when warming up, before going into the competition arena to give a stimulus to my body. It means provide words that encourage my body to play better in a game (interview with Respondent F, 11/10/2012).

Third, Competitiveness. The third sub-theme which can improve players' confidence level was competitiveness. Competitiveness is ability or self-desire to fight with a proper manner. Some of the players told that never give up and beyond the ability of a component is their statement, which is very important in confidence contribution. Here was part of the response made by a respondent regarding to competitive.

For me, self-talk is one way to motivate, provide an opportunity for self to undaunted in match and then give self-braveness. Yes, I believe that self-talk can improve performance while games, for example, when I play and have a high spirit to win the match, I will try very hard. So, indirectly I will be more serious and will not give up during the game and not underestimate the opponent (interview with Respondent G, 11/10/2012).

Fourth, Make Fewer Mistakes. The last sub-theme that can influence self-confidence was making fewer mistakes. Practicing positive self-talk will not only provide encouragement, stimulation, and competitive spirit, but also can reduce the chances of error during a game.

Here was an interviewed with one of the respondents regarding self-talk that can reduce mistakes and enhance personal and team performance.

Self-talk is usually give encouragement to self to do better and to stay positive. If I already made mistakes, I definitely can fix the mistakes that I made. So, automatically, self-talk will able to improve my performance, because it gave encouragement to myself (interview with Respondent H, 11/10/2012).

On the Anxiety Control. A third theme contribution from self-talk among university futsal players was the ability to control their anxiety. In this study, there was sub-theme that contributes to anxiety control among respondents that is able to control self-emotional and never afraid of anything: emotions controls and without pressure.

According to Adam Miles & Rich Neil (2013), positive self-talk can improve performance by increasing confidence and ability to control an anxiety. Here were some of the interviews related to the effects of self-talk in giving respondents' control of their anxiety.

After I motivate myself by using self-talk, it will improve the performance of my game and be able to control my emotions. So, I can play better and show my actual performance (interview with Respondent A, 11/10/2012).

Ability to regulate emotions within the self will enable players to reduce their anxiety and thus perform at their best. According to the statement of one respondent, self-talk does not only improve performance, but also enables one to gain greater control over his or her emotions.

To me, it (self-talk) improves the performance of my game; for example, when I use self-talk indirectly, it will also give enthusiasm, motivation, and also relieve the pressure inside me; so, without feeling any pressure of course I will play with more calm and more organized (interview with Respondent B, 11/10/2012).

Other than the ability to control one's emotions, relieving stress can also contribute to the regulation of respondents' anxiety. As the statement above demonstrates, the

respondents stated that self-talk will not only inspire and motivate, but also reduce stress levels.

Based on the objective of this study, which was to assess the effects of using positive self-talk among university futsal players in UPM (University of Putra Malaysia), the themes that obtained due to positive self-talk is to increase motivation, followed by improving confidence, and controlling anxiety. Overall, this study has shown that self-talk can enhance motivation, improve performance, and control the anxiety in futsal players.

This finding is similar to previous findings by Amir Dana, Mohammad Vaez Mousavi & Pouneh Mokhtari (2012) concerning the use of self-talk, in which the respondents were able to practise sports skills, improve strategy and performance, and also to increase motivation. In addition, this finding also supports the study conducted by Elaheh Jabbari, Mehdi Rouzbahani & Amir Dana (2013) and Nikos Zourbanos *et al.* (2013), who found that positive self-talk improves performance by increasing confidence and controlling the anxiety.

From this study, none of the effects of positive self-talk obtained were new discoveries. These findings were similar to the findings of other researchers, such as Antonis Hatzigeorgiadis *et al.* (2009); Nastaran Parvizi, Afkham Daneshfar & Masoumeh Shojaei (2012); Nikos Zourbanos *et al.* (2013); and Yu-Kai Chang *et al.* (2014). However, earlier there are fewer studies that examine the impact of self-talk in futsal games. Thus, through a qualitative study of self-talk, it was clearly shown that self-talk used by university futsal players can improve motivation, confidence, and also the ability to control the anxiety.

The respondents, who are among the university futsal players in UPM Serdang, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia, stated an opinion that the use of self-talk should not be limited only in futsal. They think, it should be done in any sport or physical activity. This is because each sport will include psychological and physical aspects, so self-talk will improve their mental strength to perform much better.

There were also respondents who felt that self-talk was not confined only to sporting

activities, but that it needs to be applied externally in learning activities, such as romance, friendship, and every aspect in human activity.

CONCLUSION

Any competition regardless of team or individual sport, the players will be exposed to numerous psychological problems. How the players handle the situation will have impact on their performance and might influence the results of the competition. For example, the players will think negatively like the “opponent is too strong”, or “I am not fully prepared for this game”, the players would lose confidence and become anxious. As the result, the players might feel less motivated to play the games and the team would most probably end up losing the games.

As a coach or psychologist, he or she needs to prepare players with the strongest mind-set. Also, the players need to be taught on how to improve their psychological ability through methods such as self-talk. The present study showed that positive self-talk among futsal players can help the players produce better performance during a game. Applying self-talk in game has contributed to three themes, namely: motivation, confidence, and anxiety control.

Hence, futsal players are advised to practice self-talk before competition, because it's one of the psychological methods or tools that can be used to improve playing performance among futsal players. Players with strong mind-set will always think positively, for example “I can beat the opponent”, or “I can win this game”, and this will definitely help the team to play better.¹

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¹**Statement:** We would like to declare that this article is our original work; so, it is not product of plagiarism and not yet also be reviewed and published by other scholarly journals.

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