



## MENTAL IMAGERY TRAINING FOR CHESS PLAYERS: AN OVERVIEW

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### ABSTRACT

*Chess is, in the traditional sense of the word, a competitive sport. The amount of training time accumulated is one of the most critical aspects in chess and athletic competence. Chess players must devote up to ten years of specialized training to achieve a high level of proficiency. Chess is a two-player board game. Furthermore, it is a competitive intelligence game with tournaments and championships held all over the world. Chess is important in cognitive psychology and artificial intelligence (AI) research because it is the area in which expert performance has been examined and assessed the most. Success or failure is frequently determined by one's emotional condition. In this study, the detailed methodology of mental imagery technique as a part of psychological skills training for the enhancement of chess performances have been discussed in detail.*

**KEYWORDS:** Mental Imagery, Chess Players, PST.

### INTRODUCTION

Chess is a strategy game that originated in India about 1500 years ago. According to legend, the monarch of India instructed his wise men to design a method of teaching the royal family's children to become greater thinkers and battlefield generals. Chess was the outcome. Chess has expanded to every country on the planet in the centuries since its invention. Chess has long been thought to help people improve their mental acuity, focus, memory, and analytical abilities. Chess is a two-person mental game played on a board with 64 white and black squares and 16 pieces each, and one of the most significant abilities required to be a strong player is focus, as it is vital to recognize numerous threats, options, and attacks. Some people consider chess to be merely a fun game, however it may help you develop or reinforce many of the mind's most valuable abilities (Sala et al., 2017). The majority of people believe that learning chess is helpful to children, which encourages parents to enroll their children in a chess club or a chess lesson at school. Chess helps people develop their problem-solving ability, their intelligence, and their strategic thinking skills,

as well as their self-esteem and higher-order thinking capabilities, also known as meta-cognitive skills. Furthermore, when playing chess, young people examine their behaviors and forecast future possibilities. In countries, where chess is intensely played by students, practicing students become among the top students in math and science and they are able to recognize complicated patterns (Milat, 1997).

### PSYCHOLOGICAL SKILLS TRAINING

Psychological Skills Training is a custom-designed set of approaches for achieving specific psychological skill goals (Gill, 2000). There is no such thing as an ideal PST package; each program must be tailored to the individual's psychological state as well as the sport. To put together an effective PST program, it's critical to understand the difference between PST skills and PST approaches. The PST program will emphasize improving self-efficacy and emotional management in order to improve performance. The athlete will complete sessions using goal setting, imagery, and relaxation to strengthen

these psychological skills. According to Gill (2000) and Horn (2000), the program will use an educational approach (2002). The program is divided into three sections: Developing an understanding of PST and how it affects performance during the educational phase. Chess players learn how to employ PST methods and how to best implement them throughout the acquisition phase. Practice Phase - Invest time and effort in PST and complete both competition and practice training (Horn, 2002).

### **MENTAL IMAGERY**

Internal (imagination) and exterior (video demonstration) performances will be included in the imaging sessions. All sessions will be exclusively focused on achieving the best possible results. The participant will be encouraged to use the imagery in real-time and in slow motion, slow motion imagery will be encouraged especially when there is a certain technique which the athlete is performing incorrectly, this will allow them to imagine performing the skill correctly, employing all the teaching points. The athlete will be encouraged to develop a competition-specific session. This session will be practiced intensely before and during the competition (Horn, 2002).

The second most powerful strategy for improving self-efficacy, according to Bandura (1977), is 'vicarious experiences.' Sports psychologists use visualization and observation as techniques to promote these vicarious experiences. Motivational general-mastery (MG-M), a type of imagery that focuses on effective coping and mastery of hard situations, according to Horn (2002), is the most helpful for developing self-efficacy. MG-M images considerably enhanced sports confidence in two out of three elite badminton players, according to Callow, Hardy, and Hall (1998), while stabilizing the confidence of the third player. Callow and Hardy (1997) tested whether external imaging (observation) improved gymnastic performance more than a combination of internal visual imagery and kinaesthetic imagery using 76 individuals.

When compared to the internal visual groups, the external imagery group performed much better. Imagery techniques have been used within clinical psychology to induce relaxation (Horn, 2002) In a study investigating the use of imagery in elite athletes, it was noted that imagery not only 'psyched-up' the athlete, but helped maintain composure during the competition (Jones, 2001). Martin, Moritz and Hall (1999) suggested that imagery which focuses on feelings such as relaxation, stress, arousal and anxiety could be used as an effective tool to control emotions. In addition to using imagery to regulate anxiety, athletes can also use imagery within the practice to pre-plan and rehearse their emotional responses before a competition (Horn, 2002).

### **MENTAL IMAGERY PRACTICES**

It is a type of mental training that entails the use of all five senses to create a holistic experience in the athlete's head (Ungerleider, 1996).

#### **Description of the Mental Imagery Practices Phase I**

##### **Vividness**

Good imagers use all of their senses to make their images as vivid and detailed as possible. It is important to create or recreate as closely as possible the actual experience in the mind. The subjects were familiar with the playing surface, grandstands, background, colors, and other environmental details. The subjects practiced getting vivid images with the three vividness exercises that follow.

##### **Vividness Exercises**

1. Imagining Chess Board: The subjects were asked to imagine that they are in front of the chess board and instructed to look around and take in all the details includes sounds in and around, the climatic conditions etcetera.
2. Imagining a Positive Performance of a move: the subjects were asked to select a particular move in chess and they visualize performing it perfectly. The subjects perform the move over and

over in their mind, and imagine every feeling and movement in their fingers.

3. Imagining a Positive Performance: The Subjects were asked to recall as vividly as possible a time when they performed very well. The subjects visualization must cover three specific areas of recall: visual, auditory and kinesthetic. First, the subjects visually recall how they looked when performing well and playing poorly. The subjects were asked to get as clear a picture as possible of what they look like when they are playing well and suggested to review films of successful performances to help crystallize the image. Next, the subjects were asked to reproduce the sounds in the mind as they hear when playing well, particularly the internal dialogue that they have with themselves. Finally, recreate in mind all the kinesthetic sensations that they have when playing well, like, how the feet and hands feel, how the muscles feel tight or relaxed. The subjects were asked to stay focused on the sensations associated with playing well (Weinberg & Gould, 2003).

## **Phase II**

### **Controllability**

Another key to successful imagery is learning to manipulate the images so they do what they want to do them. Many athletes have difficulty in controlling their images and often find themselves repeating their mistakes as they visualize.

### **Controllability Exercises**

1. Controlling performance: the subjects were asked to imagine working on a specific move that has given them trouble in the past and suggested to take careful notice of what they were doing wrong. Next, they were asked to imagine themselves performing that move perfectly while seeing and feeling the movements.
2. Controlling performance against a tough opponent: the subjects picture

themselves playing a tough opponent who has given him trouble in the past. The subjects try to execute a planned strategy against this person just as they would for a competition. The subjects should imagine situations in which they are getting best of their opponent.

3. Controlling emotions: the subjects picture themselves in a situation in which they tense up, become angry, lose concentration, or lose confidence (for example: missing a checkmate). Then they recreate the situation, especially the feelings that accompany it. Next, the subjects feel the anxiety and then use anxiety management strategies to feel the tension drain from the body and try to control what they see, hear, and feel in their imagery (Weinberg & Gould, 2003).

## **Phase III**

### **Positive Self-Talk**

Self talk can be in the form of words actually spoken, or in the form of thoughts that come into subject's mind. Self talk words and phrases such as "I can", "Focus", "Stay with him", "Now", "I See the Opponent Move" or "I set the target".

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Players use mental imagery and self-talk tactics to help manage arousal, reduce maladaptive actions, rebuild negative beliefs, and improve concentration and focus. There are many names for mental imagery including visualization, mental rehearsal, mental practice, and cognitive enactment (Short, Ross-Stewart & Monsma, 2006). The skills include memory, anticipation, prediction, advance visual cue utilization, pattern recall and recognition, visual search behaviour and knowledge of situational probabilities, which together are referred to as "game intelligence". This suggested mental imagery training could be a beneficial method to improve the mental stability as well as attention, concentration, decision making etcetra.

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