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Talking Your Way to Record Times: The Effects of Instructional and Motivational Self-Talk on 10km Time-Trial Running Performance

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Abstract: Self-talk (ST) is considered a useful psychological skill for improving performance in endurance running, yet the performance implications of motivational compared to instructional ST remain unclear. The purpose of this study was to determine whether instructional or motivational ST led to greater improvements in the completion time of a 10 km run among competitive-recreational runners. The task-matching hypothesis proposes that motivational ST is more effective for tasks requiring muscular strength and endurance as they lead to increased energy, effort, and positive affect; therefore, we hypothesized that motivational ST would lead to greater improvements in performance compared to instructional ST and control groups. Forty-five runners completed a baseline 10 km time trial and were randomly assigned to an intervention group (i.e., motivational or instructional ST) or control group. Intervention groups practiced ST in conjunction with their runs for one week and the control group continued regular training. Participants then completed the second 10 km time trial, where those assigned to intervention groups were prompted to use ST every five minutes. Results revealed no significant changes in completion times or ST frequency from time trial one to two, suggesting no difference in effectiveness between the three study groups. Although the findings of the current study did not establish a clear association between the functions of ST and an endurance running task, we still believe that ST is a helpful strategy for improving performance. More research is needed to describe the complexities of ST use in 10 km running events.