



Coaches' Preferences for Continuing Coaching Education in South Africa

by

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The purpose of this study was to examine coaches' preferences for continuing coaching education. The sample consisted of 122 male and 102 female coaches from the Gauteng Province of South Africa who were purposively recruited to participate in this study. The results of this study showed that the coaches wanted to learn more about motivational techniques, advanced instructional drills, advanced first aid, goal setting, character building and conditioning drills. The results further indicated that sport coaches would be more likely to continue their coaching education if they had a desire to coach at a high level, if topics were relevant and if courses were in line with league requirements and were available online. The practical implications of the findings for the development of coaching education programmes in South Africa were discussed.

Key words: coaching, education, preferences, certification.

Introduction

Research has shown that many children are actively involved in youth sports (Kubayi et al., 2013). As youth sport has grown comprehensively in recent years, so too has the need for qualified coaches (Vargas-Tonsing, 2007). This has resulted in the development of the International Sport Coaching Framework (ISCF) by the International Council for Coach Excellence (ICCE) and the Association of Summer Olympic International Federations (ASOIF). The ISCF was developed to provide a common ground for developing and evaluating coaching qualifications, encouraging coaching education and training, working across international boundaries and establishing ethical guidelines and standards of practice (ICCE and ASOIF, 2012). Similarly, the lack of systematic coaching education in South Africa has not gone unnoticed. The South African government has also recently made a significant commitment to develop the coaching education system by establishing the South African National Coaching Framework

(SANCF). The SANCF was established to provide skilled and qualified coaches to support the development of South Africans at all levels in sport, develop new coaching pathways and standards for all South African sport that would support the different stages of development, participation and excellence, and mobilise coaching in support of the government's drive to create an active and winning nation (South African Sport Confederation and Olympic Committee, 2011).

Although the SANCF was developed as a benchmark to promote quality coaching, research concerning the coaches' needs in South Africa is sparse. As Vargas-Tonsing (2007) pointed out, in order to begin improving the quality of sport coaching, it is necessary to design continuing coaching education programmes around the needs of coaches. Thus, it is imperative that researches begin to explore possible topics of relevance and interest for coaches (Vargas-Tonsing, 2007). Despite the existence of a

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substantial body of literature on coaching education globally (Cheung and Fung, 2007; Malete and Feltz, 2000; Vargas-Tonsing, 2007), minimal research has been conducted on coaches' educational needs in South Africa. To date, there is only one study on educational needs among coaches in South Africa. The study, undertaken by Morris-Eyton and Coopoo (2014), found that coaches reported technique correction, strength and conditioning, technique analysis, strength training, safety in sport and injury prevention as their most important coaching needs. Although their study provided baseline information on educational needs among sport coaches in South Africa, it was limited to an investigation of the needs of swimming coaches. Consequently, it was not feasible to draw a definitive conclusion.

Therefore, the present study was designed to extend the literature regarding coaches' educational needs and facilitate the implementation of a unified coaching system in South Africa. Malete and Feltz (2000) reported that well-designed coaching education programmes could significantly enhance coaching efficacy, particularly among coaches with little coaching experience. Thus, based on the findings of this study, practical recommendations for sport organisations and policymakers in developing and designing advanced and more relevant coaching education programmes in South Africa will be made. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to examine: (1) the educational needs of sport coaches; (2) coaches' reasons for, and/or barriers preventing them from, pursuing further coaching education; and (3) coaches' opinions and perceptions concerning coaching education.

Material and Methods

Participants

The sample consisted of 122 male and 102 female coaches from the Gauteng Province of South Africa who were purposively recruited to participate in this study. The purposive recruitment method entailed selecting participants according to criterion that the researcher had established (De Vos, 2001). The criterion for this study was set on the basis that the coaches were from the priority sports as categorised by the Department of Sport and Recreation of South Africa. The participants represented a variety of sports: soccer ($n = 87$),

athletics ($n = 45$), netball ($n = 44$), cricket ($n = 19$), rugby ($n = 12$), swimming ($n = 10$), boxing ($n = 4$); three coaches did not indicate their sports. In terms of age, the majority of the sport coaches were in the 18–25 years age group (45%), followed by the 26–35 years age group (30%), the 36–45 years age group (20%) and the 46–65 years age group (4%). Three (1%) were over the age of 65 years. Regarding race, the majority of these coaches were Black (65%), followed by White (25%), Coloured (8%), and Indian (2%).

Research instrument

The Coaching Education Questionnaire developed by Vargas-Tonsing (2007) was used in this study. The questionnaire was designed to assess: (1) coaches' interests in educational topics; (2) their reasons for, and/or barriers preventing them from, pursuing coaching education; and (3) perceptions of coaching education. Section one comprised 15 coaching topics scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all helpful) to 5 (extremely helpful). Section two comprised 10 questions and was also scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all important) to 5 (extremely important). Section three included seven questions designed to assess coaches' opinions and perceptions of coaching education and certification. Coaches responded to these questions by indicating 1 (yes), 2 (no) or 3 (don't know). Cronbach alpha coefficients were calculated for the entire questionnaire ($\alpha = 0.805$) and the subscales ($\alpha = 0.854$; $\alpha = 0.778$; $\alpha = 0.612$). Although the alpha value of 0.612 fell below the benchmark of 0.70, as recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), this value was still higher than the lowest permissible threshold of $\alpha = 0.60$ (Diamantopoulos and Winklhofer, 2001). However, the results of this study regarding the low reliable subscale should be interpreted cautiously.

Data collection

Ethical clearance to conduct the study was obtained from the University of Johannesburg's Higher Degree Ethics Committee. Prior to data collection, all respondents were requested to sign informed consent forms. Supervised data collection was undertaken by the principal researcher and trained fieldworkers. Participants were identified during the attendance of coaching courses, workshops and seminars. It took them approximately 10–15 min to complete

the questionnaires.

Statistical analysis

Descriptive statistics, such as means, standard deviations, frequencies and percentages, were used to analyse the data. Data were checked for normality by analysing their skewness and kurtosis. The skewness and kurtosis were near zero and three, respectively, indicating a normal distribution (Pallant, 2001). An independent t-test was also used to examine significant differences between female and male coaches. The level of significance was set at 0.05. Effect size was estimated using Cohen's *d*, which suggests that effect sizes of 0.20 are small, 0.50 are medium, and 0.80 are large. All statistical analyses were performed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.

Results

Table 1 summarises the coaches' preferences for continuing coaching education. The results showed that the sport coaches wanted to learn more about "Motivational techniques" ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 0.93$; $d = 0.27$); "Advanced instructional drills" ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 0.94$; $d = 0.02$); "Advanced first aid" ($M = 4.44$, $SD = 0.95$; $d = 0.13$); "Goal setting" ($M = 4.42$, $SD = 1.04$; $d = 0.19$); "Character building" ($M = 4.37$, $SD = 0.94$; $d = 0.08$) and "Conditioning drills" ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 1.02$;

$d=0.06$). There were significant differences regarding the following variables: "Motivational techniques" ($t [222] = 1.773$, $p<0.05$; $d = 0.27$); "Visualisation" ($t [222] = 0.291$, $p<0.05$; $d = 0.04$) and "Communication with parents" ($t [222] = 2.074$, $p<0.05$; $d = 0.14$). Based on Cohen's guidelines, all the effect sizes were small. Consequently, the difference between the male and female coaches regarding preferences for continuing coaching education appears to be of little practical significance.

Shown in Table 2 are the coaches' reasons for pursuing coaching education. Overall, coaches indicated that they would more likely continue coaching education if it was a "Desire to coach to a high level" ($M = 4.42$, $SD = 1.02$; $d = 0.04$); "Included relevant topics" ($M = 4.19$, $SD = 1.03$; $d = 0.03$); "Had league requirement" ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 1.13$; $d = 0.03$); was "Available online" ($M = 4.01$, $SD = 1.22$; $d = 0.04$) and "Required time" ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 1.25$; $d = 0.02$). Gender differences were noted concerning the "Desire to coach to a high level" ($t [222] = 2.608$, $p<0.05$; $d = 0.04$) and "Monetary compensation" ($t [222] = -2.675$, $p<0.05$; $d = 0.36$). Given that our effect sizes are lower than the value of 0.50, we can conclude that small mean differences exist between male and female coaches' reasons for pursuing coaching education.

Topic	All M (SD)	Male M (SD)	Female M (SD)	<i>p</i>	Effect size (<i>d</i>)
Motivational techniques	4.54 (0.93)	4.66 (0.61)	4.40 (1.20)	0.048*	0.27
Advanced instructional drills	4.46 (0.94)	4.47 (0.77)	4.45 (1.13)	0.895	0.02
Advanced first aid	4.44 (0.95)	4.49 (0.85)	4.37 (1.06)	0.348	0.13
Goal setting	4.42 (1.04)	4.51 (0.84)	4.30 (1.23)	0.161	0.19
Character building	4.37 (0.94)	4.41 (0.84)	4.33 (1.07)	0.553	0.08
Conditioning drills	4.31 (1.02)	4.34 (0.95)	4.28 (1.09)	0.656	0.06
Communication with athletes	4.31 (1.32)	4.46 (1.09)	4.14 (1.54)	0.078	0.24
Visualisation	4.27 (1.06)	4.29 (0.95)	4.25 (1.17)	0.042*	0.04
Communication with parents	4.24 (1.31)	4.39 (1.08)	4.06 (1.31)	0.040*	0.14
Sport psychology	4.23 (1.13)	4.29 (1.10)	4.15 (1.18)	0.346	0.12
Stress management	4.22 (1.08)	4.18 (1.10)	4.28 (1.07)	0.486	0.09
Sport nutrition	4.12 (1.31)	4.26 (1.26)	3.95 (1.37)	0.082	0.23
Gender differences	3.76 (1.38)	3.83 (1.25)	3.67 (1.52)	0.373	0.12
Addictive behaviour	3.70 (1.45)	3.63 (1.47)	3.78 (1.44)	0.457	0.10
Drugs in sport	3.37 (1.67)	3.26 (1.75)	3.51 (1.56)	0.283	0.14

* Significant at $p<0.05$

Table 2*Reasons to pursue coaching education*

Reason	All		Males		Females		p	Effect size (d)
	M	(SD)	M	(SD)	M	(SD)		
Desire to coach to a high level	4.42	(1.02)	4.58	(1.00)	4.22	(1.12)	0.010*	0.04
Relevant topics	4.19	(1.03)	4.20	(1.04)	4.17	(1.02)	0.812	0.03
League requirements	4.13	(1.13)	4.15	(1.10)	4.11	(1.20)	0.818	0.03
Online availability	4.01	(1.22)	4.02	(1.25)	4.01	(1.19)	0.970	0.04
Time required	3.99	(1.25)	4.00	(1.30)	3.97	(1.20)	0.860	0.02
Monetary compensation	3.83	(1.26)	3.63	(1.63)	4.07	(1.08)	0.008*	0.36
Convenience	3.82	(1.30)	3.70	(1.36)	3.97	(1.21)	0.137	0.20
Cost of course	3.80	(1.38)	3.77	(1.47)	3.85	(1.27)	0.685	0.05
Insurance	3.70	(1.39)	3.86	(1.28)	3.51	(1.59)	0.189	0.25

* Significant at $p < 0.05$ **Table 3***Perceptions of coaches for continuing coaching education*

Perceptions	Yes		No		Not sure	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
Do you plan on pursuing further coaching education?	191	(87)	7	(3)	23	(10)
Do you plan on pursuing further coaching education online?	135	(61)	6	(21)	40	(18)
Are you more likely to pursue coaching education if it is available online?	148	(68)	38	(17)	33	(15)
Is coaching education important for youth sport coaches?	212	(96)	5	(2)	4	(2)
Should coaching education be mandatory for youth sport coaches?	204	(92)	13	(6)	4	(2)
Should coaching certification be required for all coaches?	190	(86)	17	(8)	14	(6)
Should coaches be expected to pursue continuing education?	193	(87)	8	(4)	20	(9)

Table 3 reveals the perceptions of coaches for continuing coaching education. Overall, the majority of the coaches (96%) indicated that coaching education is important for youth sport coaches. Additionally, 92% of the sport coaches felt that coaching education should be mandatory for youth sport coaches. Furthermore, 87% of the sport coaches reported that coaches should be expected to pursue continuing coaching education, while 86% of the study's participants felt that coaching certification should be required for all coaches.

Discussion

This study assessed the educational needs of sport coaches. Particular emphasis was placed on assessing coaches' perceptions of, and reasons and preferences for, continuing coaching education. The results of the study revealed that the majority of sport coaches wanted to learn more about motivating athletes, advanced instructional drills, first aid, goal setting and character building. These results reflect the lack of

a systematic approach to coaching education (Morris-Eyton and Coopoo, 2013). Therefore, this study indicates that there is a dire need for coaching education programmes. However, the fact that the majority of sport coaches in this study were coaching on a part-time basis necessitates the structuring of coaching courses in such a way that coaches are able to attend – i.e. during weekends.

While a previous study conducted by Vargas-Tonsing (2007) recognised the importance of communicating with parents, the present study demonstrates that sport coaches showed least interest in learning how to communicate with parents. It could be surmised that poor communication between parents and the coach may perhaps be due to the number of parents who assume the role of sideline coaches and are often found leaning over the bench making suggestions to athletes (Smoll et al., 2011). In most cases, these particular parents' instructions contradict those of coaches and disrupt the team (Smoll et al., 2011), thereby weakening the potential strength of the sport triangle (coach-athlete-parent relationship) and the overall sport experience of the athlete (Vargas-Tonsing, 2007).

A disconcerting finding of this study was that sport psychology was rated as the least important reason for continuing education; yet, in contrast, it was reported as the most important reason for those questioned in previous research (Cheung and Fung, 2007). The current finding may indicate that the needs of coaches are not being met in the current coaching system (Vargas-Tonsing, 2007). This finding may also substantiate Cheung and Fung's (2007) contention that perhaps the application of the concepts of "sport psychology" was not made explicit to the coaches during their training. It could also be possible that coaches are not aware of the value of sport psychology to their coaching. Therefore, the present findings imply a need to educate coaches about sport psychology. As Weinberg and Gould (2007) have stated, sport psychology plays an important role in improving athletes' performance. This could be achieved by encouraging sport coaches to read sport psychology journals and magazines and motivating them to attend workshops on this subject.

The results of this study further indicated

that sport coaches would be more likely to continue coaching education if they had a desire to coach at a high level, if topics were relevant and if courses were in line with league requirements as well as available online. Although sport coaches showed a keen interest in continuing their coaching education if it was available online, more research is needed to ascertain whether online education is truly a viable form of coaching education (Vargas-Tonsing, 2007) in South Africa. An encouraging finding in this study was that the coaches indicated that coaching education was important and felt that it should be mandatory for young sport coaches. These findings demonstrate that sport coaches appreciate the need to attend coaching courses. Therefore, it is recommended that sport organisations should organise such courses regularly so that coaches could attend from time to time. Moreover, sport organisations should organise other, alternative methods of learning, such as coaching seminars, workshops or clinics, so that coaches' knowledge could be enhanced. The results of this study should be interpreted cautiously based on a number of limitations. First, since the study sample was drawn from one province only, it is not representative of South African coaches as a whole and therefore cannot be generalised in this context. Second, the fact that the participants were selected from the sports recommended by the Department of Sport and Recreation of South Africa confounds the generalisation of our results and warrants the need for further research to validate the current findings. Finally, the participants were not randomly selected and may not be fully representative.

Conclusion

The present study provides valuable information for identifying the educational needs among sport coaches in South Africa. This study found that the majority of sport coaches wanted to learn more about motivating athletes, advanced instructional drills, first aid, goal setting and character building. The sport coaches further indicated that coaching education was important and felt that it should be mandatory for young sport coaches. Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations are made. First, coaching courses should be conducted during

weekends so that coaches who work full-time are able to further their education. Second, sport

organisations should also make online education available for coaches.

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