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COACHES' PERCEPTION OF THEIR COMPETENCE AND TRAINING NEEDS FOR PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

Terkimbi Victor Ikpato [1],Okey Charles Ogu[2], John Ityonande Ityodugh[1],Tavershima Kparev[1],Eunice Nguungwan Seer-Uke[1],Mary Agajah[1],Sarah Ngukuran Burbwa[1]

[1]Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education, Benue State University, Makurdi, Nigeria
[2] Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education, NNamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Ananbra, Nigeria
Correspondent Author: victorterkimbi@gmail.com; 07031574332

ABSTRACT
This study examined coaches' perception of their competence and training needs for professional practice in Benue State. Two research questions and six null hypotheses guided the study. The survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised of 162 coaches. A structured questionnaire developed by the researcher was used as an instrument for data collection. The independent sample t-test and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to analyse the data collected on competence as well as training needs based on gender, age, and years of experience. The cluster mean ratings for practice and competition was 3.06 it show there was no significant difference in the mean ratings of coach's competences relating to practice and competition based on gender, age and years of experience. The cluster mean rating of coaches on their training needs was 3.09. The study concluded that there was no significant difference in the mean ratings on interpersonal skills based on gender, age and years of experience. The study recommended that coaches should develop competences related to skilled performance and also develop interpersonal skills needed to enhance both coaches and athlete's professional practices for sports development.

Keywords*: Coaches; perception; competence; training needs; professional practice.*

Introduction

In this contemporary world, sporting activities have been universally accepted as a unifying force for people of different races, tribes, cultures, creed and religious backgrounds. Historical and anthropological research evidences indicate that sports have been part of the fundamental aspects of all culture throughout the history of mankind [1]. Doyle further asserted that, as society increases in population its physical activities become more complex. Arnold [2] observed that sports have gradually become one of the most important ingredients of living. For many people in the world, people involved in professional sports can earn a great deal of money at the highest levels.

In support of the statement above, [3] pointed out that, sports is a social phenomenon that has grown from its humble beginning of being an entertainment and recreation past time to become a viable and

prominent business that could no more be ignored in the social, political and economic environment of any nation. Given this trend, government, private organizations and individuals have continued to invest huge sums of money in sporting events both in the area of training of coaches, facility development, sports administration and training of sports men and women so as to get qualified and qualitative sports coaches, for great sports performance and good representation in their various sports fields.

Sports coaches assist athletes in developing to their full potentials. They are responsible for training athletes in a sport by analysing their performances, instructing in relevant skills and by providing encouragement. A coach is also responsible for the guidance of the athlete in life and their chosen sport. McKay, Park and Seo[4] posited that a coach organizes amateur and professional athletes and teaches them the fundamentals of sport. He or she trains them to compete as a team or individually. Arnold [2] asserted that, in sports a coach is a person involved in the direction, instruction and training of the operations of a sport team or of individual sports people. Coaching is therefore a method characterized by the active involvement of the athlete through powerful questioning and active listening [5,6].

Fourie [7] noted that today coaches face great challenges as they struggle to continuously develop their athletes in accordance with the well-known Olympic motto, "Citius Altius, Fortius" which is Latin for 'Faster, Higher and Stronger'. According to Mielke [8], coaching is a highly complex process and coaches are required to undertake a variety of tasks such as in-depth planning of trainings competitions, organizational tasks, and monitoring of athletes, which extend well beyond teaching skills and tactics. Coaches' ability to deliver these key expectations is likely to determine their coaching competence. Effective coaching is crucial to the development of sports talents, however, the outcome of athletes' performance that is win or loss has been the dominant method to evaluate coaches' work and competence. However, Feltz[9] argued that such an approach is problematic because it does not take into account other important aspects of coaching, for example, athlete-coach relationship which might influence performance results. They further posited that a coach organizes amateur and professional athletes and teaches them the fundamentals of sports. He or she trains them to compete as a team or individual. Ghaneker [10] stated that in sports, a coach was a person involved in the directing, instructing and training of the operations of a sport team or of individual sports men and women. Ghaneker further asserted that, a coach must instill in athletes a feeling of self-worth and self-confidence and be able to motivate all athletes to put forth their utmost efforts to achieve their set goals.

To further buttress this point, Blanchard [11] asserted that practice is designed to help both coaches and athlete build the skills necessary to compete. He also affirmed that it is a time to build each skill set that is important for a sport or any type of competitive performance. They

further noted that, the reality is that, there is one huge difference between practice and competition; competitions matters, how well an athlete perform and result in practice do not have any value beyond that day. The fact that competition matters bring with it all sorts of baggage related to expectations, focusing on results, comparing an athlete with other athletes and fear of failure. That is why so many athletes practice much better than they compete. The majority of the population view coaching as episode of short term but this stance is detrimental to coaching. Hopefully the Nigerian Institute of Sports (NIS) which was introduced in 1992 ensures both the relevance of coach education courses and ultimately the professionalization of coaching in Nigeria. It seems like the present criteria, or lack of it to identify expert coaches, reveal certain short comings.

Furthermore, interpersonal skills in sports are the behaviours and tactics a person uses to interact with others effectively in the sports world, the term refers to a coaches' ability to work well with his team of technical crew and management staff of a sport organization. Interpersonal skills range from communication socializing and listening to impute of the others within the organization. Collins and Collins [12] asserted that interpersonal skills are often referred to as social intelligence. They depend on reading the signals others said and interpreting them accurately in order to form a response.

Research in sport coaching is still in its infancy even though some of its aspects are dated from ancient times. However, coaching in sports has today received much attention in both empirical research and sports literature. Coaching as a form of training and development is aimed at helping athletes to achieve specific personal or group goals. In other words the automate purpose of coaching is to enhance the skills knowledge and ability of athletes in order to increase their athletic performance and develop requisite attitudes and behaviours that are necessary to succeed on the task for which they are trained. Therefore, competent or successful coaches are those knowledgeable regarding the physical, technical, and tactical and psychology preparation of their athletes for training and competition. These coaches have sound knowledge in coaching methodology, principles and game strategies, and are able to corporate or harmonize their athlete's performance of such training methods tactics and game/match strategies in order to build a positive and effective coach-athlete understanding and/or relationship.

The researchers having also represented Benue State both in school sports and National competitions have observed that unlike between the 1980s and late 1990s when Benue state athletes did the state proud at national competitions, today the performance of Benue athlete during national competition has substantially decreased to the lowest ebb if compared with the good old days of 1980s and late 1990s. The impact of coaches on this cannot be easily downplayed nor overemphasized since they have the responsibility of training athletes by applying various training

methods, principles, tactics and strategies as well as adopting leadership styles that are aimed at improving the skills and overall performances of athletes. Therefore, based on these factors and the recent dwindling performances of Benue State athletes, the researcher became motivated to investigate coaches' perception of their competences and training needs for professional practice in Benue state to ascertain if the poor performance of the Benue state athletes can be attributed to failure of good or competent coaches. This study therefore, aims to examine coaches' perception of their competence and training needs for professional practice in Benue State.

Research Questions

The study was guided by two research questions:

1. What are the competences of coaches relating to practice and competition for their professional practice?
2. What are the training needs of coaches relating to interpersonal skills for their professional practice?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. Mean ratings on coaches' competences relating to practice and competition will not differ based on gender.
2. Mean ratings of coaches' competences relating to practice and competition will not differ based on age range.
3. Mean rating of coaches' competences relating to practice and competition will not differ based years of experience.
4. Mean ratings on coaches' training needs relating to interpersonal skills will not differ based on gender.
5. Mean ratings on coaches' training needs relating to interpersonal skills will not differ based age range.
6. Mean ratings on coaches' training needs relating to interpersonal skills will not differ based years of experience.

Research Method

The research design that was used for this study was survey research design. Survey research design concerns itself with the present and attempts to determine the current status of the phenomena under investigation. Brinkerhoff and Robert [13] stated that survey research design is used to describe, interpret, access and analyze the existing conditions as at the time of the study.

There is a sports council in Makurdi which is a parastatal under the Benue State Government. It is known as the Benue State Sports Council, Makurdi. One hundred and sixty two (162) coaches of Benue State Sports Council. The population for this study consisted of all the one hundred and sixty two (162) coaches of the Benue State Sports Council (BSSC) Makurdi. Purposive sampling technique was used to select all the coaches because the coaches in the sports council are not too many to be sampled. By using all the coaches for the study, the

responses obtained from the coaches will represent their ideal perception of their competencies and training needs for professional practice rather than making generalizations from a few coaches' perceptions. Data for this study was obtained through the administration of the questionnaire to respondents. This was done with the aid of four research assistants who were instructed on the administration of the questionnaire. These research assistants underwent a trial version of the data collection before the actual data collection process. The questionnaire was given to the coaches prior to their training sessions after they have been briefed about the essence of the exercise. The coaches were allowed a meaningful time to completed the questionnaire and return to the researcher on the spot to ensure high return rate. Data in this study was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. Answering the research questions was based on the following criteria:

For competency, it is as follows

Response	Real Limits
Very Competent	3.5-4.0
Competent	2.5-3.49
Incompetent	1.5-2.49
Very Incompetent	0-1.49

For training needs, it is as follows

Response	Real Limits
Strongly Agree	3.5-4.0
Agree	2.5-3.49
Disagree	1.5-2.49
Strongly Disagree	0-1.49

The independent sample t-test was used to find out gender differences in coaches level of education as a coaching competency and communication skills as a training need. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to analyse differences in level of education as a coaching competency as well as communication skills as a training need of coaches based on gender, age, and years of experience. All the analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 23) at 0.05 level of significance. In testing the hypotheses using t-test, p-value was used to test for significance. The hypotheses were rejected if p value is < 0.05 and vice versa.

Presentation of Results

Research Question One: What are the competences of coaches relating to practice and competition for their professional practice?

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Table 1: Coaches' Mean Ratings of Competences Related to Practice and Competition for their Professional Practice N=162

S/N	Competences Related to Practice and Competition	Mean	SD	Remark
1	The practice sessions are conducted considering the team and the individual needs	2.97	.59	C
2	Organizing and directing the practice session	3.01	.58	C
3	Evaluating and modifying the practice session, adapting it to unexpected situations.	2.98	.58	C
4	Preparing the athlete during practice and as a team for the competition	3.03	.58	C
5	Preparing a session's competition, establishing goals adjusted to the team's level.	3.01	.61	C
6	Guiding the athletes during the competition, considering technical and discipline aspects	3.12	.65	C
7	Seeking to act ethically and with the highest integrity during practice and competitions	3.06	.62	C
8	Focusing on skill of athletes, the game strategy and not the athlete for team selection during practice and competition	3.04	.70	C
	Mean of Means	3.03	.61	C

The results displayed in table 1 show that the mean ratings for the 8 competences relating to practice and competition range from 2.98 and 3.06. The mean ratings indicate that the coaches considered themselves competent in the remaining all the 8 competences relating to practice and competition for their professional practice. This is also shown by the overall mean rating of 3.03.

Research Question Two: What are the training needs of coaches relating to interpersonal skills for their professional practice?

Table 2: Coaches' Mean Ratings of Training Needs Related to Interpersonal Skills for their professional practice

N=162

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S/N	Interpersonal Skills as training need	Mean	SD	Remark
9	Addressing critical athletes issues in a timely manner	2.89	.62	A
10	Recognizing and rewarding the athlete behaviour that contributes towards excellent performance of the team.	2.90	.65	A
11	Knowing how to adapt to meet the athlete needs.	3.09	.60	A
12	Fostering team cooperation, building trust among team members and creating team goals.	3.02	.55	A
13	Analyzing current procedures and identifying opportunities for improvement.	3.09	.60	A
14	Understanding team strengths and weakness and using this information to create optimal solutions to problems.	3.07	.60	A
15	Making sound and timely decision under pressure	3.04	.63	A
16	Promoting open participation and communication within the entire team	2.91	.58	A
	Mean of Means	3.00	.60	A

As shown in table 2, the mean rating by coaches on their training needs of ranged between 2.89 and 3.09. The mean ratings show that the coaches agree that all the skills relating to interpersonal skills are areas they have training needs. While "addressing critical athletes issues in a timely manner" (Mean = 2.89) was the lowest area of need, "knowing how to adapt to meet the athlete needs" and "analyzing current procedures and identifying opportunities for improvement" are the highest areas of training need with mean rating of 3.09 respectively.

Testing Null Hypotheses

Gender differences in the mean ratings of coach's competences in Benue state relating to practice and competition

Table 3: t-test Comparison of Mean Rating of Competences Relating to Practice and Competition by Male and Female Coaches

Source of variation	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-cal	*p-value*	Decision
Male	128	3.03	.34	160	.18	.86	NS
Female	34	3.02	.37				

The results in table 3 shows that the mean rating of the competences relating to practice and competition by male coaches (M=3.03.29, SD=.34) was not significantly

greater than the mean rating by female coaches (M=3.02, SD=.37); t (160) .18, p=.86. Since the *p*-value was greater than the 0.05, the null hypothesis was not rejected.

Age differences in the mean ratings of coach's competences in Benue state relating to practice and competition

Table 4: Analysis of Variance on the Mean Ratings of Coach's Competences Rating to Practice and Competition by Coaches of Different Age Range

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	*P*-value	Decision
Between Groups	.50	3	.17	1.39	.25	NS
Within Groups	18.84	158	.12			
Total	19.34	161				

The results in table 4 shows that there was no significant difference in the mean ratings of competences relating to competition an practice by coaches of different age range, $F(3/158) = 1.39$, $p = .25$. Since the *p*-value was greater than the stipulated 0.05 significance level, the null hypothesis was not rejected.

Differences in the mean ratings of coach's competences in Benue State relating to practice and competition based on years of experience of coaches

Table 5: t-test Comparison of Mean Rating of Competences Relating to Practice and Competition by Coaches' of Different Years of Experience

Source of variation	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-cal	*p-value*	Decision
Beginning coaches 1-5years	73	2.98	.38	160	-1.64	.096	NS
Experienced coaches 6 years and above	89	3.07	.32				

The results in the table 5 shows that the mean rating of the competences relating to practice and competition by experienced coaches (M=3.07, SD=.32) was not significantly greater than the mean rating by beginning coaches (M=2.98, SD=.38); t (160) 1.64, *p*=.096. Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected.

Gender differences in the mean ratings of coaches in Benue State on training needs relating to interpersonal skills

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Table 6: t-test Comparison of Mean Rating of Training Needs Relating to Interpersonal Skills by Male and Female Coaches

Source of variation	**N**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Df**	**t-cal**	***p-value***	**Decision**
Male	128	3.00	38	160	.06	.95	NS
Female	34	3.00	39				

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The results in the table 6 shows that the female coaches' mean rating of the training needs relating to interpersonal skills (M=3.00, SD=.39) was not significantly greater than the mean rating by male coaches (M=3.00, SD=.38); t (160) = .06, *p*=.95. Therefore the null hypothesis was not rejected since the p value of .95 was greater than 0.05.

Age differences in the mean ratings of coaches in Benue State on training needs relating to interpersonal skills

Table 7: Analysis of Variance on the Mean Ratings of Coaches' Training Needs Relating to Interpersonal Skills by Coaches of Different Age Range

Sources of Variation	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	*p*-value	Decision
Between Groups	.41	3	.14	.95	.42	NS
Within Groups	22.95	158	.15			
Total	23.36	161				

The ANOVA result displayed in table 7 indicates that there was no significant difference in the mean ratings of training needs relating to interpersonal skills by coaches of different age range $F(3/158) = .95$, $p = .42$. Since the *p*-value of .42 was greater than the stipulated 0.05 significance level, the null hypothesis was not rejected.

Difference in the mean ratings of coaches in Benue State on training needs relating to interpersonal skills based on years of experience

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Table 8: t-test Comparison of Mean Rating of Coaches' Training Needs Relating to Interpersonal Skills by Coaches of Different Years of Experience

Source of variation	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-cal	*p-value*	Decision
Beginning coaches 1-5years	73	2.98	.38	160	-.56	.57	NS
Experienced coaches 6 years and above	89	3.02	.38				

The results in the table 8 shows that the mean rating of training needs relating to interpersonal skills by experienced coaches (M=3.02, SD=.38) was not significantly greater than the mean rating by beginning coaches (M=2.98, SD=.38); t (160) .56, *p*=.57. Since the *p* was greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis not rejected.

Discussion of Findings

The result of the study as presented in table 2 shows that the mean ratings for the 8 competences relating to practice and competition range from 2.98 and 3.06. This is also shown by the overall mean rating of 3.03. The findings were similar to Demers and colleagues [14] who emphasize that competences of communicating and implementing training tasks, providing support and managing athletes during competition. Furthermore, the elite coaches interviewed by Abraham and colleagues [15] identified the competences of providing feedback and skill acquisition as the key-words of coaches' pedagogy; which they employed to explain how to construct the practice session and to adjust information to the ever changing environments of practice and competition. Similarly, Santos and colleagues [16] in their findings, found that competences related to practice and competition orientation emerged as the one in which coaches needed more training (much needed), even though they perceive themselves as very competent. When the result was analysed based on gender, the result indicated that, there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of coach's competences in Benue state relating to practice and competition as perceived by male and female coaches indicating that male and female coaches have similar competences in Benue state relating to practice and competition($p>0.05$). In the same vein, there was no significant difference in the mean ratings of coach's competences in Benue State relating to practice and competition as perceived by age of the coaches implying that, age did not affect coaches' competences in Benue state relating to practice and competition ($p>0.05$). Relatedly, there was no significant difference in the mean ratings of coach's competences in Benue State relating to practice and competition as perceived by years of experience of coaches($p>0.05$). Furthermore, 63.33% respondents stated that the good coach-athlete interaction of the positive interpersonal relationship (social support) enhance athletic development of athletes. These results correspond with earlier findings by Loughead and Carron

[17], which examined the effect of coaching behaviours on team cohesion and found that illiteracy of a coach had detrimental effect on the team, as it creates a hostile climate and athletes keep distance for each other impacting negatively on a team's cohesion.

This study found that the coaches agree that all the skills relating to interpersonal skills are areas they have training needs. The mean rating by coaches on their training needs ranged between 2.89 and 3.09. The findings corroborate with Bredemeier and Shields [18], who carried out a research in Germany on interpersonal relationships in sport groups indicated that interpersonal relationships and groups processes have become key factors to fully understand group dynamics in sports teams. In the same vein, Adekunle [19] carried out a study on ratings skills needed by coaches for sports development in south-west, Nigeria and revealed that the respondents rated human relation skills, innovative skills and problem-solving skills as highly needed by coaches for sports development in the area. The study concluded that sports coaches highly need "relatives, innovative and problem-solving skills to succeed in their coaching career and for sport development in south west, Nigeria. The analysis of this variable by gender indicated that, there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female coaches in Benue State on training needs relating to interpersonal skills ($p>0.05$). Relatedly, there was no significant difference in the mean ratings of age ($p>0.05$), and years of experience ($p>0.05$) of coaches in Benue State on training needs relating to interpersonal skills.

Conclusion

The main purpose of this study was to examine coaches' perception of their competence and training needs for professional practice in Benue State. Based on the results of the study, it was concluded that coaches perceived themselves as competent in competences relating to practice and competition for their professional practice. Coaches agree that all the skills relating to interpersonal skills are areas they have training needs.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the study, the following recommendations were made

1. Practice and competition are of fundamental importance to athletes therefore coaches should recognize that becoming a reflexive practitioner is a competence related to skilled performance in the practice domain and it will enhance both coaches and athletes professional practice in Benue State.
2. Coaches should always remember that all the skills relating to interpersonal skills are areas of importance in sports therefore interpersonal relationships and group processes have become key factors to fully understand group dynamics in sports and problem solving career and for sport development.

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