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Assessing the needs of coaches in developing a coach education framework

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Abstract

The establishment of a global framework recognising coaching competencies and qualifications is part of the International Council for Coaching Excellence key objectives for the period 2009-2015. It is partly for this reason that the South African Sports Confederation and Olympic Committee (SASCOC) has developed a framework for Long-Term Coach Development in order to identify, recruit, support and provide recognition to coaches (SASCOC, 2011). As part of a study exploring the impact of coach education on coaching practice, a national survey of lifesaving coaches was conducted (n = 120). This was done using the Survey Monkey® internet tool and targeted all coaches and administrators listed on the Lifesaving South Africa's database. Survey questions focused on obtaining a demographic profile, coaching experience and the foci of athlete training. Questions also sought to gather information on the coach education process, its content and the way it was assessed. Results from the survey indicated that 81% of respondents are volunteer coaches with an age range between 18 and 60 years. 50% of sampled coaches had been coaching lifesaving for between two and five years, mostly at the club level (96%). Coaches were asked where they had learnt to coach, and the most common responses were drawing from their own sporting experiences, watching other coaches and being self-taught. The implementation of a coach education programme through Lifesaving South Africa was well received, although only 54% felt that certification should be mandatory. It was through this preliminary data that an understanding of what the coaches' require in a coach education programme was gained.

Key words: coaching competency, coach education framework, coaching qualifications, lifesaving, long-term coach development.

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Introduction

Lifesaving South Africa (LSA) has as its core business the provision of voluntary lifeguarding services operating in both coastal and inland areas in the country (LSA, 2011). However, lifesaving is not only about keeping aquatic resources safe. It has evolved into a competitive sport with a focus on both still-water (pool and dam) and surf events. Lifesaving sport through club and

provincial structures offer competitive and training experiences enabling nippers (ages 8 to 13) and seniors (ages 14 upwards) to compete at club, provincial, national and international events (LSA, 2011).

The training of athletes and their competitive experiences fall under the guidance of a coach. Typically, the lifesaving coach is a volunteer who may not have any formal or recognised coaching qualification (Vargas-Tonsing, 2007; Wiersma & Sherman, 2005). To date, little comprehensive research has been conducted specifically examining lifesaving as a sport or coaches' education programmes within the South African context. Previous studies have focused on the fitness norms of surf lifeguards and pool supervisors in their duty as patrollers at beaches and swimming pools (Coopoo & Andrews, 1997; Coopoo & Schafer, 2001). Internationally, the current research dealing with lifesaving sport is sparse. Topics that have been identified in the literature include: occupational fitness standards for lifeguards (Reilly, Wooler & Tipton, 2005), injuries sustained during surf lifesaving activities (Ashton & Grujic, 2001), lactate levels during an event-specific pool lifesaving event (Alfaro, Palacios & Torras, 2002), biomechanical analysis of throwing techniques (Avramidis, 2008) and issues dealing with situated learning and community identity in nippers (Light, 2006).

Coaching of sport takes place in a complex, dynamic and multi-dimensional environment embedded within a specific social and cultural context (Cushion, Armour & Jones, 2006). It can be viewed as a process that is improvement-oriented, coach-driven and occurring within the confines of a single sport, where the stages of participant development are taken into account (SASCOC, 2011).

Internationally, research on coach education has started to receive more attention. The focus of the research has been examining the efficacy of coaching education programmes (dos Santos, Mesquita, dos Santos Graca & Rosado 2010; Malete & Feltz 2000), the educational need of coaches (Erickson, Bruner, MacDonald & Côté, 2008), how coaches learn to coach and the development of expertise (Gilbert & Trudel 2005; Jones, Armour & Potrac, 2003; Werthner & Trudel 2006) as well as athletes evaluations of coaches (Meyers, Feltz, Maier, Wolfe & Reckase 2006). This has contributed to the body of knowledge allowing researcher's access into the core of the coaching process – the coach. However, what is lacking in the literature is a sport-specific contextualised understanding of the coach education process, especially as it relates to the development of a coach education framework.

The International Council for Coaching Excellence (ICCE) seeks to promote coaching as an internationally recognised profession (ICCE, 2010). The establishment of a global framework recognising coaching competencies and qualifications is part of the organisations key objectives for the period 2009-2015. A project group has thus been formed to develop an international sport-

coaching framework to develop and recognise coach education qualification on a global basis (ICCE, 2010).

As coaching takes on a more professional stance within the South African sporting arena, more emphasis is being placed on the quality of coaching through a proposed standardised series of qualifications. It is partly within this light that the South African Sports Confederation and Olympic Committee (SASCOC) has developed a framework for Long-Term Coach Development (LTCD) in order to identify, recruit, support and provide recognition to coaches (SASCOC, 2011).). This model aims to address the needs of coaches at predetermined stages of development, knowledge expertise and experience in the field. The framework allows for the recognition of coaching competence which is aligned to the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) and the Culture Arts Tourism Hospitality and Sport Sector Education and Training Authority (CATHSSETA) (SASCOC, 2011). The alignment and subsequent mapping of coaching qualifications against the requirements set by the NQF provides a platform for educational equity and coaching standardisation across sports federations. It also provides a structured professionalisation and accreditation process of the sport coaching sector.

Currently, there is no standardised coach education certification across all sports federations. Lifesaving South Africa (LSA) is a sports federation where there is no formalised coach education system at any level of coaching. A strategy is therefore required for the development of a coaching framework and its implementation that has alignment to the SASCOC requirements. Thus, the purpose of this research was to examine the lifesaving coaches' educational needs, requirements and perspectives on the value of an educational programme.

Materials and Methods

Participants

Participants (n = 120) were coaches and administrators on Lifesaving South Africa's national database, who had e-mail addresses to which a survey could be sent. Participants who did not have access to e-mail or whose contact details were missing from the database were excluded from participation in this study. Those participants not directly involved in coaching were not required to complete the coaching specific questions in the survey.

Research Design

A national survey was conducted using the Surveymonkey® internet tool was conducted (www.surveymonkey.com). The aim of the survey was to update the LSA's database and obtain a demographic profile. It also obtained information regarding the implementation of a coach education process and the requirements of the coaches in order to implement such a programme. This type of survey was used to reduce the time taken for responses to reach the researchers and it allowed those members on the data base with e-mail addresses to be contacted immediately (Wright, 2005).

The survey questions emanated from piloting an initial questionnaire and working in conjunction with the Director of Sport for LSA. The survey was set up to allow for basic question options including checklists for multiple responses. This allowed for the collection of primary data from respondents which are presented in the results. No text box options were included for qualitative responses.

Questions focused on demographic profiling, information from coaches regarding coaching experience, their level of coaching, where learning to coach took place and their athlete training information. Coaches were asked to identify their own required resources for further coaching education and what their preferences for coach education workshops including content, resources and assessment would be.

For the purposes of this paper, the demographic profile presented examined race, gender, the numbers of volunteer and paid coaches, whether or not they regard themselves as being novice or expert coaches as well as their age and employment status. Coaching experience, resources and further education requirements as well as workshop preferences are reported in the results. Athlete training information was not reported as it was beyond the scope of this paper.

Statistical Analyses

Descriptive statistics were used in the analysis and summary of survey data. This allowed for the characteristics of the coaches to be examined. Data were calculated and are presented as percentages of responses from the sampled and respondent LSA coaches.

Results

An outcome of the survey response allowed for the updating of the LSA coaches and administrators database. Of the 181 e-mails sent out, 120 responded resulting in a return rate of 66%.

Demographic profile

The racial profile of the coaches indicates that the majority of coaches were white males (52%) and white females (30%) No black or Asian female coaches completed the survey. Coaches were asked whether or not they were volunteers or paid for their coaching services and how they viewed themselves as either a novice or expert coach (Table1). There were no limitations given for the number of responses to this question. The age range of coaches is between 18 and 60 years or older, with 42% falling within the 40-49 age year category. Employment status indicated that 78 % of the coaches were in full time employment working 40 hours per week.

Coaching experience

Data showed that 25% had less than 2 years' coaching experience, 25% had been coaching for between 3-5 years and 25% for more than 10 years. Coaches were asked how they became involved in lifesaving. Being parents accounted for 56% of the responses whilst 54% were former competitive lifesavers.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of lifesaving coaches illustrating race, gender, professional or volunteer status and personal perception of level of coaching (n = 120)

Race	**Gender**		**Volunteer**		**Paid**		**Novice**		**Expert**	
	M	**F**	**M**	**F**	**M**	**F**	**M**	**F**	**M**	**F**
White	63 (52%)	36 (30%)	56 (47%)	22 (18%)	7 (6%)	14 (12%)	5 (4%)	2 (2%)	6 (5%)	7 (6%)
Coloured	16 (13%)	1 (0.8%)	16 (13%)	0	0	1 (0.8%)	1 (0.8%)	0	0	0
Black	2 (2%)	0	1 (0.8%)	0	1 (0.8%)	0	0	0	0	0
Asian	2 (2%)	0	2 (2%)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	83 (69%)	37 (31%)	75 (63%)	22 (18%)	8 (7%)	15 (12%)	6 (5%)	2 (2%)	6 (5%)	7 (6%)

M = male; F = Female

The majority of the coaches' coach at a club level (96%). Coaches were asked where they learnt to coach and numerous options were given with no limitation for the choice of options. There were 118 respondents to the question with the top three responses being; 1) drawing from own sports experience, 2) watching other coaches and 3) being self-taught (Table 2). None of the coaches surveyed have any formal coaching qualifications in lifesaving. Drawing on their sporting experience and watching other coaches were the predominant ways in which coaches learnt to coach.

Table 2: Coaches responses indicating where they learnt how to coach

Number of responses*	Response
95	Drawing on own sporting experience
83	Watching other coaches
64	Self-taught
45	Have other coaching experience
29	Have teaching experience
21	Asked to do it without any experience
16	Was a technical official

* Multiple responses

These self-taught coaches contributed to 50% of the coaching work force that have between 1-5 years of coaching experience.

Content material required for further coach education.

In order to understand the needs of the coaches regarding necessary content and further coaching education opportunities, coaches were asked to respond as to the importance of predetermined coach education modules. These modules were determined in focus group discussions with University sports science lecturers. A Likert-type scale ranging from totally unimportant to very important was used to determine responses (Figure 1).

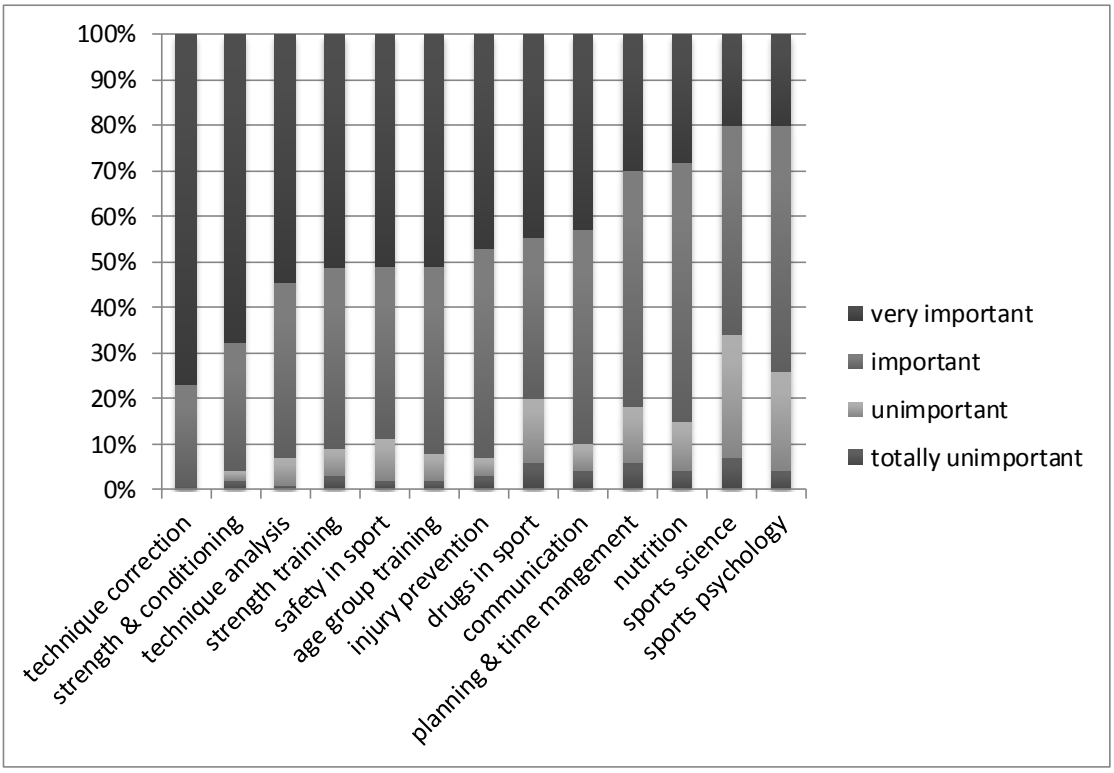

Figure 1: The importance lifesaving coaches place on predetermined coach education modules

The top three very important modules were; 1) technique correction, 2) strength and conditioning and 3) technique analysis. Those modules coaches deemed most totally unimportant included sports science, planning and time management and drugs in sport. When asked if a coach education programme should be implemented through the federation, 89% of the coaches answered yes. However, only 54% felt that coaching certification should be mandatory.

Coach preferences for education workshops, including content delivery, resources and assessment

Coaches were also asked about the delivery of workshops and the majority (82%) identified practical sessions as being the most preferred, with lectures, discussion groups and group work being the least preferred. Time allocation for workshops was also examined where 39% of the coaches preferred a half day (4 hour) work shop, while 39% preferred a one and a half day workshop compared to a full day workshop (22%). The preferred method for receiving the workshop resources was a compact disc. As with any type of educational qualification, competency and skill acquisition is required to be assessed. An on-line option, multiple choice questions and an open book assessment were the most preferred methods for assessment. Least preferred assessment methods included a written assessment, presentation and self-assessment.

Discussion

In an attempt to understand the needs of a coach for the implementation of a coach education framework, the survey provided an in depth view as to what coaches are looking for when embarking on an education journey. The fact that coaches have learned the tools of their trade primarily through their own sports experiences, watching other coaches and being self-taught shows the lack of a systemised approach to coach education. This could however be seen as a strength for the current successful lifesaving coach, as research by Cushion, Armour and Jones (2003) indicated that coach education has little impact on the process of coaching or on coaching practice itself. However, it is assumed that a basic theoretical knowledge is essential in order to interpret, understand and develop coaching programmes without injury to the athletes. The basic knowledge in the science of coaching is essential in order to assist the coach in making the correct decision with respect to training and recovery, periodisation and conditioning programmes that are appropriate for the developmental stages of the lifesaver.

The recognition of prior learning (RPL) is a process that will require attention within the coach education framework, especially if experiential learning and coaching experience is to be taken into account. If 25% of the coaches have been coaching for more than 10 years without having gone through a structured or formalised coach education process, RPL is essential for the retention of

experiential "capital" within the sports federation. The implementation process would thus require guidance from SASCOC and LSA to ensure that all coaches receive the necessary recognition and "license" to coach, whilst taking into account their needs and those of the athletes they coach.

When examining the content that coaches presumed to be important, the survey indicated the topics with the highest ratings of importance were those focusing on enhancing athlete performance (technique and strength and conditioning). However, fundamental topics (which received the lowest ratings of importance) such as psychology, sports science, communication, planning and time management also play a role in the coaching process and should be integrated into the knowledge base that coaches receive (Vargas-Tonsing, 2007).

Coaches are in favour of having a coach education system implemented through LSA but are not giving their total support for mandatory coach certification (46% not in favour of mandatory certification). This could be due to the fact that the majority of coaches (81%) are volunteers with limited time available for extracurricular learning based on the demands of family life, or that the content and format of a coach education system could be seen as too formalised and thus not appealing to coaches (Wiersma & Sherman, 2005). To address these issues, time for effective instruction, best methods for delivery as well as the relevance and practicality for coaches is required (Vargas-Tonsing, 2007).

Formal coach education programmes have been critiqued for their ineffectiveness in ensuring coach learning and the development of knowledge and expertise (Erickson, et al., 2008). By conducting this survey the opinions of the coaches have been assessed in terms of what they would like to be considered in a coach education programme. The inclusion of topics that coaches are interested in brings about the potential for an enhanced educational process to be realised (dos Santos, et al., 2010).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The implementation of a coach education framework is scheduled to be implemented through the Federation with the required alignment to SASCOC. This process requires engagement with the coaches to ensure their needs are taken into account for their own professional coaching development. If this takes place it will ensure a coach education framework that is relevant and contextualised for lifesaving coaches. From this process it is anticipated that improved lifesaving performances can be realised.

Recommendations from this study include ensuring that through coaches' engagement, an understanding as to their needs from a coach education perspective can be gained. This allows for coach education decisions to be made with their participation. Piloting a coach education programme with continuous

feedback from coaches before the implementation phase will enhance the relevancy and applicability to the specific coaching context. The mapping and curricular frameworks against governing body structures require planning and consultation between coaches and sports federations. Ideally this should be done in conjunction with a higher education institution partner.

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