Are coach education programmes the most effective method for coach development?

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to establish whether coaches from a multi-sport context develop most effectively through coach education programmes and whether formal learning is fostering coach effectiveness. A sample of eight qualified male multi-sports’ coaches participated with an age range of 24 to 52 years (M = 32.6, ± = 8.9) and 9 to 18 years coaching experience (M = 12.6, ± = 3.8). Qualitative semi structured interviews were employed, lasting approximately 30 to 60 minutes. The data then underwent a thematic analysis process reducing the data into six overarching themes: values of the coach; the coach’s role on athlete development; forms of learning; barriers regarding coach education; role of governing bodies; coaches career pathway. The findings of the study indicated coaches access a wide range of sources to enhance their practice, but informal learning was preferred (interacting with other coaches and learning by doing). This resulted from numerous barriers experienced surrounding the delivery, cost and access to coach education programmes preventing coaches from progressing through the pathway. However, coaches in the study feel coach education should be a mandatory process for every coach. The findings have implications for policymakers and sport organisations in developing their coach education structure.

Keywords: coach education programmes; coach effectiveness; sports coaches; multi-sport context; sport organisations
Sports coaches have a direct influence on individual’s participation, enjoyment, passion and commitment in playing sports throughout their entire lifetime (ScUK, 2015). There are approximately 1.3 million individuals that are actively engaged in the role of a sports coach in the United Kingdom (UK) fostering the development of 7 million children and adults competing at various levels (ScUK, 2015). Sports’ coaching is an occupation, but remains distant from becoming an established, regulated profession. Only few studies have addressed the prevailing challenges preventing sports coaching from achieving a professionalised status (Duffy et al., 2011; Gray et al., 2011; Taylor & Garratt, 2010). In particular, sports’ coaching has not established an empirically tested knowledge base, ethical code of conduct, rights to practice and self-regulatory process. Further to this the roles of the coach have become increasingly stratified where sports’ coaching has been associated with health, educational and business fields (Nash, Sproule and Horton 2008).

Practitioners working in professional industries are required to develop an extensive knowledge base through attaining appropriate levels of education (undergraduate/postgraduate levels). Further to this, once practicing, these individuals are obligated to self-regulate themselves through complying with continuous professional development (CPD) throughout their careers (Armour, 2010). There has been a shift towards a unified body with the establishment of the United Kingdom Coaching Certificate (UKCC). However, this represents a workforce of predominantly volunteers where not all sports comply or have adopted the UKCC framework into their own system, thus creating a clear divide between governing bodies of sport. Standardisation among sports is assumed to create homogeneity between organizations and sports coaches (Foucault, 1991: p.184), as it introduces a clearly defined framework that delineates coaches’ stages of learning, but it is clear that sports coaching must address the pressing issues preventing it from achieving a professional status.
Collinson (1996) identified a triad of knowledge that can be interpreted from a sports coaching perspective. Collinson’s triad of knowledge is underpinned by three forms of knowledge: professional, interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge. Professional knowledge refers to Abraham and colleagues (2006) ‘ologies’: sport specific, pedagogical and sports science knowledge. This is usually conceptualised by a coaches ability of knowing what (declarative) and knowing how (procedural) to operate in the coaching environment. Previous research has indicated that professional forms of knowledge have underpinned current coach education programmes (Gilbert & Trudel, 2006), but this fails to truly acknowledge the interpersonal dynamics of the coaching environment. Interpersonal knowledge refers to the bidirectional relationships that are present in the coaching environment: coach, athlete(s) and the structure (club/ culture). Finally, intrapersonal knowledge refers to the knowledge of oneself and has been heavily cited within the reflective practice literature (Cote & Gilbert, 2009). It is expected that coaches must consistently engage in all three aspects in order to achieve coaching effectiveness (Cote & Gilbert, 2009). There has been a range of theoretical and empirical perspectives relating to coaches’ development, but there is ambiguity regarding the nature of the coaching process due to overly simplistic representations of the coaching process (Cushion, 2007), failing to acknowledge the complexity and unpredictability of the coaching environment.

Research suggests that coaches access multiple methods to increase their learning and develop their coaching (learning by doing; print/ electronic material, coach education, clinics, CPD, observation of others, interactions and mentoring), but it has been identified that the forms of learning contributing to coach development are not equally valued (Erickson et al., 2008). The education of coaches has received significant attention in recent years due to an increasing expectation of coaching roles at both ends of the coaching spectrum. Therefore, it would be presumed that coach education, the focus of the current study, would be highly
desired by sports coaches in the UK. However, a body of literature has indicated that coach education is not the most desired resource for developing coaching knowledge, but informal experiences, such as learning through experience and interaction with other coaches is preferred (Erickson et al., 2008; Gilbert & Trudel, 2006; Cushion et al., 2003; Nelson et al., 2006; Mallett et al., 2008; Gilbert & Trudel, 2001).

From the various sources of learning identified, these can be grouped into three overarching sources of coach learning: formal; informal and non-formal. Formal learning, such as coach education has a standardized structure where attendance is compulsory and normally culminates in certification only once the individual meets the desired criteria expected. Informal learning represents a lifelong process where individuals acquire and accumulate knowledge, skills, beliefs and perspectives from everyday experiences and exposure from their surroundings. Research has indicated that sports coaches devote over 1,000 hours in informal learning situations and as little as 10 hours in formal coach education (Gilbert et al., 2010). Finally, non-formal learning has been positioned between formal and informal learning as it is structured, systematic and educational but does not culminate in certification. Examples of non-formal learning include: continuous professional development (CPD), clinics, workshops or seminars.

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the existing coaching literature by investigating whether coaches develop more effectively through coach education from a multi-sport context. It will consider whether coaches value coach education as a predominant learning source in consideration to the range of sources available (formal/informal/non-formal). By implementing semi-structured interviews and deducing participant interpretations through thematic analysis, this study will allow appropriate conclusions to be drawn from the effectiveness of formal coach education programmes.
METHODOLOGY

Participants

From the eight coaches interviewed, various sports were represented: football (n=3), rugby (n=1), swimming (n=1), multi-sports (n=3). The age range between the participants was 24 to 52 years (M = 32.6, ± = 8.9), with 9 to 18 years of coaching experience (M = 12.6, ± = 3.8). Across the sample, the coaches’ work demographic was taken into consideration: three of the eight coaches are active sports development officers, two are head coaches, one coach is self-employed, one is an active schools coordinator, and the remaining coach is an assistant sports development officer. In relation to the coaches respective coaching groups, two have worked with elite athletes and hold Level 4 qualifications in their sport. The remaining six coaches varied in their highest level of qualification from level 2 to level 4. All of the coaches had previously studied a sport’s specific degree, excluding one coach that obtained a master’s degree in sports coaching. The coaches in the study had not previously participated at an elite level, but had experience at recreational levels. Finally, all of the coaches participated at a voluntary basis.

Instrumentation

Semi-structured interviews were utilized as the method of data collection for the study. This research technique was underpinned through an interpretive research paradigm where participants were prompted to answer each question as honestly as they could with as much information, through open ended questions. Each interview was maintained through a consistent framework that was followed for each interview. The interview structure (Appendix 5), based on Falcao et al. (2012) framework consisted of 12 questions and was
divided into three sections: introductory questions; key questions; summary questions; concluding question. The introductory questions were used as an ice-breaker; initiate conversation surrounding participant experiences in coaching sport. The key questions of the study explored and evaluated participant perceptions of coach development and coach learning in relation to their developmental pathway. Two summary questions were included to summarize the overall effectiveness of the coaching courses by establishing whether coaches perceived themselves as a more competent coach as a result of completing the course, and whether they completed the course to fulfil or enhance career objectives. To conclude the interview, a concluding question was used to establish whether the coach has come closer to achieving their main career objective as a result of engaging in coach education.

Procedure

Once ethical approval was granted from the university’s ethical board, the recruitment process was initiated. This process consisted of sending emails to head coaches and sport development officers locally in Dundee. A purposeful sampling technique was used to recruit coaches where the coaches that were contacted consisted of high and low level qualification. The recruitment email consisted of a general outline describing the nature of the study with some background information of the researcher. If contact was returned, a second email was sent to participants to organise an interview meeting, alongside an information sheet. The interviews were conducted in the most convenient location for each participant; participants working environment. In preparation for every interview, the researcher ensured written consent, a note pad, digital recorder and interview structure was readily available. During the interview, the coaches were prompted to reflect on their experiences as a sports coach whilst taking into consideration the sources of learning they
engaged in to develop their coaching. Every participant was encouraged to give as much
information as possible, but if responses lacked depth, a probing technique was used to
prompt further discussion. This was also used to reduce ambiguity in the context of
participant’s interpretations of participant experiences. Interviews were recorded and
transcribed verbatim and lasted approximately 25 to 65 minutes.

Data Analysis

The eight interviews were transcribed verbatim. The data then underwent a thematic
analytical process including: similarities and differences, coding, categorizing and constant
comparison completing the familiarization of the data (Jones et al., 2014). A reduction of
categories was formed and coded using a colour coded representation of the different themes
that emerged from the analysis. The themes and sub themes were further analysed and
compared to assess the integrity of themes and to remove any form of researcher bias or
overlaps in the data. To maintain reliability of the data, inter-rater reliability was employed
to reduce the level of subjectivity of the researcher’s interpretation of the data, increasing the
validity of the research findings. According to Flick (2009) validity must be constantly
maintained throughout the entire research process and this was assured by having a
substantive understanding of the research theory of coaching science research, mastery of
theoretical underpinnings related to coaching and having a reflexive stance of the
RESULTS

In consideration to the purpose of the study six themes were identified: virtues of the coach; the coach’s role on athlete development; forms of learning; barriers to coach education; role of governing bodies; coaches career pathway.

Virtues of the coach

There are many aspects that contribute to the values of the coach as two coaches reiterated, “It’s a wide remit”. Similarly, another coach disclosed, “If you try and put what coaching is on bits of paper, you are not going to do it”. However, from this study, three overarching sub-themes were generated by the eight coaches: positivity, communication and patience.

Positivity.

All eight coaches incorporate positive coaching into their coaching sessions. In particular, one coach identified a new policy reinforcing positive coaching, “The older coaches who go back shouting and balling and tooting at them [children]… through the new project Positive Coaching Scotland we are trying to eradicate that out of the game”. Similarly, another coach stated the importance of positive coaching, “Even if you’re having the worst day ever, you kinda got to put your game face on and you have got to be like all happy, enthusiastic”. One coach rewards their athletes through positivity, “If they do say please and thank you, nice manners thanks for that, high five…trying to be positive”.

Communication

Communication was identified as a key virtue by the coaches in this study. In particular, one coach disclosed, “It’s a tree with a load of branches… ability to give them that information, impart that information to them… facts, short, sharp, accurate facts”. Another
coach indicated that coaches must be knowledgeable in order to communicate effectively,
“You need the knowledge to go deliver, but you also need the method of delivering that knowledge”.

Patience

The coaches in the study raised the importance of the virtue, patience in coaching, “I have never said to a child, you know that was murder it’s kinda like, hey that was a good effort”. Similarly, another coach stated, “as long you can promote enthusiasm and fun in a caring way, caring and understanding towards the children”.

The coaches’ role on athlete development

All of the coaches in the study perceived the coaches role of high importance where the coach acts as the main facilitator and barrier to athlete participation in sport. Two sub themes were identified within the theme ‘The coaches’ role on athlete development’: Importance of the coach on athlete development and dropout in sport.

Importance of the coach on athlete development

The coaches in the study raised the importance of the coach on athlete development, “They need to have the player at the centre and they should be a master of instantaneous response”. One coach underlined the role of the coach as he explained that coaches should not take the credit for the success of their athletes, “We can do all the preparation we want, we don’t get in there, we don’t do the long jump, we don’t run the race for them, score the goal that makes them champions… I put the little building blocks in place, that’s my job”
Another coach mentioned that coaches’ develop by the same principles of athletes, “We are training our knowledge and our brain to be better or be physically sharper… it’s a shame about everything else down”. Similarly, another coach mentioned their governing body are trying to create, “a double go coach… success through effort…motivating players to have a bit of intrinsic motivation…teaching them life skills that are transferrable into everyday life”. Furthermore, one coach explained, “Coaches try to coach what’s on the bit of paper not what’s actually happening”.

Drop-out in Sport

One coach reinforced the coaches role through sport, “Inspire the children to take part in sport and make sport fun [coach]…as you develop into your teens a coach is really there to impart knowledge and to improve people’s games”. However, too much pressure on athletic performance may lead to ‘drop-out’ as one coach disclosed, “Falls back to the coach”. Another coach stated the importance of coaches’ being aware of athletic training zones, “You can’t push a body and a person a hundred per cent all the time”. Finally, one coach reinforced equality to sports participation at all levels, “You want to give that 1 per cent the best chance but the other 99 per cent you have to look after those guys as well”.

Forms of learning

All of the coaches within the study identified two main types of learning that coaches can access to enhance their level of coaching: formal learning; informal learning. Formal learning such as coach education had been previously accessed by all of the coaches and was a requirement for participants to have in order to take part within the study.
All eight coaches in the study reinforced the importance of formal learning; one coach disclosed, “We have got to have these licensed, generic coaching courses so we have a professionalism and identity”. Similarly, another coach stated, “Gives you the tools to put in your toolbox [coach education]”. One coach identified numerous benefits of coach education, “The qualifications give you ideas; they prompt you to think… you get to see other people in practice and it gives you an idea of good and bad practice”. Two coaches explained they have integrated formal learning into their own coaching, “That’s [coach education] given me a bit of a framework of what I think is good practice and I have taken wee bits of it and put it in my mould, made it relevant for myself”. Finally, coaches explained the importance of coaching courses, “You need to get folk on an introductory course, you have got to get them clued up, get them safe you know, they have got to be doing safe practice… then from there look at educating them on how to do stuff…take that help before you turn up for courses”

Informal learning

The coaches in the study identified numerous forms of informal learning as one coach disclosed, “Going out and watching people and learning and looking on YouTube for drills, buying books, and asking people”. Two of the eight coaches expressed the need for coaches to be flexible with their learning, “You need to be open and receptive… soak up as much as you can”. Mentoring programmes were also identified, “learning from experienced coaches who have been there, done that”. However, one coach stated, “[mentoring] certainly works, but the key question is, is it the right mentor”. Furthermore, this participant stated that it is vital to access formal and informal learning,
“You couldn’t specifically say I am a good coach now I have been on these coach education courses… just because you have got lots of coaching hours doesn’t necessarily make you a good coach, they need to go hand in hand with each other.”

Barriers to coach education

Three prominent barriers were identified to undertaking coach education courses: course structure, cost and access to courses.

Course structure

In relation to course structure, coaches felt that the courses were quite limited in content, “I have got to do management, various bits of paperwork and that sort of thing. The coaching courses don’t really prepare you for that sort of thing”. Similarly, another coach disclosed, “There are so many different aspects you have to cover [in coach education]…you have got a limited amount of time presenting these coach education courses”. To counter this point, another coach explained, “The tutor basically controlled you, didn’t really get the chance to develop your own style of coaching”. Similarly, another coach distinguished variances between assessment criteria, “People pass it too easily, they are almost giving away these courses like sweeties”. Additionally, “Assessments should be across every single level; it’s not just a case of turn up and get your badge”. However, another coach explained, “It’s such a fine line because once someone knows it’s a test you’re not confident, then you will not go, so you don’t want to discourage people”.

Cost

Five of the eight coaches disclosed cost as a barrier to undertaking coach, “The cost for some of the courses is outrageous”. Similarly, another coach stated, “I think cost is, as you go up the levels is something that probably puts a lot of people off”. However, another
coach countered this viewpoint, “The only way to grow the game is by people going out and coaching the game, so it's a double edged sword again. If you don’t have the coaches, you don’t have the people participating”. One coach stated there are ways around costs, “At quality mark clubs you get it for half price”. Similarly, another coach mentioned, “The universities and colleges are quite good to find courses and pots of money to put on free coaching qualifications for students or for senior pupils or for teachers”.

Access to courses

Four of the eight coaches explained access to courses was problematic, “The timing for some courses; some are at the weekend… Sometimes the courses are at an area that people can’t get to easily”. However, another coach stated, “Courses are there, they run courses maybe midweek or over the weekend, they run them over two weekends, they provide options for people to go”. Furthermore this coach explained, “They [courses] are certainly available online, you can look at everything, where the venues are…”

The role of National Governing Bodies

All of the coaches in the study believe that the NGBs have a significant role in shaping coach education courses. Two sub-themes were identified from the theme ‘The role of NGBs’: structure of the courses and self-regulation.

Self-regulation

One coach felt that coaches are not prompted to improve themselves, “It wasn’t I’ll do the absolute minimum and sit on my backside which is what a lot of people do”. Similarly, “My first aid was due for renewal after 3 years; you know they were able to achieve it… I don’t see why the governing bodies can’t do it”. However another coach indicated regulation is becoming introduced, “We have now introduced CCD [football pathway] which is
continued coach development… If they have not gone on a course within 4 years I think, or 3 years, then they are going to lose their certificate”. One coach mentioned regulation within their NGB,

We have evolved our resources going from it was a video to a DVD in a booklet, we now have a CD-ROM in a booklet which gives you the opportunity to download future application forms for future courses

Coaches’ career pathway

In relation to the coaches’ career pathway, two sub-themes were identified: higher education and accrediting coaches.

Higher education

All of the coaches in the study attended higher education through a college or university. Some coaches stressed the importance of higher and further education, “There should be some form of introduction…most coaches’ get that through college or University, other coaches and volunteers don’t get introduced to that”. Similarly, another coach expressed the significance towards their coaching career, “That 2, 3 years [of University] was the biggest, the most significant development of my coaching career so far”. Furthermore, another coach distinguished the difference between coaching courses and higher education, “It would take 6 days to do the course at FAW [Wales Football Association]; we could spend up to 3 months doing it [at University]”. However, another coach explained a degree is not conclusive, “Going through a degree doesn’t make you a good coach and playing the game doesn’t mean you can actually coach the game”.

Accrediting coaches
All the coaches previously volunteered before they reached the role they were in now. One coach explained, “Volunteers is the bottom level of the pyramid, but it’s the biggest level”. Another coach mentioned an accreditation programme for volunteer coaches, “We do a quality mark programme with 89 clubs… the volunteers need to be accredited to a certain level of qualification”. One coach explained that change needs to occur within the football structure,

We have been talking a long time about grass roots in this country… and that’s the ones where the least time is invested, it’s only when you go up the pathway up to the elite spectrum that you start to focus more hours at that particular level, yet you need better coaches at that level, but there is less players at the top so it’s almost turning that pyramid on its head so you have got an inverted triangle that’s got more resources should go to the bottom.

Another coach mentioned the importance of getting qualifications,

I have sat with head teachers trying to get in a school and do taster sessions and the first thing they might say to you can you prove your credentials, so I have got a folio…and then straight away they are thinking this guy does actually have a bit of experience, he is well qualified.

Furthermore, one coach mentioned, “If you go for any job… you can have all the experience that you want, but if you have not got a bit of paper saying you have been on this course it’s worthless”. Another coach stated that there are now requirements to access particular job positions, “If you wanted to get into a pro initiative club you need a licence; club development management posts you have to have a licence… if you don’t have a licence you don’t get on”.
DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to establish whether coaches develop more effectively through coach education programmes. This was achieved through qualitative, semi-structured interviews of qualified sports coaches. The data underwent thematic analysis and six themes and sub-themes emerged from the eight interviews: values of the coach; coaches role on athlete development; importance of the coach on athlete development; forms of learning; barriers to coach education; the role of NGBs; coaches career pathway.

Virtues of a coach

Three distinctive virtues were identified within the theme virtues of a coach: positivity, communication and patience.

Positivity

Creating a positive environment was used to gain trust and encourage positive traits underpinned by national policy (PCS), consistent with Sullivan's et al. (2012) qualitative questionnaires of 172 youth sport coaches. Similarly, coaches’ indicated negative coaching behaviours are detrimental to fostering a positive coaching environment. This is reinforced by coaching literature that suggests athlete’s motivation levels are decreased through negative reinforcement and expletive criticism, decreasing coaching effectiveness (Vargas-Tonsing et al., 2004).

Communication

Coaches in the study stated the importance of communication as a virtue of coach development. However, Cote & Gilbert (2009) explained coach development is predominantly focused on developing coaches’ professional knowledge: sport specific/science knowledge. They (Cote & Gilbert, 2009) believe coaches must integrate a
mixture of interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge to be able to communicate effectively
as the coaching environment requires high levels of communication between key agents
(athletes/coaches/parents). Therefore, it is anticipated that coach education must diverge
from its traditional teaching approach towards Sfard (1998) participational metaphor.

Patience

Findings revealed that effort should be valued more than outcome, reflecting a
mastery climate that fosters athlete’s competencies, enjoyment and involvement in sport
(Weiss et al., 2009). Similarly, the coaching role requires coaches’ to develop mental
preparation, performance strategies, goal setting and promoting effort and perseverance
(Gould & Carson, 2011).

Forms of learning

Coaches identified various sources of learning underpinned through two forms of
learning: formal/informal learning.

Formal learning

The coaches in the study stated the importance of coach education programmes in
sustaining and enhancing the quality of sports coaching, consistent with Cushion et al.
(2003). Aforementioned, coaches have a direct influence on athlete involvement and
development in sport and therefore, it is of particular importance that coaches receive
adequate training (Cote & Gilbert, 2009). Coach education develops a framework that a
coach can integrate into their own coaching, but due to the simplistic nature of the framework
coaches often feel isolated and resort to developing their own heuristic model. However,
Sullivan & Campbell’s (2005) study shows that coaches who participated in a coach
education programme had greater levels of coaching efficacy, in contrast to the control group
of coaches who had not undertaken any form of coach education. Furthermore, coaches have access to experts in their field as a result of attending coach education courses (Mallett et al., 2009).

Informal learning

All eight coaches disclosed informal learning as their most preferred method of learning, consistent with previous literature (Erickson et al., 2007; Erickson et al. 2008; Nelson et al., 2006; Trudel et al., 2010; Wright et al., 2007). The coaches engaged in mentoring, CPD, reading books and using the Internet to develop their coaching knowledge. Similarly, Farrell & van de Braam (2012) suggested is a responsibility of the modern day coach to engage in informal learning. Moreover, coaches expressed the importance to interact with other coaches, reinforcing the need to be open and receptive to learning (Erickson et al., 2008). However, Lemyre et al. (2007) study indicated that coaches are unlikely to interact with other teams at recreational levels due to the competitive nature and pressure of winning.

Coaches’ role on athlete development

Two sub themes emerged from the theme coach’s role on athlete development:

importance of the coach on athlete development and dropout in sport.

Importance of the coach on athlete development

The role of the coach on athlete development was reported significantly by coaches in laying the foundations for their athletes where the players are at the centre of every session, with performance goals addressed in training sessions. This is reinforced by creating a social environment that reflects children's aspirations to participation, allowing athletes to achieve sport related goals (Bailey et al., 2013). Moreover, coaches explained the desire to coach
what you see rather than on the session plan, thus facilitating a democratic coaching style, contrasting autocratic coaching styles (Cushion & Jones, 2001). However, Potrac et al. (2007) stated instructional feedback allows coaches to have control over their athletes and of the training session and therefore variances in coaching styles were apparent in this current study.

Dropout in sport

The findings indicate coaches have a significant role in shaping a child's involvement in sport, through the coaches role frame in delivering fun coaching sessions (Keathley et al., 2013; Russell & Limle, 2013). Similarly, previous research indicates participation in sport at an early age promotes longevity in sport participation in later life (Backmand et al., 2010). Coaches identified indicators of dropout of sport. In particular, athletic burnout was identified as a significant contributor towards dropout in sport, resulting from severe fluctuations in psychological and physiological performance (Kentta et al., 2001). Similarly, athletic burnout was identified as the most significant predictor of dropout in college athletes (Holmberg and Sheridan, 2013). Lemyre, Treasure and Roberts (2006) study found that devaluation was most significantly correlated to psychological factors where exhaustion was most significantly correlated towards physiological factors.

Barriers to coach education

Two subthemes were identified from the theme barriers to coach education: course structure, cost and access to courses.

Course structure

The structure of coach education was perceived as being dogmatic in its structure, supporting Vella et al. (2013, p426) study that suggests coaches are indoctrinated by coach
educators, developing only closed skills. Vella et al. (2013, p.426) indicate that coaches need to develop open skills, where coach educators allow coaches to contribute to the learning process, demonstrating competence and creativity in learning. There were differences disclosed between assessments and attendance based courses between various NGBs and this was reinforced by one coach explained some NGBs are passing coaches too easily on coach education courses. Similarly, the courses are often too short in duration and one to one interaction with the tutor is limited; therefore, these programmes may be ambiguous for some learners (Mallett et al., 2009). Moreover, coach education is performance improvement focused where coaches are overloaded with information in a very small time frame (Vargas-Tonsing, 2007). This may have detrimental effects on coach development as one coach believed coach education courses are limited in developing the array of skills required by coaches; administration and management. Therefore, it may be presumed that coaches are not fully prepared entering their coaching roles at recreational levels of the game.

Cost and access to courses

Another two prominent barriers were reported by coaches in the current study: cost and access to courses. In particular, one coach in the study explained that the cost for courses is outrageous, consistent with Armstrong & Weidner’s (2011) study that identified the cost of coach education and travel to courses as the two most dominant barriers in accessing coach education. Findings (Armstrong & Weidner’s, 2011) revealed that female coaches perceived cost and travel distance as significant barriers in comparison to male coaches. This is an interesting contrast to this present study as cost and travel were two of the most dominant themes that emerged as barriers for the male coaches.

The role of NGBs
Two sub-themes emerged from the theme the role of NGBs: structure of courses and self-regulation.

Self-regulation for coaches and NGBs

Coaches disclosed the role of their NGBs in self-regulation through continuous regulation and evolving their course content. This was reinforced by Majid et al. (2012) that investigated six international and national coach education programmes and found that sport organizations should be evaluating their programmes on a regular basis to ensure coaches are learning and developing most effectively. In terms of regulating coaches it was observed that only some sport organizations have regulation policies in place, such as CPD where coaches are expected to renew their level of certification in order to practice, but it is clear most NGBs do not enforce this. Therefore, questions arise to whether mechanisms should be in place for all sport coaches to maintain regulation as in order to obtain a professional status, regulation must be introduced at every stage of coach development (Duffy et al., 2011).

Coach’s career pathway

Two subthemes emerged from the theme coaches’ career pathway: higher level education and accrediting coaches.

Higher education

Coaches in this study perceived higher education as a significant contributor towards their development. In particular, one coach stated it was a milestone in their coaching career so far. According to Dos Santos et al. (2010) the effect of higher education on coaching knowledge indicates coaches that undertake higher education benefit more than those that do not access it as the academic environment promotes higher cultural levels and develops a more extensive sport science knowledge base (Demers et al., 2006). All eight coaches in this
present study attained sport specific degrees but coaching science research indicates that most coaches do not get introduced to higher level education and therefore, this increases the requirement for coach education (Nash & Sproule, 2009). Although going through higher education has shown to be beneficial to the coaches in this study, it is apparent that it is not enforced for all coaches to engage in this process.

Accrediting coaches

Coaches in the study mentioned how their sports organizations have mechanisms in place to accredit all of their coaches (volunteer, part-time, full-time); coach education. One coach in the study indicated the need for qualifications is necessary for career progression in sports related fields. All eight coaches stressed the importance of volunteer coaches in coaching, and this may be linked to previous engagements as a volunteer coach. As a result it is suggested that more resources are required at the bottom of the pyramid of the novice to elite spectrum, as more children at the bottom are participating at this level under volunteer coaches, suggesting that grassroots is the biggest area of development. Sports coach UK supports this finding as the survey conducted in 2008 identified that 76% of coaches in the UK are volunteer coaches, 29% are part time coaches and 3% are full time coaches (ScUK UK, 2011). Strategies need to be put in place to incur a cultural change, providing greater opportunities for volunteer coaches, supported through a national shift in coaching (Feltz et al., 2009).

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to establish whether coaches develop more effectively through coach education and this was achieved through qualitative, semi-structured interviews. To analyse the data, thematic analysis was employed resulting in six themes
The findings of the study suggest that coaches engage in two types of learning: formal and informal. The coaches preferred to access informal learning more frequently than formal learning and this was achieved by interacting with other coaches and learning through trial and error. This research advocated every coach (volunteer, part time and full time) should engage within coach education reinforcing the coaches’ role on children’s involvement and development in sport (Backman et al., 2010). Findings from Mallett et al. (2009) study indicate all learning opportunities should be valued equally as they contribute to the cyclical cycle of coach development. However, in consideration to the findings (Mallett et al., 2009), formal learning is significantly underrepresented and this may be linked towards the trend of informal learning. This study postulates coach education should be valued as a significant learning endeavour similar to that of informal learning, but it is believed that systematic changes in the governance of sports will allow progress to be achieved (Cushion et al., 2010).
REFERENCES


