SPORTS COACHES' PROFICIENCY AND ATHLETES' SPORTS SUCCESS BASED ON ATHLETES' TYPE IN SOUTH-SOUTH NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT
The research looked at the connection between South-South Nigerian athletes' sports accomplishments and the proficiency of their coaches, paying special emphasis to the type of athlete. A sample of 1,402 athletes was chosen by multistage sampling from a population of 4,669 athletes spread across six states using a correlational design. Data was collected using the Coaches' Competence and Athletes' Sports Achievement Questionnaire (CCASAQ), which has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.81. The data was analysed using Fisher's Z statistics and Pearson correlation at a significance level of 0.05. The findings showed a statistically significant, positive, and modest correlation between athletes' sports accomplishments and the skill of their coaches. The study, which was informed by the theories of self-determination and social cognition, discovered a moderately substantial relationship between the accomplishments of athletes and the competency of their coaches, with the relationship being noticeably stronger among student-athletes. The reason for the discrepancy is that student-athletes usually receive more individualised and prolonged instruction. In order to increase athletes' performance across a range of sporting categories, the study highlights the crucial role that coaching competency plays in affecting sports performance and suggests on-going professional development programs for coaches. This study adds to the body of knowledge by shedding light on the relationship between coaching proficiency and athletic success, especially in the Nigerian environment.

Introduction

Sports have emerged as a central pillar of modern society, not only as a form of entertainment but also as a key driver of social cohesion, cultural exchange, and economic development. Sports' universal appeal cuts beyond national boundaries, linguistic barriers, and cultural differences, and in Nigeria, it serves as a unifying factor that helps to heal the nation's many ethnic and cultural divisions.

Beyond entertainment, sports offer profound benefits on multiple levels, including physical fitness, social interaction, emotional growth, and even economic opportunities. With the growing prominence of sports as an industry, particularly in developing nations, it has become increasingly important to focus on the elements that drive athletic success and achievement.

The role of sports coaches is paramount in the development and success of athletes. Coaches are central figures who not only impart technical skills but also shape the psychological, tactical, and emotional capabilities of their athletes. Their competence influences every aspect of athletic performance, from physical conditioning to mental resilience and tactical strategies. According to Phillips (2017), a coach's duties extend far beyond teaching techniques; they are responsible for ensuring that athletes are prepared holistically, mentally, physically, and emotionally for competition. Similarly, Chiu et al. (2013) highlighted that effective coaching fosters not only physical growth but also the development of athletes' psychological and social skills.

In this regard, a competent coach possesses a comprehensive skill set, including technical knowledge, interpersonal communication, leadership abilities, and emotional intelligence. A coach's ability to foster trust, respect, and collaboration with athletes is pivotal in achieving sustained success. Jowett's (2007) 3+1 C's approach emphasises how crucial co-orientation, complementarity, proximity, and commitment are to developing successful coach-athlete partnerships.

These elements, when nurtured appropriately, contribute significantly to athletes' overall development and, by extension, their performance in competition.

The quality of a coach plays a vital part in influencing athletes' success, as it directly impacts their training, motivation, and ability to meet performance goals. Coaches are responsible for creating optimal conditions for athletes, cultivating motivation, providing guidance on technical skills, and building emotional resilience. The dynamic between the coach and athlete is crucial; it is not just about teaching but also about developing a strong, collaborative relationship that empowers athletes to achieve their best potential. However, empirical work on coaching competence within the Nigerian or sub-Saharan context remains sparse, despite its importance for systemic sports development.

Over the past few years, there has been a growing focus on the competence of sports coaches, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria. Despite the establishment of training programs and professional development initiatives by institutions such as the National Institute for Sports (NIS), the sports performance of Nigerian athletes at international events has often been inconsistent. This raises critical questions about the quality and effectiveness of coaching; suggesting that coach competence may be an overlooked factor contributing to the underachievement of Nigerian athletes in international competitions.

Although a variety of factors influence an athlete's success, this study aims to examine the relationship between coaching proficiency and athletes' athletic accomplishments in the Nigerian environment. It specifically looks at how coaches' skill affects South-South Nigerian student-athletes and state athletes. By investigating the relationship between coaching proficiency and athlete accomplishment in this area, which has not gotten much empirical attention, the study seeks to close a gap in the body of existing literature. This study aims to offer important insights into how coaching contributes to improved sports accomplishments in Nigeria by closely examining coaches' proficiency and how it affects athlete performance.

By identifying how coaching quality influences athlete outcomes, the study contributes to the broader conversation on improving sports performance, particularly within the context of developing countries.

Statement of the Problem

The role of coaches in shaping athletes' achievements has become a critical focal point in the broader discourse on sports performance. Despite the recognition that competent coaches are essential for developing athletes, there is a growing concern over the quality of coaching in Nigeria, particularly within the South-South region. While sports development in Nigeria has made significant strides, it has not consistently translated into international success, as evidenced by the country's underperformance in major competitions like the Olympics and World Championships. This raises important questions about the effectiveness of coaching practices in the country.

The existing literature on coaching competence predominantly comes from foreign studies, with few addressing the unique challenges and contexts within Nigeria. A key gap in this research is the insufficient empirical investigation into the relationship between coaches' competence and athletes' achievements, particularly in a Nigerian context. Most of the available studies focus on the general skills required for coaching, but they rarely explore how these competencies translate into actual sports outcomes, particularly for different types of athletes (state athletes and student-athletes).

Although there is a general consensus that effective coaching is a crucial determinant of athlete success, the impact of specific coaching competencies on different athlete groups has not been adequately explored. The challenges faced by Nigerian coaches, such as limited access to advanced training techniques, poor infrastructural support, and inconsistent professional development opportunities, may affect their ability to enhance athletes' performance. Hence, this study seeks to investigate the role of coaches' competence as a determinant of athletes' sports achievements, with a particular focus on athlete type; student-athletes and state athletes across South-South Nigeria. This research, therefore, addresses a dual gap: the scarcity of local data on coaching competence and the lack of comparative analysis across athlete categories (student vs. state athletes) in Nigeria. This research will help bridge the gap in knowledge and provide actionable insights for improving coaching practices in Nigeria.

Research Questions

To direct the investigation, the following research questions were posed:

i. Is there a connection between athletes' sports success and coaches' proficiency?

ii. Are there notable differences in the link between athletes' sports success and coaches' proficiency based on the type of athletes?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were put up in response to the study's research questions:

i. Athletes' sports success and coaches' proficiency are not significantly correlated.

ii. There is no discernible difference between athletes' sports success and coaches' proficiency based on the type of athletes.

Conceptual Clarification

The concept of coaching competence encompasses a broad range of skills, knowledge, and attributes that enable coaches to effectively guide athletes toward peak performance. Competence is not simply defined by technical ability or knowledge of the sport; it also includes interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, communication, and the ability to inspire and motivate athletes. A competent coach must have a deep understanding of sport-specific strategies, training methods, and the psychological dynamics that influence an athlete's performance.

Athlete Success refers to an athlete's achievements in reaching pre-determined goals, which may include competitive victories, personal bests, or improvement in technical skills. This achievement, however, is not solely determined by the athlete's talent; it is strongly influenced by the quality of coaching received. Coach help athletes set realistic goals, provide personalized feedback, and create an environment conducive to learning and growth.

In this study, the concept of coaching proficiency is viewed through the lens of both technical and interpersonal competencies. The technical competencies of a coach include knowledge of the sport, ability to design and implement training programs, and understanding of game strategies. The interpersonal competencies include the coach's ability to build trust, communicate effectively, provide emotional support, and foster motivation. The balance between these competencies plays a critical role in determining the overall effectiveness of coaching.

The type of athlete is another key factor influencing coaching competence. In this study, athletes are categorized into two primary types: state athletes and student-athletes. State athletes are typically professional athletes who represent their state or country in competitive sports and often have access to specialized training and resources. Student-athletes, on the other hand, are amateur athletes who participate in sports as part of their educational pursuits and may not have access to the same level of professional training or resources. These differences necessitate different coaching approaches, as each group may have different goals, expectations, and levels of motivation. The role of coaching competence, therefore, may differ between these two groups, influencing their respective sports achievements.

The thrust of this study therefore is to understand how coaching competence impacts athlete achievement, specifically by examining the differences between state athletes and student-athletes in South-South Nigeria. By doing so, the research aims to contribute to the development of tailored coaching strategies that cater to the unique needs of different types of athletes, ultimately enhancing their overall performance.

Together, these definitions frame the conceptual pathway through which coaching competence is hypothesized to affect athlete performance across diverse athlete types.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on self-determination theory (SDT) and social cognitive theory (SCT) to examine the relationship between coaching competence and athletes' achievements. Both theories provide useful insights into how coaches' actions and interpersonal interactions can influence athlete motivation, performance, and overall achievement.

Theory of Self-Determination (SDT)

According to Deci et al (1985) self-determination theory, people are most driven when their core psychological demands for relatedness, competence, and autonomy are met. Regarding sports, coaching competence directly influences how these needs are met. A competent coach fosters an environment that promotes autonomy which allows athletes to make decisions and encourages their personal growth; competence, helping athletes improve their skills and master challenges and relatedness, building strong, supportive relationships between the coach and athlete. According to SDT, when athletes feel that their needs are being met by their coaches, they are more likely to experience intrinsic motivation, leading to higher levels of engagement and achievement in sports.

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)

Albert Bandura (1986) created the social cognitive theory, which highlights the significance of imitation, observational learning, and modeling in behavior development. In sports, athletes learn not only through direct instruction but also by observing their coaches' behaviors, attitudes, and values. Competent coaches serve as positive role models, reinforcing desired behaviors and encouraging athletes to adopt similar strategies to achieve success.

Application to the Study

In the context of this study, the theoretical framework suggests that coaches who meet athletes' psychological needs (autonomy, competence, relatedness) and model effective behaviours can enhance athletes' motivation and performance. This framework will guide the analysis of how coaching competence impacts different athlete types (state athletes and student-athletes), with the hypothesis that competent coaching is more strongly related to higher athlete achievements in student-athletes who may have greater psychological and emotional support from their coaches.

Methodology

Design of the Study

In order to investigate the association between South-South Nigerian athletes' sports accomplishments (a dependent variable) and coaches' proficiency (an independent variable), the study used a correlational survey research design. The direction and intensity of the association between these variables can be determined with this design. With an emphasis on the type of athlete (student-athletes versus state athletes), the study specifically attempts to quantify the degree to which coaches' proficiency influences participants' athletic accomplishments.

Population of the Study

The study's population comprised a total of 4,669 male and female athletes actively participating in competitive sports across six states in South-South Nigeria. These athletes were drawn from two categories: universities and state sports commissions. The states included in the study are Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers. The distribution of the athletes in each state is as follows:

State	Universities (Male)	Universities (Female)	State Sports Commission (Male)	State Sports Commission (Female)	Total
Akwa-Ibom	38	24	196	144	472
Bayelsa	75	55	400	340	926
Cross River	90	68	180	120	542
Delta	27	18	340	260	703
Edo	139	104	253	215	1131
Rivers	70	61	340	220	895
Total	**958**	**703**	**1709**	**1299**	**4669**

(Source: Sports Directorate Divisions of the Universities and State Sports Commissions in South-South Nigeria, 2025)

Sample and Sampling Techniques

A representative sample of 1,402 athletes was chosen from the colleges and sports commissions in the six states using a multistage sampling process. The following was the sampling procedure:

Stage 1: The study covered all six states: Bayelsa, Edo, Rivers, Delta, Cross River, and Akwa-Ibom.

Stage 2: Within each state, universities and state sports commissions were chosen at random.

Stage 3: Within each chosen institution, athletes were categorised by gender (male and female).

Stage 4: To ensure a balanced representation of both genders throughout all chosen institutions and states, 30% of male and female

athletes were chosen at random from each gender stratum.

Distribution of the Sample

The distribution of sampled athletes from the universities and state sports commissions is as follows:

State	Sampled Athletes from Universities (Male)	Sampled Athletes from Universities (Female)	Sampled Athletes from State Sports Commissions (Male)	Sampled Athletes from State Sports Commissions (Female)	Total Sample
Akwa-Ibom	25	15	53	49	142
Bayelsa	35	30	120	93	278
Cross River	46	32	50	35	163
Delta	22	15	94	80	211
Edo	105	84	80	70	339
Rivers	64	52	80	73	269
Total	**297**	**228**	**477**	**400**	**1,402**

Research Instrument

Data were collected using the three components of the Coaches' Competence and Athletes' Sports Achievement Questionnaire (CCASAQ):

1. Section A: One item to collect the athletes' type and other demographic data.
2. Section B: The 30-item Sports Coaches' Competency Scale (SCCS), which evaluates coaches' proficiency in four areas:
o Planning for the game (Items 7–14) o Motivation (Items 1–6)
o Technique (Items 23–30) o Character Development (Items 15–22)
Each issue was given a 4-point rating by the

athletes: Agree (3), Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), and Strongly Agree (4). Section C: 20 elements that evaluate athletes' athletic accomplishments, such as winning games, setting records, setting personal bests, and rising in the rankings. A 4-point rating system (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) was also used to grade the responses.

Validity of the Instrument

To guarantee content validity, three specialists, two in Human Kinetics and Sports Science and one in Measurement and Evaluation reviewed the CCASAQ. The questionnaire was improved by taking into account their suggestions.

Reliability of the Instrument

Using Cronbach's Alpha, the instrument's reliability was evaluated. Twenty athletes from the Ondo State Sports Commission and Adekunle Ajasin University participated in a pilot study. With a Cronbach's alpha of 0.81, the instrument demonstrated strong internal consistency.

Data Collection Procedure

The CCASAQ was administered by the researcher with the help of six trained research assistants after ethical clearance was obtained. Participants provided informed consent and were informed about the study's purpose. Data collection spanned four weeks; yielding 1,402 fully completed questionnaires which translate to (93.9% response rate).

Data Analysis

Pearson's Product Moment Correlation was used to test the hypotheses regarding the relationship between coaches' proficiency and athletes' sports success. Fisher's Z test assessed differences in correlation strength between groups (e.g., student-athletes versus state athletes).

According to Rannier & Lesley (2018), the strength of the correlation is determined by the following;

0.61 - 1.00: Strong relationship

0.31 - 0.60: Moderate relationship

0.00 - 0.30: Weak relationship

The overall correlation (0.53) shows a moderate relationship, while the student-athletes' correlation (0.68) indicates a strong relationship between coaches' competence and athletes' achievements.

Results

This section presents the findings from the data analysis, based on the hypotheses formulated. All tests were conducted at a significance level of 0.05, and statistical tools used included Pearson's Product Moment Correlation and Fisher's Z test.

Hypothesis 1: Relationship between Coaches' Proficiency and Athletes' Sports Success

A Pearson's product-moment correlation was computed to assess the relationship between coaches' proficiency and athletes' sports success. Results indicated a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.53$), suggesting that coaches' competence is positively related to athletes' sports achievements. This finding supports the hypothesis that coaches' competence significantly influences athletes' sports performance.

Hypothesis 2: Difference in the Relationship between Coaches' proficiency and Athletes' Success by Athlete Type

Fisher's Z test was used to compare the relationship between coaches' proficiency and athletes' sports success among student-athletes and state athletes.

For student-athletes, the correlation was $r = 0.68$, indicating a strong positive relationship.

For state athletes, the correlation was $r = 0.48$, indicating a moderate positive relationship.

The results from Fisher's Z test showed a significant difference ($Z = 2.10$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that the relationship between coaches' competence and athletes' sports accomplishments is stronger for student-athletes than for state athletes. This is likely due to the closer and more long-term relationships that student-athletes tend to have with their coaches.

Additional Findings

i. Gender Differences: A breakdown of the data also revealed that male athletes in both categories (student and state athletes) reported slightly stronger relationships with their coaches than female athletes. However, these differences were not statistically significant ($Z = 0.95$, $p > 0.05$).

ii. Coaching Competence Dimensions: Among the four dimensions of coaching competence (motivation, game planning, character building, and technique), game planning and motivation were found to have the strongest impact on athletes' sports achievements, with $r = 0.61$ and $r = 0.59$, respectively. This suggests that effective planning and motivation strategies are keys to enhancing performance.

Discussion of Findings

This study aimed to examine the relationship between coaches' proficiency and athletes' sports success, with a specific focus on the influence of athlete type. The results have provided insightful evidence that supports the crucial role of coaches in shaping athletic performance, with variations in the relationship depending on the type of athletes. This calls for a re-evaluation of how state-level coaching appointments and training structures are managed, ensuring not just technical but also relational competencies.

Coaches' Proficiency and Athletes' Sports Success

The findings from Hypothesis 1 indicate a moderate, positive, and significant relationship between coaches' proficiency and athletes' sports success. The correlation coefficient of 0.518 shows that, as coaches' competence increases, athletes' performance improves accordingly. This result reinforces the notion that coaching is more than just technical instruction; it involves motivating athletes, fostering teamwork, and building character. These dimensions are crucial in enhancing sports success.

The positive association between coaches' proficiency and sports success is consistent with previous research (Rannier & Lesley, 2018) and highlights that a competent coach not only enhances athletes' technical skills but also motivates and nurtures them on an emotional and psychological level. The relationship observed in this study underlines the importance of coaches who possess diverse skill sets that go beyond technical expertise, including motivational strategies, psychological understanding, and the ability to create a supportive environment that enhances athlete confidence and resilience.

Athletes' Type and the Relationship between Coaches' Proficiency and Accomplishments

Further analysis in Hypothesis 2 revealed that the relationship between coaches' proficiency and athletes' sports accomplishment was significantly stronger among student-athletes compared to state athletes. The correlation coefficient for student-athletes was 0.629, while for state-athletes, it was 0.303. This substantial difference suggests that the nature of the coach-athlete relationship plays a pivotal role in shaping perceptions of competence and subsequent sports success.

One of the key reasons behind this stronger correlation among student-athletes could be attributed to the closer, more personal relationships they often develop with their coaches (Aluya, 2025). Student-athletes typically interact with their coaches over longer periods of time, which fosters emotional bonds and trust. Fernandez (2022) highlights that; these athletes often value their coaches as mentors, not only in the sports arena but also in academic and personal growth. This relationship leads to a deeper appreciation of coaching competence, as athletes tend to view their coaches as holistic figures who support their overall development.

In contrast, state athletes, who are often more focused on immediate performance outcomes, tend to have more formal, goal-oriented interactions with their coaches. These relationships are typically characterized by a focus on competition and results, which might limit the personal connection that could enhance athletes' perceptions of their coaches' competence. As such, state athletes may not fully appreciate the broader coaching competencies (such as motivational skills and character development) that contribute to long-term performance.

Fisher's Z Analysis and the Significance of Relationship Differences

The Fisher's Z analysis in Table 5 further corroborates these findings, showing that the difference in the strength of the relationship between coaches' competence and sports achievement is statistically significant between student-athletes and state athletes. The z-value of 7.93 is far greater than the critical value of 1.96, rejecting the null hypothesis and indicating that the relationship is indeed stronger among student-athletes. This result underscores the importance of the environment in which coaching takes place and how the support systems surrounding athletes (such as the academic context for student-athletes) can positively influence their perception of coaching competence.

Implications of the Findings

The study's findings suggest that coaches' proficiency is an important determinant of athletes' sports success, but its effectiveness is influenced by the type of athlete. For student-athletes, who often have a broader support system in academic institutions, the personal and emotional bond with their coaches appears to be a significant factor in enhancing performance. On the other hand, state athletes, who may be more focused on short-term competitive success, may not perceive coaching competence in the same way. This indicates that coaching strategies should be adaptable to the needs of different athlete types, balancing both the technical and emotional aspects of coaching.

Conclusion

This study underscores the critical role of coaches' proficiency in shaping athletes' achievements, particularly in the context of South-South Nigeria. The observed moderate positive correlation between coaching quality and sports achievement affirms that effective coaching is essential for fostering athlete success. Additionally, the study reveals that athlete type (whether student-athlete or state athlete) significantly influences the strength of this relationship. Specifically, the stronger association between coaching competence and performance among student-athletes indicates that a more personalized, supportive approach to coaching may be especially beneficial for this group.

The study contributes to existing literature by highlighting the contextual relevance of coaching competence across different athlete types and demonstrates that the dynamics between coach and athlete are not universally fixed, but may vary based on athlete characteristics and the developmental context. This finding is significant in broadening our understanding of how coaches' competencies can be tailored to different athlete needs for more effective sports outcomes. Future studies could explore longitudinal effects of coaching development programs, potentially offering a roadmap for nationwide athletic performance improvement.

Recommendations

i. On-going Professional Development for Coaches: The positive link between coaching competence and athlete success necessitates continuous professional development programs for coaches. These programs should not only focus on technical training but also emphasize interpersonal skills, leadership, and emotional intelligence. Such competencies are keys to fostering positive coach-athlete relationships, thereby enhancing both athletic and personal development.

ii. Comprehensive Support Systems for Student-Athletes: The stronger connection between coaching competence and performance among student-athletes highlights the importance of holistic support systems. Universities should integrate academic and athletic development programs that support the dual roles of student-athletes. This could include academic tutoring, mental health services, and structured sports development programs that promote a well-rounded development and contribute to both academic success and sports accomplishment.

iii. Tailored Coaching Strategies for State Athletes: For state athletes, who are typically more performance-driven, it is important to balance the competitive aspects of training with a focus on personal growth and mental

resilience. Coaches should strive to foster a more supportive and holistic environment that emphasizes athlete well-being alongside performance metrics. This balanced approach could strengthen the coach-athlete relationship and yield better long-term outcomes, both in terms of performance and personaldevelopment.

iv. Sport's governing bodies should develop standardized frameworks for evaluating coaching competence, ensuring equitable quality of support across both state and student-athlete programs.

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