

Coaches' Qualifications and Athletes' Achievement in Sports Academies in Kenya

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Abstract: *Coaches are the most contiguous stakeholders to the athlete in the sports talent development process, hence their qualifications can neither be underestimated nor ignored in projecting the athletes' achievement. Little research has however been done to examine the qualifications of coaches and trainers in sports academies, and how the same relates to athletes' achievement. This study, therefore, examined coaches' qualifications and athletes' achievement in sports academies in Kenya. A total of 102 sports academy coaches sampled from 19 sports academies were involved. The study employed a cross-sectional mixed-methods design to generate both qualitative and quantitative data. It was hypothesized that there was no statistically significant relationship between the qualifications of coaches and athletes' achievement in sports academies in Kenya. The study found that a majority of coaches (60.7%) had a coaching experience of less than 5 years in the sports academy; a majority agreed that coaches in sports academies had high professional qualifications; a majority (35.7%) had a Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) as the highest academic qualification; the majority agreed that higher academic qualifications were important for effective athlete coaching; and there was a strong, positive correlation between the qualification of coaches and athletes' achievement, which was statistically significant ($\gamma = 0.424, p < 0.05$). The study recommended that the Ministry of Sports Culture and Heritage should in liaison with relevant stakeholders develop and administer refresher courses for sports administrators and coaches of sports training institutions; sports academies should recruit coaches with higher academic and professional qualifications; coaches should undertake refresher courses regularly to upgrade and update their coaching skills and competencies.*

Keywords: Curriculum, Structure and content, Athletes' achievement, Sports Academies

1. Introduction

The idea of sports academies (sometimes referred to as sports schools) originated in the Soviet Union in the 1930s, to prepare young athletes for high achievement (Grant, 2012). They thereafter became increasingly popular globally as a means to guarantee a long-term development model for aiding excellence for elite athletes. Sports academies commonly adopt two models of establishment: being created as independent institutions, such as in Ethiopia (Tadesse, 2019), or being launched within mainstream educational frameworks. In Finland, for instance, sports academies are a part of the elite sports system, where young elite athletes pursue their education, while also training and competing at an elite level. According to Väänänen and Kuorikoski (2010), there were more than 15 sports academies in the Finnish Sports Academy Network regulated by the Finnish Olympic Committee. In Canada, sports academies domiciled within schools is a concept that is fast-rising in popularity (Leong & Chorney, 2020). In Hungary, football academies function in an educational environment within the secondary education system (Rabai, 2019).

Whether sports academies are established as autonomous institutions or domiciled within regular schools, the main catalyst behind their formation is the need to excel during significant sporting events such as the Olympics and World Championships (Tadesse, 2019). Sports coaching and development in academies, therefore, aim at honing performance and achievements at the regional, national, and

international levels (Prabu, Hidayah, & Nasuka, 2021). Sports academies in the context of mainstream educational frameworks such as schools have further merit in improving learners' academic performance, health, and well-being. This calls for training personnel with the requisite qualifications to meet this need.

Owan and Agunwa (2019) asserted that a nation rises only in direct proportion to the quality of its teachers. This is debatable. But if the postulation is true, then it can be similarly conjectured that effective sports curriculum implementation is concomitant with the academic and professional qualifications of the technical personnel responsible for implementation. It would thus raise questions such as: What is the academic merit of sports coaches in sports academies? Are there coaches who are excellent at the game but lacking in academic qualifications, and if so, on what basis are their training services engaged? Do coaches in sports training institutions require accreditation from the relevant federations? What are the "irreducible minimums" in terms of the professional qualifications for sports coaches in Kenya, and how do they relate to athletes' achievement? Coaches have a fundamental role in identifying and nurturing athletes' sporting competencies (Blijlevens, 2019). This means they should have the capacity to help trainees acquire and train their physical, technical, tactical, and psychological competencies.

Due to the significance of qualifications in providing and maintaining training standards, some countries have

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established standardized qualification systems for coaches and trainers. In Germany for instance, the German Olympic Sports Confederation has created a formal qualifications system that grants a variety of licenses and qualifications to coaches and trainers (Breuer, *et al.*, (2021). The system distinguishes between coaches and trainers, with coaches being those who handle one sport and trainers involved in more than one sport, including fitness training. The qualification system awards non - sport - specific licenses for trainers and sport – specific licenses for coaches on four levels, rising from C, B, and A, up to diploma licenses. These credentials are a requirement if coaches and trainers to practice their trade.

While arguing the need to rethink the credentials of coaches, Ewing (2019) maintained that most coaches were retired former players, in spite of a budding body of evidence that suggested that being a great player was, in and of itself, no guarantee of coaching success. Blackett *et al.*, (2017) as a case in point argued that “the best way of learning to coach the game is playing the game”, which carries a connotation that it is easier for an athlete to transition into a coach than one who was not. This discourse raises questions such as: What qualifications does a coach need? Can a coach boast of a history of celebrity performance as an athlete, yet flop as a coach? Can tertiary qualifications make a coach distinguished? This does not however imply that successful athletes cannot translate to great coaches, nor that coaches with diplomas and degrees are superior to those without. It is a discourse that calls for deeper investigation.

In Portugal, there were legislative changes in coach education which were done largely to respond to the need to harmonize qualifications in the European Union (Resende, *et al.*, 2016). The responsibility for certifying coaches was relocated from the various sports federations to a national sports organization. The organization established four grades of coach education. Coach instruction in the country is thus guided by a general and a specific curriculum module and an internship under the supervision of a qualified mentor. The academic formation for coaches is well structured and regulated. However, some sports federations are opposed to this process of certifying coaches with awards of academic qualifications for fear of giving away the exclusive control of their coach certification. Nonetheless, the significance of academic qualification of sports technical personnel has been brought to the fore. The current study examined the status of academic qualifications of sports academy administrators and coaches, and how this affects athletes’ achievement in sports academies.

In the UK which is a developed country, Maclean and Lorimer (2016) interrogated whether coach education programs were the most effective method for developing coaches. The qualitative study sought to establish whether coaches from a multi - sport context developed most effectively through coach education programs and whether formal learning strengthened the effective delivery of the coach’s duty. The study findings showed that coaches accessed a variety of educational sources to boost their practice, though they preferred informal learning such as intermingling with and learning from their colleagues and through practice. Barriers that hindered coaches from

attending formal coach education programs included the cost and access. However, the coaches felt that coach education needed to be a mandatory process for every coach. While this study examined coach education, the current study looked at whether the coaches had the qualifications, and if so, which. While coaches in the UK mentioned cost and access as the challenges they faced, what would be the case of Kenya, a developing country? The current study thus investigated the Kenyan situation, with a view to enhancing the achievement of athletes.

In the Philippines, Lacaba and Lacaba (2020) examined coaches’ profiles vis - à - vis athletic performance in the Eastern Samar State University - Guiuan Campus. The study found that the majority of the faculty coaches in the university were 32 - 42 years old, mostly males who had earned units leading to MA degrees and with 1 - 5 years of coaching experience. Some had attended training conducted at the school/campus, division, regional and national levels. The findings of the study showed that the number of years of coaching as well as the number of in - service trainings attended by faculty coaches at the school/campus or division level had significant associations with the performance of the athletes. The study recommended that these indicators needed to be further enhanced and/or provided on the campus to produce better - performing or excellent athletes.

Mendonça, Miranda, and Pedroso (2019) studied the profile of the managers of gymnastics academies in Brazil. This was due to the concern that the quality of the fitness sector in Brazil had been disputed. The descriptive study aimed at analyzing the profiles of the managers of the gymnastics academies. The study revealed that 55% of the managers of the gymnasiums had higher education. The study findings also suggested that managers did not stop their studies as undergraduates, but were more interested in taking postgraduate and specialization courses in the field of sports management. The current study also examined the academic qualifications of sports academy managers as well as coaches, and how this influenced achievement of athletes in the sports academies.

The skills and competencies of coaches can be upgraded and updated through continuing professional development. Continuing professional development upholds contemporary professional practice while promoting higher knowledge and expertise. This is however a road less traveled by coaches and sports trainers. In the UK, Nashet *et al.*, (2017) explored continuing professional development for sports coaches, with a view to determining why not many coaches were involved. Results of the study showed that many coaches did not value continuing professional development. Neither did it contribute to their expertise, nor was it a priority for their organization. The study further indicated that there was a need for a coherent model of professional development for coaching personnel. It was suggested that any continuing professional development model for coaches needed to transition from a prescriptive trajectory to a more individualized and flexible one. While this study in the United Kingdom examined coaches’ involvement in professional development, the current study in Kenya looked at the ultimate qualifications the coaches had acquired, and

how the same related to athletes' achievement during and at the end of the training circuit.

Aoyagi, *et al.*, (2015) analyzed the expected coaches' qualifications for extra - curricular sporting activities in schools. The respondents included 253 teachers in public junior high schools and public high schools. The quantitative study applied a cross - sectional survey design, with data collected using questionnaires. A Chi - square test and Fisher's exact test were used for the analysis of data. Qualities that were commonly expected of coaches included being humane, able, cooperative, and trustworthy. Expertise in technical coaching, age, and occupations were perceived as expected attributes. Further, there were no significant differences between junior high school coaches and high school coaches. Even though this study was done in school contexts, it highlighted the significance of the qualifications of coaches in enhancing the quality of training. The current study investigated the qualifications of coaches and how they influenced athletes' achievement in sports academies. According to Yamaletdinova and Semenov (2019), the professional functions of a coach transcend mere training of an athlete for competitions to performing multiple roles of a manager, teacher, psychologist, and cheerleader. The demand for a coach to raise successful cheerleaders for teams is enormous in modern sporting. They undertook a study on the level of professional skills development in cheerleading coaches of various qualifications. Through a retrospective analysis of literature in psychology and pedagogy, analysis of pedagogical experiences, survey, and testing, data for the study was obtained. The requisite professional skills of cheerleading coaches were examined. Persistence, ability to reflect, self - control, empathy, aggressiveness, conflict - resolution skills, creativity, dialoguing, and interpersonal relations were mapped out as fundamental indicators of a cheerleading coach. It was found that coaches with greater practical work experience had a much higher level of the indicators. This study revealed that a coach's years of practical work experience contribute to the larger pool of their training abilities and competencies. In the investigation of coaches' qualifications, the current study therefore also looked into the years of experience of the coaches.

In many African countries where physical education or sport is offered in schools, educators have their primary qualification first as teachers of other subjects. Coaching of sports simply happens alongside. Domfeh and Odoom (2018) conducted a study on challenges teachers encountered in teaching alongside coaching sports in senior high schools in the central region of Ghana. They argued that teaching and coaching were two different occupational roles. Results revealed that most P. E. teachers taught P. E. alongside coaching school teams. This eventually led most of them to experience work - family conflict, fatigue, tension, and job stress. Besides, married P. E. teachers experienced more burnout than their unmarried colleagues. Finally, gender, age, and academic qualification did not predict the burnout of teachers. The study recommended that coaches should be employed in schools to reduce the workload of the P. E. teacher in the Senior High School in the Central region of Ghana.

In Kenya, the national development schema is hinged on the enhancement of the skill inventory of her citizenry. Skill training in sports though is technical and endears a methodological and practical approach (Hakman, *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, at the center of skill formation, the quality of technical coaches is pivotal. Chepkoech, *et al.*, (2021) looked into the quality of coaches at public technical, vocational, education, and training institutions, to examine the missing link in Kenya's skill development. The quantitative capacity of coaches was evaluated in terms of numbers while the qualitative aspect was based on initial coaches' academic qualification, their area specialization, and their involvement in continuous professional development. The study found that the skill training institutions were inadequately staffed. Furthermore, though a majority of coaches were Bachelor's degree holders, most of them had a specialty in areas falling outside the core mandate of the institution. Just as Chepkoech *et al* focused on coaches and administrators, the current study likewise involved coaches, but also included trainees who are the recipients of the training process. Further, the current study also narrowed down to sports training which was not included in their study. In addition, Chepkoech *et al* did not examine the level of training output, a gap that the current study sought to bridge.

Mucheke, Bailasha, and Waiganjo (2021) undertook a study to establish whether the academic status of coaches predicted team performance in the Kenyan national soccer and volleyball leagues. Results showed that coaches' academic status had a significant effect on team performance. The study concluded that the academic qualifications of coaches have a significant relationship with team performance. It was recommended that team managers, owners, and other stakeholders in sports needed to take up educated coaches, while coaches who were not educated needed to go back to school to further their education to gain more skills for enhancing their teams' performance. While this study exclusively focused on the performance of elite athletes, the current study involved amateur athletes undergoing training in sports academies. Morris - Eyton and Roux (2019) argued that one of the objectives of coaching sport is improvement in athlete performance, and thus viewed coach education as a vehicle for enhancing the standards of coaching practice.

2. Methods

This study employed a cross - sectional mixed - methods design to generate both qualitative and quantitative data. It targeted 102 sports academy coaches sampled from nineteen sports academies. The study was anchored on Dynamic Systems Theory and collected both qualitative and quantitative data. Questionnaires, semi - structured interview schedules, and document analysis guides were used for data collection. The data collected were analyzed descriptively using frequencies and percentages, while the hypothesis was tested using Goodman and Kruskal's Gamma correlation at $\alpha = 0.05$ to test for ordinal association.

3. Results

a) Coaches' Years of Experience in Coaching

The study first sought to determine the coaches' years of experience and their academic qualifications. Their responses on experience are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Distribution of Sports Academy Coaches by Years of Experience

Years of Experience in Coaching	f	%
Below 5	17	60.7
5 - 10	7	25.0
11 - 15	4	14.3
16 - 20	0	0.0
Total	28	100.0

The study found that 17 coaches (60.7%) had an experience of less than 5 years in the sports academy, seven coaches (25%) had an experience of 11 - 15 years and four coaches (14.3%) had a coaching experience of 11 - 15 years. This means that majority of coaches in the sports academies had limited experience in sports training. This finding is similar to what Lacaba and Lacaba (2020) found in the Philippines, that the majority of the coaches had 1 - 5 years of coaching experience. It however differs from Magwa (2015) who found that a majority of university coaches in South Africa had an experience of 11 - 15 years and a majority of school coaches had an experience of over 16 years. Ideally, the years of experience in sports coaching should be commensurate to the coach's expertise. It may thus be concluded that sports academies' coaches in Kenya have low years of coaching experience.

b) Professional Qualifications of Coaches.

Secondly, the participants were asked about their perceptions of the professional qualifications of coaches in sports academies. This also included their recognition by the relevant federations and frequent attendance of refresher courses/ training. Results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Coaches' Responses on Professional Qualifications

Statement		SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Coaches have high professional qualifications	f	2	4	2	9	11	28
	%	7.1	14.3	7.1	32.1	39.3	100
Coaches are registered with the relevant Federation	f	0	2	7	7	12	28
	%	0	7.1	25.0	25.0	42.9	100
Coaches frequently attend refresher courses/ training	f	0	2	6	5	15	28
	%	0	7.1	21.4	17.9	53.6	100

The results showed that 32.1% agreed while 39.3% strongly agreed that coaches had high professional qualifications. This means that coaches were trained and qualified in their respective sports disciplines. It was also indicated (56.3% strongly agreed) that coaches frequently attended refresher training in their respective sports disciplines, except for swimming coaches who rarely attended such refresher training programs. One sports academy administrator explained that "Swimming instructors seldom undertake refresher courses, as the courses are rare to find" (Joan*, personal interview, March 18, 2022). This revealed a capacity - building gap in swimming. But for the other sports disciplines, frequent attendance of refresher courses was an indicator that the coaches are fairly updated in matters of their sport. This agrees with AbdKarim and Nadzalan (2017) who found that though the Malaysian football coaches in the study had attended coach education courses and were licensed, they still found it necessary to go for refresher courses. In his review on contemporary issues in coach education, Krasilshchikov (2015) maintained that:

Becoming a good coach is not just about obtaining a degree in coaching or getting certified by an International or National organization. It is also about improving own theoretical knowledge and practical skills through practicing coaching and through participating in various refresher courses and seminars organized by various professional bodies (p.6).

c) Coaches' Academic Qualifications

The responses of coaches on their academic qualifications are summarized in Figure 1.

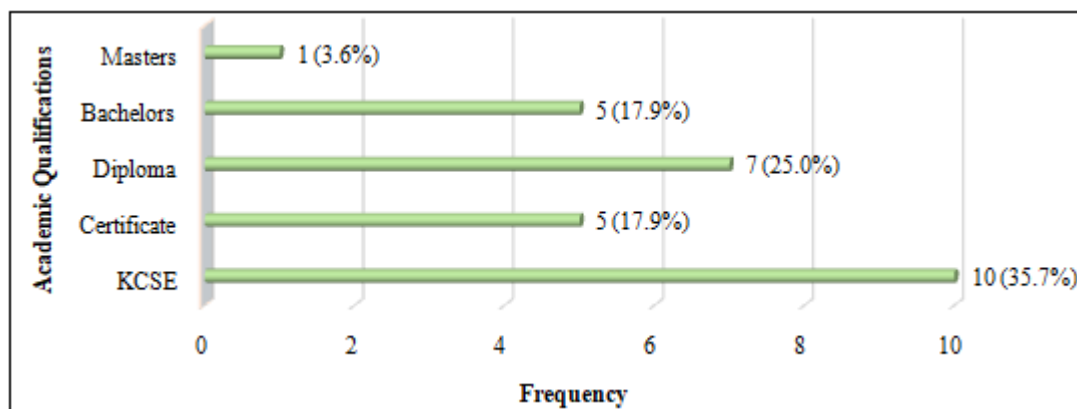


Figure 1: Distribution of Coaches by Academic Qualification

Findings of the study showed that 10 coaches (35.7%) had attained the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) as the highest qualification, followed by 7 coaches (25.0%) with Diploma. This means that apart from the

professional qualifications attained by coaches in their specific sports discipline, a majority had low academic qualifications. This agrees with Mucheke, et al., (2021), that coaches in Kenyan Soccer and Volleyball leagues had low

academic qualifications despite the significant relationship between the academic qualifications of coaches and the performance of athletes. However, it differs from Moustakas, *et al.*, (2022) who found that in the European Union States, coaching systems had brought about “higher than expected, systemic professionalization of coaching” (p.93) with coaches having high academic qualifications.

D: Coaches’ Perceptions on Importance of Academic Qualifications

First, the study determined the perceptions of coaches on the importance of academic qualifications in enhancing athletes’ training. Their level of agreement or disagreement on the statement “Academic qualifications of coaches do not matter” was sought on a scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Results are summarized in Figure 2.

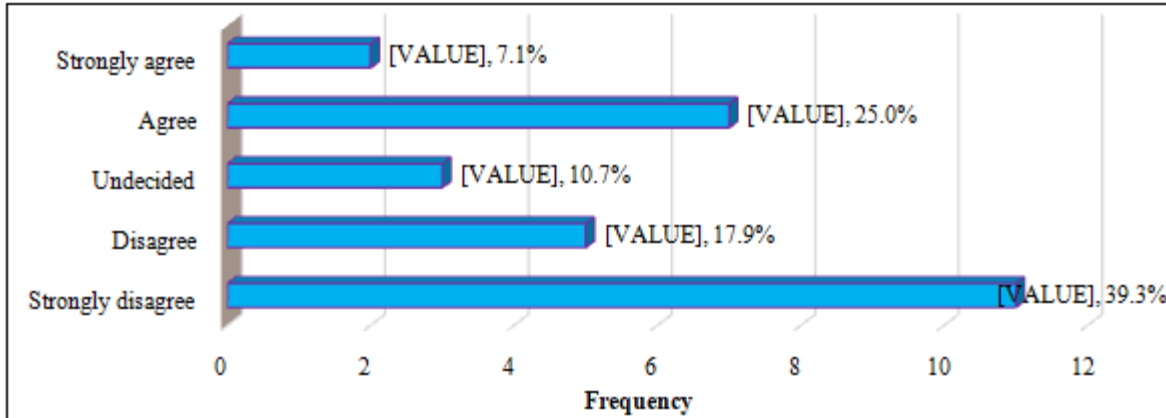


Figure 2: Coaches’ Responses to the Statement “Academic Qualifications of Coaches Don’t Matter”

The study found that the majority (39.3%) strongly disagreed that the academic qualifications of coaches do not matter. This means that most coaches regarded academic qualifications as being important for effective athlete coaching. Though findings from the coaches’ demographic characteristics showed that most of them had low academic qualifications, with a majority (35.7%) having attained the KCSE as the highest qualification, they still appreciated that higher academic qualifications were important. Sports academy administrators also agreed with this position, as clearly echoed in the remarks from Joe*, who stated that:

Academic qualifications are very important, even though least considered when identifying swimming coaches. A basic level one course can suffice. I know of an excellent swimming coach who only has a KCPE certificate. However, a coach with a diploma or degree may demonstrate a better understanding of the game and stronger training competencies. (Joe, Personal Interview, March 18, 2022).*

This finding agrees with Resende, *et al.*, (2016) that coaches’ academic qualifications are important. It, however, contrasts with Onyancha, *et al.*, (2018) who held that academic qualifications were not necessarily a predictor of performance. These varied positions notwithstanding, the importance of academic training cannot be underestimated in developing one’s mental capacities that are requisite for the attainment of technical competencies.

d) Test for the Null Hypothesis

Goodman and Kruskal Gamma Correlation was performed to determine the relationship between sports of coaches’ qualifications and athletes’ achievement in sports academies under the null hypothesis that:

H₀: The qualifications of sports coaches have no statistically significant association with athletes’ achievement in sports academies in Kenya.

The test results are presented in Table 3.

Table 4: 1 Gamma Correlation for Coaches’ Qualifications & Athletes’ Achievement

		Experience, academic and professional qualifications of coaches					Total
		Very low	Low	Moderate	High	Very high	
Overall performance of athletes in the sports academy	Very low	0	0	2	0	0	2
	Low	0	2	0	0	0	2
	Moderate	0	0	0	0	6	6
	High	0	0	0	5	2	7
	Very high	0	0	3	0	8	11
Total		0	2	5	5	16	28

Symmetric Measures					
		Value	Asymp. Std. Error ^a	Approx. T ^b	Approx. Sig.
Ordinal by Ordinal	Gamma	.424	.351	.624	.033
N of Valid Cases		28			
a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.					
b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.					

The study found that there was a strong, positive correlation between the coaches' qualifications and athletes' achievement, which was statistically significant ($\gamma = 0.424$, $p < 0.05$). This means that the higher the experience, and academic and professional qualifications of the coaches, the better the achievement of athletes in the sports academies. This finding agrees with Muccheke, *et al.*, (2021) who established that the academic status of coaches predicted team performance in the Kenyan national soccer and volleyball leagues. The finding however was at variance with Lacaba and Lacaba (2020) who found that age, gender, and educational qualification of the coaches had no significant association with athletes' performance. Generally, however, coaches have a central role in enhancing athletes' performance by identifying and nurturing their sporting competencies (Blijlevens, 2019). It is thus important that they should have the capacity to help trainees acquire physical, technical, tactical, psychological, and any other competencies athletes need for winning the game. Their qualifications should neither be underestimated nor ignored in envisioning the achievement of athletes.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the above results, this study concluded that the sports coaches' qualifications had a statistically significant relationship with athletes' achievement in sports academies in Kenya. The study, therefore, recommended that the government through the Ministry of Sports Culture and Heritage should develop and administer refresher courses for sports administrators and coaches of sports training institutions; sports academies to recruit coaches with higher academic and professional qualifications; coaches should undertake refresher courses regularly to upgrade and update their coaching skills and competencies.

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