THE EFFECT OF QUALIFICATION LEVEL ON SOCCER MATCH COACH BEHAVIOUR: A MIXED METHODS STUDY

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Abstract:

The aim of this study was to investigate the effect of English Football Association (FA) qualification level on coaches' behaviours during soccer matches using a mixed methods approach. Coaches qualified by the FA at level 1 (*n*=5), level 2 (*n*=5), Union of European Football Associations B (UEFA B) (*n*=5) and UEFA A (*n*=5) agreed to participate. A grand total of 57,384 behaviours were recorded using the coach analysis intervention system and subsequently each coach was interviewed for a mean duration of 29±11 minutes. Level 1 and level 2 qualified coaches used convergent questions at a higher percentage of total behaviours in comparison to UEFA B and UEFA A licenced coaches (*p*<.05). UEFA A licenced coaches used scolds at a higher percentage of total behaviours when compared to level 1 qualified coaches (*p*<.05). Qualification level had no effect on coaches' rationale for using the behaviours they did. Collectively, these results may indicate that coaches with higher qualifications have higher expectations of player's performance. However, this effect could be attributed to performance standard differences, as highly qualified coaches tend to work with players who compete for teams of higher performance standard.

Keywords: systematic observation, interpretive interviews, senior men's soccer coaches

1. Introduction

Coaches have the capacity to influence players' performance through their behaviours (Baker, Côté & Hawes, 2000, p.111; Chambers & Vickers, 2006, p.184; O'Connor et al.,

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2017, p.1; Guzmán & Calpe-Gómez, 2012, p.728; Khasawneh et al., 2013, p.43; Nicholls, Morley & Perry, 2016, p.172; Schmidt et al., 1989, p.352; Smith & Cushion, 2006, p.361; Zulqarnain et al., 2016, p.253). Coach behaviour is often defined as the words and actions used by a coach during practice sessions or matches and some examples include instruction, questioning and silence (Gallimore & Tharp, 2004, p.124). Over the past forty years, a considerable amount of research has focused on coaches' behaviours (Cope, Partington & Harvey, 2016; Kahan, 1999, p.17). However, it is still recognised that current understanding and knowledge of coaching behaviours needs to be extended (Smith et al., 2017, p.157; Vinson et al., 2016, p.66).

A significant shortcoming in current understanding of coaching behaviour relates to the lack of investigations conducted during matches (Cushion, Ford & Williams, 2012, p.1632). An explanation for this shortcoming is that fewer matches than practices occur in each sports season. Consequently, coaches' behaviours have been studied more frequently during practices, thus creating a gap in current knowledge regarding coaches' behaviours during matches (Partington and Cushion, 2012, p.94).

Furthermore, the literature reviews of Kahan (1999, p.25) and Cope, Partington & Harvey (2016, p.3) collectively indicate that 17 peer-reviewed articles have been published in relation to soccer coaches' behaviours since 1975. Yet, most of these studies tend to focus on youth team coaches and therefore there remains a need to extend current knowledge in relation to the behaviours of coaches working for senior men's teams (defined as soccer teams comprised of male players aged 16 and above) (Partington & Cushion, 2013, p.375).

Moreover, very few researchers have sought to investigate what independent variables may influence coaching behaviours (Cope, Partington & Harvey, 2016, p.1). One variable that could impact behaviour is the coach's exposure to coaching qualifications (Abraham & Collins, 1998, p.73; Cassidy, Jones & Potrac 2009, p.59). Indeed, Nash et al. (2008, p.549) findings, indicate that coaches who have obtained higher levels of coaching qualifications, typically have better-defined coaching philosophies, thus might utilise certain behaviours at different frequencies than coaches with lower qualifications.

Douge & Hastie (1993, p.15), recommendations suggest that effective coaches tend to provide high levels of instructions, questions and feedback. Theoretically, highly qualified coaches should display effective behaviours more frequently than less qualified coaches, however, this is yet to be confirmed empirically (Bowley, Bodden & O'Donoghue, 2014, p.32). Therefore, the aim of this study was to investigate the effect of qualification level on coaches' behaviours during soccer matches using both quantitative and qualitative methods. It was hypothesised that one or more significant

differences would be identified the in the frequency of use, percentage of total and rate per minute (RPM) of behaviours between coaches with different qualification levels.

2. Method

2.1 Participants
Following institutional ethical approval, 20 soccer coaches agreed to participate in this study, including 5 coaches for each of the first four qualification levels of the English Football Association (FA) coaching qualification pathway (Figure 1). All coaches occupied the highest coaching role of a senior men's team, competing in a league within steps 1 to 7 of the English National League System. The participants (mean age 43±10), had been coaching for 16±7 years and qualified by the FA to coach for 13±10 years.

2.2 Systematic observation
The systematic observation instrument used to record coaches' behaviours was Partington & Cushion's (2012, p.96) amended version of the CAIS (Table 1). The reliability of the of the researcher's use of the CAIS was established through a rigorous, 5 phase observer training program and an intra-observer reliability check, identical to that used by Cushion et al. (2012, p.206). The reliability kappa value obtained was 0.83, which represents an 83% agreement level. There is no standard on agreement levels in behavioural research, but 80% has been accepted as high, thus it was assumed that intra-observer reliability was established.

2.3 Interpretive interviews
Telephone semi-structured interviews were conducted with each observed coach. The purpose of the interviews was to understand why the coaches used the observed behaviours did. The interview guide started with an introduction including confirmations of confidentiality and orienting instructions. Thereafter, a set of questions related to coach's demographic details were included to encourage coaches to speak while being recorded. The CAIS behaviour categories structured the interview schedule, with the combined use of open questions and probe questions allowing issues to be explored fully until data saturation had occurred

2.4 Procedure
Having obtained the participants' informed consent, systematic observation took place throughout the duration of one official league match, for each observed coach. A camera (JVC Everio GZ-R50, Yokohama, Japan) placed on the opposite side of the

coach's bench was used to video record the coach's non-verbal behaviours, whereas verbal behaviours were recorded through 4th generation iPod attached on the coaches. The recordings were coded using the behavioural category definitions of the amended hand notation version of the CAIS and the Focus X2 software (Performance Innovation, Scotland). Interpretative interviews were conducted after the systematic observation.

2.5 Data analysis

The mean values of the total frequency of behaviours, percentage of total behaviours and RPM of each behaviour were calculated for the four groups of coaches. For normally distributed data, a series of one-way independent analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were used to compare each behaviour between the four groups of coaches. ANOVA tests were followed by posthoc Tukey's honestly significant difference tests, to identify significant differences between groups. For non-normally distributed data Kruskal-Wallis tests were used to compare the groups of coaches for each behaviour and were followed by individual two-tailed Mann-Whitney U tests to identify the groups of which between significant differences occurred. Where a p-value below .05 was observed, a significant effect of qualification level on coaching behaviour was reported. Statistical tests were conducted on SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), version 22 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, Illinois, United States).

Moreover, interviews were intelligently transcribed, transcripts were then analysed thematically following the procedures outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006, p.87). Exemplary quotations were presented to illustrate the sub-themes and anonymity was maintained by using unique identifier codes that related to each coach's qualification level and order of observation, for example, the first level 1 qualified coach observed had the unique identifier code L1C1 Trustworthiness was ensured by using direct quotes, member checking and an interview structure based on previous literature (Partington & Cushion, 2013, p.377).

3. Results

In total 57,384 behaviours were recorded throughout the 20 matches that were filmed for 1,895 minutes. Level 1 (Mdn=20[30]) and level 2 (Mdn=25[17]) qualified coaches significantly differed from UEFA A (Mdn=13[11]) qualified coaches in the frequency of use of convergent questioning, both at U=1.5, z=-2.305, p<.05, r=-.73 (Table 2). Level 1 (Mdn=0.8[0.8]) and level 2 (Mdn=0.8[0.4]) qualified coaches significant differed from UEFA A (Mdn=0.4[0.4]) qualified coaches in the percentage of convergent questioning, both at U=1, z=-2.402, p<.05, r=-.76. Level 1 (Mdn=0.8[0.8]) and level 2 (Mdn=0.8[0.4])

qualified coaches also significantly differed in the percentage of convergent questioning from UEFA B (Mdn=0.4[0.4]) qualified coaches, both at U=2, z=-2.193, p<.05, with a large effect size in both cases, r=-.69 and r=-.63 respectively. Significant differences in mean percentage of scold and total punitive behaviours were observed between Level 1 (1.3±0.6) and UEFA A (3.4 ± 0.7) qualified coaches (p<.05). Level 1 (Mdn=0.2[0.3]) and level 2 (Mdn=0.3[0.2]) qualified coaches significant differed from UEFA A (Mdn=0.1[0.1]) qualified coaches in the RPM of convergent questioning, both at U=1.5, z=-2.305, p<.05, r=-.73. The mean interview duration was 29±11 minutes and the interview transcripts resulted in 169 pages of 1.5 spaced text. All behaviours were used for similar purposes between coaches of different qualification levels (Table 3).

4. Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate the effect of qualification level on coaches' behaviours during soccer matches. The frequency of use, percentage of total and RPM of convergent questioning differed significantly between coaches of different qualification levels as well as the percentage of punitive and scolding behaviours. As hypothesised qualification level influenced coach's behaviours during senior men's soccer matches.

All groups of coaches had the same conceptual rationale for using convergent questioning. These questions were used as a form of instruction with reduced pressure placed on the players or as a challenge to extend player's performance: "*A challenge, can they do it? … You know just make sure they try and achieve a little bit more out of them*" L1C1; "*It gives them more of an incentive to do it because it's been asked nicely*" L2C4; "*By using words like 'you have to', 'you must do' it kind of puts pressure on, whereas… you kind of hide it in a way where you say "can we do this?*" UBC4; "*I try to say it in a very positive manner, not a manner that will get their backs up*" UAC2.

However, UEFA A and UEFA B qualified coaches used convergent questioning at a significantly lower percentage than level 1 and level 2 qualified coaches. Although Douge & Hastie's (1993, p.15) recommendations indicate that effective coaches use questions more frequently than less effective coaches, the present study did not confirm this pattern in coaches of different qualification levels. One possible explanation for these differences could be that the coaches with the higher qualifications worked with players of a higher competitive standard therefore, these players had enough experience to solve decision-making problems by themselves without the need to be guided through convergent questions. Conversely, level 1 and level 2 qualified coaches might have used a higher percentage of convergent questions, as their players may

need higher levels of guidance during matches, perhaps due to less competitive experience.

There were no quantitative differences in the use of scold between coaches of different qualification given that all coaches generally agreed that scold represented a release of frustration when player's performance was below their expectations: *"I'll get frustrated with some of the players because I know their ability, I think they can do a lot more"* L1C5; *"It's born out of frustration"* L2C1; *"frustration with a player's mistake or not following instructions"* UBC1; *"my forward players frustrate me because they get in some great positions and they're not ruthless"* UAC1.

However, a trend towards a higher frequency, percentage and RPM of scold, with increased qualification level was observed. Additionally, the difference in the percentage of scold was significant between the level 1 and UEFA A qualified coaches. Similarly, Partington, Cushion & Harvey (2014, p.407) found significant differences between coaches of contrasting age groups, leading the authors to speculate that coaches with of older and more mature players tend to have higher expectations of player's performance and therefore may display scolds more frequently when their expectations are not met. Likewise, the differences in scolding behaviours between level 1 and UEFA A coaches could be attributed to competitive standard differences, given that the coaches who held higher qualifications, worked with players who competed for teams of higher performance standard. Additionally, the increased levels of pressure associated with the competitive coaching roles of highly qualified coaches, might have led these coaches to use to more controlling motivational styles, by increasing the use of scold, to influence the match result (Smith et al., 2017, p.151).

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the present study shows that coaches with different qualification levels used coaching behaviours for similar purposes and most behaviours were used at a similar frequency, percentage and rate. The differences found in convergent questioning and scold between, level 1 and level 2 qualified coaches in comparison to UEFA B and UEFA A licenced coaches, could be attributed to competitive standard differences. Indeed, highly qualified coaches tend to work with players who compete for teams of higher performance standard; therefore, these players may need less guidance through convergent questions. Likewise, highly qualified coaches, who work for teams of higher competitive standard, might have higher performance expectations and therefore display more scolding behaviours when their players fail to meet these expectations.

A limitation that could have influenced the present findings was that the CAIS does not recognise tactical behaviours such as conferring with assistants and communicating with the referee, therefore a large percentage of all coach's behaviours were deemed uncodable. As such the "other" category made up a large percentage of all coaches' total behaviours (range 1-14%), which increased data ambiguity. Future research could seek to provide quantitive and qualitative data in relation to UEFA Pro licenced coaches behaviours during senior soccer matches, which was beyond the scope of the present study.

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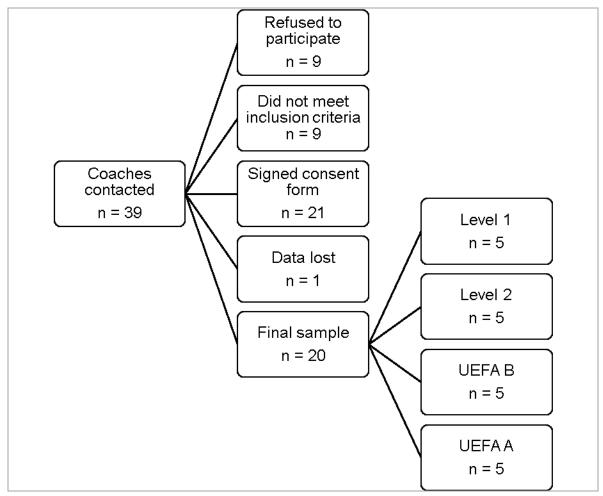
Appendix

Figure 1: Sampling flow chart

Table 1: Behaviour categories of the amended coach analysis intervention system and their definitions

Behaviour	Definition
Pre-instruction	Initial information/instruction given preceding the desired action.
Concurrent instruction	Cues, reminders, prompts (given during execution of the desired action).
Post-instruction	Information given after the execution of the desired action.
Convergent questioning	Limited number of correct answers/options - more closed
Divergent questioning	Multiple responses/options - more open.
Response to a question	Coach responds to a question that may or may not be directly related to practice.
Feedback – knowledge of results	The coach gives feedback on the outcome of an action.
Feedback – knowledge of performance	Coach gives information on the movement pattern that caused the result.
Reinforcement	A corrective statement that contains information to correct and improve the next attempt/a participant's performance (can be delivered concurrently or post-instruction).
Positive feedback	Feedback from the coach that is positive.
Negative feedback	Feedback from the coach that is negative.
Silence – on-task	Coach monitors practice without reacting verbally or non-verbally, maintaining eye contact with the players.
Silence – off-task	Coach is visibly not engaged in the practice.
Management	Management of the players; related coach behaviour contributing directly to practice.
Humour	Jokes or content designed to make players laugh or smile.
Hustle	Verbal statements or gestures linked to effort to activate or intensify previously directed behaviour.
Praise	Positive or supportive statements or gestures not relating to a specific skill attempt.
Punishment	Specific punishment following a mistake.
Scold	Verbal or non-verbal behaviours demonstrating displeasure at the player/s performance or behaviour.
Other	Any behaviour not fitting the given categories.

Table 2: Mean frequency, standard deviation, percentage and rate per minute of coaches' behaviours across qualification level

Behaviour	Level 1				Level 2				UEFA B				UEFA A			
	Mean	±	%	RPM	Mean	±	%	RPM	Mean	±	%	RPM	Mean	±	%	RPM
Pre-instruction	32	32	1.1	0.3	69	42	2.0	0.7	40	30	1.3	0.4	36	25	1.3	0.4
Concurrent instruction	222	162	7.9	2.3	492	279	14.6	5.2	303	170	10.0	3.2	268	190	9.6	2.8
Post-instruction	11	10	0.4	0.1	22	20	0.7	0.2	26	10	0.9	0.3	25	21	0.8	0.3
Total instruction	265	200	9.4	2.8	584	324	17.3	6.2	369	197	12.2	3.9	330	233	11.5	3.5
Convergent questioning	29	20	1.0	0.3	27	11	0.8	0.3	14	10	0.5[1,2]	0.2	11[1,2]	6	0.4[1,2]	0.1[1,2]
Divergent questioning	9	5	0.3	0.1	14	10	0.5	0.1	9	6	0.3	0.1	24	19	0.9	0.3
Total questioning	38	20	1.4	0.4	41	11	1.4	0.4	23	15	0.8	0.2	35	16	1.3	0.4
Response to a question	5	3	0.2	0.1	5	3	0.2	0.1	5	4	0.2	0.1	2	1	0.1	0.0
Feedback – knowledge of results	28	27	1.0	0.3	60	43	1.8	0.6	29	22	0.9	0.3	35	16	1.3	0.4
Feedback – knowledge of performance	9	7	0.3	0.1	30	19	0.9	0.3	19	26	0.6	0.2	24	18	0.9	0.3
Reinforcement	9	7	0.3	0.1	21	13	0.6	0.2	18	21	0.6	0.2	19	4	0.6	0.2
Total feedback	47	36	1.6	0.5	111	66	3.3	1.2	66	67	2.1	0.7	77	27	2.8	0.8
Positive feedback	75	66	2.7	0.8	200	169	5.7	2.1	65	85	1.9	0.7	73	56	2.5	0.8
Negative feedback	14	10	0.5	0.1	23	11	0.7	0.2	18	18	0.6	0.2	29	24	1.0	0.3
Silence – on-task	722	179	28.3	7.6	470	225	15.7	5.0	707	131	25.5	7.5	628	179	23.6	6.6
Silence – off-task	37	24	1.4	0.4	30	15	1.0	0.3	22	15	0.8	0.2	37	42	1.3	0.4
Total silence	759	180	29.7	8.0	500	233	16.7	5.3	729	135	26.3	7.7	665	166	24.9	7.0
Management	8	6	0.3	0.1	11	11	0.4	0.1	10	9	0.3	0.1	11	10	0.4	0.1
Humour	12	7	0.5	0.1	20	18	0.7	0.2	4	4	0.1	0.0	5	6	0.2	0.1
Hustle	68	66	2.4	0.7	99	103	3.0	1.1	96	92	3.1	1.0	70	65	2.4	0.7
Praise	48	41	1.7	0.5	32	36	0.9	0.3	50	50	1.6	0.5	23	33	0.8	0.2
Punishment	0	0	0.0	0.0	0	0	0.0	0.0	0	0	0.0	0.0	0	0	0.0	0.0
Scold	35	19	1.3[a]	0.4	74	49	2.4	0.8	85	28	3.0	0.9	94	33	3.4	1.0
Total punitive	35	19	1.3[a]	0.4	74	49	2.4	0.8	85	28	3.0	0.9	94	33	3.4	1.0
Other	133	59	5.0	1.4	200	116	6.6	2.1	103	52	3.5	1.1	125	53	4.6	1.3
Total	**1507**	**-**	**100**	**15.9**	**1902**	**-**	**100**	**20.1**	**1624**	**-**	**100**	**17.2**	**1541**	**-**	**100**	**16.2**

[1] Significantly different from Level 1 ($p<.05$); [2] Significantly different from level 2 ($p<.05$); [a] Significantly different from UEFA A ($p<.05$).

Table 3: Higher order themes, sub-themes and exemplary quotes of coaches' rationale for using coaching behaviours

Higher order theme	Sub-theme	Quote
Pre-instruction Concurrent instruction	Aid decision making	"*Helps to make somebody's mind up I think*" L1C3
Post-instruction	Reflection on action	"*Allows the player to create a larger picture in his mind for the next time*" L2C3
Convergent questioning	Challenge or instruction	"*You're offering that person the challenge to try and achieve that goal the next time it happens*" UAC5
Divergent questioning	Develop player's decision making	"*You're saying "where is your man?" so next time play breaks down he is thinking to himself "where is my man?"*" L1C1
Response to a question Feedback – knowledge of results	Clarify player roles	"*Give them an answer as quick as you can, if they've not understood an instruction*" UAC5
Feedback – knowledge of performance Reinforcement	Enforce performance expectations	"*So obviously, they know exactly what I'm asking for on the pitch*" UBC1
Positive feedback	Increase player's confidence	"*To build a bit of confidence, to know that they're doing well*" L1C1
Negative feedback	Increase player's performance	"*Some players need reminding to react to negative feedback if you like, whereas, you're having a little bit of a go at them, they can produce better*" UBC3
Silence – on-task	Analyse game and promote autonomy	"*Let them try and come up with the answers… you've got to observe so you can understand and you can see exactly what is going*" UAC4
Silence – off-task	Consolidating on change	"*Contemplating who to bring on, whether to change the shape and it's just a moment to yourself to contemplate what to do next*" L2C5
Management	Ensure physical preparation of substitutes	"*To make sure they get warmed up before they go on*" L1C5
Humour	Get player's relaxed. Promote enjoyment	"*It's about getting everyone relaxed it's about that enjoyment factor*" L2C2
Hustle	Increase player's performance intensity	"*It's just injecting some urgency and some energy and some life into a particular point in the game*" L2C1
Praise	Positive reinforcement	"*To reinforce something that I've seen and they've done really well, so they've understood it and executed it really well*" UAC3
Punishment	Unnecessary during match	"*It's just inappropriate… you should be supportive to them*" L1C4
Scold	Frustration with player's performance	"*It's a release of my frustration*" UAC1