

Experiences of Student Coaches in Brazilians University Teams: a possibility for the coach education process

Experiências de Estudantes Treinadores em Equipes Universitárias Brasileiras: uma possibilidade para o processo de formação de treinadores

Experiencias de Estudiantes Entrenadores en Equipos Universitarios Brasileños: una posibilidad para el proceso de formación de entrenadores

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Abstract

We aimed to explore the experiences of student coaches as coaching staff members in university teams. In consideration of exploring the experiences of student coaches as coaching staff members in university teams, we used an intrinsic case study to comprehend the specific conditions of five different students' experiences. In this intrinsic case study, a total of ten interviews were conducted with student coaches (two female; three male) characterizing a variety of sports (soccer, volleyball, track and field, futsal, and handball). Participant ages ranged from 19 to 25 years. Interviews lasted from 50 min to 60 min and were transcribed verbatim. Inductive analyses of the transcripts revealed meaning units that were further grouped into general themes and subthemes. Findings showed that the experiences of student coaches as coaching staff members are represented by a gradual involvement, opportunities to plan and conduct training, people management, coaching adaptability and self-awareness, and the importance of constant supervisor support.

Keywords: Coach education; Student-coach experience; University teams; Higher education; Coach development.

Resumo

O nosso objetivo foi explorar as experiências dos estudantes treinadores como membros de comissão técnica em equipes universitárias. Em consideração à exploração das experiências dos estudantes treinadores como membros da comissão técnica das equipes universitárias, utilizamos um estudo de caso intrínseco para compreender as condições específicas de cinco experiências de estudantes diferentes. Neste estudo de caso intrínseco, foram realizadas dez entrevistas com treinadores estudiantis (duas mulheres; três homens) caracterizando uma variedade de esportes (futebol, vôlei, atletismo, futsal e handebol). As idades dos participantes variaram de 19 a 25 anos. As entrevistas

duraram de 50 minutos a 60 minutos e foram transcritas literalmente. As análises indutivas das transcrições revelaram unidades de significado que foram agrupadas em temas e subtemas gerais. As descobertas mostraram que as experiências dos estudantes treinadores como membros da comissão técnica são representadas por um envolvimento gradual, oportunidades para planejar e conduzir treinamentos, gestão de pessoas, adaptabilidade e autoconscientização do coaching, e a importância do apoio constante do supervisor.

Palavras-chave: Formação de treinadores; Experiência de estudantes treinadores; Equipes universitárias; Ensino Superior; Desenvolvimento do treinador.

Resumen

Nuestro objetivo era explorar las experiencias de los estudiantes entrenadores como miembros del cuerpo técnico de los equipos universitarios. Con el fin de explorar las experiencias de los estudiantes entrenadores como miembros del cuerpo técnico de los equipos universitarios, utilizamos un estudio de casos intrínseco para comprender las condiciones específicas de cinco experiencias estudiantiles diferentes. En este estudio de caso intrínseco, se realizaron diez entrevistas a estudiantes entrenadores (dos mujeres y tres hombres) de diversos deportes (fútbol, voleibol, atletismo, fútbol sala y balonmano). Las edades de los participantes oscilaban entre los 19 y los 25 años. Las entrevistas duraron entre 50 y 60 minutos y se transcribieron literalmente. El análisis inductivo de las transcripciones reveló unidades de significado que se agruparon en temas y subtemas generales. Los resultados mostraron que las experiencias de los estudiantes entrenadores como miembros del cuerpo técnico están representadas por la participación gradual, las oportunidades de planificar y dirigir la formación, la gestión de personas, la adaptabilidad y la autoconciencia del coaching, y la importancia del apoyo constante del supervisor.

Palabras clave: Formación de entrenadores; Experiencia de los estudiantes entrenadores; Equipos universitarios; Educación superior; Desarrollo de entrenadores.

1. Introduction

We have reached this point in the research on the education of sports coaches with some evidence. Coaches use different sources of knowledge (e.g., experience as athletes, formal programs, peers, mentoring, etc.); the learning preferences of coaches are in informal learning; a balance needs to be found in formal, non-formal, and informal learning; there is importance in understanding the complementarity of these sources; formal coach education programs have been created to enhance their learning (Ciampolini et al., 2020; Côté, 2006; Nelson et al., 2006; Trudel et al., 2020; Walker et al., 2018). The recent review study by Trudel et al., (2020) recognized the special aura of formal coach education (especially those offered by higher education institutions). This movement is accompanied by the search to understand the role of higher education institutions in coach education and the experiences of students in this context (De Martin-Silva et al., 2015; Dieffenbach et al., 2011; Gomes et al., 2018; Milistetd, Brasil, et al., 2018; Zakrajsek et al., 2015).

In Brazil, the coach education scenario has a unique characteristic since coaching is a profession (Santos, 2018). As a profession, coaches who wish to work in the sport system must follow a governmental law (Brazil, 1998) and obtain a bachelor's degree in Physical Education (Milistetd, Ciampolini, et al., 2018; Milistetd et al., 2014), except for soccer, which has its own legislation (Brazil, 1993). In Brazilian higher education institutions, learning activities are varied, and recent studies that have drawn the most attention consider the experiential learning of student coaches (Milistetd et al., 2017). The experiential learning activities occur through Curricular Pedagogical Practices (CPP, opportunities to play the role of a coach), internships (opportunities for students to apply their knowledge in real sports contexts) (Galatti et al., 2016; Milistetd et al., 2014), and, lastly, Scientific-Cultural-Academic Activities (SCAAs). SCAAs (Milistetd, Ciampolini, et al., 2018) represent a type of self-driven activity outside a program curriculum, such as participating in sports programs, taking extra courses, or being a research lab member, when students may learn and develop specific skills of a given context (Brazil, 2018).

Students who wish to become coaches may validate SCAA credits by performing activities as coaching staff members in university sports teams, having the opportunity to learn coaching skills through practice (Gaion et al., 2020; Milistetd, Ciampolini, et al., 2018). Although little explored in the context of university teams, these activities are characterized for allowing knowledge transfer within a real coaching context, involving higher education professors as supervisors (Gaion et al., 2020). When compared to university sports in other countries such as Canada, the United States, and European countries

(Gaion et al., 2020; Santos, 2018) the Brazilian university sport system is not viewed as a high-performance environment since there are few competitions and the student-athletes mostly use their participation in sports as a life quality strategy or to have scholarships to study in private institutions (Malagutti et al., 2020). The highest entity of the Brazilian university sport system is the Brazilian Confederation of University Sports, which organizes the main championships; however, student associations also organize sports events involving university programs (Malagutti et al., 2020, 2021). In this context, supervising professors assume the role of Head Coaches, and student coaches act as coaching staff members (Santos et al., 2021). It means that when professors assume this role, they will be coaching in the first moment and supervising after, gradually integrating the students in the coaching activities. From this reality, one may say that (a) the environment of university teams in Brazil seems to provide learning opportunities for students during their education process, and (b) despite this, there are not enough reports on how experiences in this environment may effectively contribute to coaching learning. Therefore, our main objective was to explore the experiences of student coaches as coaching staff members of Brazilian university teams.

Taking this dimension into account, we recognize the student experience as a central element of learning, a combination of different processes throughout life in which the person experiences social situations (cognitively, emotionally, practically, or a combination thereof) that continuously change their biography (Jarvis, 2011). It is from the experiences that the possibility of discovering new knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and beliefs emerges, in the process of giving meaning to each daily experience instead of merely reacting to them (Jarvis, 2011). Notably, De Martin-Silva et al. (2015) pointed out that the quality of the experiences in undergraduate programs is a stimulating factor for student coaches to move from dualistic thinking (absolute truth - right or wrong) to relativistic thinking (multiple realities and perspectives of coaching). Use the paragraph as a template.

2. Methodology

2.1 Paradigmatic position

This study was conducted from a qualitative research approach. The descriptive and interpretive nature of the qualitative design allows the perception of different perspectives that make up a determined and complex phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Following an ontological, epistemological, and axiological position, this research is positioned in the constructivist paradigm (Lincoln et al., 2018). In this paradigm, the researcher seeks the complexity of the worldviews of individuals without reducing them to categories or ideas simply “imprinted” on the determined subject. For this, the action of the researcher is to openly question and listen to what individuals express about their lives (Creswell, 2013). Still, one’s understanding of the world is a construction of their world, inevitably associated with the perspectives and viewpoints that they carry, without the possibility of an independent (universal) view that does not consider particular ways of thinking (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

2.2 Research design

Following our paradigmatic position, this research is based on a case study, which means a detailed analysis of one certain case selected in a real context was conducted (Yin, 2018). In consideration of exploring the experiences of student coaches as coaching staff members in university teams, we used an intrinsic case study to comprehend the specific conditions of five different students’ experiences (Mertens, 2019). Aligned with Yin (2018), we conducted a holistic case study because the data from all five students were examined as the main unit of the analysis procedure.

2.3 Context description

The choice for the research context was due to the recognition of this institution on the national scene (7th place in the University National Ranking) (Folha, 2019), both in terms of the quality in the training of teachers and coaches, as well as in the offer of university sports, with the conquest of medals in the main sporting events promoted by the Brazilian Confederation University Sports and the Santa Catarina University Sports Federation. Furthermore, the institution has a sports Department, responsible for developing institutional actions aimed at the practice of university sports, as well as the organization of community services (UFSC, 1982).

2.4 Participants

The selection of participants was influenced by a desire to include student coaches with experience in university teams at the time in order to investigate their experiences over time in these projects. Hence, participants were preselected based on a combination of specific interests, purposive sampling, and convenience (Patton, 2014; Stake, 2005).

The study participants were five student coaches (two female and three male) from a Brazilian public university (see Table 1). The selection was made according to the following criteria: the student had to (1) be enrolled in the Undergraduate Program in Physical Education (bachelor's degree); (2) be in a university team as a coaching staff member; (3) have a professor as a supervisor in the university sports team. In this context, a brief overview of each student is provided below using pseudonyms to maintain their confidentiality.

Table 1. Presentation of research participants.

	Participants	Age	Gender	University Team	Experience in the University Team (semesters)
Students	Mauricio	20	Male	Soccer	03 semesters
	Camila	19	Female	Volleyball	02 semesters
	Olivia	25	Female	Handball	02 semesters
	Lanza	20	Male	Track and Field	02 semesters
	Marcos	21	Male	Futsal	04 semesters

Source: Authors.

At the time, Mauricio, aged 20, had less than one year of coaching experience with a local female soccer team (amateur level); his desire to become a sports coach motivated him to attend a Physical Education program. Camila, aged 19, had no experience as a coach but much experience as an athlete in her sport. Olivia, aged 25, had three years of experience as a karate athlete during her childhood but no experience as a coach until the beginning of her community service. Marcos, aged 21, also had no coaching experience but had spent many years as an athlete in his sport. Lastly, Lanza, aged 20, had significant experience as a volleyball and track and field athlete and had begun his coaching journey in university teams.

In order to point the experiences of students, only students with at least six months (one semester) of involvement as coaching staff members in the university teams were selected. This is an important strategy because all university teams in SCAA activities have a minimum of six months, which allows range and depth of experiences.

2.5 Procedures

After ethical clearance was received from the university (protocol number 2.083.301), the first author contacted its Department of Physical Education to create a list of university teams and identify which students were participating in such projects. Next, each student was contacted by the first, second, and third authors through an email presenting the purpose of this study, informing the ethical procedures, and inviting them to participate. Consent was obtained from five students. Then, the first three authors scheduled the interviews with the students at a place and time convenient to the participants. The

interviews were recorded using audio recorder equipment (Sony Digital Voice Recorder ICD-PX312 IC). The same process was conducted with the second round of interviews after the first six months of participating in the university teams.

2.6 Data collection

2.6.1 Interviews

Semi-structured interviewing was the data collection method used in this study (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). Each student participated in two rounds of individual interviews in sequence, aiming to capture as many experiences as possible. Every one of the ten interviews was conducted in person with the participants at a location convenient to them. The average interview duration was 60 min in the first round and 52 min in the second round.

The first semi-structured interview was conducted in the first semester of 2019. These interviews were focused on gaining a general overview of the motivation of the students to participate in the university teams as coaching staff members. The students were encouraged to answer about their motivations for selecting university team activities. Questions in the first interviews included: (a) What motivated you to join the university team? (b) How was your first contact with the university team? (c) How were your first experiences with the team as a coaching staff member?

The second round of interviews took place during the second semester of 2019. It focused on identifying the learning experiences of the students during their participation in the university teams relative to the process of becoming coaches. Questions in the follow-up interviews included: (a) How was your performance routine in the university team? (b) Can you perceive significant learning experiences during your experience with the university team? (c) Did you directly coach the team? Could you tell us about this experience?

2.7 Data analysis

Aligned with a constructivist paradigm (Lincoln et al., 2018), there was an interpretative and subjective aspect to the data analysis process, given that the participants spoke about their experiences with personal details, demonstrating their social experiences in the scenarios of the university teams. Thus, the analytical process was conducted in six recursive phases of reflexive thematic analysis (TA), according to Braun & Clarke (2019), allowing a comprehension of the diverse perspectives of the students.

The initial analysis involved the transcription of each interview, resulting in long documents with eleven single-space pages for each student interview that were later sent to the participants to gain their consent. In order to analyze the data in such long documents, the first four authors immersed themselves in the data over several days, reading the documents multiple times and making some notes. From an inductive approach, the authors started an organic process to thematically organize the material by creating codes (phrases and terms), themes, and subthemes (Braun & Clarke, 2019). To capture the deepening understanding of the data as mentioned by Braun and Clarke (2021), the first four authors held a reflexive meeting moment in each TA phase before starting the next step. The NVivo software (version 12) was used to support the analytical process.

2.8 Methodological integrity

Regarding the methodological rigor, transferability, and credibility, we developed this process by verbatim transcription and a member-checking procedure (Smith & McGannon, 2018). Following Patton (2014), a member-check process was conducted between all first four authors during each analysis step (creating codes, themes, and subthemes). All steps were conducted with a critical friend (the fifth author) with much experience in qualitative and coach development research who assisted the first four authors during the entire analytical process (Smith & McGannon 2018). Also, during this

process, the authors enhanced the opportunity to expand their interpretations of the data through critical reflection about the engagement with the analysis (Braun & Clarke 2019; Smith & McGannon 2018).

3. Results

The analysis of the interviews elicited three higher-order inductive themes (Table 2): (i) entry into and involvement with the university teams; (ii) content experiences in the university teams; (iii) role of supervisor and learning environment.

Table 2. Conceptual map of the data analysis process.

Inductive Themes	Subthemes	Codification
Entry into and Involvement with the University Teams	Perceptions of first experiences in the project	Formal opportunity to work in a team Combine theory and practice
	Gradual involvement	Peripheral involvement with the training Direct involvement with the training
Content Learning Experiences in the University Teams	Planning and conducting training sessions	Technical, tactical, and physical aspects of training
	People management (relationships/communication)	Manage a group of athletes/technical committee Communicate with athletes, staff, and other agents
	Coaching adaptability and self-awareness	Understanding of the coaching context Self-awareness as a coach
Role of Supervisor and Learning Environment	Importance of constant support Positive and open relationship Mentoring	

Source: Authors.

3.1 Entry into and involvement with the community service

Entering community service was highlighted by the students as a challenging experience in the process of learning to become a coach. In particular, the students mentioned their first experiences (formal opportunity to work in a team and combine theory and practice) and characteristics of a gradual involvement in the projects (peripheral to direct involvement).

3.1.1 Perceptions of first experiences in the university teams

The students highlighted that the first opportunities to work formally in the projects contributed to reinforce their desire to be coaches, combined with the development of responsibility and commitment to assume the role of scholarship holders.

I wanted to be a coach! Working with sports, with soccer, I had this goal of working in soccer and being a coach. So I started as a volunteer, and then I became a scholarship holder. (Mauricio)

But, as a scholarship holder, it has a different characteristic. So that would weigh, like, I would have to go to every training session, both as an athlete and as a scholarship holder, regardless of my personal problems. So I had to put it as a commitment, right? (Olivia)

The first experiences in the projects were also important for the students to understand the relationship with the theory learned in their undergraduate programs. With the practice of being coaches, the students were exposed to all coaching roles, leading them to observe and transfer what they had learned.

Often, you read something you have in theory, but then you don't apply it very well in practice. So if I didn't do the project, for example, I wouldn't know what could work. (Marcos)

Many things that we see in theory, you start to see in your practice, you know why that thing happens because you are also experiencing in theory, and you can draw a parallel (with practice). (Mauricio)

The roles and responsibilities accumulated in the community service varied according to the degree of involvement, with the students going from more peripheral roles to direct intervention. In addition, the routine of each student within the projects allowed them to take the lead in different roles.

3.1.2 Gradual involvement

The students perceive a gradual involvement throughout their participation in the university teams, initially highlighting a more indirect role structured by the team supervisors.

The coach would set up the training, and we would watch the training and discuss it, or he would just say: “you are going to do this!” So I controlled the time of the activities, punctuation, one or another group training. Sometimes he would stay with one team and I would stay with the other team. (Mauricio). In the first semester, I watched (the training) and received more instructions from the supervisor because I still did not have the mastery of how to perform a training. Gradually, the supervisor inserted me in the training sessions doing some activities, usually in the warm-up, and then I did one or another activity. (Camila).

Throughout the semesters of work and as they acquired more experience, the students were exposed to greater responsibilities and began to have more direct roles in the university teams. The student coaches expanded their roles within the training environment, being required, for example, to dialogue more with the athletes and organize training sessions. They left the role of assistant coaches to assume the actual coach functions.

In my third semester as an assistant coach, it was a turning point, the key turned. I was one of the most experienced members of the team now, the responsibility increased. So, it was the coach and me; we were discussing and talking. (Mauricio).

For Camila, this transition in roles and responsibilities was catalyzed as she and the athletes got to know each other better.

I think this process happened because I loosened up and got to know the boys better too. So, little by little, I was doing more activities. Sometimes the supervisor helped me, and sometimes I was already conducting the training by myself. I was already setting up the court and the equipment. For example, when there was something more specific for a libero or a setter, I usually prepared it myself. (Camila).

3.2 Content experiences in the university teams

As mentioned by the five students, the learning opportunities as coaching staff members in the university teams are diversified. Trying to be more specific regarding effective learning experiences, the students mentioned three special moments: (a) planning and conducting training sessions; (b) people management (relationships/communication); (c) coaching adaptability and self-awareness. All participants shared the importance of learning experiences in their respective university teams, revealing the nature of these moments.

3.2.1 Planning and conducting training sessions

The students perceived several activities related to planning a training session in their university teams as fundamental to their learning to be coaches, developing skills to organize training sessions with physical, technical, and tactical contents. The students highlighted how they perceived the training organization during their coaching experience in the university team activities.

About planning, my assistant and I reflected on what we could work on during the week, and we planned everything together with the soccer and futsal research laboratory because I'm part of the laboratory too. So we planned the physical part and the technical part together, but the tactical part was my function. (Lanza)

I learned about the schedule: in week one, we're going to train this, in week two, we're going to train this, and to have a logic in the semester we were going to train. (Mauricio)

For Camila and Marcos, their dispositions about the process of planning training sessions were representative of a security and adaptability sense about coaching.

Sometimes the training day came and you didn't really know what they (the athletes) needed. (Camila)

Learn several things that really influence athlete performance; it's very interesting for you to know how to plan the training session. (Marcos)

3.2.2 People management (relationships/communication)

One of the most important roles of a sports coach is to manage a group of athletes and the coaching staff. This role represents a challenge for many coaches in distinct sports scenarios. In this context, the students explained how essential this learning was during their experience at the university as sports coaches.

The biggest challenge for me was that all of them (the athletes) have very strong personalities. So we tried to talk more informally with them to create more confidence in us (as coaches). (Camila)

I think it was mainly dealing with the athletes, this is constant learning, we are always learning. (Marcos)

Dealing with the group, dealing with people, dealing with different personalities, with different moods. Knowing how to understand the athlete, what he will be able to give me if I know how to understand him. (Olivia)

Furthermore, another important lesson during this period was to develop the ability to communicate in the training environment, particularly with the athletes. Even considering just one year into the university team activities as coaches, the students revealed how they improved their communication abilities.

It's step-by-step. During the first semester, I said that the issue of talking, making gestures, dealing with people, and providing training evolved a lot. It got even better this semester. I managed to teach myself, knowing how to give better instruction. (Camila)

I've always sought a bond with them (the athletes), dialoguing, always talking a lot. I'm always asking for feedback from them (the athletes) related to training, related to myself, related to their friends, about what they see, what they perceive as missing in the game. (Olivia)

3.2.3 Coaching adaptability and self-awareness

Improvisation is a frequent characteristic of the work performed by a sports coach. The students described that, when acting as sports coaches in the university teams, numerous challenges were reasons for new experiences. As coaches, the students felt the need for a change of mindset regarding what was not possible to control, requiring constant adaptations in the interventions.

There are several things that are unpredictable. You try your best to get around. For example, the issue of not having an athlete. It's something that we trained, we talked about. And that's something you must deal with. (Mauricio)

I believe that being a coach is a challenge. You are always being evaluated. Your training can go wrong, it can go right. You have to plan well to make your training work, so it's always challenging. (Marcos)

During the semester, I realized that the training sessions were difficult, we were at a plateau, with no evolution of the athletes. So we had the idea that, every week, an athlete would find a video of a handball figure that demonstrated some different skills than them (the athletes). It was very productive. (Olivia)

The students also outlined how the experience in the university teams allowed them to develop autonomy to conduct the first training sessions for all athletes, advancing from monitoring roles to coaching roles. This change was perceived as natural by the student coaches, as they were still learning and needed previous experiences in the training environment.

I think the coolest thing for me was having coached a training session alone for the first time. In the first semester, I was pretty insecure. So for me to be able to do one training session by myself was, how can I say, innovative. (Camila)

I became a little more active; I was not so much in that auxiliary role, just accompanying, I also planned more activities, which I think is a natural process. (Marcos)

With the engagement during the semesters, the students could develop a capacity to focus their coaching abilities into practice, and the comments suggest a possibility to stimulate this process across the training sessions. Understanding the context and the way they were acting as coaches made the students aware of some decisions.

It was kind of natural, but I took his [the supervisor] good stuff and always did the same. Trying to do what I saw wasn't working, you know? Then, it was when I discovered that doing things my way was better than trying to copy the other way. Since then, training and the semester have improved, and I've evolved a lot. (Mauricio)

I was very shy in training, especially with a group of people, a group of older boys. But, over time, I got to improve a lot and develop my personal skills. (Camila)

I lost a lot of athletes because I didn't know how to motivate them, and it was my fault, my way of training. (Marcos)

3.3 Role of supervisor and learning environment

The role of supervisors may be defined as supporting students in university teams through conversations and being positive references, among other actions and behaviors in an orientation relationship. The supervisors were professors of the Physical Education program, responsible for the university teams as coaches.

3.3.1 Importance of constant support

Initially, the five students identified some reasons to attribute importance to the constant support of their supervisors. The scenarios for Mauricio and Camila represent how their supervisors provided real orientation that contributed to their development as future coaches.

He (the supervisor) followed some training sessions. When he saw something different, he would say: “Look, what a surprise!” Sometimes he would see that the same mistakes were happening over and over again, so he would speak up again. But it is interesting that in a few training sessions, his feedbacks were always accurate, he always contributed. (Mauricio)

The supervisor was always there helping and inserting me into the activities. I planned together with the supervisor in the second semester. I did some activities, he (the supervisor) looked at it and gave his opinion, and vice-versa. (Camila)

Therefore, the support of supervising professors was important for the students to confirm whether they were doing well as coaches, through assertive collaborations between these actors in the university teams.

3.3.2 Positive and open relationships

In the orientation process, it was possible to perceive the importance of positive and open relationships between the participants and their supervisors or more experienced colleagues for developing their autonomy. Gradually, the students were able to gain confidence and take on some activities and specific sessions until they became the main people responsible for the entire coaching process.

The supervisor always said: “Look at this activity, you are going to explain this activity to them (the athletes)”. But as I became more active, I presented ideas to him (the supervisor), for example: “Today I want to do this activity at practice. What do you think?” And he usually cleared it. (Camila)
I always had enough autonomy; she (the supervisor) supported our decisions, always talking to know if it was possible or not. (Lanza)

3.3.3 Mentoring

For all the student coaches, besides providing feedback and sharing information, supervisors may also stand out in the mentoring process for being positive references for them. The speech of student Marcos demonstrates this.

Everyone likes him (the supervisor) very much, so I consider him a very successful coach because he can attract people. And this is one of the main points that I have to improve because I consider myself very distant from the athlete. I talk to him (the supervisor), I show him what I did and what I have to change about it, so he is my mentor here. (Marcos)

In addition, the attitude of the supervisors of being close to the athletes also made the student coaches wonder to what extent their performances as coaches were influenced by the positive behaviors of the supervisors during the projects.

He (supervisor) was a real professor. If I had been alone, it would have been hard to progress, especially when it came to being in charge of the athletes. And, with him (the supervisor), I understood a little of the gestures, how to call the boys, how to make the chronology of the training, the pedagogical and practical parts as well. I think it was very important. (Camila)

4. Discussion

In this study, we identify the experiences of student coaches as coaching staff members in Brazilian university sports. The results advance the understanding of formal education in Brazil in two ways. First, the students acquired a body of knowledge and skills during the process, and their experience in university teams represents a potential activity for real experiences in coaching and its complexity. Secondly, the diversity of these real experiences related to coaching goes beyond the limitation encountered by students in the internships of coaching education programs in Brazil (Milistetd, Ciampolini, et al., 2018), offering a more significant understanding of the context of the performance of the sports coach. At first glance, the quality of the experiences reported by the student coaches and the stimulating relationships within the context of university teams provided insights into the multiple realities and perspectives of coaching, as well as their own identities as future coaches (De Martin-Silva et al., 2015).

The entry into and involvement with university teams strengthened the desires of the students to become coaches, mainly because of the opportunities they had to apply in practice what they had already learned theoretically in their training. These moments may be considered learning orientations (academic, social, personal, professional) (Moon, 2004), as they define the motivation and engagement of the students in each learning activity. Similarly, Jarvis (2011) ensured that this decision involves trying to obtain resources for possible learning (perhaps as a response to a disjuncture).

The student coaches started in the university teams in a peripheral way, performing punctual activities. These moments may be considered opportunities to approach the coaching field since they did not have much prior experience as coaches (only Mauricio had been a coach before, yet for less than a year). In general, when student coaches start their bachelor's degree in Brazil, they usually do not have experience as coaches, and those responsible for the program almost always disregard this perspective (Trudel et al., 2020). In this case, the student coaches demonstrated that there was constant support and direction in these peripheral experiences, especially from the role of the supervisor, who is a central element for the quality of the practical experiences the students have (Woodburn et al., 2021). However, this reality is different from that perceived in internships, in which support is seen as a weakness during the process (Dieffenbach et al., 2011; Milistetd, Brasil, et al., 2018; Milistetd, Ciampolini, et al., 2018; Zakrajsek et al., 2015).

The supervisor was mentioned as the most important figure for the support offered to the students, promoting communication/orientation from a positive influence that generated confidence and sureness to act. Previous research shows that the presence of a supervisor in experiential learning situations is essential to help students read and respond to the action field (Barney & Andersen, 2014; Dieffenbach et al., 2011). When the presence of the supervisor is constant and their actions promote a challenging but supportive learning environment, students develop greater engagement with the nature of their professional reality (Griffiths & Armour, 2012; Mesquita et al., 2015). When examining the relationship of supervisors with their students in sport training contexts, Woodburn et al. (2021) pointed to the contribution of the supervisors in providing students with opportunities for responsibility, along with constant dialogue and feedback within the real coaching environment. In fact, the greater the stimulus for interaction with an educational authority (e.g., the supervisor) or the context (e.g., university teams) is, the more lasting the commitment of students to discovering the personal and social positions of coaching in formal education will be (De Martin-Silva et al., 2015; Nash, 2003).

As the student coaches acquired greater skills and knowledge (e.g., responsibility to plan, conduct, and evaluate activities), a gradual increase in the number of experiences with the multifaceted context of coaching in university teams was evident. This result supports some similar studies on internship activities in sports teams, demonstrating that, after peripheral involvement, students gradually develop greater confidence to assume more central roles in the team (Gomes & Mesquita, 2015; Zakrajsek et al., 2015). Student coaches also point to the value of experiences in real coaching situations during formal education, as mentioned in previous investigations (Dieffenbach et al., 2011; Gomes et al., 2018; Zakrajsek et al., 2015). The diversity of experiences close to the real context of the professional performance of a coach is a factor that guides learning habits, aiming at capturing environmental influences in the face of coaching unpredictability, expanding skills and levels of awareness in a transformational learning experience process (Potter, 2017; Walker et al., 2018). The gradual experience in a structured environment such as that of university teams seems to have provided the student coaches increasingly more complex experiences of the coaching activity, which has already been pointed out as guidance for coach education programs in Brazilian higher education (Milistetd et al., 2017).

The experience journey of the student coaches in university teams also demonstrated an approximation with particular learning contents, emphasized by Jarvis (2011) as one of the nine elements of the learning sequence that may exist in educational programs. In the case of the student coaches, these contents are directly related to a set of knowledge and skills endorsed by the International Council for Coaching Excellence (International Council for Coaching Excellence, 2013), namely, professional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal knowledge. As a result of their performance in the university teams, the professional competencies of the student coaches were related to planning, conducting, and evaluating the training sessions (considering physical, technical, and tactical aspects of each modality). In fact, Abraham et al., (2006) stated that the professional knowledge of the coach is in the junction of sport-specific knowledge with physiological, pedagogical, and sport psychological knowledge, among others. Consequently, the literature already mentions that the development of professional knowledge occupies the larger part of the learning experiences of student coaches in formal education in Brazil (Milistetd, Ciampolini, et al., 2018; Milistetd et al., 2017; Trudel et al., 2020).

Acting as coaches in an environment with constant coaching complexity, the students emphasized that the experiences in university teams also develop intrapersonal and interpersonal skills. Communication skills with the team and athletes, self-knowledge as a coach, and adaptability/unpredictability are content experiences related to the essential characteristics of coaches (Gilbert & Côté, 2013). With regard to formal education, the gradual and continuous involvement in real spaces of professional performance of coaches seems to ensure the acquisition of intra and interpersonal skills, unlike the isolated experiences of students in internships (Milistetd, Brasil, et al., 2018; Milistetd, Ciampolini, et al., 2018) or undergraduate programs in general (Trudel et al., 2020). This result is in line with what Rynne et al., (2017) considered as the improvement of the introspection of the coach, allowing better learning and performance from the relationships established (interpersonal) and from a broad understanding of oneself (intrapersonal).

In this sense, the learning experiences of the student coaches from their choices to join university teams are, according to Jarvis (2011), from a process of selection by negotiation. Allied to personal motivations, students, even in a scenario of institutional education, negotiate the importance of learning certain contents considering the environment involved (e.g., the complexity of a sports team) (Jarvis, 2011). The student coaches in this study found in university teams an alternative for personal progress that made them more secure in their learning about coaching (De Martin-Silva et al., 2015), despite acknowledging the following: (1) university-based coach education programs in Brazil do not provide adequate preparation for students to engage in performance contexts (Milistetd et al., 2014); (2) coach education programs are limited in helping students understand their current and future coaching practice (Webb & Leeder, 2021); (3) despite their potential, internships still present weaknesses (Dieffenbach et al., 2011; Gomes et al., 2018; Milistetd, et al., 2018; Milistetd, Ciampolini, et al.,

2018; Zakrajsek et al., 2015).

5. Practical Implications

The present study offers some practical implications for establishing and facilitating experiential activities in coach education programs in higher education institutions in Brazil. Firstly, those responsible for coach education programs may foster the practical experiences highlighted in this study, from a peripheral entry of students into sports teams until they become head coaches. Secondly, in this journey, it seems crucial to ensure a mentoring process, with discussions about the quality of reflections and relationships amid the process of sports coaching development, aiming at new lessons. Lastly, the student coaches recognized that the ongoing involvement of supervisors promotes better learning outcomes, in which the key challenge is to clarify the perception of support that supervisors and students have of each other.

6. Conclusion

The study results contribute to the literature by describing the relevance of student coaches presenting gradual participation in terms of responsibility in university teams, first as coaching staff members, with the role of assisting the supervising professors in the actions as coaches and, later, assuming the role of head coaches, with greater responsibilities. Another point to be highlighted was the reports of the student coaches about learning contents related not only to professional knowledge, but also to interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge. These experiences were often presented as positive because of the role of supervisors, who guided and facilitated the development of the student coaches and their practices.

As a major limitation of this study, we highlight the fact that it was only conducted through semi-structured interviews. The use of other research techniques such as participant observation could render the study more robust. In this sense, two interviews were conducted to deepen the understanding of the experiences of student coaches throughout the sports season. Another limitation was conducting interviews only with the students, not including the supervising professors as participants in the study, which could have broadened the interpretation of the experiences in the university teams.

Future studies may help understand in depth the role of supervisors in facilitating the learning of student coaches through interviews with these actors. In addition, studies involving observations and other research techniques (mixed methods) may contribute to a broader understanding of the participation of student coaches in extracurricular activities at the university. Thus, we recommend that future study designs on this theme analyze student coaches and their supervisors side-by-side during trajectories within college teams. In addition, we need to focus efforts on including and analyzing the legal documents that guide these sporting activities in Brazilian universities when possible.

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