



Exploring the experiences of female coaches in selected football clubs, schools, and associations in South Africa

TR Phadziri



orcid.org/0000-0003-3708-4239

Mini-dissertation accepted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree *Master of Business Administration* at the North-West University

Supervisor: Prof LTB Jackson

Graduation: June 2026

Declaration

I, Thinawanga Phadziri hereby declare that this mini-dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master of Business Administration at North-West University is my own original work and has not been previously submitted for examination at any other institution.



November 2025

Acknowledgements

The completion of this study would not have been possible without my community. I wish to express my gratitude to the following people:

- To the King of my heart, my Lord and saviour Jesus Christ, all glory belongs to you, thank you for being my rock and giving me the strength and ability to complete this study.
- To all the coaches who took part in the study, thank you, this study would not be complete if it were not for your willingness to be interviewed.
- To my supervisor Prof. Leon Jackson, thank you for your belief, guidance, and continuous encouragement throughout this process.
- My language editor, Helen, thank you for doing what you do best.

I unfortunately cannot mention everyone, but a huge bill of thanks to every family member, friend and colleague who gave me words of encouragement and wisdom through this process.

Abstract

Background: Despite the rapid growth and professionalisation of women's football, the underrepresentation of female coaches remains a global challenge. In South Africa female coaches continue to face barriers that limit their access to resources, opportunities and leadership pathways.

Aim: The aim of the study was to explore the lived experiences of female football coaches working in clubs, schools and academies across South Africa. The study further explored the barriers and challenges that the coaches face and the organisational interventions that could be adopted to decrease those barriers and challenges.

Methods: A qualitative research methodology was used through an explorative descriptive qualitative design, with a cross-sectional time horizon. Semi-structured one-on-one interviews were conducted with the participants.

Results: Thematic analysis revealed two major themes: structural and systemic barriers and strategic priorities for growth. The findings indicated that female coaches navigate environments that are characterised by inadequate structural support, gender inequality and limited development pathways. Based on the findings, the study provides managerial implications, recommendations for organisations and further recommendations for future research.

Keywords: experiences, female football coaches, gender inequality, leadership, male-dominated sports.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1. Introduction	1
1.2. Background to the study.....	1
1.3. Problem statement.....	1
1.4. Rationale and significance of the study	3
1.5. Demarcation/delimitation of the study	4
1.6. Definition of key concepts	4
1.7. Aim and objectives of the study.....	4
1.8. Research Questions.....	5
1.9. Research Methodologies	5
1.9.1. Research paradigm.....	5
1.9.2. Research approach.....	6
1.9.3. Research design.....	6
1.9.4. Time horizon	6
1.10. Research Process	6
1.10.1. Population	6
1.10.2. Sample method/technique and sample size	6
1.10.3. Data collection instruments.....	7
1.10.4. Data collection/fieldwork.....	7
1.10.5. Data coding and analysis	8
1.11. Ethical considerationS.....	8
1.11.1. Anonymity	9
1.11.2. Confidentiality	9
1.11.3. Voluntary participation.....	9
1.11.4. Risks and benefits	9
1.11.5. Dissemination of findings.....	10
1.12. Structure of the mini-dissertation	10
2. CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH ARTICLE.....	12
2.1. Introduction	12
2.2. Aim and objectives of the study.....	12
2.3. Research Questions.....	13

2.4. Rationale and significance of the study	13
2.5. Literature review	14
2.5.1. Theoretical perspectives	14
2.5.2. Leadership and coaching styles	15
2.5.3. Female coaches in male-dominated sports.....	17
2.5.4. Challenges faced by female coaches	18
2.5.5. Strategies by world and continental federations to increase numbers of female coaches.....	21
2.6. Research Methodologies	22
2.6.1. Research paradigm.....	22
2.6.2. Research approach.....	22
2.6.3. Research design.....	22
2.6.4. Time horizon	23
2.7. Research Process	23
2.7.1. Population	23
2.7.2. Sample method/technique and sample size	23
2.7.3. Data collection instruments.....	23
2.7.4. Data collection/fieldwork.....	24
2.7.5. Data coding and analysis	24
2.8. Findings.....	25
2.8.1. Introduction	25
2.8.2. Theme 1: Structural barriers.....	26
2.8.3. Theme 2: Strategic priorities for improvement.....	29
2.9. Discussion	32
2.9.1. Theme 1: Structural barriers.....	32
2.9.2. Theme 2: Strategic priorities for growth	34
2.10. Summary of findings.....	36
2.11. Managerial implications.....	36
2.12. Recommendations and limitations.....	38
2.12.1. Recommendations	38
2.12.2. Limitations	39
REFERENCE LIST	40
3. CHAPTER 3: CONCLUSION	52
3.1. Introduction	52
3.2. Conclusion.....	52
3.3. Managerial implications.....	54

3.4. Recommendations and limitations.....	55
3.4.1. Recommendations	55
3.4.2. Limitations.....	56
3.5. Areas for future research.....	57
REFERENCE LIST	58

List of Tables

TABLE 1.1: RISKS	9
TABLE 2.1: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE PARTICIPANTS	25
TABLE 2.2: THEMES, SUB-THEMES AND CODES.....	26

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
CAF	Confederation of African Football
FIFA	Fédération Internationale de Football Association
NCAA	National Collegiate Athletic Association
NWSL	National Women's Soccer League
PSL	Premier Soccer League
SAFA	South African Football Association
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SIT	Social Identity Theory
TUKS	University of Pretoria
TUT	Tshwane University of Technology
UEFA	Union of European Football Associations
UJ	University of Johannesburg
UK	United Kingdom
US/A	United States of America
UWC	University of the Western Cape

1. CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. INTRODUCTION

Female football coaches have enjoyed historical success at major tournaments, the previous six Olympic gold medallist teams were led by female coaches while only two male coaches have led their teams to World Cup glory since the first edition in 1991. Regardless of the growth of women in leadership positions, the number of women leaders in sports remains low, especially in top management positions such as coaching (Carson et al., 2018:64; Kenttä et al., 2020:200; Mikkonen, 2023:1003; Norman, 2013:4). Research conducted has shown coaching to be associated as a profession for men, while another study in the United Kingdom (UK) found that two-thirds of sports coaches in the UK are men, while there is an even smaller number of qualified female coaches as they are either beginning or developing coaches, rather than working in high-performance environments (Murray et al., 2020:475; UK Coaching, 2020). Such patterns are not just prevalent in the UK, with studies conducted showcasing that the same issues exist in other countries such the United States of America, Norway, Poland, Sweden and South Africa (Fasting et al., 2017; Karlik & Wolden, 2023; Kenttä et al., 2020; Kubayi et al., 2016; Organista & Kossakowski, 2024).

1.2. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The journey for women in coaching comes with a number of obstacles that they must overcome at every turn, making the journey a difficult one to navigate. One of the most noteworthy obstacles is the limited opportunities available for female coaches in male-dominated sports. The lack of opportunities limits female coaches from obtaining elite-level coaching positions; however, for the lucky ones who do manage to reach that level, challenges remain in the form of scrutiny and additional pressures and stress. This exclusion not only limits the prospects of the coach's career but also deprives football of diverse perspectives and talents.

1.3. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite the increased growth in women's football (soccer) professionally and commercially around the world, coaching football is a strongly male-dominated profession globally, including in South Africa (Fasting et al., 2017:454; Knoppers et al., 2021:881). The 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup saw an increase in attendance of about 42% from the 2019

Women's World Cup, highlighting the ever-growing support for women's football (FIFA, 2023a; Organista & Kossakowski, 2024:2). However, women face a number of challenges when trying to build a career in coaching (International Olympic Committee, 2024). Firstly, in most countries, the women's leagues do not receive the same level of investment and support as the men's leagues. This leads to challenges such as lack of funding and resources, and unequal wages (Kenttä et al., 2020:200). Secondly, traditional social practices that stem from ingrained habits in male coaching educators, such as devaluing women's stature and foul coaching habits, prevent women coaches from striving for a career in coaching football (Clarkson et al., 2019:74; Lewis et al., 2018:37). Furthermore, a study conducted in the UK on female coaches who were undergoing or had recently attended a coaching education programme reported that the women found the coaching courses to be sexist, unwelcoming, damaging and harmful (Fasting et al., 2017:456).

Additional to the challenges female coaches face, there are several barriers that prevent female coaches from breaking into the profession and being successful in it (Kenttä et al., 2020:200; The Football Association, 2023). One of those barriers is the cost of completing a coaching education course; for example, a UEFA A licence in the UK (Scotland) is £3000 (±R70 000), while a CAF A licence in South Africa costs ±R35 000 (South African Football Association, 2023; The Football Association, 2023). These licences are a necessity for any coaches aspiring to work within the professional game in senior (age 21+ years) and/or youth development (The Football Association, 2023). Furthermore, due to the disparity in wages between men's and women's football, female coaches are less likely to be able to afford coaching education licences and, therefore, find it difficult to move up the coaching ladder (International Olympic Committee, 2024). According to a study conducted by the Confederation of African Football (2022:77), at the time of the study there were a total of 230 licenced female coaches across the A, B and C licence categories. However, the study failed to disclose how many of the coaches were currently coaching professionally or in registered leagues. Continentally, only 35% of head coaches of women's national teams were women, compared with the 65% who were men (Confederation of African Football, 2022:77). A second barrier is the limited amount of female role models coaching the sport whom other female coaches can turn to for support, networking and learning opportunities (Carson et al., 2018:64).

For these reasons and more, there are a small number of female leaders in football and, although studies have been conducted on the inequalities and disparities experienced by female leaders or coaches in male-dominated sports such as football, little research has

been conducted on the experiences of female head coaches in South Africa (Fasting et al., 2017; Karlik & Wolden, 2023; Kenttä et al., 2020; Kubayi et al., 2016; Organista & Kossakowski, 2024).

Therefore, the aim of this study was to answer the following research question: “What are the experiences of professional female football coaches who are coaching in South Africa?”.

1.4. RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Despite policy commitments to gender equality, women continue to be underrepresented in coaching and leadership roles within sport globally (Fasting et al., 2017; Karlik & Wolden, 2023; Kenttä et al., 2020; Kubayi et al., 2016; Organista & Kossakowski, 2024). A report by FIFA (2023b:11) highlighted that only 5% of registered football coaches are women. The 2023 Women’s World Cup saw the competition expand from 24 to 32 teams, only 12 teams (37.5%) had a female head coach (Supersport, 2023). While, at the 2024 Paris Olympic games 13% of all coaches at the games were women (Batha, 2024). Women’s football is rapidly on the rise, as evidenced by the 42% increase in attendance at the most recent Women’s World Cup; however, previous research demonstrated that female coaches continue to face social exclusion, systemic discrimination and limited pathways for progression (Burton, 2015:156; FIFA, 2023b; Kenttä et al., 2020:200; Norman & Simpson, 2023:302).

Considerable research has been documented globally on the experiences and challenges female coaches face in a male-dominated space such as football, which has led to reforms around the world to correct these challenges. However, very little is known about the experiences of South African female coaches, as recent literature provides little information on the lived experiences of the coaches.

The study will thus add to the existing literature in South Africa on sport management and leadership. Greater knowledge of the experiences of female coaches in South Africa will aid the perceptions of women aspiring to become a coach in a male-dominated sport such as football. Becoming aware of the experiences of female coaches in the country can assist associations such as the South African Football Association (SAFA) and professional football clubs with the necessary knowledge to design effective policies, develop programmes and provide leadership development pathways that can further increase the number of female coaches in the country.

1.5. DEMARCATION/DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The study focus was in the field on industrial psychology, with a sub-field of focus on organisational behaviour. Industrial psychology is a specialised field in the larger discipline of psychology that focuses on the workplace (Khurshid, 2021:286; Van Vuuren, 2010:2). Industrial psychology focuses on how organisations influence individual behaviour in the workplace through the study of organisational structures, management styles and job monitoring (Khurshid, 2021:286; Van Vuuren, 2010:2). The study focused on the following topics: female coaches, women in leadership, leadership and gender. The geographical location of the study spanned the entire country of South Africa, throughout each province where SAFA districts can be found.

1.6. DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

Challenges: (the situation of being faced with) something that needs great mental or physical effort in order to be carried out successfully and therefore tests a person's ability (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019).

Coach: someone whose job is to teach individuals to improve at a sport or skill while promoting the positive effects of sport participation such as the development of social skills, respect, fair play and discipline (Jacobs *et al.*, 2014:413).

Gender norms: social and cultural rules and expectations about how men and women behave in society (Cislaghi & Heise, 2019:410).

Leadership: the process of influencing players towards the achievement of important goals (Martens & Vealey, 2023:26).

Structural barriers: gender inequalities that exist in social structures due to institutionalised conceptions of gender differences (United Nations: ESCWA, 2022).

1.7. AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study was to describe the experiences that female football coaches face in South Africa.

The primary objective was to explore the experiences of female coaches in selected schools, clubs and academies.

The secondary objectives were:

1. To describe the challenges faced by female football coaches in South Africa
2. To describe the needs of female football coaches in South Africa
3. To describe how organisations and associations can assist in developing the number of female coaches in South Africa.

1.8. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary research question was:

What steps can managers and organisations take to improve the experiences of female football coaches in South Africa?

The secondary research questions (aligned with the objectives) were:

1. What are the experiences of female football coaches in South Africa?
2. Are there enough opportunities for female coaches to grow in South Africa?
3. What can organisations and associations do to create better opportunities for female coaches to grow in South Africa?
4. Does coaching in a male-dominated space impact the way female coaches lead?

1.9. RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

1.9.1. Research paradigm

According to Rehman and Alharthi (2016:51), a paradigm is a basic belief system, one's way of studying and understanding the realities of the world. Elements of a research paradigm included ontology, epistemology, methodologies and methods. According to Richards (2003:33), ontology is the "nature of our beliefs about reality", how it exists and what can be identified from it. Epistemology, according to Gall et al. (2007:13), is "the branch of philosophy that studies the nature of knowledge and the process by which knowledge is acquired and validated". Epistemology is concerned with how knowledge can be acquired and communicated to other people (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016:52).

The study made use of interpretive research, as this type of research aims to understand the interpretations of individuals regarding the experiences they encounter (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016:51). Thus, the goal is to understand social phenomena in the context of the participants (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016:51). Interest was in the experiences of female coaches and their interpretations.

1.9.2. Research approach

A qualitative research methodology was followed. Qualitative research is seen as a systematic and subjective approach to highlight daily life experiences of the participants. Furthermore, qualitative research investigates meanings, interpretations, code, and the processes and relationships of social life. Due to its focus in everyday life experiences, qualitative research provides researchers with the space to create new theories using the inductive method, which can then be tested with further deductive reasoning (Muzari *et al.*, 2022:15).

1.9.3. Research design

The study was based on an explorative, descriptive qualitative research design. A descriptive qualitative design has been identified as the most beneficial and appropriate for research questions focused on discovering the who, what, and where of events or experiences of the participants. Furthermore, a descriptive qualitative design focuses on obtaining a rich and straight description of an experience or an event (Kim *et al.*, 2017:23; Neergaard *et al.*, 2009:53; Sandelowski, 2000:339).

1.9.4. Time horizon

A cross-sectional time horizon was used for the study. Cross-sectional studies are seen as a collection of relevant information at a certain point in time and can be either descriptive or analytical (Kesmodel, 2018:388). Thus, the information was gathered at one point in time (Kesmodel, 2018:388).

1.10. RESEARCH PROCESS

1.10.1. Population

The participants were current active female football coaches in club, school or academy settings in South Africa. Male coaches and international coaches were excluded from the study.

1.10.2. Sample method/technique and sample size

Purposive sampling was used to identify clubs in professional/semi-professional leagues such as the Hollywoodbets Super League and the Sasol Women's League, and competitive schools, universities and academies that had female football coaches as part of their staff. Snowball sampling and "word of mouth" were used to attract more participants. Snowball

sampling is described as a process by which researchers identify participants who, in turn, may put the researcher in contact with other possible participants (David & Sutton, 2011:232).

Individuals were recruited to participate in the study until data saturation was reached. Data saturation refers to the point when no new information, themes or codes are being presented in the interviews, thus no additional new data are being gathered (Saunders et al., 2018:1895). The sample size was based on data saturation, and nine participants were ultimately recruited.

1.10.3. Data collection instruments

Semi-structured one-on-one interviews with open-ended questions were conducted with the participants. Furthermore, the opportunity was made available to change the sequence of the questions or follow up on different aspects as the participant mentioned them. The interview schedule that was used consisted of questions on the way in which participants lead and coach, and the experiences and challenges they have faced so far throughout their careers (see Appendix A).

1.10.4. Data collection/fieldwork

Participants were recruited by contacting the sporting directors or general managers of local schools, clubs, academies and organisations. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp were also used. The role of social media was to create a snowball effect whereby the researchers' followers could be informed of the study and refer potential participants. Participants who had agreed to take part in the study were asked if they had contact with any other people who met the inclusion criteria of the study. Those who did were asked if they were willing to refer those individuals to the study and forward them the link with the details of the study, and, once they had given consent (through the digital form), the researcher contacted them to arrange when and where to conduct their interview.

Individuals who were interested in participating in the study received a link from whomever referred them to a Google form with more information on the study. The link also included a digital consent form for those who were interested in participating in the study, which was forwarded to the researcher after submission. Once the prospective participants had given consent, the researcher contacted them to arrange when to conduct their interview.

Interviews with the participants were held online on Microsoft Teams (MS Teams), as this platform offered greater flexibility and reduced costs for the researcher than face-to-face interviews, and provided ease of access to both the researcher and participants (Doyle et al., 2020:447).

1.10.5. Data coding and analysis

The researcher recorded and transcribed all the interview audio recordings retrieved from MS Teams. Interviews were analysed promptly to determine when data saturation was reached, further allowing for any necessary adjustments to the interview schedule (Greeff, 2011:360). Once transcription of the recordings was complete, the participants' names were removed and replaced with coded identifiers to ensure anonymity and uploaded to a folder until they were transcribed.

Data analysis was further conducted using a thematic analysis approach, which facilitated the identification of key themes considered significant to the study (Narayan & Sekhsaria, 2019:13360). For further analysis of the transcribed data, the researcher utilised ATLAS.ti, a software program employed at North-West University for the qualitative analysis of large textual, graphical, audio and video datasets. The finalised codes were used to develop themes and sub-themes aligned with the study's objectives.

1.11. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the ethics committee of North-West University Business School. Adherence to the Protection of Personal Information (POPI) Act was enacted. The purpose of the POPI Act of 2013 is to “give effect to the constitutional right to privacy”. This is achieved by regulating the way one’s personal information is processed, providing participants the right to protect their private information and establishing voluntary and compulsory measures (De Bruyn, 2014:1315). As previously mentioned, the advertisement, the Google form and the consent procedures made it clear that the participant could withdraw from the study before, during or after the interview and at any point in the study procedure, and that any personal data gathered from them would be subsequently deleted and not used in the study or for secondary purposes. Furthermore, the following ethical considerations were considered when conducting the research (Laryeafio & Ogbewe, 2023:102).

1.11.1. Anonymity

Anonymity refers to the collection of data without the acquisition of any personally identifying information (Kang & Hwang, 2023:2). Anonymity was provided by excluding the participants' personal details in their responses.

1.11.2. Confidentiality

Confidentiality is the process of changing or eliminating any personal information that can be used to identify the participant (Kang & Hwang, 2023:2). Confidentiality was ensured as only the researcher and supervisor had access to the data.

1.11.3. Voluntary participation

Participants were made aware throughout the recruitment phase and before and during the interview that the interview is voluntary and thus had the option of opting out of the process at any stage if they wanted to. Furthermore, participants could choose to omit any sensitive information from the interviews if they wished to.

1.11.4. Risks and benefits

The potential risks of the study were identified and are mentioned in Table 1.1. Due to the focus of the study on the participants' experiences, no physical harm was caused to the participants.

Table 1.1: Risks

Risk	Risk level	How to overcome the risk
Not enough participants or participants do not attend	Low	Recruit more participants through snowball sampling.
Technical failures (computer, internet or application)	Low	Make sure that the computer being used is fully charged before the interviews and that there is stable internet connection. Wi-Fi inverter in the case of power failure. Test the application beforehand and ensure that microphone and audio are working.

Participants misunderstand the questions	Low	Keep the questions simple while also using probes to make sure participants understand the question.
Emotional risks	Low	Participants can withdraw from the study at any time if they feel uncomfortable or they can opt not to answer a question that they feel uncomfortable answering.
External constraints	Low	Reschedule interviews in case of unforeseen circumstances.

Benefits

The participants were informed that they would not receive any direct benefits from the study but would receive indirect benefits, as knowledge gained from their experiences may bring about change and better opportunities for female coaches. This would be possible by the study findings providing insight that could influence policy development and gender equality efforts in football, while helping to create a space where female coaches experience better opportunities and fewer barriers.

1.11.5. Dissemination of findings

The findings have been used in the submission of a mini-dissertation, and the study findings will be published in academic journals. The researcher communicated with the participants once the mini-dissertation was submitted to see if they were interested in receiving feedback on the study findings. Those interested, were sent an email with the full mini-dissertation attached once it was available on North-West University's Boloka institutional repository.

1.12. STRUCTURE OF THE MINI-DISSERTATION

Chapter 1 provides an overview of current research, introduces the research problem and research questions and highlights the significance of the study and shortcomings in the

research field. The chapter additionally elaborates on the research design and methodology used.

Chapter 2 is a stand-alone independent article that provides the results of the study through the discussion of the findings derived from the collected and analysed data. The references included in the chapter are set out according to the *NWU 2020 referencing guide* (third edition).

Chapter 3 draws conclusions and provides managerial implications, limitations and recommendations for future studies.

2. CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH ARTICLE

2.1. INTRODUCTION

The number of female leaders has steadily increased across various sectors; however, sport particularly football, remains a significantly male-dominated setting (Carson *et al.*, 2018:64; Kenttä *et al.*, 2020:200; Mikkonen, 2023:1003; Norman, 2013:4). Coaching football is universally perceived as a masculine profession, with previous research illustrating the low number of female coaches in high-performance environments (Fasting *et al.*, 2017:454; Knoppers *et al.*, 2021:881, Stone *et al.*, 2025:2).

In South Africa, the rapid rise of women's football and the increasing successes of the national women's football team, known as Banyana Banyana, on the international stage have not translated into improved or equal opportunities for women's football in the country. Female football coaches continue to encounter challenges such as a lack of resources, stereotypical gender norms, unequal wages and minimal representation in leadership structures. A lack of role models, limited development pathways and insufficient investment in the women's game further restricts their progression.

The challenges faced by female coaches globally such as unconscious bias, stereotyping and disparity are well documented and has led to considerable changes in organisational structures and processes in those countries; however, literature focusing on the lived experiences of South African female coaches is limited (Fasting *et al.*, 2017; Karlik & Wolden, 2023; Kenttä *et al.*, 2020; Kubayi *et al.*, 2016; Organista & Kossakowski, 2024). Thus, understanding the experiences of these coaches is essential for the reforming and shaping of equitable organisational policies that will empower and support female coaches. The aim of this study was, therefore, to explore and describe the experiences of female football coaches across selected clubs, schools, academies and associations in South Africa.

2.2. AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study was to describe the experiences that female football coaches face in South Africa. The primary objective was to explore the experiences of female coaches in selected schools, clubs and academies. The secondary objectives were:

1. To describe the challenges faced by female football coaches in South Africa

2. To describe the needs of female football coaches in South Africa
3. To describe how organisations and associations can assist in developing the number of female coaches in South Africa.

2.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary research question was “What steps can managers and organisations take to further develop female football coaches in South Africa?”.

The secondary research questions (in alignment with the objectives) were:

1. What are the experiences of female football coaches in South Africa?
2. Are there enough opportunities for female coaches to grow in South Africa?
3. What can organisations and associations do to create better opportunities for female coaches to grow in South Africa?
4. Does coaching in a male-dominated space impact the way female coaches lead?

2.4. RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Despite policy commitments to gender equality, women continue to be underrepresented in coaching and leadership roles within sport globally (Fasting et al., 2017; Karlik & Wolden, 2023; Kenttä et al., 2020; Kubayi et al., 2016; Organista & Kossakowski, 2024). Women’s football is rapidly on the rise, as evidenced with the 42% increase in attendance at the previous FIFA Women’s World Cup; however, previous research has demonstrated that female coaches continue to face social exclusion, systemic discrimination and limited pathways for progression (Burton, 2015:156; FIFA, 2023a; Kenttä et al., 2020:200; Norman & Simpson, 2023:302).

Considerable research has been documented globally on the experiences and challenges female coaches face in a male-dominated space such as football, which has led to reforms around the world to correct these. However, very little is known about the experiences of South African female coaches, as recent literature provides little information on their lived experiences.

The findings of this study add to the existing literature on sport management and leadership in South Africa. Greater knowledge of the experiences of female coaches in South Africa will aid the perceptions of women aspiring to become a coach in a male-dominated sport such as football. Improved awareness of the experiences of female coaches in the country will assist associations such as the South African Football Association (SAFA) and

professional football clubs with the necessary knowledge to design effective policies, develop programmes and provide leadership development pathways to further increase the number of female coaches in the country.

2.5. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.5.1. Theoretical perspectives

Below are four theories that examine, analyse, explain and provide perspective on the reasons female coaches or leaders face barriers and challenges in male-dominated industries.

Similarity-attraction theory

The similarity-attraction hypothesis formulated by Donn Byrne in 1971 argues that individuals are more inclined towards people similar to them (Abbasi *et al.*, 2023:662). According to Abbasi *et al.* (2023:662), Byrne further argued that when individuals feel they are similar to those around them, they are more likely to experience positive feelings of attraction towards them. The similarities may comprise a number of factors; however, they are typically separated into demographics such as gender, race and ethnicity, as well as psychological aspects such as religion, values and interests (Abbasi *et al.*, 2023:226; Byrne, 1971; Wells & Aicher, 2013:4). Previous research on female teams suggests that replacing a male coach with a female coach may improve the team's performance, while replacing a male coach with another male coach has no impact on the team's performance (Aicher & Sagas, 2010:166; Wells & Aicher, 2013:6).

Social identity theory

The social identity theory (SIT) was formulated in the late 1970s and early 1980s by Henri Tajfel and John Turner (Ashforth & Mael, 1989:20; Evans *et al.*, 2023:2; Tajfel, 1981; Turner, 1975). The theory observes how individuals derive a sense of belonging from their affiliated groups and how this affects their intergroup behaviour. Tajfel and Turner's assumption was that an individual's motivation to develop and sustain a positive self-identity is through the groups they belong to (Evans *et al.*, 2023:2; Martin *et al.*, 2017:326). Research of SIT in sport has found that positive social identity found in groups can improve one's self-worth, effort and commitment (Evans *et al.*, 2023:2; Martin *et al.*, 2017:327).

Feminist theory

Feminist theory aims to understand and challenge gender-based power inequalities and promote the social, political and economic equality of all genders (Benschop & Verloo,

2016:100; Hecker & Kalpokas, 2025; Knoppers & McLachlan, 2018:165). This perspective emphasises the need to understand the experiences of women and other marginalised genders, as well as the ways in which gender intersects with other social categories like race and class (Hecker & Kalpokas, 2025). Benschop and Verloo (2016:100) mention that there are different strands of feminism, one of them being liberal feminism. Liberal feminism's focus is based upon the extent to which men and women have equal opportunities to develop themselves, considering the notions of equality, opportunity and idea of choice (Benschop & Verloo, 2016:100; Knoppers & McLachlan, 2018:165). Factors explored through liberal feminism usually directly impact the individual, such as pay, promotions and discrimination; thus this theory has been the basis of most studies that focus on the underrepresentation of female leaders in sports (Knoppers & McLachlan, 2018:166).

Critical theory on leadership

Critical theory aims to understand and challenge power structures and social inequalities to drive social change. It emerged in the late 1970s through researchers such as Benson (1977) and Burrell and Morgan (1979). Scholars in this field seek to uncover the root causes of social problems and empower marginalised groups (Edwards *et al.*, 2005:234; Hecker & Kalpokas, 2025). Their research often focuses on issues related to race, gender, class and economic inequality. Key concepts such as the conflict perspective, symbolic violence and hermeneutical injustice highlight the role of power imbalances and their deeper causes (Hecker & Kalpokas, 2025).

2.5.2. Leadership and coaching styles

There are a number of different theories that explain the way people lead. Lewin *et al.* (1939) identified three primary leadership styles found in leaders, namely autocratic, democratic and laissez-faire. These styles were dubbed as behavioural theories based on the notion that how a leader acts is a factor that influences their leadership of organisations (Deshwal & Ashraf Ali, 2020:39; Northouse, 2016:71). An autocratic leader is one who takes full control and makes all the decisions regarding a specific task, without any input from other people (Caillier, 2020; Deshwal & Ashraf Ali, 2020; Ekiyor & Dapper, 2019; Jaafar *et al.*, 2021). The democratic leadership style, on the other hand, is the opposite of an autocratic leadership style, with democratic leaders relying on group decision making, active participation and overall teamwork (Caillier, 2020; Jaafar *et al.*, 2021:2). Research shows that there is a direct positive correlation between a democratic leadership style and employee motivation (Jaafar *et al.*, 2021:2). The laissez-faire leadership style, however, offers more freedom to employees, as the leader tends to take less control of the specific task (Kamal *et al.*,

2024:1460; Wong & Giessner, 2016:758). Researchers are generally in support of this leadership style as it gives employees more autonomy and creativity and may improve employee expertise or role performance (Ekiyor & Dapper, 2019:90).

After behavioural theories were formed, contemporary theories such as transformational theory, transactional leadership, servant theory and authentic leadership soon followed. Transformational theory of leadership, first introduced by Bernard Bass (1985), is defined as a leaders' ability to positively influence their employees to accomplish more than what is usually expected of them. This includes the leaders' ability to influence employees to look beyond their self-interests and ambitions through changing their values, interests and morals (Northouse, 2016:162; Xu *et al.*, 2021:61). Transactional leadership is based on the notion of the exchanges that occur between leaders and employees, usually upon agreed terms that benefit each parties' self-interests (Rudansky-Kloppers & Strydom, 2015:131). These types of leaders are seen to manage through a reward and punishment approach; thus, the leader clarifies the roles and tasks that need to be performed to reach certain goals (Northouse, 2016:162; Young *et al.*, 2021:1259).

The servant theory was first seen in the work of Robert Greenleaf and is based on the notion that leaders serve their employees through emphasising their development, while always placing the good of their employees over their own self-interests (Greenleaf, 1970; Heyler & Martin, 2018:230; Northouse, 2016:226). The basis of the theory is two questions: Whom do you serve? And for what purpose? (Spears, 2002:11). Lastly, authentic leadership, in layman terms, is about leaders being genuine and "real" about the way in which they represent themselves and lead those around them (Northouse, 2016:197). Authentic leadership is based on self-awareness, which may assist leaders to build trust and understanding and further build positive, rewarding and meaningful relationships with employees (Northouse, 2016:206; Rayiramkandath, 2021:1238).

In contrast to leadership, coaching, in the context of sport, is seen as providing guidance to a group or an individual to help them develop and improve their performances in their chosen sport (Castillo *et al.*, 2014:33).

According to researchers, there are various coaching styles, with the most popular being democratic and autocratic coaching styles (Castillo *et al.*, 2014:34; Kim *et al.*, 2021:479; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003:886). A democratic coaching style encourages players to have a say in the decision-making processes concerning the team, as the coach sets rules and provides instruction while asking for the players' perspectives (Kim *et al.*, 2021:479). Such

an approach emphasises relationships and communication between a coach and athletes. According to Mageau and Vallerand (2003:886), democratic coaching involves considering the players' feelings and viewpoints, providing opportunities for the players to become independent and make their own decisions about certain things and avoiding mandatory instructions and controlling behaviours. The benefits of a democratic coaching style are that it provides the players with an encouraging atmosphere in which to cultivate teamwork, while also reducing stress levels and allowing the players to be more physical and emotionally comfortable (Kim *et al.*, 2021:479). However, according to Castillo *et al.* (2014:34), democratic coaches may be seen as weak, and they tend to establish vague goals.

An autocratic coaching style is seen as an authoritative leadership style and assumes that the coach makes all the decisions with no input from the players (Kim *et al.*, 2021:480). Autocratic coaches usually inform players on what they are supposed to do, which is beneficial in situations that need a high level of guidance or instruction (Castillo *et al.*, 2014:34; Kim *et al.*, 2021:480). A further benefit of an autocratic coaching style is that it gives the players a chance to focus on their tasks, as the coach makes the decisions. However, a disadvantage of this coaching style is that the decisions made and feedback provided by coaches can be damaging to the players' confidence (Castillo *et al.*, 2014:34; Kim *et al.*, 2021:480).

2.5.3. Female coaches in male-dominated sports

The number of female leaders in top management positions remains low despite the increased growth and popularity of women's sport (Burton, 2015:155; Mikkonen, 2023:1003)

At the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, just 13% of coaches were women and while the Paris 2024 Olympics broke new ground in accomplishing gender equality with a 50-50 split in terms of the athletes participating, the same cannot be said about the athletes' coaches, only 13 % of coaches at the games were women (Olympics, 2024). A web-based tool that monitors women's representation on sport boards internationally shows that gender equality in sport governance remains male dominated with only four out of 44 countries having more than 30% women comprising their national sport organisations (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2013; Sotiriadou & de Haan, 2019:365).

Policies, initiatives and reforms have been established to increase female representation in leadership roles, however with the rapid growth of women's sports, there still seems to be a disparity in the employment of female administrators and coaches in male-dominant sports (BBC Sport, 2015; Hensley & Chen, 2019:29). The same discrepancies can be found in

football, as at the 2023 Women's World Cup only 12 coaches were women out of the 32 nations that participated in the tournament (International Olympic Committee, 2024; Sky Sports News, 2023). A similar trend continues in Europe where, in the top English and French women's football leagues, four out of 12 coaches or managers are women, and in Spain only four out of 16 teams' coaches are women. The Italian and German leagues boast the widest gender gap, with two out of 10 and one out of 12, respectively (International Olympic Committee, 2024; Sky Sports News, 2023). North America's highest female division, the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL), currently features 14 clubs; of these, only five have a female head coach (International Olympic Committee, 2024).

In South Africa, the first ever professional women's league was established in 2019. Currently known as the Hollywoodbets Super League, the league comprises 16 teams, of which only five have head coaches or managers who are women (South African Football Association, 2021).

2.5.4. Challenges faced by female coaches

LaVoi and Dutove (2012:19) made use of Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems model to highlight the day-to-day challenges and barriers that female coaches may experience. The first level of Bronfenbrenner's model is the intrapersonal/individual level, which includes personal and psychological factors such as beliefs, emotions and values; thus, an individual barrier may be that the coach does not believe they are competent enough to coach (Aboagye *et al.*, 2026:7; Kubayi *et al.*, 2016:103; LaVoi & Dutove, 2012:20). The second level is the interpersonal level, which includes social-relational factors such as colleagues, friends, family and life partners; thus, a barrier could be a lack of support at work (Aboagye *et al.*, 2026:6; Kubayi *et al.*, 2016; LaVoi & Dutove, 2012). The third level is the structural/organisational level, such as workplace policies, job descriptions and opportunities, or a lack of opportunities; thus, a barrier could be the amount of travelling for competitions that may interfere with family responsibilities, leading a coach to choose between coaching and parenting (Aboagye *et al.*, 2026:5; Kubayi *et al.*, 2016; LaVoi & Dutove, 2012). The final level is the sociocultural level, which refers to the norms and other cultural systems that indirectly affect coaches. These may include gender stereotypes based on femininity and leadership that may affect the way a female behaves in a coaching role (Aboagye *et al.*, 2026:5; Kubayi *et al.*, 2016; LaVoi & Dutove, 2012:20).

Gender disparity

Women face a multitude of challenges in coaching; however, the most common challenge among them is gender disparity. Male-dominated organisations and industries are those “reflecting the more traditional workplace – one created, maintained, and controlled by males since its inception” (Jandeska & Kraimer, 2005: 465), and are characterised by stereotypical masculine traits such as aggressiveness, decisiveness, risk-taking and competitiveness (Bligh & Kohles, 2008; Fisher, 2015) (Campuzano, 2019:438; Fisher, 2015; Jandeska, & Kraimer, 2005:465). According to the United States Department of Labor Women’s Bureau, as mentioned by Campuzano (2019:438), male-dominated industries are those with a workforce of less than 25% female employees. Despite the increased participation and rising popularity of women’s sport, coaching is seen as a male-dominated occupation (Kubayi *et al.*, 2016:103; Norman, 2013:4).

Discrimination and stereotyping

Literature on sports coaching and gender found that majority of groups of female coaches are more likely to experience discrimination than men in coaching, across most sports (Burton, 2015:156; Kenttä *et al.*, 2020:200; Norman & Simpson, 2023:302). A further study conducted on the problems female coaches face found that the coaches feel that the environment within which they work makes them feel minoritised through unequal gendered assumptions and power retained by a few rather than the many (Jowett *et al.*, 2022:19). This leads to female coaches being left out of educational and networking opportunities and decision-making goals (Norman & Simpson, 2023:303). Furthermore, additional studies on female coaches’ gendered experiences found that the coaches’ experiences were those of sexism, intimidation, lack of respect and isolation, resulting in their experience to be hegemonic masculinity (i.e., they are discriminated against for their lack of masculinity) (Murray *et al.*, 2020:481; Norman & Simpson, 2023:303; Norman *et al.*, 2018:396; UK Coaching, 2020).

Lack of development opportunities

An additional challenge that female coaches face is in obtaining a job. A study conducted by Navin (2015) investigated 37 female coaches who, at the time, were coaching or had coached in a world class programme in the UK, and found that of 15 coaches who had applied for a coaching position, only one coach had been offered an interview. Several of the participants indicated that coaching positions are usually offered without any formal

recruitment and interview process as appointments were based on the gendered “old boys’ network” (Jowett *et al.*, 2022:20; Nicholson, 2024:266).

Cultural norms / gendered role

Football has historically been a male-dominated sport and, because of this, men are more valued and tend to sustain leadership positions in the sport. In contrast, women usually find themselves in subordinate roles in sport, making it difficult for them to be actively involved in male-dominated sports (English, 2017; Pankowiak *et al.*, 2024:3; Spaaij *et al.*, 2015). Due to the cultural and societal value placed on men as superior athletes and coaches, female coaches’ opportunities as leaders in sport are lessened (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012:28; McGinty-Minister *et al.*, 2024:1835). Furthermore, female coaches are seen to be better suited for youth sport at lower levels of competition due to their natural caring and nurturing characteristics (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012:28; McGinty-Minister *et al.*, 2024:1827). However, as previously mentioned, research on sports coaching has found that having a coach with a similar social identity to the team that they are coaching can improve self-worth, effort, commitment and overall team performance (Aicher & Sagas, 2010:166; Evans *et al.*, 2023:2; Martin *et al.*, 2017:327; Wells & Aicher, 2013:6).

Lack of female mentors

There are assumptions made within literature that women found in top senior positions will mentor and promote other women, adding a feminine perspective to leadership while being an inspirational role model or mentor for other women in lower positions (Derks *et al.*, 2016). However, researchers have argued that this is not the case, and that gender inequality is not initiated by men but rather by women, in a phenomenon known as the “queen bee” phenomenon (Cibibin & Leo, 2022:3; Derks *et al.*, 2016:456). The queen bee phenomenon is a term given to women who pursue personal success in male-dominated workspaces by adapting to the masculine culture of the organisation and distancing themselves from other women (Derks *et al.*, 2016; Kanter, 1977; Staines *et al.*, 1974). Women achieve this by supporting the organisation current gender hierarchy, and by physically and psychologically distancing themselves from other women (Derks *et al.*, 2016; Kanter, 1977; Staines *et al.*, 1974).

2.5.5. Strategies by world and continental federations to increase numbers of female coaches

Owing to the increased popularity of women's football after the 2019 Women's World Cup, FIFA developed a women's development programme for 2020–2023 designed to further support its member associations in the development of women's football, especially at the national level. The programme focused on key areas that included women's football strategy, league development, women's football campaigns, club licencing, capacity-building for administrators, coach education scholarships, coach mentorship and women in football leadership (FIFA, 2023a). The coach education scholarships programme reflects one of FIFA's objectives – to increase the number of qualified female coaches (FIFA, 2023a). The scholarship is offered to female coaches and players by providing them with further education. The scholarships aim to increase the number of qualified female coaches, provide easier pathways for female players to gain qualifications and increase their opportunities to obtain employment in coaching during or after their playing career, as well as to educate and inspire female players and coaches to ensure long careers (FIFA, 2023a). The coach mentorship programme provides coaches with an experienced coach (mentor) who will guide and support the mentee throughout the mentorship (FIFA, 2023a). Furthermore, the programme provides guidance on career, a networking platform and additional advice to help them achieve greater results in their current coaching positions and secure future success (FIFA, 2023a). The women in football leadership programme focuses on the need to have higher female representation in football's decision-making bodies (FIFA, 2023a). FIFA aims to provide a learning platform for women who are already in football structures to gain the knowledge and experience necessary to succeed. Participants take part in an intensive 1-week training session accompanied by further leadership support (FIFA, 2023a).

Outside of FIFA, various football associations have developed their own programmes to support female coaches and leaders. One example is in the UK, where Chase, the official banking partner of the English, Welsh, Irish and Scottish football teams, is providing opportunities for coaches to gain football coaching qualifications where cost is a barrier (Chase, 2019).

In South Africa, SAFA has joined forces with the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) to offer a series of education and knowledge-sharing programmes that focus on operations and football for women's football coaches, referees, team managers and

members of the media in women's football. Furthermore, leadership workshops are held for SAFA women and executive committees (SAFA, 2023).

2.6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

2.6.1. Research paradigm

According to Rehman and Alharthi (2016:51), a paradigm is a basic belief system, one's way of studying and understanding the realities of the world. Elements of a research paradigm include ontology, epistemology, methodologies and methods. According to Richards (2003:33), ontology is the "nature of our beliefs about reality", how it exists and what can be identified from it. Epistemology, according to Gall et al. (2007:13), is "the branch of philosophy that studies the nature of knowledge and the process by which knowledge is acquired and validated". Epistemology is concerned with how knowledge can be acquired and communicated to other people (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016:52).

The study made use of interpretive research, as this type of research aims to understand the interpretations of individuals regarding the experiences they encounter (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016:51). Thus, the goal is to understand social phenomena in the context of the participants (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016:51). Interest was in the experiences of female coaches and their interpretations.

2.6.2. Research approach

A qualitative research methodology was followed. Qualitative research is seen as a systematic and subjective approach to highlight daily life experiences of the participants. Furthermore, qualitative research explores meanings, interpretations, code, and the processes and relationships of social life. Owing to its focus on everyday life experiences, qualitative research provided the researchers with the space to create new theories using the inductive method, which can then be tested with further deductive reasoning (Muzari *et al.*, 2022:15).

2.6.3. Research design

The study was based on an explorative, descriptive qualitative research design. A descriptive qualitative design has been identified as the most beneficial and appropriate for research questions focused on discovering the who, what, and where of events or experiences of participants. Furthermore, a descriptive qualitative design focuses on

obtaining a rich and straight description of an experience or an event (Kim *et al.*, 2017:23; Neergaard *et al.*, 2009:53; Sandelowski, 2000:339).

2.6.4. Time horizon

A cross-sectional time horizon was used for the study. Cross-sectional studies are seen as a collection of relevant information at a certain point in time and can be either descriptive or analytical (Kesmodel, 2018:388). Thus, the information was gathered at one point in time (Kesmodel, 2018:388).

2.7. RESEARCH PROCESS

2.7.1. Population

Study participants were current active female football coaches in clubs, schools or academy settings in South Africa. Male coaches and international coaches were excluded from the study.

2.7.2. Sample method/technique and sample size

Purposive sampling was used to identify clubs in professional/semi-professional leagues, such as the Hollywoodbets Super League and the Sasol Women's League, and competitive schools, universities and academies that had female football coaches on their staff. Snowball sampling and "word of mouth" were used to attract more participants. Snowball sampling is described as a process by which researchers identify participants who, in turn, may put the researcher in contact with other possible participants (David & Sutton, 2011:232).

Individuals were recruited to participate in the study until data saturation was reached. Data saturation refers to the point when no new information, themes or codes are being presented in the interviews, thus no additional new data are being gathered (Saunders *et al.*, 2018:1895). Data saturation was assessed through code saturation which is the point where no new additional issues were identified and the codes begin to stabilize (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022:8; Hennink *et al.*, 2017:594). The first five interviews yielded 95% of the codes that were developed with the last two interviews providing four more codes (5%). The sample size was based on data saturation, and seven participants were ultimately recruited.

2.7.3. Data collection instruments

Semi-structured one-on-one interviews with open-ended questions were conducted with the participants. Furthermore, the opportunity was made available to change the sequence of

the questions or follow up on different aspects as the participant mentioned them. The interview schedule that was used consisted of questions on the way in which participants lead and coach, and the experiences and challenges they have faced so far throughout their careers (see Appendix A).

2.7.4. Data collection/fieldwork

Participants were recruited through contacting the sporting directors or general managers of local schools, football clubs, academies and organisations. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp were also used. The role of social media was to create a snowball effect where the researchers' social media followers would know about and refer potential participants to the study. Snowball sampling refers to the process by which participants who had agreed to take part in the study were asked if they had contact with any other people who met the inclusion criteria of the study. Those who did were asked if they were willing to refer those individuals to the study and forward them the link with the details of the study.

Individuals who were interested in participating in the study received a link from whomever referred them, to a Google form with more information on the study. The link also included a digital consent form for those who were interested in participating in the study, which was forwarded to the researcher after submission. Once the prospective participants had given consent, the researcher contacted them to arrange when to conduct their interview.

Interviews were held online with the participants on Microsoft Teams (MS Teams) as this offered greater flexibility and reduced costs for the researcher, compared with in-person interviews, and provided ease of access to both the researcher and participants (Doyle *et al.*, 2020:447).

2.7.5. Data coding and analysis

The researcher recorded and transcribed all the interview audio recordings retrieved from MS Teams. Interviews were analysed promptly to determine when data saturation was reached, further allowing for any necessary adjustments to the interview schedule (Greeff, 2011:360). Once transcription of the recordings was complete, the participants' names were removed and replaced with coded identifiers to ensure anonymity. The recordings were then uploaded to a folder until they were transcribed by the researcher.

Data analysis was further conducted using a thematic analysis approach, which facilitated the identification of key themes considered significant to the study (Narayan & Sekhsaria, 2019:13360). For further analysis of the transcribed data, the researcher utilised ATLAS.ti, a software program employed by North-West University for the qualitative analysis of large textual, graphical, audio and video datasets. The finalised codes were used to develop themes and sub-themes aligned with the study's objectives

2.8. FINDINGS

2.8.1. Introduction

Semi-structured one-on-one interviews were conducted with seven female football coaches in South Africa. The coaches had varied backgrounds, with all of them except one having had a playing career in football, ranging from grassroots participation to the national football team. Furthermore, the coaches interviewed had significant experience within the industry, with coaching experience ranging from 2 to 19 years.

The data provided by the coaches were based on their personal experience as a female football coach in the country. Table 2.1 provides further details on the demographics of the participants.

Table 2.1: Demographic profile of the participants

Participant	Coaching title	Number of years coaching	Highest qualification	Coaching
Coach A	Head coach	10	CAF B	Women's team
Coach B	Assistant coach	10	CAF A	Women's team
Coach C	Assistant coach	2	CAF C	Women's team
Coach D	Head coach	11	CAF C	Women's team
Coach E	Self-employed/head coach	19	CAF A	Women's team
Coach F	Head coach	16	CAF A	Women's team
Coach G	Head coach	8	CAF B	Women's team

Data analysis uncovered two main themes, identified to answer the research questions. These themes were *structural barriers* and *strategic priorities for growth*. Each theme has its own set of sub-themes. Table 2.2 provides an overview of each theme and its sub-themes.

Table 2.2: Themes, sub-themes and codes

Theme	Sub-themes	Codes
Theme 1: Structural barriers	Day-to-day challenges	• Lack of resources • Limited player pool • Gender norms
	Lack of opportunities	• Trying to find employment
	Wage disparity	• Unequal pay
Theme 2: Strategic priorities for growth	Increasing female representation	• Enough female leaders • Lack of female role models/ mentors
	Continuous investment	• Sponsors
	Governance and organisational support	• SAFA • Recommendations

2.8.2. Theme 1: Structural barriers

Day-to-day challenges

The sub-theme *day-to-day challenges* is related to the recurring challenges the coaches face on a daily or weekly basis.

The code **lack of resources** refers to supplies such as money, equipment or other collective means that a coach needs to do their work effectively.

The coaches (n=4) noted that the biggest challenge for them is a lack of resources such as funding, equipment and facilities, as mentioned by Coach C: “The female team would obviously be getting lesser amounts, would be fighting for equipment, would get less equipment.” This results in coaches having to fight to gather resources for their teams, as

stated by Coach A: “So that's another challenge that I have that every time, my voice at work, if I need something for the team, I have to say it twice...”.

Reflecting on her experience coaching at the national level, Coach E mentioned that the lack of resources offered to the women's teams is a sign of discrimination: “We stayed in a two-star hotel, and the men would stay in a seven-star hotel. That's discrimination!” Coach C concurs, mentioning that women's teams are not treated equally to men's teams: “Coaching a ladies team, you always have to fight for a lot of things. Whereas if there's a male team in the same team, it's something different.”

Another day-to-day challenge that the majority of the coaches (n=5) mentioned was the **limited player pool**. Coach B stated, “The biggest challenge is that when you coach a female team in training, normally you get about 11, 7 to 11 players as compared to males. Males, it's always a full house”. Coach D further elaborated that the challenge is from a lack of development at grassroots level that leaves a small pool of players to pick from at league and national level: “It's like I feel like now development is dying. So, like, the grassroots is dying and we can't even find players...”. Thus, instead of coaches receiving well developed players, they find themselves with players who lack the desired knowledge for the level they are at, as coach E states, “The biggest challenge is finding players that understand what is structured and professional football in terms of training first, never mind competition”. This was reiterated by coach G: “It's not every day that you find quality players, ready-made players like you would in the men's game.”

Lastly, coaches (n=5) also noted that **gender norms** play a role in their day-to-day activities as a coach. The coaches mentioned that there are still individuals who do not believe that females can be or have what it takes to be top football coaches, which gives rise to more challenges in the workplace. Coach A mentioned the following when asked if gender norms impact her at work:

“I would say that has impacted my work a whole lot...now it's the case of how they treat you...is like you're in the wrong space and the only time I'm in the wrong space is when we're talking about football. But when we're having a meeting and it's that time for us to eat, everybody's looking at me to dish up for them...I'm not expected to know more of football than a man. But I'm expected to know how to cook more than a man.”

This is illustrated by the comments of Coach A: “The worst challenge that I get is having to prove myself, double of what I'm doing. If I win, I need to do double of that.” The same sentiment was shared by Coach F:

"I think as a woman coach, you must prove yourself 10 times. You can do anything that the male coach can do, but you never will be recognised because a woman coach, there's always gonna be 'she's doing this', 'she's got that because of...', 'she got that because of'... So, you must always try to prove yourself 10 times better than male coaches."

Although there may be certain social expectation from the coaches, for most of the coaches, (n=5) this did not impact the way they lead. The coaches adopt a transformational (n=2), laissez-faire (n=2), democratic (n=1) and a mixture of both autocratic and democratic leadership styles (n=2). The way the coaches lead was based on their previous experience with former coaches either as a player or in an assistant role earlier on in their career, as mentioned by coach E: "100% they...my past experiences ... influence how I lead, I've assisted coaches that are a nightmare and I've always vowed to say I would never if I don't want to be a nightmare." Coach C stated, "The past experiences have influenced how I lead now because of how I felt as a player. I wanna be a different person, you know, on the other side for the young ones that are actually upcoming".

Lack of opportunities

The sub-theme *lack of opportunities* refers to unequal or insufficient access to jobs and coaching education pathways.

Participants were asked what their experience was **trying to find employment** as a female coach in the country. Many (n=6) noted that finding a job is difficult due to various factors such as a lack of proper structures and competition in the women's game, being undermined due to their gender and a lack of investment.

Coach E notes her reasons why it is difficult to get a job in South Africa:

"There's a bit of a question mark there because for you to see a plethora of quality coaches and all of that, you'll have to create opportunities and environments where they work and you get to see those quality coaches ... there isn't enough opportunities, enough structures, enough competitive competitions and things like that for us to have those coaches placed or involved in a lot of football for us to see them."

Coach F concurs that there are enough qualified coaches in the country, they are just not given a chance:

"We do have a lot of qualified female coaches now, there's a lot. But first of all, they are not given opportunities. They are not given opportunities you look at, again, I'm

going to go back to the league. You look at our league, how many teams are being coached by female? I can tell you it's 4 out of 16. It's 4 or maybe five. It's TUKS, UJ, TUT, UWC.”

Coach G mentions that there are plenty of opportunities to volunteer; however, it is a difficult space to break into as a woman if looking for a paying job: “If you're looking for volunteering then I think the space is quite large. You know there's a lot of teams that are looking for volunteers, but if you're looking for a job like a paying job then it's quite tough.”

Wage disparity

This sub-theme focuses on the unequal earnings between men and women coaches.

The coaches were asked if they experienced that there is currently a disparity in wages earned. All the coaches acknowledged that there is a disparity that they all currently face. Coaches noted that, unlike their male counterparts, certain teams would appoint them if they worked for little to no pay, as noted by coach E: “You know, if I could want to go join a club, probably in the League, now in the National League. Some of them would, you know, want me to do it for free and maybe they would say ‘OK coach you can pay for your petrol’.”

Coach F also mentions that in the women's league, not all the teams are currently paying their coaches:

“I stand to be corrected, even in the Hollywoodbets Super League, maybe it's Sundowns and TS Galaxy that are paying the coaches and obviously the universities because those coaches have contracts. But the rest of the other teams I don't even think they pay their coaches.”

2.8.3. Theme 2: Strategic priorities for improvement

The sub-theme *increasing female representation* refers to the number, or lack thereof, of women in executive and senior administrative positions in football clubs, federations and associations.

Participants were asked if they believe there are **enough female leaders** in the country. The majority of the coaches (n=6) answered that there were not, and that this is the reason women's football is not given as much attention as it should, as mentioned by Coach F: “There's not enough leaders. So that means now there is not enough people that would sit down and talk about women's football ... because they are in that room that is dominated by men”.

The lack of leaders subsequently leads to a lack of female role models and mentors in the women's game, causing the road to the top of the coaching ladder to be a tough and lonely journey for most of the coaches (n=6), as mentioned by Coach G:

"It is a lonely, you know, space because there aren't too many of females. Even if you're looking for mentors, you'll hear most coaches saying I was mentored by this guy or that coach who's also a guy. So, I don't think we've got mentors that are female. You know that [we are] able to represent and also be able to give off, you know, to other females as well, so it is a lonely space."

Coach G's statement was further reciprocated by Coach F:

"In this country we don't have, like, role models, for instance, me, the people that I talk to are like my previous coaches, maybe. Yeah, my previous coaches, those are my mentors, people that I talk to are my mentors. We don't have that thing to say 'ah there's a woman coach you must look up to or there's women conferences, women's coaches where coaches go and talk' ... but I don't have. I don't have a mentor. My mentor is a male coach."

The sub-theme *continuous investment* refers to the need for investment through sponsors and private investment in the women's game for the betterment of each team, player and the league.

For a league to grow, there needs to be investment, and this must be investment that will lead to clubs being able to afford the resources they need to compete successfully. This includes, but is not limited to, coaches, equipment and transport.

According to the coaches, a lack of sponsors at times limits teams from competing, as they cannot travel to the opposition, as with the experience of Coach E: "You hear horrible things like the team didn't pitch for a league game because they didn't have the money to be booking flights or they have to take a bus or, you know, from here to Cape Town, for example, because they don't have a sponsor."

The lack of investment is what causes coaches not to get paid or receive little pay, as with the experience of Coach B: "It's difficult for you to coach a team that doesn't have sponsors because once we have sponsors in a team, it makes it easier for you maybe to travel and sometimes you would work long hours without getting paid."

Furthermore, the lack of investment in the women's game means that the women's national team and the league is not as promoted or marketed as the men's side:

“The senior national team has one sponsor ... one sponsor, which is Sasol ... one sponsor, regardless of how Banyana Banyana has done. But they still have one sponsor, and you look at the other side, there's so many sponsors, you look at our League, Hollywoodbets League is a national league, so it's like the highest league in the country. But we don't have the sponsors as, maybe, the PSL [Premier Soccer League].”

The sub-theme *governance and organisational support* refers to the interventions that organisations such as SAFA and local governments can implement to improve the standards of the women's game.

To improve the overall standards of the women's game in South Africa and, in turn, create more opportunities and players alike, better governance needs to be in place. Set processes, policies and structures need to be put in place for the development of women's football in the country, from grassroots level to the professional setup.

The coaches were asked what recommendations governing bodies such as SAFA could implement to further improve women's football and create more opportunities for female coaches in the country. Coach G believes that a shakeup is needed at the top of SAFA, with more women needed around the table:

“They can take out all those old men out and allow women, I mean. Honest, I think if I can see the President of SAFA, for instance, is a female, you can imagine how many ideas are coming for the up and coming people that are watching, you know, and especially if that President starts achieving great things or starts doing great things. You know. It will inspire the others that are watching. So right now you look at the federation, it's full of men. There aren't too many females there and the projection is that one where people think okay there's no space for me there, so I'm not going to venture into that one.”

Coach F stated:

“We need leaders that, first of all, understand woman's football. People, when they look at woman's football, they think woman's football is Banyana Banyana or is the Hollywoodbets Super League. It's not that, same way as they fight up for the boys to play the juniors, it should be the same way they (should) fight for the ladies to play under 15, [under] 17 leagues, so we need leaders that will understand that, we need leaders that will understand, get the buy-in, love women's football.”

2.9. DISCUSSION

2.9.1. Theme 1: Structural barriers

Day-to-day challenges

The coaches' experiences in receiving unequal access to resources is in line with prior research from Australia, the US and the UK (Hoye *et al.*, 2025:10). However, when compared with European and American clubs, African clubs struggle with a lack of resources, such as those mentioned by the coaches, owing to insufficient commercialisation opportunities and a lack of investment and finances (Bawuah, 2022). Furthermore, a report by the Commission for Gender Equality (2024:19) noted that in South Africa, men's football is prioritised, leaving the women's teams with little to no access to facilities, attire, equipment and transport.

A limited player pool is not a theme that has arisen frequently in previous research and shows the need for attention to grassroots and school sport. Observation of the top countries in women's football reveals that the USA has policies and legislation in place that requires government-funded schools and universities to provide equal opportunities to female athletes. This has led to increased investment in women's football programmes and the development of elite players (Dias *et al.*, 2025:4). This explains the dominance of the USA in the women's game, exemplified by their winning of the FIFA Women's World Cup four times. England's football federation has launched their "Let Girls Play" campaign, which saw a 56% increase in the number of girls and women playing football and a subsequent 88% increase in the number of female coaches (UEFA.com, 2023). The country has also recently reached its target of having 90% of schools offering girls equal access to football, 3 years before their intended target year of 2028 (Sky Sports, 2025). Furthermore, the participation of women and girls in football in Spain has more than doubled in the last decade through high youth participation rates and significant government involvement, and this has led to Spain dominating the women's game at youth and senior level (iSportConnect, 2024).

The definition of gender norms in this study refers to the social and cultural rules and expectations about how men and women behave in society (Cislaghi & Heise, 2019:410). Thus, being a casualty to gender norms is consistent with research on female coaches in sport, especially those in male-dominated areas (Braybrook *et al.*, 2025:9; Clarkson *et al.*, 2019:78). Recent research on female coaches working in the men's English football league found that women continue to experience inequality, sexism and sociocultural barriers that hinder their professional progression (Braybrook *et al.*, 2025:9; Clarkson *et al.*, 2019:78).

Furthermore, previous research in the UK and USA has indicated that there are differences in how organisations evaluate their male and female coaches, with female coaches feeling the need to constantly prove their competence by performing at a higher level than their male counterparts (Hoye *et al.*, 2025:15; Norman *et al.*, 2018:395; Strode *et al.*, 2023:111). An international survey analysing gender disparities in youth sports coaching found that female coaches experience a sense of obligation to prove their coaching abilities, while male coaches reported to have experienced the opposite (Dias *et al.*, 2025:13).

However, this study's findings on leadership and coaching styles are inconsistent with research that has noted that female coaches in male-dominated sports felt they had to adopt an authoritarian coaching or leadership style to feel respected (Thomas *et al.*, 2021:111; LaFontaine & Kamphoff, 2016:35).

Lack of opportunities

Increasing opportunities and the number of female coaches has been found to increase workplace innovation and performance (Jowett *et al.*, 2022:20). However, research notes that certain organisational practices and processes that include recruitment and hiring practices often marginalise women and implicitly favour men and masculine ideologies (Schull & Kihl, 2019:2; Strode *et al.*, 2023:118). Furthermore, research conducted by FIFA involving 677 clubs across 90 leagues globally illustrated that women are underrepresented, with 22% of head coach positions held by females (Ewing, 2025). Responses from the study participants, however, seem to differ to the findings of research in other countries, with a lack of proper structures and a limited number of female teams across all age groups limiting opportunities for female coaches specifically in the women's game, where all the study participants were employed. For context, Division I of the women's National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) national championships in the USA has approximately 8300 student athletes competing across the country. The NCAA has three divisions showcasing the number of available opportunities available at university level alone (NCAA, 2025). However, organisational practices that discriminate against women remain prevalent and a lack of female leaders within organisations is seen as a limiting factor to the number of available coaching opportunities awarded to women relative to men (Hoye *et al.*, 2025; Schull & Kihl, 2019:2; Strode *et al.*, 2023:118).

Wage disparity

The gender pay gap has been well documented throughout women's sports for some time, with the same sentiments shared by female players and coaches alike. Reports in 2023

found that female players earned just 25 cents for every dollar earned by a male player (Jalal *et al.*, 2023). After England women's national team won their second European championship in a row, reports from media networks reported that the England women's head coach earned £400 000 annually unlike her male counterpart with the men's team who is reported to be earning £5 million annually (Harpur, 2024; Sanders, 2025). Although coaching salaries have increased throughout the years, the salaries of male coaches in the women's game continue to rise at a higher percentage than those of female coaches (Carrick & Schwab, 2025:10; Coates & Webber, 2023:222; Hirko *et al.*, 2025:31). The study findings were consistent with previous research that discovered that female coaches in SA are underpaid compared with their male counterparts with similar credentials, with most coaches volunteering or receiving a small stipend that is insufficient as a living wage (Adom-Aboagye, 2022:3; Kubayi *et al.*, 2020:2504; Kubayi *et al.*, 2017:105).

2.9.2. Theme 2: Strategic priorities for growth

Increasing female representation

The study findings were consistent with research by Adom-Aboagye (2022:7) illustrating that female leaders in sport in South Africa remain a minority despite legislation supporting gender equality in sport. Furthermore, previous findings indicated that more women are needed in senior administrative roles and that the lack thereof creates barriers and challenges for female football coaches to be afforded opportunities (Karlik & Wolden, 2023:253).

The lack of female role models or mentors has been cited in previous research as a challenge for female coaches (Kenttä *et al.*, 2020:205; Kubayi *et al.*, 2016:106; Stone *et al.*, 2024:6). Thus, providing a platform on which female coaches can work and perform would facilitate more female coaches being offered coaching jobs and subsequently improve the number of female role models (Kenttä *et al.*, 2020:205). Furthermore, the lack of female leaders and role models plays an important part in the number of opportunities available to female coaches, with research noting that organisations should encourage female-focused networks that lead to development opportunities, employment and support (Forsyth *et al.*, 2019:87; Karlik & Wolden, 2023:254; Stone *et al.*, 2024:6)

Continuous investment

The findings on a lack of investment are consistent with the report conducted by the Commission for Gender Equality (2024:25) in which Banyana Banyana players and the National Department of Sports, Arts and Culture acknowledged the inequalities of funding

and sponsorships in women's football. Continuous investment will undoubtedly lead to more opportunities offered to players, coaches and anyone with aspirations of working in women's football (Carrick & Schwab, 2025:11). The South African women's football landscape is lagging compared with other countries, with improved commercialisation in the UK, Europe and the USA seeing increased investment in their respective leagues and clubs (Garry, 2024; UEFA, 2024; U.S Soccer, 2025).

SAFA's national executive committee (NEC) currently has two women in the presidency seats (one chief executive officer/general secretary and one vice-president) with the other four seats occupied by men (one president and three vice-presidents) (SAFA, 2025b).

Governance and organisational support

SAFA's national list, at the time of writing, numbered 15 members, only two of whom were women. Of SAFA's provincial list of 18 members, none were women (SAFA, 2025b). This illustrates a dire imbalance and, according to Adriaanse and Schofield (2013:509), who analysed gender dynamics in sport governance, gender ratios tend to have an impact on power and control. Furthermore, men tend to be in a position of power as the majority of influential positions are held by them, dominating majority consent with women unable to make an impact on traditional masculine dominance (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2013:509). The underrepresentation of women in football at national, provincial and regional level is a common trend, with research carried out in the US and UK noting that females are underrepresented in all positions of power at all age groups in football (Hoye *et al.*, 2025:2; LaVoi, 2009:32). Other research has concluded that for women's sports to progress, women need to be part of sport governance and decision-making structures.

LaVoi *et al.* (2019:137) argue that to create an organisational climate where female coaches feel valued, safe and supported, organisations need gender allies. Gender allies are people in the dominant social group who are in pursuit of meaningful change, who have an unapologetic belief in the systematic and diligent recruitment of competent women, and who intentionally create an organisational climate that values and supports women (LaVoi *et al.*, 2019:137). The pathway into the SAFA's NEC is not an easy one, as potential members must start locally and be nominated into the regional and provincial lists before making their way into the national list. Thus, to share the sentiments of Coach F, there is a need for leaders who will champion women's football and be an ally for female coaches and players.

2.10. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Using an explorative descriptive qualitative design and through thematic analysis of the findings, two main themes emerged: *structural barriers* and *strategic priorities for growth*. *Structural barriers* highlighted three sub-themes: day-to-day challenges, lack of opportunities and wage disparity. The day-to-day challenges that female coaches face affect their ability work effectively. These include (1) a lack of resources such as limited access to equipment, funding and quality facilities; (2) a limited player pool due to poor developmental structures at grassroots level limiting the number of girls and women playing football; and (3) stereotypical gender norms that highlight the continued social and gendered expectations the coaches face. The sub-theme lack of opportunities illustrates how current organisational structures restrict the sustainability of the women's game and limit coaching job opportunities, with female coaches often overlooked in favour of male coaches, even when highly qualified. The female coaches in the study confirmed the disparities that exist between male and female coaches that lead to female coaches receiving only stipends or no pay at all.

Three sub-themes emerged from the second theme of strategic priorities for growth: (1) increasing female representation and leadership, (2) continuous investment, and (3) governance and organisational support. The participants noted the need to increase female representation in administrative and executive roles, which would hopefully lead to a domino effect whereby women's football is no longer marginalised. This would then lead to growth in the women's game, subsequently increasing the number of female coaches and leading to the development of more mentors and role models. The sub-theme of continuous investment highlights the need for greater financial backing of the women's game to professionalise the league and improve player development pathways and resources. The sub-theme governance and organisational support highlights the need for improved policies and processes in the governance of women's football.

2.11. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

To unlock the full potential of South Africa's female coaching talent and create long-term growth and success in the women's game, managers and organisations should implement strategic interventions and structured managerial practices to foster a more inclusive environment for female coaches and remove current barriers. Managerial intervention is necessary to address the structural barriers currently faced by female football coaches, to implement the strategic priorities that the study findings have highlighted. A lack of

intervention could lead to the women's game in South Africa falling further behind leading nations and hinder the growth of future players and coaches alike.

Clubs, schools and associations will need to ensure that there is an equal distribution of resources allocated between their mens' and womens' teams (Commission for Gender Equality, 2024:37). The reported lack of resources provided to women's teams directly impacts the coach's ability to work effectively, as they continue to manoeuvre with limited equipment and low operational funding.

The coaches reported working with a limited player pool, which stems from dying grassroots structures and ultimately limits the number of coaching jobs available for female coaches. The association will need to address this and launch more national development leagues that enable girls to compete in more structured competition from U/9 all the way to U/20 level nationwide. Furthermore, schools that do not currently offer girls' football should introduce the sport, which would further broaden the player pool (Commission for Gender Equality, 2024:37).

Formalised recruitment practices need to be adopted by clubs and associations, providing open job advertisements and the opportunity for female coaches to be appointed. The lack of opportunities provided to female coaches implies that recruitment processes are often biased and informal and, thus, gender equity targets need to be established and integrated into recruitment processes. Jowett *et al.* (2022:23) notes that having a gender-balanced working environment may lead to healthy, stable, and better functioning workplaces.

Football management structures need to establish bursaries or scholarships, similar to those provided by FIFA and other global federations to increase the number of development opportunities provided to women. Furthermore, coaching workshops provided by SAFA should have a 50:50 quota to ensure female coaches are involved, providing them with much needed networking opportunities. Such programmes and initiatives should be continuously monitored for effectiveness (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2013:509; Banwell *et al.*, 2020; Chase, 2019; Strode *et al.*, 2023:119).

The current coaching landscape for female coaches is demonstrated by their experiences of wage disparity and unpaid work that devalues the coaching profession, which is perceived for most women as an unsustainable career (Carrick & Schwab, 2025:15). Minimum standards and mandates need to be put in place, especially for leagues such as the Hollywoodbets Women's Super League, whereby coaches receive a formal contract and

minimum salary cap as part of club licencing requirements. SAFA should thus thoroughly monitor clubs and ensure that requirements are being met.

Organizational culture and social change will be required to recruit potential female leaders. However, the country's football association and decision-making body is currently dominated by men, highlighting the "old boys' network" that is seen as a root cause of the marginalisation of women's football in the country (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2013:509; Jowett *et al.* 2022:24; LaVoi *et al.*, 2019:137; Strode *et al.*, 2023:119). This translates into a lack of female representation at the administrative and executive level. The association should address this and itself implement and enforce a quota system that will increase female representation on all SAFA committees, aiming for at least 40% female membership (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2013:509; Jowett *et al.* 2022:24; LaVoi *et al.*, 2019:137; Strode *et al.*, 2023:119).

2.12. RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

2.12.1. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. To reduce the current male-dominated leadership, which was identified as a potential root cause of the marginalisation of women's football governing bodies should enforce and aim for at least 40% female representation on all national, provincial and regional executive committees and decision-making structures.
2. Coaching pathway programmes should be made available to all aspiring female coaches, with the registration process made transparent and posted on multiple platforms for maximum visibility. Furthermore female-only workshops, seminars and clinics for coaches, managers and administrators will increase the number of networking opportunities, as well as provide opportunities for mentor–mentee relationships to be established.
3. Organisations should offer coaches formal paid contracts and ensure pay equity measures are put in place with pay scales that are comparable with those of male coaches at the same clubs, schools and academies.
4. To further increase the opportunities available and accelerate the women's game in the country. SAFA should implement club licencing rules for teams in the men's Premier Soccer League, such as those adopted across multiple leagues in Europe, to establish a female team.

5. Governing bodies should apply greater emphasis to commercialising the women's game to attract private investment and sponsorships, which would subsequently lead to the professionalisation of the women's league, and improve standards, resources and opportunities available in the women's game.

2.12.2. Limitations

Despite the insightful findings of the study, the research has a few limitations. Firstly, the sample size was seven participants and, although data collection was continued until saturation was reached, the number does limit broader generalisation. Furthermore, time constraints on the completion of the study limited the number of participants recruited. Secondly, recruitment of female football coaches was a challenge for the researcher, as coaches are few; thus, the researcher had to rely on snowball sampling and word of mouth to gain participants. Thirdly, very few provinces and regions have structures with women's football teams, with most teams being in and around Gauteng, and so some regions of the country may not have been represented.

REFERENCE LIST

- Abbasi, Z., Billsberry, J. & Todres, M. 2023. Empirical studies of the “similarity leads to attraction” hypothesis in workplace interactions: a systematic review. *Management Review Quarterly*. 2024(74):661–709.
- Aboagye, E., Mamle Tetteh, P., Kwaku Ofori, P. & Carson, F. 2026. Exploring the challenges of female high-performance football coaches in Africa. *Sports Coaching Review*. (January, 8):1–12.
- Adom-Aboagye, N.A.A. 2022. Where are the African voices and perspectives of women in sport coaching? *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living*. 4:1–5.
- Adriaanse, J.A. & Schofield, T. 2013. Analysing gender dynamics in sport governance: a new regimes-based approach. *Sport Management Review*. 16(4):498–513.
- Aicher, T.J. & Sagas, M. 2010. Are head coaches in Intercollegiate athletics perceived as masculine? an evaluation of gender stereotypes and the effect of sexism on intercollegiate coaches. *Gender Issues*. 27(3-4):165–174.
- Ashforth, B.E. & Mael, F. 1989. Social identity theory and the organization. *The Academy of Management Review*. 14(1):20–39.
- ATLAS.ti. 2025. *Theoretical perspective in qualitative research*.
<https://atlasti.com/guides/qualitative-research-guide-part-1/theoretical-perspective> Date of access: 27 Feb. 2025.
- Banwell, J., Kerr, G. & Stirling, A. 2020. Benefits of a female coach mentorship programme on women coaches’ development: an ecological perspective. *Sports Coaching Review*. 10(1):1–23.
- Batha, E. 2024. *Paris Olympics 2024: where are the women coaches?*
<https://www.context.news/socioeconomic-inclusion/olympics-where-are-the-women-coaches> Date of access: 17 Feb. 2026.
- Bawuah, J. 2022. Women’s football in Africa is in danger of being left on the touchline. *The Guardian*. 7 December. <https://www.theguardian.com/global->

[development/2022/dec/07/womens-football-in-africa-is-in-danger-of-being-left-on-the-touchline](#) Date of access: 16 Nov. 2025.

BBC Sport. 2015. Why are there so few female coaches?

<https://www.bbc.com/sport/football/33323102> Date of access: 10 Dec. 2024.

Benschop, Y. & Verloo, M. 2016. Feminist organization theories: islands of treasure. In: R. Mir, H. Willmott, & M. Greenwood, eds. *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy in Organization Studies*. pp. 100–112.

Braybrook, K., Hodgson, L., McAuley, A.B.T. & Kelly, A.L. 2025. Exploring “lone woman” coaches’ experiences and opportunities in men’s football settings. *Managing Sport and Leisure*. (November, 4):1–16.

Burton, L.J. 2015. Underrepresentation of women in sport leadership: a review of research. *Sport Management Review*. 18(2):155–165.

Byrne, D.E. 1971. *The attraction paradigm*. New York: Academic Press.

Campbell, S., Greenwood, M., Prior, S., Shearer, T., Walkem, K., Young, S., ... Walker, K. 2020. Purposive sampling: complex or simple? Research case examples. *Journal of Research in Nursing*. 25(8):652–661.

Campuzano, M.V. 2019. Force and inertia: a systematic review of women’s leadership in male-dominated organizational cultures in the United States. *Human Resource Development Review*. 18(4):437–469.

Carrick, S. & Schwab, B. 2025. Equal pay in international women’s football—reflections, challenges and potential solutions. *The International Sports Law Journal*. (October, 20):1–20.

Carson, F., McCormack, C., Walsh, J., Carson, F. & McCormack, C. 2018. Women in sport coaching: challenges, stress and wellbeing. *Journal of Physical Education, Sport, Health and Recreations*. 7(2):63–67.

Castillo, D., Alexandria, M., Balibay, V., Alarcon, J., Picar, J., Lampitoc, R., ... Espinosa, A. 2014. Autocratic and participative coaching styles and its effects on students’ dance performance. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*. 3(1):32–44.

- Chase. 2019. *Chase football coaching programme*. <https://www.chase.co.uk/gb/en/chase-football-coaching-programme/> Date of access: 06 Oct. 2024.
- Cibibin, C. & Leo, I. 2022. The “queen bee syndrome” in sports federations: an exploratory investigation of gender stereotypes in Italian female coaches. *Sustainability*. 14(3):1–11.
- Cislaghi, B. & Heise, L. 2019. Gender norms and social norms: differences, similarities and why they matter in prevention science. *Sociology of Health & Illness*. 42(2):407–422.
- Clarkson, B.G., Cox, E. & Thelwell, R.C. 2019. Negotiating gender in the English football workplace: composite vignettes of women head coaches’ experiences. *Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal*. 27(2):73–84.
- Coates, D. & Webber, M. 2023. Pay and performance in men’s and women’s football: comparing the MLS and NWSL. *International Journal of Sport Finance*. 18(4):222–240.
- Commission for Gender Equality. 2024. *Gender inequality in sport: insights into the women’s national soccer team - Banyana Banyana*. <https://www.parliament.gov.za/storage/app/media/Docs/tpap/1ae48a40-a643-4c30-8270-9cc7ef757b94.pdf> Date of access: 16 Nov. 2025.
- Creswell, J.W. 2014. *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. 4th ed. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- De Bruyn, M. 2014. The protection of personal information (POPI) act: impact on South Africa. *scholar.sun.ac.za*. 13(6):1315–1340. <http://hdl.handle.net/10019.1/96516>.
- Derks, B., Van Laar, C. & Ellemers, N. 2016. The queen bee phenomenon: why women leaders distance themselves from junior women. *The Leadership Quarterly*. 27(3):456–469.
- Dias, V., Calleja-Gonzalez, J., Víctor López-Ros, Font-Lladó, R., Arede, J., Cunha, L., ... Leite, N. 2025. Analysing gender disparities in youth sports coaching: an international survey (FEMCoach project). *Frontiers in Psychology*. 16:1–20.
- Doyle, L., McCabe, C., Keogh, B., Brady, A. & McCann, M. 2020. An overview of the qualitative descriptive design within nursing research. *Journal of Research in Nursing*. 25(5):443–455.

- Edwards, A., Skinner, J. & Gilbert, K. 2005. Towards a critical theory of sport management. *International Journal of Sport Management*. 6(3):233–251.
- English, C. 2017. Toward sport reform: hegemonic masculinity and reconceptualizing competition. *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*. 44(2):183–198.
- Evans, A.L., Coffee, P. & Barker, J.B. 2023. The effects of social identity and social identity content on cohesion, efficacy, and performance across a competitive rugby league season. *International journal of sport and exercise psychology*. 22(7):1–19.
- Ewing, L. 2025. FIFA report finds wide discrepancy in women's pay, contracts, attendance. *Reuters*. 17 March. <https://www.reuters.com/sports/soccer/fifa-report-finds-wide-discrepancy-womens-pay-contracts-attendance-2025-03-17/> Date of access: 21 Nov. 2025.
- Fasting, K., Sand, T.S. & Nordstrand, H.R. 2017. One of the few: the experiences of female elite-level coaches in Norwegian football. *Soccer & Society*. 20(3):454–470.
- FIFA. 2023a. *Staggering statistics demonstrate FIFA Women's World Cup™ growth*. <https://inside.fifa.com/tournaments/womens/womensworldcup/australia-new-zealand2023/media-releases/staggering-statistics-demonstrate-fifa-womens-world-cup-tm-growth> Date of access: 31 Jul. 2024.
- FIFA. 2023b. *Women's football: member associations survey report 2023*. <https://digitalhub.fifa.com/m/28ed34bd888832a8/original/FIFA-Women-s-Football-MA-Survey-Report-2023.pdf> Date of access: 17 Feb. 2026.
- Fisher, M. 2015. Wall Street women: professional saviors of the global economy. *Critical Perspectives on International Business*. 11(2):137–155.
- Forsyth, J.J., Jones, J., Duval, L. & Bambridge, A. 2019. Opportunities and barriers that females face for study and employment in sport. *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education*. 24(24):80–89.
- Gall, M.D., Gall, J.P. & Borg, W.R. 2007. *Educational research: an introduction*. 8th ed. Boston: Pearson/Allyn & Bacon.

- Garry, T. 2024. *WSL and women's championship secure record £30m commercial deal*. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2024/sep/23/wsl-and-womens-championship-secure-record-30m-commercial-deal> Date of access: 22 Nov. 2025.
- Greeff, M. 2011. Information collection: interviewing. In: *Research at grass roots*. 4th ed. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers. pp. 341–374.
- Hecker, J. & Kalpokas, N. 2025. *Theoretical perspective in qualitative research*. <https://atlasti.com/guides/qualitative-research-guide-part-1/theoretical-perspective> Date of access: 27 Feb. 2025.
- Hennink, M. & Kaiser, B.N. 2022. Sample sizes for saturation in qualitative research: a systematic review of empirical tests. *Social Science & Medicine*. 292(1):1–10.
- Hennink, M.M., Kaiser, B.N. & Marconi, V.C. 2017. Code Saturation versus meaning saturation: how many Interviews are enough? *Qualitative Health Research*. 27(4):591–608.
- Hensley, C. & Chen, S. 2019. Females serving as the head coach of competitive elite male sports. *Kentucky Journal of Undergraduate Scholarship*. 3(1):4.
- Hirko, S., Tsyruleva, M. & Upton, J. 2025. Football and financial (in)equality: comparing salaries of men's and women teams' coaches and men's severance pay within division I-FBS. *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport*. 18(2):23–45.
- Hoye, R., Kappelides, P. & Baxter, H. 2025. The experiences of women coaches in community sport. *Sports Coaching Review*. (February, 10):1–21.
- International Olympic Committee. 2024. "Why are there so few female coaches in English football? Chelsea boss Emma Hayes on "closing the gap". <https://olympics.com/en/news/football-few-female-coaches-english-football-chelsea-boss-emma-hayes> Date of access: 27 Jul. 2024.
- iSportConnect. 2024. *The growing force of girls' football in Spain: a new era of empowerment and opportunity*. <https://www.isportconnect.com/the-growing-force-of-girls-football-in-spain-a-new-era-of-empowerment-and-opportunity/> Date of access: 24 Nov. 2025.

- Jandeska, K.E. & Kraimer, M.L. 2005. Women's perceptions of organizational culture, work, attitudes, and role-modeling behaviors. *Journal of Managerial Issues*. 17:461–478.
- Jowett, S., Gosai, J. & Slade, K. 2022. Women in coaching: what are the problems and probable solutions? *Sport & Exercise Psychology Review*. 17(1):16–29.
- Kamal, F., Ridwan, R. & Rachman, A. 2024. Laissez-faire leadership: a comprehensive systematic review for effective education practices. *Journal of Education and Learning (edisi elektronik)*. 18(4):1460–1467.
- Kanter, R.M. 1977. *Men and women of the corporation*. New York: Basic Books.
- Karlik, S. & Wolden, M. 2023. Women's collegiate soccer coaching in the United States: exploring barriers and challenges. *Soccer & Society*. 24(2):245–257.
- Kenttä, G., Bentzen, M., Dieffenbach, K. & Olusoga, P. 2020. Challenges experienced by women high-performance coaches: sustainability in the profession. *International Sport Coaching Journal*. 7(2):200–208.
- Kesmodel, U.S. 2018. Cross-sectional studies - what are they good for? *Acta Obstetricia Et Gynecologica Scandinavica*. 97(4):388–393.
- Kim, H., Sefcik, J.S. & Bradway, C. 2017. Characteristics of qualitative descriptive studies: a systematic review. *Research in Nursing & Health*. 40(1):23–42.
- Kim, S., Park, S., Love, A. & Pang, C. 2021. Coaching style, sport enjoyment, and intent to continue participation among artistic swimmers. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*. 16(3):439–872.
- Knoppers, A. & McLachlan, F. 2018. Reflecting on the use of feminist theories in sport management research. In: L. Mansfield, J. Caudwell, B. Wheaton, & B. Watson, eds. *The palgrave handbook of feminism and sport, leisure and physical education*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. pp. 163–179.
- Knoppers, A., de Haan, D., Norman, L. & LaVoi, N. 2021. Elite women coaches negotiating and resisting power in football. *Gender, Work & Organization*. 29(3):880–896.
- Kubayi, A., Didymus, F.F., Morris-Eyton, H. & Jooste, J. 2020. Design and preliminary validation of the barriers to sports coaching questionnaire for women in South Africa: an application of the ecological model. *Journal of Sports Sciences*. 38(21):2500–2507.

- Kubayi, A., Coopoo, Y. & Morris-Eyton, H. 2016. Work-related constraints in sports coaching: perceptions of South African female coaches. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*. 12(1):103–108.
- LaFontaine, J. & Kamphoff, C.S. 2016. Coaching boys' high school teams: female coaches' experiences and perceptions. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*. 11(1):27–38.
- Laryeafio, M.N. & Ogbewe, O.C. 2023. Ethical consideration dilemma: systematic review of ethics in qualitative data collection through Interviews. *Journal of Ethics in Entrepreneurship and Technology*. 3(2):94–110.
- LaVoi, N.M. 2009. Occupational sex segregation in a youth soccer organization: females in positions of power. *Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal*. 18(2):25–37.
- LaVoi, N.M. & Dutove, J.K. 2012. Barriers and supports for female coaches: an ecological model. *Sports Coaching Review*. 1(1):17–37.
- LaVoi, N.M., McGarry, J.E. & Fisher, L.A. 2019. Final thoughts on women in sport coaching: fighting the war. *Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal*. 27(2):136–140.
- Lewis, C.J., Roberts, S.J. & Andrews, H. 2018. “Why am I putting myself through this?” women football coaches' experiences of the football association's coach education process. *Sport, Education and Society*. 23(1):28–39.
- Mageau, G.A. & Vallerand, R.J. 2003. The Coach–athlete relationship: a motivational model. *Journal of Sports Sciences*. 21(11):883–904.
- Martin, L.J., Balderson, D., Hawkins, M., Wilson, K. & Bruner, M.W. 2017. The influence of social identity on self-worth, commitment, and effort in school-based youth sport. *Journal of Sports Sciences*. 36(3):326–332.
- McGinty-Minister, K.L., Swettenham, L., Champ, F.M. & Whitehead, A.E. 2024. “Smile more”: women's experiences of sexism while working in sport from a socio-ecological perspective. *Sport in Society*. 27(11):1818–1841.
- Mikkonen, M. 2023. “We are going to the right direction... but we are not in ideal world yet”: understanding gender (in)equality within leadership positions in Nordic football governance. *Sport in Society*. 26(6):1003–1023.

- Murray, P., Lord, R. & Lorimer, R. 2020. "It's just a case of chipping away": a postfeminist analysis of female coaches' gendered experiences in grassroots sport. *Sport, Education and Society*. 27(4):1–14.
- Muzari, T., Goerge, N. & Shonhiwa, S. 2022. Qualitative research paradigm, a key research design for educational researchers, processes and procedures: a theoretical overview. *Indiana Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*. 3(1):14–20.
- Narayan, T. & Sekhsaria, P. 2019. Media reporting on the protected areas in Maharashtra, India: a thematic analysis. *Journal of Threatened Taxa*. 11(3):13360–13376.
- NCAA. 2025. *College Cup: women's DI soccer championship road to the championship*. https://www.ncaa.com/championships/soccer-women/d1/road-to-the-championship?utm_source=ncaatickets&utm_medium=WCCchampinfofiles&utm_campaign=roadtochamp Date of access: 20 Nov. 2025.
- Neergaard, M.A., Olesen, F., Andersen, R.S. & Sondergaard, J. 2009. Qualitative description – the poor cousin of health research? *BMC Medical Research Methodology*. 9(1):52–56.
- Nicholson, R. 2024. Women coaches, professionalisation, and national governing body mergers in England, 1989–2000. *Sport in history*. 44(2):257–275.
- Norman, L. 2013. The challenges facing women coaches and the contributions they can make to the profession. *International Journal of Coaching Science*. 7(2):3–23.
- Norman, L. & Simpson, R. 2023. Gendered microaggressions towards the "only" women coaches in high-performance sport. *Sports Coaching Review*. 12(3):302–322.
- Norman, L., Rankin-Wright, A.J. & Allison, W. 2018. "It's a concrete ceiling; it's not even glass": understanding tenets of organizational culture that supports the progression of women as coaches and coach developers. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*. 42(5):393–414.
- O'Brien, W., Hanlon, C. & Apostolopoulos, V. 2023. Women as leaders in male-dominated sectors: a bifocal analysis of gendered organizational practices. *Gender, Work & Organization*. 30(6):1867–1884.

- Organista, N. & Kossakowski, R. 2024. "There's nothing you can do": multi-level factors affecting the careers of female football coaches in Poland. *Sport in Society*. 1–22.
- Pankowiak, A., Casey, M., Eime, R. & Westerbeek, H. 2024. A socio-ecological approach to understanding the experiences of women and girls playing male-dominated sports. *Sport in Society*. (August, 19):1–20.
- Rahman, S. 2016. The advantages and disadvantages of using qualitative and quantitative approaches and methods in language "testing and assessment" research: a literature review. *Journal of Education and Learning*. 6(1):102–112.
- Rehman, A.A. & Alharthi, K. 2016. An introduction to research paradigms. *International Journal of Educational Investigations*. 3(8):51–59.
- Richards, K. 2003. *Qualitative inquiry in TESOL*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- SAFA. 2023. *SAFA/ UEFA join partnership for women assist programme*. <https://www.safa.net/2023/02/07/safa-uefa-join-partnership-for-women-assist-programme/>
Date of access: 06 Oct. 2024.
- SAFA. 2025a. *Banyana Banyana*. *SAFA.net - South African Football Association*. <https://safa.net/banyana-banyana/> Date of access: 07 Mar. 2025.
- SAFA. 2025b. *NEC - South African Football Association*. <https://www.safa.net/nec/> Date of access: 13 Nov. 2025.
- Sallee, M.W. & Flood, J.T. 2012. Using qualitative research to bridge research, policy, and practice. *Theory Into Practice*. 51(2):137–144.
- Sandelowski, M. 2000. Whatever happened to qualitative description? *Research in Nursing & Health*. 23(4):334–340.
- Sasol in Sport. 2024. *About the Sasol League*. <https://sasolinsport.co.za/sasol-league/about-sasol-league/> Date of access: 07 Mar. 2025.
- Schull, V.D. & Kihl, L.A. 2019. Gendered leadership expectations in sport: constructing differences in coaches. *Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal*. 27(1):1–11.
- Sky Sports. 2025. *FA hits target for 90 per cent of schools to offer girls equal access to football in PE*. <https://www.skysports.com/football/news/11095/13472952/fa-hits-target-for->

[90-per-cent-of-schools-to-offer-girls-equal-access-to-football-in-pe](#) Date of access: 24 Nov. 2025.

Sky Sports News. 2023. *Why there is a lack of female coaches in football – and the steps being taken to change landscape*.

<https://www.skysports.com/football/news/11095/12830328/why-there-is-a-lack-of-female-coaches-in-football-and-the-steps-being-taken-to-change-landscape> Date of access: 07 Sep. 2024.

Sotiriadou, P. & de Haan, D. 2019. Women and leadership: advancing gender equity policies in sport leadership through sport governance. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*. 11(3):365–383.

South African Football Association. 2021. *Hollywoodbets super league*.
<https://www.safa.net/hollywoodbets-super-league/> Date of access: 08 Sep. 2024.

South African Football Association. 2023. *SAFA -CAF A license coaching course*.
<https://www.safa.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/SAFA-CAF-A-License-Advertisement-2023-1.pdf> Date of access: 31 Jul. 2024.

Spaaij, R., Farquharson, K. & Marjoribanks, T. 2015. Sport and social inequalities. *Sociology Compass*. 9(5):400–411.

Staines, G., Tavis, C. & Jayaratne, T.E. 1974. The queen bee syndrome. *PsycEXTRA Dataset*. 7(8):55–60.

Stone, M. E., Chapman, P., Khasnis, U., & Collins, D. (2025). Addressing the shortage of women in high-performance sport: what is known and what we need to know. *Psychology International*. 7(3), 74.

Stone, M., Chapman, P., Khasnis, U., & Collins, D. 2024. Firsts in their field: the perceptions of women who have led the way. *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living*. 6:1–8.

Strode, J.P., Parker, H.M. & Kerwin, S. 2023. Organizational-level factors that influence women coaches' experiences. *Journal of Sport Management*. 38(2):110–121.

Sullivan-Bolyai, S. & Bova, C. 2021. Qualitative description: a “how-to” guide. University of Massachusetts Medical School: (Report).

Supersport. 2023. *It's the Women's World Cup, so where are the woman coaches?* Supersport.com. <https://supersport.com/hereforher/news/89599ce3-d44c-42e4-b3ae-7c317cb0f75e/it-s-the-women-s-world-cup-so-where-are-the-woman-coaches-> Date of access: 17 Feb. 2026.

Tajfel, H. 1981. *Human groups and social categories: studies in social psychology*. Cambridge Etc: Cambridge University Press.

Tajfel, H. & Turner, J.C. 1982. *Social Identity and intergroup relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Taylor, D., Hanlon, C. & Dawson, A. 2023. Good organizational practices to encourage women high-performance coaches in sports. *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living*. 5:1–15.

The Confederation of African Football. 2022. *CAF womens football: landscape report 2022*. <https://www.cafonline.com/media/hedpebel/caf-womens-football-landscape-report-2022.pdf> Date of access: 29 Jul. 2024.

The Football Association. 2023. *UEFA A licence: England football learning*. <https://learn.englishfootball.com/courses/football/uefa-a-licence> Date of access: 31 Jul. 2024.

Thomas, G., Guinan, J. & Molnár, G. 2021. “It's not particularly P.C., you know...”: women coaches' performing gender in strength and conditioning. *Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal*. 29(2):106–116.

Turner, J.C. 1975. Social comparison and social identity: some prospects for intergroup behaviour. *European Journal of Social Psychology*. 5(1):5–34.

U.S Soccer. 2025. *Kynisca innovation hub to join U.S. Soccer's soccer forward foundation, advancing research, development and global standards in women's soccer*. <https://www.ussoccer.com/stories/2025/04/kynisca-innovation-hub-to-join-us-soccers-soccer-forward-foundation> Date of access: 22 Nov. 2025.

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2015. *Women in the labor force: a databook, December 2014*. <https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/womens-databook/archive/women-in-the-labor-force-a-databook-2014.pdf> Date of access: 06 Aug. 2025.

UEFA. 2024. *Unstoppable: a six-year plan towards a sustainable ecosystem for women's football*. <https://fr.uefa.com/news-media/news/0292-1c1cdb984150-b1281f374ec0-1000--unstoppable-a-six-year-plan-towards-a-sustainable-ecosystem-/> Date of access: 22 Nov. 2025.

UEFA.com. 2023. *Record-breaking let girls play event marks milestone for women's football in England*. <https://www.uefa.com/news-media/news/027f-1787bbcffe8-4f7e7887c6a6-1000--record-breaking-let-girls-play-event-marks-milestone-for-wo/> Date of access: 24 Nov. 2025.

UK coaching. 2020. *Coaching in the UK 2019: coach survey*. www.ukcoaching.org. https://www.ukcoaching.org/getattachment/Resources/Topics/Research/Coaching-in-The-UK/CPS_Coaches-_FINAL.pdf?lang=en-GB. Date of access: 06 Aug. 2024.

Valerio, M.A., Rodriguez, N., Winkler, P., Lopez, J., Dennison, M., Liang, Y., et al. 2016. Comparing two sampling methods to engage hard-to-reach communities in research priority setting. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*. 16(1).

Wangari, G. & Wango, G. 2017. Challenges faced by women football players who participate in football leagues. *Journal of Developing Country Studies*. 2(1):13–35.

Wells, J.E. & Aicher, T.J. 2013. Follow the leader: a relational demography, similarity attraction, and social identity theory of leadership approach of a team's performance. *Gender Issues*. 30(1-4):1–14.

Wong, S.I. & Giessner, S.R. 2016. The thin line between empowering and laissez-faire leadership: an expectancy-match perspective. *Journal of Management*. 44(2):757–783.

3. CHAPTER 3: CONCLUSION

3.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter serves as the concluding chapter of the study. A conclusion based on the research aim, objectives and findings is provided. The chapter further provides managerial implication, recommendations, the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research.

3.2. CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to explore and describe the experiences of female football coaches in South Africa. Specific focus was placed on the challenges that female football coaches face and the organisational improvements that need to be adopted to facilitate the improvement of the coaching landscape for female coaches in the country. The findings demonstrate that female coaches' experiences are shaped by structural and organisational barriers that limit their professional growth. The findings were consistent with previous literature that noted that female coaches face gender disparities, inequalities, resource disparities and underrepresentation in male-dominated sports.

The primary objective was to explore the experiences of female football coaches in selected schools, clubs and academies. The findings indicated that female coaches encounter a range of challenges that include unequal access to resources, a limited player pool and deep-seated gender norms. The coaches reported how they felt they need to constantly prove their competence and navigate the gendered expectations that come with working in a male-dominated space. The secondary objectives (SOs) were: (1) to describe the challenges faces by female football coaches in the country, (2) to describe the needs of female football coaches in the country, and (3) to describe how organisations and associations can assist in the development of female coaches in the country.

The findings revealed three core challenges tin fulfilment of the first SO, noting that the coaches faced (1) day-to-day challenges, (2) a lack of opportunities, and (3) wage disparities. The day-to-day challenges included working with limited or a lack of resources, a limited player pool due to underdeveloped grassroots structures, and navigating stereotypical gender norms. The coaches also mentioned a lack of opportunities stemming from limited coaching positions and organisational policies and practices that marginalise women (Schull & Kihl, 2019:2; Strode *et al.*, 2023:118). Lastly, the coaches confirmed

significant income inequality, with many working for little to no pay at all, which is consistent with previous South African research (Kubayi *et al.*, 2020:2504; Kubayi *et al.*, 2017:105).

Three critical points were raised by the coaches in analysis of the second SO to describe their needs. Firstly, the coaches noted the need for more female mentors and role models to combat professional isolation and gain valuable networks. Secondly, the coaches asked for the need for continuous financial investment from the government, association and private investors to professionalise the women's game, thereby creating more stable paid employment. Lastly, the coaches mentioned the need for better governance and organisational support, which includes placing more women in decision-making roles within federations who can champion raising the standards of women's football in the country.

The third SO was to describe how organisations can assist in the development of female coaches. The findings revealed, firstly, that proper interventions and strategies need to be put in place and that organisations such as SAFA need to move beyond policy statements and implement concrete actions. These include, but are not limited to, reforming current governance through increasing female representation in executive and committee positions and rectifying the current gender imbalances that exist. Secondly, there is a need to create proper development pathways and establish proper development leagues at girls' youth level to expand the player pool available in the country, which would consequently create more coaching opportunities. Lastly, there is a need to implement support programmes through the development of formal mentorship programmes, and increase support for coaching education that will facilitate the advancement of female coaches.

In conclusion, the experiences of female football coaches in South Africa are currently characterised by numerous challenges. The findings confirm that the current female football coaching space is critically underdeveloped, needs to be nurtured to sustain the careers of female football coaches, and is not in line with current sustainable development goals (SDGs) 5: to achieve gender equality and empower all women and goals, and SDG 10: to reduce inequality. Addressing these issues will require football associations, member clubs and sponsors to improve or implement the strategic priorities and put timelines in place to ensure the goals are met. The successes of Banyana Banyana indicate that women's football in South Africa has a relatively high ceiling, despite the lack of robust organisational support systems. Thus, changes will need to be implemented to raise the potential of the women's game in the country and, consequently, the coaching landscape for female football coaches in the country.

3.3. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Managerial intervention is necessary to address the structural barriers currently faced by female football coaches, to implement the strategic priorities that the study findings have highlighted. A lack of intervention could lead to the women's game in South Africa falling further behind leading nations and hinder the growth of future players and coaches alike.

The reported lack of resources provided to women's teams directly impacts the coach's ability to work effectively, as they continue to manoeuvre with limited equipment and low operational funding. Clubs, schools and associations will need to ensure that there is an equal distribution of resources allocated between their mens' and womens' teams (Commission for Gender Equality, 2024:37).

The lack of opportunities provided to female coaches implies that female coaches are often overlooked for higher paid coaching positions in favour of their male counterparts. This suggests that recruitment processes are often biased and informal and, thus, that gender equity targets need to be established and integrated into recruitment processes. Furthermore, formalised recruitment practices need to be adopted by clubs and associations, providing open job advertisements and the opportunity for female coaches to be appointed. Jowett *et al.* (2022:23) notes that the inclusion of female coaches makes both moral and business sense as having a gender-balanced working environment may lead to healthy, stable, and better functioning workplaces.

The limited number of development opportunities and the high cost of coaching licences create a barrier for female coaches to progress within their profession. Football management structures need to establish bursaries or scholarships, similar to those provided by FIFA and other global federations. Furthermore, formal structured mentorship programmes should be put in place to pair experienced coaches with aspiring female coaches, and coaching workshops provided by SAFA should have a 50:50 quota to ensure female coaches are involved, providing them with much needed networking opportunities. Such programmes and initiatives should be funded and continuously monitored for effectiveness (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2013:509; Banwell *et al.*, 2020; Chase, 2019; Strobe *et al.*, 2023:119).

The current coaching landscape for female coaches is demonstrated by their experiences of wage disparity and unpaid work that devalues the coaching profession, which is perceived for most women as an unsustainable career (Carrick & Schwab, 2025:15). Minimum standards and mandates need to be put in place, especially for leagues such as the Hollywoodbets Women's Super League, whereby coaches receive a formal contract and

minimum salary cap as part of club licencing requirements. SAFA should thus thoroughly monitor clubs and ensure that requirements are being met.

The country's football association and decision-making body is currently dominated by men, highlighting the "old boys' network" that is seen as a root cause of the marginalisation of women's football in the country. This translates into a lack of female representation at the administrative and executive level. The association should address this and itself implement and enforce a quota system that will increase female representation on all SAFA committees, aiming for at least 40% female membership. Furthermore, gender allies will need to be identified within organisations, who are committed to advocating the women's game and gender equity (LaVoi *et al.*, 2019:137). Thus, organizational culture and social change will be required to recruit potential female leaders and gender allies (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2013:509; Jowett *et al.* 2022:24; LaVoi *et al.*, 2019:137; Strode *et al.*, 2023:119)

The coaches reported working with a limited player pool, which stems from dying grassroots structures and ultimately limits the number of coaching jobs available for female coaches. The association will need to address this and launch more national development leagues that enable girls to compete in more structured competition from U/9 all the way to U/20 level nationwide. Furthermore, schools that do not currently offer girls' football should introduce the sport, which would further broaden the player pool (Commission for Gender Equality, 2024:37).

To unlock the full potential of South Africa's female coaching talent and create long-term growth and success in the women's game, managers and organisations should implement strategic interventions and structured managerial practices to foster a more inclusive environment for female coaches and remove current barriers.

3.4. RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

3.4.1. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. National governing bodies should enforce and aim for at least 40% female representation on all national, provincial and regional executive committees and decision-making structures. This would reduce the current male-dominated leadership, which was identified as a potential root cause of the marginalisation of women's football, and ensure that women's voices are heard and represented in policy making.

2. Fully or partially funded coaching pathway programmes should be provided for female coaches, to further develop coaches and increase the number of coaches in the country. Such pathways should be made available to all aspiring coaches, with the registration process made transparent and posted on multiple platforms for maximum visibility.
3. SAFA should provide female-only workshops, seminars and clinics for coaches, managers and administrators. This will increase the number of networking opportunities, as well as provide opportunities for mentor–mentee relationships to be established
4. Organisations should ensure that all coaches are offered formal paid contracts, with pay equity measures put in place to ensure that pay scales are comparable with those of male coaches at the same clubs, schools and academies.
5. SAFA should implement club licencing rules for teams in the men's Premier Soccer League, such as those adopted across multiple leagues in Europe, to establish a female team. This would further increase the opportunities available and accelerate the women's game in the country. It is, however, important that clubs are monitored to ensure that proper backing and licencing rules are being adhered to, and that the team is receiving the necessary financial backing and resources to succeed, as can be observed with Mamelodi Sundown's female squad.
6. Governing bodies should apply greater emphasis to commercialising the women's game to attract private investment and sponsorships, which would subsequently lead to the professionalisation of the women's league, and improve standards, resources and opportunities available in the women's game.

3.4.2. Limitations

Despite the insightful findings of the study, the research has a few limitations. Firstly, the sample size was seven participants and, although data collection was continued until saturation was reached, the number does limit broader generalisation. Furthermore, time constraints on the completion of the study limited the number of participants recruited. Secondly, recruitment of female football coaches was a challenge for the researcher, as coaches are few; thus, the researcher had to rely on snowball sampling and word of mouth to gain participants. Thirdly, very few provinces and regions have structures with women's football teams, with most teams being in and around Gauteng, and so some regions of the country may not have been represented.

3.5. AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Based on the results of this study, the following should be considered for future research:

1. Conducting longitudinal research to track the coaching education pathways of female coaches from D licence to A or Pro licence and their career progression over time.
2. Conducting research studies on the experiences of female administrators and executive leaders in South Africa to further gain an understanding of organisational barriers.
3. Conducting comparative research studies on male football coaches and analysing the lived experiences across genders.
4. Conducting larger studies covering all the provinces in South Africa and exploring the grassroots and school structures that are currently inhibiting the growth of girls' football at school and grassroots levels.

REFERENCE LIST

- Abbasi, Z., Billsberry, J. & Todres, M. 2023. Empirical studies of the “similarity leads to attraction” hypothesis in workplace interactions: a systematic review. *Management Review Quarterly*. 2024(74):661–709.
- Adom-Aboagye, N.A.A. 2022. Where are the African voices and perspectives of women in sport coaching? *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living*. 4:1–5.
- Adriaanse, J.A. & Schofield, T. 2013. Analysing gender dynamics in sport governance: a new regimes-based approach. *Sport Management Review*. 16(4):498–513.
- Aicher, T.J. & Sagas, M. 2010. Are head coaches in Intercollegiate athletics perceived as masculine? an evaluation of gender stereotypes and the effect of sexism on intercollegiate coaches. *Gender Issues*. 27(3-4):165–174.
- Ashforth, B.E. & Mael, F. 1989. Social identity theory and the organization. *The Academy of Management Review*. 14(1):20–39.
- ATLAS.ti. 2025. *Theoretical perspective in qualitative research*.
<https://atlasti.com/guides/qualitative-research-guide-part-1/theoretical-perspective> Date of access: 27 Feb. 2025.
- Banwell, J., Kerr, G. & Stirling, A. 2020. Benefits of a female coach mentorship programme on women coaches’ development: an ecological perspective. *Sports Coaching Review*. 10(1):1–23.
- Bawuah, J. 2022. Women’s football in Africa is in danger of being left on the touchline. *The Guardian*. 7 December. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/dec/07/womens-football-in-africa-is-in-danger-of-being-left-on-the-touchline> Date of access: 16 Nov. 2025.
- BBC Sport. 2015. Why are there so few female coaches?
<https://www.bbc.com/sport/football/33323102> Date of access: 10 Dec. 2024.

- Benschop, Y. & Verloo, M. 2016. Feminist organization theories: islands of treasure. In: R. Mir, H. Willmott, & M. Greenwood, eds. *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy in Organization Studies*. pp. 100–112.
- Braybrook, K., Hodgson, L., McAuley, A.B.T. & Kelly, A.L. 2025. Exploring “lone woman” coaches’ experiences and opportunities in men’s football settings. *Managing Sport and Leisure*. (November, 4):1–16.
- Burton, L.J. 2015. Underrepresentation of women in sport leadership: a review of research. *Sport Management Review*. 18(2):155–165.
- Byrne, D.E. 1971. *The attraction paradigm*. New York: Academic Press.
- Cambridge Dictionary. 2019. *Coach: meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary*. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/coach> Date of access: 19 Nov. 2024.
- Campbell, S., Greenwood, M., Prior, S., Shearer, T., Walkem, K., Young, S., ... Walker, K. 2020. Purposive sampling: complex or simple? research case examples. *Journal of Research in Nursing*. 25(8):652–661.
- Campuzano, M.V. 2019. Force and inertia: a systematic review of women’s leadership in male-dominated organizational cultures in the United States. *Human Resource Development Review*. 18(4):437–469.
- Carrick, S. & Schwab, B. 2025. Equal pay in international women’s football—reflections, challenges and potential solutions. *The International Sports Law Journal*. (October, 20):1–20.
- Carson, F., McCormack, C., Walsh, J., Carson, F. & McCormack, C. 2018. Women in sport coaching: challenges, stress and wellbeing. *Journal of Physical Education, Sport, Health and Recreations*. 7(2):63–67.
- Castillo, D., Alexandria, M., Balibay, V., Alarcon, J., Picar, J., Lampitoc, R., ... Espinosa, A. 2014. Autocratic and participative coaching styles and its effects on students’ dance performance. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*. 3(1):32–44.
- Chase. 2019. *Chase football coaching programme*. <https://www.chase.co.uk/gb/en/chase-football-coaching-programme/> Date of access: 06 Oct. 2024.

- Cibibin, C. & Leo, I. 2022. The “queen bee syndrome” in sports federations: an exploratory investigation of gender stereotypes in Italian female coaches. *Sustainability*. 14(3):1–11.
- Cislaghi, B. & Heise, L. 2019. Gender norms and social norms: differences, similarities and why they matter in prevention science. *Sociology of Health & Illness*. 42(2):407–422.
- Clarkson, B.G., Cox, E. & Thelwell, R.C. 2019. Negotiating gender in the English football workplace: composite vignettes of women head coaches’ experiences. *Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal*. 27(2):73–84.
- Coates, D. & Webber, M. 2023. Pay and performance in men’s and women’s football: comparing the MLS and NWSL. *International Journal of Sport Finance*. 18(4):222–240.
- Commission for Gender Equality. 2024. *Gender inequality in sport: insights into the women’s national soccer team - Banyana Banyana*.
<https://www.parliament.gov.za/storage/app/media/Docs/tpap/1ae48a40-a643-4c30-8270-9cc7ef757b94.pdf> Date of access: 16 Nov. 2025.
- Creswell, J.W. 2014. *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. 4th ed. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- De Bruyn, M. 2014. The protection of personal information (POPI) act: impact on South Africa. *scholar.sun.ac.za*. 13(6):1315–1340. <http://hdl.handle.net/10019.1/96516>.
- Derks, B., Van Laar, C. & Ellemers, N. 2016. The queen bee phenomenon: why women leaders distance themselves from junior women. *The Leadership Quarterly*. 27(3):456–469.
- Dias, V., Calleja-Gonzalez, J., Víctor López-Ros, Font-Lladó, R., Arede, J., Cunha, L., ... Leite, N. 2025. Analysing gender disparities in youth sports coaching: an international survey (FEMCoach project). *Frontiers in Psychology*. 16:1–20.
- Doyle, L., McCabe, C., Keogh, B., Brady, A. & McCann, M. 2020. An overview of the qualitative descriptive design within nursing research. *Journal of Research in Nursing*. 25(5):443–455.
- Edwards, A., Skinner, J. & Gilbert, K. 2005. Towards a critical theory of sport management. *International Journal of Sport Management*. 6(3):233–251.

- English, C. 2017. Toward sport reform: hegemonic masculinity and reconceptualizing competition. *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*. 44(2):183–198.
- Evans, A.L., Coffee, P. & Barker, J.B. 2023. The effects of social identity and social identity content on cohesion, efficacy, and performance across a competitive rugby league season. *International journal of sport and exercise psychology*. 22(7):1–19.
- Ewing, L. 2025. FIFA report finds wide discrepancy in women's pay, contracts, attendance. *Reuters*. 17 March. <https://www.reuters.com/sports/soccer/fifa-report-finds-wide-discrepancy-womens-pay-contracts-attendance-2025-03-17/> Date of access: 21 Nov. 2025.
- Fasting, K., Sand, T.S. & Nordstrand, H.R. 2017. One of the few: the experiences of female elite-level coaches in Norwegian football. *Soccer & Society*. 20(3):454–470.
- FIFA. 2023. *Staggering statistics demonstrate FIFA Women's World Cup™ growth*. <https://inside.fifa.com/tournaments/womens/womensworldcup/australia-new-zealand2023/media-releases/staggering-statistics-demonstrate-fifa-womens-world-cup-tm-growth> Date of access: 31 Jul. 2024.
- Fisher, M. 2015. Wall Street women: professional saviors of the global economy. *Critical perspectives on international business*. 11(2):137–155.
- Forsyth, J.J., Jones, J., Duval, L. & Bambridge, A. 2019. Opportunities and barriers that females face for study and employment in sport. *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education*. 24(24):80–89.
- Gall, M.D., Gall, J.P. & Borg, W.R. 2007. *Educational research: an introduction*. 8th ed. Boston: Pearson/Allyn & Bacon.
- Garry, T. 2024. *WSL and women's championship secure record £30m commercial deal*. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2024/sep/23/wsl-and-womens-championship-secure-record-30m-commercial-deal> Date of access: 22 Nov. 2025.
- Greeff, M. 2011. Information collection: interviewing. In: *Research at grass roots*. 4th ed. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers. pp. 341–374.
- Hensley, C. & Chen, S. 2019. Females serving as the head coach of competitive elite male sports. *Kentucky Journal of Undergraduate Scholarship*. 3(1):4.

- Hirko, S., Tsyruleva, M. & Upton, J. 2025. Football and financial (in)equality: comparing salaries of men's and women teams' coaches and men's severance pay within division I-FBS. *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport*. 18(2):23–45.
- Hoye, R., Kappelides, P. & Baxter, H. 2025. The experiences of women coaches in community sport. *Sports Coaching Review*. (February, 10):1–21.
- Harpur, C. 2024. *Sarina Wiegman's extension is a huge coup for England, but her team must kick on*. <https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/5206542/2024/01/17/wiegman-england-contract-extension/> Date of access: 18 Feb. 2026.
- International Olympic Committee. 2024. "Why are there so few female coaches in English football? Chelsea boss Emma Hayes on "closing the gap". <https://olympics.com/en/news/football-few-female-coaches-english-football-chelsea-boss-emma-hayes> Date of access: 27 Jul. 2024.
- iSportConnect. 2024. *The growing force of girls' football in Spain: a new era of empowerment and opportunity*. <https://www.isportconnect.com/the-growing-force-of-girls-football-in-spain-a-new-era-of-empowerment-and-opportunity/> Date of access: 24 Nov. 2025.
- Jalal, S., Ardern, C. & Khan, K. 2023. *The FIFA women's world cup is closing its gap with the men's tournament - Beyond*. <https://beyond.ubc.ca/the-fifa-womens-world-cup-is-closing-its-gap-with-the-mens-tournament/> Date of access: 18 Feb. 2026.
- Jandeska, K.E. & Kraimer, M.L. 2005. Women's perceptions of organizational culture, work, attitudes, and role-modeling behaviors. *Journal of Managerial Issues*. 17:461–478.
- Jowett, S., Gosai, J. & Slade, K. 2022. Women in coaching: what are the problems and probable solutions? *Sport & Exercise Psychology Review*. 17(1):16–29.
- Kamal, F., Ridwan, R. & Rachman, A. 2024. Laissez-faire leadership: a comprehensive systematic review for effective education practices. *Journal of Education and Learning (edisi elektronik)*. 18(4):1460–1467.
- Kang, E. & Hwang, H.-J. 2023. The importance of anonymity and confidentiality for conducting survey research. *Journal of Research and Publication Ethics*. 4(1):1–7.
- Kanter, R.M. 1977. *Men and women of the corporation*. New York: Basic Books.

- Karlik, S. & Wolden, M. 2023. Women's collegiate soccer coaching in the United States: exploring barriers and challenges. *Soccer & Society*. 24(2):245–257.
- Kenttä, G., Bentzen, M., Dieffenbach, K. & Olusoga, P. 2020. Challenges experienced by women high-performance coaches: sustainability in the profession. *International Sport Coaching Journal*. 7(2):200–208.
- Kesmodel, U.S. 2018. Cross-sectional studies - what are they good for? *Acta Obstetricia Et Gynecologica Scandinavica*. 97(4):388–393.
- Khurshid, S. 2021. Industrial-organizational psychology basics and overview. *Clin Exp Psychol*. 7(11):286.
- Kim, H., Sefcik, J.S. & Bradway, C. 2017. Characteristics of qualitative descriptive studies: a systematic review. *Research in Nursing & Health*. 40(1):23–42.
- Kim, S., Park, S., Love, A. & Pang, C. 2021. Coaching style, sport enjoyment, and intent to continue participation among artistic swimmers. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*. 16(3):439–872.
- Knoppers, A. & McLachlan, F. 2018. Reflecting on the use of feminist theories in sport management research. In: L. Mansfield, J. Caudwell, B. Wheaton, & B. Watson, eds. *The Palgrave handbook of feminism and sport, leisure and physical education*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. pp. 163–179.
- Knoppers, A., de Haan, D., Norman, L. & LaVoi, N. 2021. Elite women coaches negotiating and resisting power in football. *Gender, Work & Organization*. 29(3):880–896.
- Kubayi, A., Didymus, F.F., Morris-Eyton, H. & Jooste, J. 2020. Design and preliminary validation of the barriers to sports coaching questionnaire for women in South Africa: an application of the ecological model. *Journal of Sports Sciences*. 38(21):2500–2507.
- Kubayi, A., Coopoo, Y. & Morris-Eyton, H. 2016. Work-related constraints in sports coaching: perceptions of South African female coaches. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*. 12(1):103–108.
- LaFontaine, J. & Kamphoff, C.S. 2016. Coaching boys' high school teams: female coaches' experiences and perceptions. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*. 11(1):27–38.

- Laryeafio, M.N. & Ogbewe, O.C. 2023. Ethical consideration dilemma: systematic review of ethics in qualitative data collection through Interviews. *Journal of Ethics in Entrepreneurship and Technology*. 3(2):94–110.
- LaVoi, N.M. 2009. Occupational sex segregation in a youth soccer organization: females in positions of power. *Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal*. 18(2):25–37.
- LaVoi, N.M. & Dutove, J.K. 2012. Barriers and supports for female coaches: an ecological model. *Sports Coaching Review*. 1(1):17–37.
- LaVoi, N.M., McGarry, J.E. & Fisher, L.A. 2019. Final thoughts on women in sport coaching: fighting the war. *Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal*. 27(2):136–140.
- Lewis, C.J., Roberts, S.J. & Andrews, H. 2018. “Why am I putting myself through this?” women football coaches’ experiences of the football association’s coach education process. *Sport, Education and Society*. 23(1):28–39.
- Mageau, G.A. & Vallerand, R.J. 2003. The Coach–athlete relationship: a motivational model. *Journal of Sports Sciences*. 21(11):883–904.
- Martens, R. & Vealey, R.S. 2023. *Successful coaching*. 5th ed. Human Kinetics.
- Martin, L.J., Balderson, D., Hawkins, M., Wilson, K. & Bruner, M.W. 2017. The influence of social identity on self-worth, commitment, and effort in school-based youth sport. *Journal of Sports Sciences*. 36(3):326–332.
- McGinty-Minister, K.L., Swettenham, L., Champ, F.M. & Whitehead, A.E. 2024. “Smile more”: women’s experiences of sexism while working in sport from a socio-ecological perspective. *Sport in Society*. 27(11):1818–1841.
- Mikkonen, M. 2023. “We are going to the right direction... but we are not in ideal world yet”: understanding gender (in)equality within leadership positions in Nordic football governance. *Sport in Society*. 26(6):1003–1023.
- Murray, P., Lord, R. & Lorimer, R. 2020. “It’s just a case of chipping away”: a postfeminist analysis of female coaches’ gendered experiences in grassroots sport. *Sport, Education and Society*. 27(4):1–14.

- Muzari, T., Goerge, N. & Shonhiwa, S. 2022. Qualitative research paradigm, a key research design for educational researchers, processes and procedures: a theoretical overview. *Indiana Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*. 3(1):14–20.
- Narayan, T. & Sekhsaria, P. 2019. Media reporting on the protected areas in Maharashtra, India: a thematic analysis. *Journal of Threatened Taxa*. 11(3):13360–13376.
- NCAA. 2025. *College Cup: women's DI soccer championship road to the championship*. https://www.ncaa.com/championships/soccer-women/d1/road-to-the-championship?utm_source=ncaatickets&utm_medium=WCCchampinfoiles&utm_campaign=roadtochamp Date of access: 20 Nov. 2025.
- Neergaard, M.A., Olesen, F., Andersen, R.S. & Sondergaard, J. 2009. Qualitative description – the poor cousin of health research? *BMC Medical Research Methodology*. 9(1):52–56.
- Nicholson, R. 2024. Women coaches, professionalisation, and national governing body mergers in England, 1989–2000. *Sport in history*. 44(2):257–275.
- Norman, L. 2013. The challenges facing women coaches and the contributions they can make to the profession. *International Journal of Coaching Science*. 7(2):3–23.
- Norman, L. & Simpson, R. 2023. Gendered microaggressions towards the “only” women coaches in high-performance sport. *Sports Coaching Review*. 12(3):302–322.
- Norman, L., Rankin-Wright, A.J. & Allison, W. 2018. “It’s a concrete ceiling; it’s not even glass”: understanding tenets of organizational culture that supports the progression of women as coaches and coach developers. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*. 42(5):393–414.
- O’Brien, W., Hanlon, C. & Apostolopoulos, V. 2023. Women as leaders in male-dominated sectors: a bifocal analysis of gendered organizational practices. *Gender, Work & Organization*. 30(6):1867–1884.
- Organista, N. & Kossakowski, R. 2024. “There’s nothing you can do”: multi-level factors affecting the careers of female football coaches in Poland. *Sport in Society*. 1–22.

- Pankowiak, A., Casey, M., Eime, R. & Westerbeek, H. 2024. A socio-ecological approach to understanding the experiences of women and girls playing male-dominated sports. *Sport in Society*. (August, 19):1–20.
- Rahman, S. 2016. The advantages and disadvantages of using qualitative and quantitative approaches and methods in language “testing and assessment” research: a literature review. *Journal of Education and Learning*. 6(1):102–112.
- Rehman, A.A. & Alharthi, K. 2016. An introduction to research paradigms. *International Journal of Educational Investigations*. 3(8):51–59.
- Richards, K. 2003. *Qualitative inquiry in TESOL*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- SAFA. 2023. *SAFA/ UEFA join partnership for women assist programme*.
<https://www.safa.net/2023/02/07/safa-uefa-join-partnership-for-women-assist-programme/>
 Date of access: 06 Oct. 2024.
- SAFA. 2025a. *Banyana Banyana*. *SAFA.net - South African Football Association*.
<https://safa.net/banyana-banyana/> Date of access: 07 Mar. 2025.
- SAFA. 2025b. *NEC - South African Football Association*. <https://www.safa.net/nec/> Date of access: 13 Nov. 2025.
- Sallee, M.W. & Flood, J.T. 2012. Using qualitative research to bridge research, policy, and practice. *Theory Into Practice*. 51(2):137–144.
- Sandelowski, M. 2000. Whatever happened to qualitative description? *Research in Nursing & Health*. 23(4):334–340.
- Sanders, E. 2025. *Sarina Wiegman “not for sale at any price” after Euro 2025*.
<https://www.bbc.com/sport/football/articles/cn0z0x8pg9ko> Date of access: 18 Feb. 2026.
- Sasol in Sport. 2024. *About the Sasol League*. <https://sasolinsport.co.za/sasol-league/about-sasol-league/> Date of access: 07 Mar. 2025.
- Schull, V.D. & Kihl, L.A. 2019. Gendered leadership expectations in sport: constructing differences in coaches. *Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal*. 27(1):1–11.
- Sky Sports. 2025. *FA hits target for 90 per cent of schools to offer girls equal access to football in PE*. <https://www.skysports.com/football/news/11095/13472952/fa-hits-target-for->

[90-per-cent-of-schools-to-offer-girls-equal-access-to-football-in-pe](#) Date of access: 24 Nov. 2025.

Sky Sports News. 2023. *Why there is a lack of female coaches in football - and the steps being taken to change landscape*.

<https://www.skysports.com/football/news/11095/12830328/why-there-is-a-lack-of-female-coaches-in-football-and-the-steps-being-taken-to-change-landscape> Date of access: 07 Sep. 2024.

Sotiriadou, P. & de Haan, D. 2019. Women and leadership: advancing gender equity policies in sport leadership through sport governance. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*. 11(3):365–383.

South African Football Association. 2021. *Hollywoodbets super league*.
<https://www.safa.net/hollywoodbets-super-league/> Date of access: 08 Sep. 2024.

South African Football Association. 2023. *SAFA -CAF A license coaching course*.
<https://www.safa.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/SAFA-CAF-A-License-Advertisement-2023-1.pdf> Date of access: 31 Jul. 2024.

Spaaij, R., Farquharson, K. & Marjoribanks, T. 2015. Sport and social inequalities. *Sociology Compass*. 9(5):400–411.

Staines, G., Tavis, C. & Jayaratne, T.E. 1974. The queen bee syndrome. *PsycEXTRA Dataset*. 7(8):55–60.

Stone, M. E., Chapman, P., Khasnis, U., & Collins, D. (2025). Addressing the shortage of women in high-performance sport: what is known and what we need to know. *Psychology International*. 7(3):1-19.

Stone, M., Chapman, P., Urvi Khasnis & Collins, D. 2024. Firsts in their field: the perceptions of women who have led the way. *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living*. 6:1–8.

Strode, J.P., Parker, H.M. & Kerwin, S. 2023. Organizational-level factors that influence women coaches' experiences. *Journal of Sport Management*. 38(2):110–121.

Sullivan-Bolyai, S. & Bova, C. 2021. Qualitative description: a “how-to” guide. University of Massachusetts Medical School: (Report).

- Tajfel, H. 1981. *Human groups and social categories: studies in social psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tajfel, H. & Turner, J.C. 1982. *Social Identity and intergroup relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Taylor, D., Hanlon, C. & Dawson, A. 2023. Good organizational practices to encourage women high-performance coaches in sports. *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living*. 5:1–15.
- The Confederation of African Football. 2022. *CAF womens football: landscape report 2022*. <https://www.cafonline.com/media/hedpebel/caf-womens-football-landscape-report-2022.pdf> Date of access: 29 Jul. 2024.
- The Football Association. 2023. *UEFA A licence: England football learning*. <https://learn.englishfootball.com/courses/football/uefa-a-licence> Date of access: 31 Jul. 2024.
- Thomas, G., Guinan, J. & Molnár, G. 2021. “It’s not particularly P.C., you know...”: women coaches’ performing gender in strength and conditioning. *Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal*. 29(2):106–116.
- Turner, J.C. 1975. Social comparison and social identity: some prospects for intergroup behaviour. *European Journal of Social Psychology*. 5(1):5–34.
- U.S Soccer. 2025. *Kynisca innovation hub to join U.S. Soccer’s soccer forward foundation, advancing research, development and global standards in women’s soccer*. <https://www.ussoccer.com/stories/2025/04/kynisca-innovation-hub-to-join-us-soccers-soccer-forward-foundation> Date of access: 22 Nov. 2025.
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2015. *Women in the labor force: a databook, December 2014*. <https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/womens-databook/archive/women-in-the-labor-force-a-databook-2014.pdf> Date of access: 06 Aug. 2025.
- UEFA. 2024. *Unstoppable: a six-year plan towards a sustainable ecosystem for women’s football*. <https://fr.uefa.com/news-media/news/0292-1c1cdb984150-b1281f374ec0-1000--unstoppable-a-six-year-plan-towards-a-sustainable-ecosystem-/> Date of access: 22 Nov. 2025.

UEFA.com. 2023. *Record-breaking let girls play event marks milestone for women's football in England*. <https://www.uefa.com/news-media/news/027f-1787bbcffde8-4f7e7887c6a6-1000--record-breaking-let-girls-play-event-marks-milestone-for-wo/> Date of access: 24 Nov. 2025.

UK coaching. 2020. *Coaching in the UK 2019: coach survey*. www.ukcoaching.org. https://www.ukcoaching.org/getattachment/Resources/Topics/Research/Coaching-in-The-UK/CPS_Coaches_FINAL.pdf?lang=en-GB. Date of access: 06 Aug. 2024.

United Nations: ESCWA. 2022. *Structural barriers/causes*. <https://www.unescwa.org/sd-glossary/structural-barrierscauses> Date of access: 23 Nov. 2025.

Valerio, M.A., Rodriguez, N., Winkler, P., Lopez, J., Dennison, M., Liang, Y., et al. 2016. Comparing two sampling methods to engage hard-to-reach communities in research priority setting. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*. 16(1).

Van Vuuren, L.J. 2010. Industrial Psychology: Goodness of fit? Fit for goodness? *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*. 36(2):1–16.

Wangari, G. & Wango, G. 2017. Challenges faced by women football players who participate in football leagues. *Journal of Developing Country Studies*. 2(1):13–35.

Wells, J.E. & Aicher, T.J. 2013. Follow the leader: a relational demography, similarity attraction, and social identity theory of leadership approach of a team's performance. *Gender Issues*. 30(1-4):1–14.

Wong, S.I. & Giessner, S.R. 2016. The thin line between empowering and laissez-faire leadership: an expectancy-match perspective. *Journal of Management*. 44(2):757–783.

APPENDIX A – INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

TOPIC	MAIN QUESTION	POSSIBLE PROBES OR FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS
Opening	Welcome, thank you for agreeing to participate in the study the reason for this interview today is to gain your insights on your experience as a female soccer coach in South Africa A recording is being done of the interview as mentioned in the informed consent form you signed and if at any time you do not feel comfortable let me know and we will stop. I just have a few questions to ask, but the interview shouldn't take more than 60 minutes. OK let's begin.	
Background	Did you have a playing career in football?	Do you believe your playing experience prepared you for coaching and why?
	Do you have any coaching qualifications?	What has been your experience of getting the qualifications?
	How long have you been coaching for?	Do you coach a men's or women's team?
	What is your title at the club/school?	How are the demographics of your coaching team?
Experience of coaching	How is it trying to find a coaching job in the country?	What makes finding a job easier or difficult?
Challenges faced by female coaches in their relation and interaction with athletes and staff	Tell me about the challenges you usually face on a day-to-day basis	Do you think you face different challenges to a male coach? Why?
	Have you ever felt looked down upon by your colleagues?	Do you feel well supported by your club/school?

	Have you ever felt undermined as a coach, by your players/colleagues?	Do you think it is due to your gender? If so, why?
	Have you ever experienced discrimination as a coach?	Can you explain what happened?
	Have you ever experienced gender disparity (wages) in your role as coach?	Please elaborate
	Do you or have you ever benefited from development opportunities?	
	How does gender norms and roles impact your work?	
	Any other challenges that you might have faced that I have not mentioned?	
	Do you ever feel lonely in your journey as a coach / feel there is a lack of female role models?	
	How is your work life balance as a coach?	
	Do you feel there is a lack of support from family/colleagues/ clubs	
	Have you ever experienced Sexual/Gender Harassment?	Do you care to elaborate?
How difficult was it for you to get into this position		What were the barriers?
Coaching style	Tell me what type of coach you think you are?	Is your coaching style influenced by a previous coach/mentor/experiences?
Leadership style	What type of leadership style would best represent you and why?	Why do you prefer this type of leadership style?

		Have past experiences influenced the way you lead?
Role of female coaches	Do you think there are enough female coaches in football?	
Barriers	What prevents them from getting in?	Please elaborate
	Do you think there are enough female leaders in football?	If not, what can be done by the football association to improve this?
	What strategies or initiatives do you think can be provided to improve the number of female coaches in football?	
Closing	Is there anything else you would like to add? Do you have any questions or concerns? Thank you for participating in this research study. Once the study has been concluded the research findings will be shared with you. • Have a good day!	

APPENDIX B – ETHICS



Private Bag X1290, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520

Tel: 086 016 9698
Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za/>

Faculty of Humanities Research Ethics Training and Support

North-West University Education, Management
and Economic Sciences, Law, Theology,
Engineering and Natural Sciences-Social
Sciences Research Ethics Committee (NWU-
EMELTEN-SSREC)

Tel: +27 18 289 2899
Email: Emabor.Idemudia@nwu.ac.za

Senate Committee for Research Ethics
Tel: 016 103 4446
Email: Feziwe.Mseleni@nwu.ac.za

10 December 2025

Dear Prof Jackson

ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER OF STUDY

Based on approval by the North-West University Education, Management and Economic Sciences, Law, Theology, Engineering and Natural Sciences-Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (NWU-EMELTEN-SSREC) on 12 December 2025, the NWU-EMELTEN-SSREC hereby approves your study as indicated below. This implies that the NWU-EMELTEN-SSREC grants its permission that, provided the general conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the study may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

Study title: Exploring the experiences of female football coaches in selected football clubs, schools and associations in South Africa.																												
Principal Investigator/Study Supervisor/Researcher: Prof L Jackson																												
Student: Thina Phaadziri (27310523)																												
Ethics number:	<table border="1"><tr><td>N</td><td>W</td><td>U</td><td>-</td><td>0</td><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>7</td><td>6</td><td>-</td><td>2</td><td>5</td><td>-</td><td>A</td><td>2</td></tr><tr><td colspan="3">Institution</td><td colspan="3">Study Number</td><td colspan="3">Year</td><td colspan="3">Status</td></tr></table> Status: S = Submission; R = Re-Submission; P = Provisional Authorisation; A = Authorisation	N	W	U	-	0	1	2	7	6	-	2	5	-	A	2	Institution			Study Number			Year			Status		
N	W	U	-	0	1	2	7	6	-	2	5	-	A	2														
Institution			Study Number			Year			Status																			
Application Type: Single study	Risk: <table border="1"><tr><td>Low Risk</td></tr></table>	Low Risk																										
Low Risk																												
Commencement date: 10 December 2025																												
Expiry date: 10 December 2026																												
Approval of the study is provided for a year, after which continuation of the study is dependent on the receipt and review of a twelve-monthly monitoring report and the concomitant issuing of a letter of continuation.																												

General conditions: <i>While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, the following general terms and conditions will apply:</i> • The principal investigator/study supervisor/researcher must report in the prescribed format to the NWU-EMELTEN-SSREC: - twelve-monthly on the monitoring of the study, whereby a letter of continuation will be provided annually, and upon completion of the study; and

APPENDIX C – LANGUAGE EDITING CERTIFICATE

STATEMENT ON EDITORIAL ASSISTANCE

12th January 2026

I hereby confirm that I, Helen Robinson, ID: 7001051824085, edited the mini-dissertation written by Thinawanga R Phadziri, titled "Exploring the experiences of female coaches in selected football clubs, schools, and associations in South Africa".

Corrections were made to grammar, punctuation, spelling, syntax and typographical errors. Suggestions were made to enhance the clarity and readability of some sections of the text. The academic content remains entirely the work of the author.

The version submitted may not be identical to my edited version. The author, at their discretion, had the prerogative to accept, delete or change, before submission, amendments made by the editor.



Helen Robinson
Language and Copy Editor

3/113 Valleifontein
Mahikeng
North-West
South Africa
Tel: 082 714 3003
msinsi@mweb.co.za

Member: Professional Editors' Guild of South Africa

APPENDIX D – TURN IT IN REPORT



Page 2 of 96 - Integrity Overview

Submission ID trnold::1-3456610891

24% Overall Similarity

The combined total of all matches, including overlapping sources, for each database.

Filtered from the Report

- Bibliography
- Quoted Text

Match Groups

-  **245 Not Cited or Quoted 14%**
Matches with neither in-text citation nor quotation marks
-  **167 Missing Quotations 10%**
Matches that are still very similar to source material
-  **0 Missing Citation 0%**
Matches that have quotation marks, but no in-text citation
-  **0 Cited and Quoted 0%**
Matches with in-text citation present, but no quotation marks

Top Sources

- 17%  Internet sources
- 19%  Publications
- 0%  Submitted works (Student Papers)

Integrity Flags

1 Integrity Flag for Review

-  **Hidden Text**
22 suspect characters on 1 page
Text is altered to blend into the white background of the document.

Our system's algorithms look deeply at a document for any inconsistencies that would set it apart from a normal submission. If we notice something strange, we flag it for you to review.

A flag is not necessarily an indicator of a problem. However, we'd recommend you focus your attention there for further review.



Page 2 of 96 - Integrity Overview

Submission ID trnold::1-3456610891