

## ORIGINAL SCIENTIFIC PAPER

# Sports Coaches' Competence as Correlates of Athletes' Sports Achievements in South-South Nigeria

Christopher O. Aluya<sup>1</sup><sup>1</sup>Department of Human Kinetics and Sports Science, Faculty of Education, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria**Abstract**

This study investigated the relationship between coaches' competence and athletes' sports achievement in South-South Nigeria, with a focus on gender differences. A correlational research design was used, employing a multistage sampling technique to select 1,402 athletes from a population of 4,669 across six states in South-South Nigeria. The sample selection involved four stages: inclusion of all six states, random selection of universities and sports commissions, and stratification of athletes by gender, and proportionate random sampling from each gender stratum. Data were collected using the validated Coaches' Competence and Athletes' Sports Achievement Questionnaire (CCASAQ), with a Cronbach's alpha reliability of 0.81. Data analysis was performed using Pearson product-moment correlation and Fisher's Z statistics at a 0.05 significance level. The results showed a moderate, positive, and statistically significant relationship between coaches' competence and athletes' sports achievement. The relationship was stronger for female athletes compared to male athletes. The study concluded that coaches' competence significantly impacts athletes' performance. It recommends the implementation of continuous professional development programs for coaches to enhance their competence and improve athletes' sports achievements.

**Keywords:** Sports, Coaches, Competence, Athletes, Achievements

**Introduction**

In contemporary society, sports have become much more than just a form of entertainment. They have evolved into an essential aspect of human life, encompassing physical activity, recreation, competition, and professionalism. Governed by rules and regulations, sports are designed to achieve specific outcomes that promote personal growth, team unity, and national pride. Beyond their role as a leisure activity, sports foster cultural exchange, social cohesion, and economic development. They transcend borders, languages, and cultures, providing a powerful tool for unity and peace by facilitating interactions between different nations and resolving conflicts. In Nigeria, sports are recognized as a vital unifying force, bridging the country's ethnic and cultural divides and fostering a sense of national identity among its diverse population (Efebeh, 2020).

The importance of sports extends far beyond the playing field. Physically, they enhance overall health and fitness, while socially; they instil important values such as teamwork, discipline, responsibility, and fair play (Bailey et al., 2009; Eime et al., 2013). Moreover, sports contribute to the emotional and psychological development of participants, helping to build resilience, self-confidence, and the ability to cope with competition (Fraser-Thomas & Cote, 2009; Holt et al., 2017). They create opportunities for social interaction and community building, and in many cases, they inspire national pride (Eime et al., 2013; Tomlinson & Young, 2006). On an economic level, sports have emerged as a profitable industry, generating significant revenue through various channels, including athlete remunerations, sports infrastructure investments, and the large market for sports goods and services (Andreff & Szymanski, 2006). As a result, sports have become a

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capital-intensive sector that is critical to the economic well-being of many nations, including Nigeria.

At the heart of athletes' success and performance is the coach. Coaches provide the guidance, expertise, and mentorship needed to help athletes reach their full potential. They play a critical role in developing athletes' physical, technical, tactical, and psychological skills, ensuring they are prepared for competition. According to Phillips (2017), the responsibilities of a coach go beyond merely teaching sports skills; they include physical conditioning, tactical strategy, competitive preparation, and serving as role models for athletes. Effective coaching is a multidimensional profession that requires not only technical expertise but also strong interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, and the ability to inspire and motivate athletes.

Coaching is not just about executing daily practice routines; it involves the holistic development of the athlete, which includes their social and emotional well-being (Bush & Silk, 2015). Kowalski (2013) emphasizes that a coach's psychological influence on athletes can significantly impact their motivation, character, and behavior—key factors contributing to their overall achievements. A competent coach is one who not only has the necessary knowledge and skills but is also able to create a supportive learning environment, build trust with athletes, and foster a strong, positive relationship with them. Jowett's (2007) 3+1 C's model of the coach-athlete relationship identifies the key components of effective coaching: closeness (emotional bonds), commitment (long-term relationships), complementarity (collaboration), and co-orientation (alignment of goals and values). These elements are essential for creating the ideal conditions for athlete development and success.

The competence of a coach is therefore central to athletes' achievements in sports. A competent coach has the ability to tailor coaching strategies to meet individual athletes' needs, taking into account factors such as gender, experience level, and specific goals (Cote & Gilbert, 2009; Nash et al 2008). For example, male and female athletes may require different approaches in terms of motivation, communication, and coaching techniques, as gender influences how athletes respond to coaching strategies (Horn, 2002; Jowett & Clark-Cater, 2006). Competent coaches must be able to adapt their methods to suit these differences, thereby maximizing the potential of each athlete.

Furthermore, the level of competition plays a crucial role in shaping the demands placed on coaches. Professional athletes often require highly specialized training and sophisticated strategies (Cote & Gilbert, 2009; Lyle, 2002), while amateur athletes may benefit more from a developmental approach that emphasizes skill-building, personal growth, and enjoyment of the sport (Fraser-Thomas et al, 2005; Cushion et al, 2003). This distinction highlights the importance of understanding the context in which coaching is applied and how coaches can adjust their competence to meet the needs of different type of athletes.

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of coaching competence, concerns remain about the quality of coaching in many parts of the world, particularly in Nigeria. While organizations like the National Institute for Sports (NIS) have made efforts to improve coaching standards through training programs and research, the performance of Nigerian athletes in international competitions, such as the Olympics, has been marked by inconsistency. Although some athletes, like Blessing Okagbare and Ese Brume, have achieved notable individual success, many others have underperformed on the world stage. This inconsistency in performance raises questions about the effectiveness of the coaching systems in place and suggests that the competence of coaches may be a key factor that has been overlooked in discussions about athlete performance and achievement.

Despite the central role of coaching in athlete development, there remains a significant gap in research regarding the relationship between coaching competence and sports achievement in the Nigerian context. While studies have examined coaching practices and their impact on athletes' success in other countries, there is a lack of empirical evidence concerning how coaching competence influence sports achievement in Nigeria. This gap in knowledge underscores the need for further research that explores the specific ways in which coaching competence affects the performance of Nigerian athletes in international competitions. Therefore, the competence of sports coaches in Nigeria should be closely examined to determine if it is truly aligned with the needs of athletes and capable of producing consistent, world-class performances.

#### *Statement of the Problem*

Despite the critical role that coaches play in shaping athletes' performance and development, there is a growing concern about the quality of coaching in Nigeria. While sports in Nigeria hold significant cultural and social value, the performance of Nigerian athletes on the global stage, particularly at the Olympic Games, has been inconsistent over the years. Some individual athletes, such as Blessing Okagbare and Ese Brume, have achieved notable success, but these victories have been overshadowed by broader underachievement, especially in team sports and during certain Olympic cycles. For instance, the Nigerian football team, the Super Eagles, has suffered from early exits in major tournaments, reflecting a wider issue of inconsistency in the country's sports performance.

This inconsistency in athletic achievement raises critical questions about the role of coaching in Nigeria. Specifically, it suggests that the competence of sports coaches in Nigeria might not be adequately aligned with the needs of the athletes they are training. While organizations like the National Institute for Sports (NIS) have made efforts to enhance coaching standards, there is a lack of empirical research on the direct relationship between coaching competence and athletes' sports achievements in the Nigerian context. Existing studies on coaching effectiveness have largely focused on international contexts, and there is a notable gap in research examining how coaching quality impacts the performance of Nigerian athletes across various sports disciplines.

The underperformance of Nigerian athletes in global competitions, despite their immense talent, indicates that coaching methods may not be as effective as they should be. This issue is compounded by the lack of comprehensive data and analysis on the impact of coaching competence in Nigeria, making it difficult to identify the specific factors contributing to athletes' inconsistent achievements. As a result, there is a need for research that investigates the connection between coaching competence and athlete performance, with particular attention to factors such as gender, athlete type (e.g., professional or amateur), and the specific challenges faced by Nigerian athletes in their training environments.

This research aims to address this gap by exploring how coaching competence influences athletes' sports achievements in Nigeria. The findings of this study are expected to provide valuable insights into the role of coaching in improving athletes' performance, thus offering a framework for enhancing coaching practices and supporting the development of high-performing athletes in Nigeria.

#### *Research Questions*

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What is the relationship between coaches' competence and athletes' sports achievement?

2. Does the relationship between coaches' competence and athletes' sports achievement differ significantly by athletes' gender?

#### Hypotheses

The research questions raised in the study were hypothesized as follows:

1. There is no significant relationship between coaches' competence and athletes' sports achievement.
2. The relationship between coaches' competence and athletes' sports achievement does not significantly differ by athletes' gender.

#### Methodology

##### Design of the Study

The study adopted the correlational survey research design.

This design was used to establish a relationship between two or more variables and to determine the direction of the relationship. Hence, the study sought to establish the relationship between the independent variable (Coaches Competence) and the dependent variable (athletes' sports achievements).

##### Population of the Study

A total of 4,669 male and female athletes who participate in competitive sports from Universities and State Sports Commissions located across the six states in South-South region of Nigeria constitute the population for the study. These include; Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers States with athletes' representation as follows: Akwa-Ibom (472), Bayelsa (926), Cross River (542), Delta (703), Edo (1131) and Rivers (895).

#### Distribution of the population of the study

State	Universities	State Sports Commission		Total
		Male	Female	
Akwa-Ibom	Akwa-Ibom State University	38	24	472
	University of Uyo	34	36	
Bayelsa	Niger Delta University	75	55	926
	Federal University Otuoke	31	25	
Cross River	University of Calabar	90	68	542
	Cross River State University	44	40	
Delta	Federal University of Petroleum	27	18	703
	Delta State University	35	23	
Edo	University of Benin	139	104	1131
	Ambrose Alli University	112	95	
	Edo State University	58	30	
	Benson Idahosa University	38	26	
Rivers	Igbinedion University	35	26	895
	University of Port Harcourt	70	61	
	Ignatius Ajuru	56	42	
	University of Education Rivers State University	66	40	
Total		958	703	4669

Overall number of athletes = 4669

Source: Sports directorate divisions of the various Universities and offices of the Sports Commission of the various States in South-South Nigeria, 2024

#### Sample and Sampling Techniques

The multistage sampling technique was used to select a sample of 1,402 athletes from the sports commissions and universi-

ties across the six states in South-South Nigeria. In the first stage, all six states—Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers, were included in the study. In the second stage, univer-

#### Distribution of the sample for the study.

State	population	Sampled Athletes from Universities		Sampled Athletes from State Sports Commission		Total
		Male	Female	Male	Female	
Akwa-Ibom	472	25	15	53	49	142
Bayelsa	926	35	30	120	93	278
Cross River	542	46	32	50	35	163
Delta	703	22	15	94	80	211
Edo	1131	105	84	80	70	339
Rivers	895	64	52	80	73	269
Total	4,669	297	228	477	400	1,402

(N= 1,402)

sities and sports commissions were randomly selected within each state. In the third stage, the athletes were stratified by gender (male and female) within the selected institutions. Finally, in the fourth stage, a proportionate random sampling method was used to select a sample of athletes, ensuring that 30% of male and female athletes from each gender stratum were chosen. This approach helped ensure that the sample was representative of both genders across all selected institutions in the six states.

#### Research Instrument

The instrument used for data collection was the Coaches' Competence and Athletes' Sports Achievement Questionnaire (CCASAQ), which consists of three sections.

Section A contains 1 item to gather the demographic information regarding athletes' gender. Section B includes the Sports Coaches' Competency Scale (SCCS), consisting of 30 items to assess coaches' competence across four dimensions: motivation (items 1-6), game planning (items 7-14), character building (items 15-22), and technique (items 23-30). Athletes rated each item on a 4-point scale: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1).

Section C contains 20 items focused on athletes' sports achievement, including accomplishments like winning games, breaking records, achieving personal bests, and improving rankings. Responses were also rated on a 4-point scale: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1).

#### Validity of the Instrument

To ensure the validity of the research instrument, the questionnaire was distributed to two Human Kinetics and Sports Science experts and one from Measurement and Evaluation all from the University of Benin. The suggestions, opinions, corrections, clarifications and recommendations received from these sources aided modifications that improved the final draft of the instrument.

#### Reliability of the Instrument

The reliability of the instrument was done using the Cronbach's Alpha reliability statistics after the instrument has been validated and standardized. The instrument was administered once to 20 athletes: 10 from Adekunle Ajasin University (AAU),

Ondo State, and 10 from the Ondo State Sports Commission, all of whom were involve in competitive sports. The responses to the instrument were analyzed which yielded a Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.81, demonstrating the instrument's dependability for use in the study. It is noteworthy that these 20 athletes were excluded from the main study population.

#### Method of Data Collection

The research instrument Coaches competence and Athletes' Sports Achievement Questionnaire (CCASAQ) was administered by the researcher with the aid of 6 trained research assistants. The research assistants were instructed on how to guide the athletes in filling the questionnaire and ensuring the retrieval of the completed questionnaire.

The researcher and the research assistants briefed the respondents (athletes) of the purpose of the study, the need to provide honest answers and how they can complete or fill in the questionnaire. The data collection spanned four weeks. Out of the 1,493 copies of questionnaire distributed, 1,402 completely filled instruments were retrieved representing a high response rate of 93.9%.

#### Method of Data Analysis

In this study, all the research questions were hypothesized and the hypotheses were tested at a significance level of 0.05. The statistics that was used to test all the hypotheses was the Pearson product Moment Correlation statistics.

Furthermore, the researcher used the categorization of correlation coefficient value ( $r$ ) developed by Jim frost (2020) and that of Rainier and Lesley (2018) in categorizing the correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) value as well as to show the direction or magnitude of the relationship. The categorization is as follows:

1. 0.61 – 1.00 strong relationship
2. 0.31 – 0.60 moderate relationship
3. 0.00 – 0.30 weak relationship

#### Presentation of Results and Discussion of Findings

The researcher ensured that the relevant demographics were collected in order to provide in-depth analysis of the study in relation to the variables within which specific questions can be answered. The demographic distribution is presented in table 1.

**Table 1:** Distribution of the demographic data of the sample size

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Athletes' Gender		
Male	761	54.28
Female	641	45.72

Table 1 revealed that in terms of athletes' gender, the number of male athletes was 761 representing (54.28%) while the female athletes were 641 representing (45.72%). The above table and analysis revealed the clear distribution of the sample size in terms of the demographic data in line with the study.

**Table 2:** Pearson ' $r$ ' on coaches' competence and athletes' sports achievement.

Variables	N	$r$	P (sig.)	Decision
Coaches' Competence	1402	0.518	< 0.001	Ho Rejected
Athletes' sports achievement				

( $\alpha=0.05$ )

Table 2 revealed that a correlation coefficient value of 0.518 which is significant at <0.001 was obtained. This indicates that there is a significant relationship between coaches' compe-

#### Testing of the Hypotheses Formulated

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between coaches' competence and athletes' sports achievement.

A summary of the relationship between coaches' competence and athletes' sports achievement is presented in table 2.

tence and athletes' sports achievement. Since the correlation coefficient value is positive and also falls within the moderate category level, there is a moderate positive significant re-

relationship between coaches' competence and athletes' sports achievement.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between coaches' competence and athletes' sports achievement based on

athletes' gender.

A summary of the relationship between coaches' competence and athletes' sports achievement based on athletes' gender is presented in table 3 and 4.

**Table 3:** Pearson 'r' on coaches' competence and athletes' sports achievement among male athletes

Variables	N	r	P (sig.)	Decision
Coaches' Competence	761	0.422	< 0.001	significant
Athletes' sports achievement				

( $\alpha=0.05$ )

A correlation coefficient value of 0.422, which is significant at <0.001, was found according to table 3. Therefore, it can be concluded that, among male athletes, there is a significant relationship between coaches' competence and athletes' sports achievement.

The positive correlation coefficient value indicates a moderately positive correlation. Thus, it can be concluded that, among male athletes, there is a moderately positive and significant relationship between coaches' competence and athletes' sports achievement.

**Table 4:** Pearson 'r' on coaches' competence and athletes' sports achievement among female athletes

Variables	N	r	P (sig.)	Decision
Coaches' Competence	641	0.574	<0.001	significant
Athletes' achievement In sports				

( $\alpha=0.05$ )

A correlation coefficient value of 0.574 which is significant at <0.001 was found according to table 4. Therefore, it can be concluded that, among female athletes, there is a significant relationship between coaches' competence and athletes' sports achievement. The positive correlation coefficient value indicates a moderately positive correlation. Thus, it can be concluded that, among female

athletes, there is a moderately positive and significant relationship between coaches' competence and athletes' sports achievement.

Hence it can be therefore concluded that there is a significant relationship between coaches' competence and athletes' sports achievement based on athletes' gender, the relationship was however a moderate one, thus the null hypothesis was rejected.

**Table 5:** Fisher's z analysis between male and female athletes on the relationship between coaches' competence and athletes' sports achievement.

Gender	N	R	Z <sub>r</sub>	Z <sub>cal</sub>	Z <sub>crit</sub>	Decision
Male	761	0.422	0.4477	3.71	1.96	Reject HO
Female	641	0.574	0.6475			

( $\alpha=0.05$ )

The fisher-z analysis of the variation in the relationship between athletes' sports achievement and coaches' competence is presented in Table 5. After testing at  $\alpha=0.05$ , a computed value of 3.71 for z was found. The null hypothesis is thus rejected since the z computed value of 3.71 is higher than the critical or table value of 1.96. This merely suggests that there are notable gender differences in the relationship between coaches' competence and athletes' sports achievement. It can be inferred from Table 5 that there is a significantly stronger correlation between the sports achievement of female athletes and their coaches' competence than there is for male athletes. This is because the r value of female athletes is higher than that of male athletes.

#### Discussion of Findings

This study investigates the relationship between coaches' competence and athletes' sports achievement, offering a comprehensive analysis of how different dimensions of coaching contribute to an athlete's performance across various contexts. The findings from this study reflect a complex interplay between coaching factors, athlete characteristics, and sport-related variables.

Findings from hypothesis 1 were supported, as the study revealed a moderate positive significant correlation between coaches' competence and athletes' sports achievement. A competent coach is not only skilled in technical aspects but also in motiva-

tional strategies, tactical understanding, and character development. The finding suggests that as coaches' competence increases, athletes' performance improves correspondingly. This finding is consistent with the study of Rainier and Lesley (2018), who found that coaches' competence positively influences athletes' sports achievement. As Eshani (2017) highlighted, a highly competent coach helps to unlock an athlete's potential, fostering improvement in both skill and overall performance. This research builds on the idea that competence in coaching can act as a driving force behind athletic success, facilitating growth in athletes' abilities across physical, psychological, and emotional domains. The implications of this result are substantial as coaches play an essential role in shaping athletes' success, and the competence of the coach directly influences an athlete's ability to perform at higher levels. It is crucial to understand that competence here includes a range of skills such as motivation, strategy, technique, and character building, which together form the foundation for sports achievement.

In hypothesis 2 the study found that the relationship between coaches' competence and athletes' sports achievement was significantly stronger among female athletes than male athletes. Female athletes rated coaches with high competence more positively than male athletes. Female athletes, thus, tend to appreciate coaching styles that promote emotional intelligence, teamwork, and support, which are seen as integral to their personal growth. This result



aligns with Magaeu et al. (2013), who suggested that male athletes prioritize performance and competition, while female athletes are more likely to value personal development, interpersonal relationships, and well-being. This also corroborates with Eshani (2017)'s assertion that male athletes may lean toward autocratic coaching styles that focus on competitiveness and physical strength, while female athletes prefer democratic and relational coaching styles. These differences can be attributed to the gendered norms and expectations prevalent in sports, where male athletes often face higher societal pressures to succeed, and female athletes may be more open to coaching that nurtures holistic development. This finding is particularly intriguing, as it suggests that female athletes may place a greater emphasis on the interpersonal and developmental qualities of coaching, such as emotional intelligence and relationship-building, while male athletes may focus more on outcomes like winning and performance. Male athletes often prioritize performance over personal development, which could explain why they might expect coaches to adopt a more autocratic or directive style (Horn, 2002). In contrast, female athletes tend to appreciate coaches who support their overall well-being and prioritize personal growth (Cunningham & Sagas, 2002; Becker & Solomon, 2005). Female athletes may prefer coaching styles that promote emotional intelligence and teamwork, whereas male athletes may align more with autocratic coaching that focuses on competitiveness (Tucker, 2004; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003). These gendered differences highlight the importance of tailoring coaching styles to the unique needs and preferences of male and female athletes, ultimately optimizing their development and performance.

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#### Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that this study emphasize the critical role of coaches' competence in driving athletes' sports achievement. A moderate, positive relationship between coaching quality and performance was observed, indicating that skilled coaches significantly enhance athlete outcomes. Notably, female athletes benefited more from competent coaching than their male counterparts, suggesting that gender-sensitive coaching approaches may be needed. Additionally, student-athletes attending universities displayed a stronger connection between coaching competence and achievement compared to state sports commission athletes, potentially due to the enhanced support systems in academic settings.

#### Recommendations

Based on the findings and the conclusion drawn, the following recommendations were made:

1. Given the moderate positive relationship between coaches' competence and athletes' sports achievement, it is crucial to invest in on-going professional development for coaches. This includes training in both technique and interpersonal skills to improve their ability to support athletes' success.
2. As female athletes showed a stronger response to competent coaching, it would be beneficial to tailor coaching techniques to better address the unique needs of female athletes. This could involve focusing on confidence-building, communication, and emotional intelligence to enhance performance and achievement.

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