

## **National vs State-Level Athletics Coaching Practices in India: A Study on Disparities and Alignment**

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### **Abstract**

*This mixed methods study aimed to identify disparities and opportunities for alignment between national and state-level athletic coaching practices in India. A survey was administered to more than three hundred national and state-level coaches. The key differences in training philosophies, resources, experience levels, and perceived challenges were explored. The results showed that national coaches were significantly more experienced and seniors, but underrepresented females than state coaches. While 63% of national coaches felt practices were well-structured. On the other hand, over 75% endorsed greater collaboration between different levels. The findings highlight the need for targeted professional development, gender inclusivity initiatives, and knowledge-sharing platforms to optimize coaching practices across levels. A unified coaching ecosystem is imperative for nurturing athletic talent and propelling India's sporting success.*

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### **I. Introduction**

India aspires to establish itself as an athletic powerhouse on the global stage (Chelladurai & Patil, 2020). Realizing these ambitions necessitates optimizing coaching practices that shape athletic development across the country. Coaching in India operates as a two-tiered system, with national coaching programs targeting elite athletes and state-level coaching focusing on grassroots talent identification and nurturing (Jones et al., 2004). While this dual structure caters to athletes' diverse needs, it also introduces complex dynamics between coaching practices at each level (Lyle, 2002). This dynamic can sometimes lead to inconsistencies in training methods and athlete development strategies. Therefore, bridging the gap between national and state-level coaching programs is crucial to ensure a more cohesive and effective approach to developing India's athletic talent (Dasgupta, 2007). Addressing these dynamics will enhance the synergy between coaching levels and contribute to a more streamlined and harmonized pathway for athletes from grassroots to elite competition.

As India invests in sporting infrastructure and support systems, more profound insights into the intricacies of national and state coaching paradigms can inform policies and interventions. However, existing literature has predominantly examined coaching practices in aggregation, obscuring potential disparities between levels (Chelladurai, P., & Patil, S. 2020). The present study addresses this gap through an in-depth mixed methods exploration of national and state athletic coaching in India.

The specific objectives were to:

1. Identify key differences in coaching practices, philosophies, and perceived challenges at national and state levels
2. Assess coaches' perspectives on the alignment between coaching practices across levels
3. Examine implications for athlete development pathways and transitions between levels
4. Develop recommendations to enhance collaboration, optimize coaching quality, and nurture talent across all levels

These insights can equip policymakers and sporting organizations with targeted strategies for India to realize its athletic aspirations. Aligned and holistic coaching practices across all levels are instrumental in this pursuit.

### **II. Methodology**

A mixed methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative techniques provided multi-dimensional insights into coaching practices.

The mixed methods approach to coaching research has been instrumental in understanding the complex dynamics of coaching practices (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). By combining qualitative and quantitative methods, researchers comprehensively understand the subjective experiences and perspectives of coaches and athletes (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews and observations, allow for a deeper understanding of coach-athlete relationships (Adler & Adler, 1994), while quantitative data, often derived from surveys or performance metrics, offers a structured and numerical lens for analyzing patterns and trends (Patton, 2002). This approach fosters a richer understanding of the interplay between factors influencing coaching effectiveness, providing a more nuanced understanding of coaching practices and enhancing the validity and

reliability of findings (Creswell, 2014). The mixed methods approach is precious in addressing the complexities of the coaching domain, where human interactions, psychological aspects, and performance metrics intertwine (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). By embracing the strengths of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, researchers can uncover the layers of meaning embedded in coaching practices, contributing to advancing evidence-based coaching strategies and optimizing athlete development (Adler & Adler, 1994).

### **Participants**

This research used purposive and snowball sampling to select 172 national and 132 state-level coaches for semi-structured interviews. The aim was to ensure the chosen coaches had the expertise and insights for the study's objectives. The snowball sampling strategy recruited 304 coaches at each level, expanding the pool of participants. This dual-method approach aimed to capture diverse perspectives and experiences within the coaching community at national and state levels, providing a comprehensive understanding of coaching practices and challenges across different echelons of the sport. By recruiting coaches from various backgrounds and contexts, the study allowed for a more holistic examination of coaching practices and challenges, contributing to a richer analysis of the collected data. Including coaches from different levels also helped identify common themes and unique differences in coaching approaches, providing a more nuanced view of the overall landscape.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

A structured survey was distributed electronically to a broad sample of coaches, utilizing online platforms for geographical diversity.

The survey instrument contained questions on demographics, coaching practices, development strategies, and alignment perceptions. The survey data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods via SPSS software. Descriptive statistics provided an overview of demographic profiles and coaching approaches. Inferential analysis through chi-square tests enabled identifying significant differences between national and state-level practices. This rigorous quantitative analysis offered crucial insights into coaching patterns and disparities at national and state levels, enriching the overall interpretation and implications of the study.

## **III. Results**

### **Key Differences in Coaching Practices and Perspectives**

The thematic analysis revealed that national coaches emphasized more structured, intense training focused on specialization and competition exposure to hone elite talent. In contrast, state coaches adopted a more holistic approach concentrated on foundational skill development and talent identification.

National coaches had access to more extensive facilities, sports science support, and organizational funding. However, both levels faced challenges in resources and professional development.

Survey results showed significant demographic differences, with national coaches being older ( $M=45.2$  v/s  $30.8$  years), more experienced ( $M=18$  v/s  $5$  years), but less gender diverse (18% v/s 28% female representation). In contrast, the state level leans heavily towards the 20-30 age bracket, with nearly half of the coaches falling under this category. At the same time, the non-significant chi-square results across tables indicate that these discrepancies might not be statistically significant.

Perceptions on Alignment and Collaboration: Only 39% of state coaches felt current practices effectively prepared athletes for national-level competition, while 63% of national coaches believed their methods were well-structured.

Over 75% of coaches emphasized greater knowledge sharing between levels and endorsed aligning strategies with global best practices. Enhanced collaboration was pivotal for 43% of national and 56% of state coaches. The results highlight the necessity for streamlined communication channels, joint training programs, and consistent athlete development pathways connecting the national and state coaching ecosystems. Bridging these gaps through strategic alignment and collaborative efforts could potentially enhance the overall effectiveness of Indian athletics coaching across all levels.

## **IV. Discussion**

The findings reveal distinct coaching paradigms at national and state levels tailored to athletes' developmental stages. While this segmentation serves essential purposes, strengthening communication and transitions between levels is vital for nurturing talent pipelines.

The demographic variations indicate a need to promote diversity in national coaching and develop state coaches' expertise through professional development programs. Addressing resource constraints across levels can optimize the training environment.

Targeted collaborative initiatives, knowledge-sharing platforms, and policy measures focused on inclusive and holistic development can help bridge gaps between levels. As India strives for sporting excellence, synchronized coaching practices are imperative.

## V. Conclusion

This study provides novel insights into the nuanced coaching landscapes in Indian athletics. The empirical exploration elucidated key differences, alignment perceptions, and opportunities for targeted interventions. These findings equip policymakers and sports organizations with a framework for strengthening coaching practices facilitating seamless athlete transitions between levels. Aligned national and state coaching practices can unleash India's athletic potential, catalyzing the ascent to global sporting success.

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