**CHAPTER 1**

**Coach education in football: Setting the scene**

*Thomas M. Leeder*

**Introduction and aim**

The sport of association football is known globally by a range of terms, including football, soccer, fútbol, voetbal, and Fußball1 (Dichter, 2020). Despite the use of varying terminology, football can be considered a universal language and is arguably the world’s most popular sport in terms of viewing figures, supporters, and participation numbers. For example, recent statistics show that 3.3 billion people watched at least 1 minute of linear TV coverage of the 2018 Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup in Russia, with 1.12 billion people globally watching the final between France and Croatia on July 15th, 2018 (FIFA, 2020). Furthermore, data collected in 2006 from 207 member associations of FIFA indicate that approximately 265 million people participate in football within organised or recreational settings worldwide (FIFA, 2007; O’Gorman, 2016). Consequently, to cope with this high demand, a large football coaching workforce is required to prepare, deliver, and organise appropriate coaching practices to support the development of male and female, youth and adult, alongside grassroots2 and professional football players across the world.

It goes without saying that football coaches play a significant role in shaping the sporting experiences of the players under their guidance. For example, youth football players who are exposed to a coach who adopts a *growth approach* (e.g., opponents viewed as ‘friendly-enemies’, competition inclusive and socially safe) rather than a *selective approach* (e.g., opponents viewed as enemies, competition exclusive and socially insecure), experience increased enjoyment, opportunities to play, and enhanced coach-athlete relationships, which ultimately reduces the risk of dropout (Andersson, 2020; Temple & Crane, 2016). Moreover, football coaching not only influences the learning and performance of players but can also be considered an educational environment for political socialisation, where taken-for-granted identities, values, attitudes, and norms are reproduced uncritically (Andersson, 2020; Cushion & Jones, 2014). It is evident that all coaches, including those within football, have the power to influence, both positively and negatively, the lives of multiple participants each year. Therefore, the importance of regulated and meaningful coach education cannot be overstated, functioning as a quality assurance measure to prepare coaches for future practice, in addition to shaping the progress of sport coaching as a profession (Lyle & Cushion, 2017). Yet, at the time of writing, we are at a stage where much coach education provision is unregulated, one-off, and lacks both depth and breadth (Callary & Gearity, 2020).

This situation is surprising, as coach education should help coaches to “hone their craft, and to become effective and ethical at achieving desirable ideals” (Callary & Gearity, 2020, p. 2), while encouraging them to think creatively about alternative coaching methods (Cushion & Nelson, 2013). Moreover, football coach education at the grassroots level is vital to support coaches in providing quality experiences which sustain participation, and enhance players’ learning and development (O’Gorman, 2016; Potrac et al., 2016). In recognising its significance, research exploring coach education, coach learning, and coach development across sports is undoubtedly growing (Callary & Gearity, 2020). However, research that focuses “specifically on the professional development of football coaches is notably scarce” (Armour et al., 2016, p. 30), despite the sport’s popularity and global appeal. Therefore, stakeholders responsible for designing and delivering football coach education have found it challenging to develop meaningful provision, due to being unaware of what works, why, and for whom across coaching domains and countries. This very issue was the catalyst to produce this book.

In looking to enhance coach education provision, both researchers and practitioners are often guilty of adopting ‘second order’ approaches, which involves the recycling of activities, practices, and pedagogies which seemingly work within more established professions (Cushion & Nelson, 2013). Nevertheless, coaching broadly and football specifically has a diverse workforce grounded in volunteerism with an entrenched learning culture (Armour et al., 2016), meaning the transfer of such approaches from other contexts to coaching is “neither neat nor unproblematic” (Cushion & Nelson, 2013, p. 369). Thus, in wanting to understand the ‘what’, ‘when’, ‘how’, and ‘why’ associated with designing and delivering football coach education, rather than looking externally at other occupational fields, there would seem some value in football national governing bodies (NGBs) looking internally towards their global counterparts.

While being cautious of “drawing simple conclusions, ignoring subtle variations between countries” (Piggott, 2012, p. 285), alongside acknowledging the significant influence of context and localism, I am of the belief that understanding the ‘active ingredients’ and contemporary issues within football coach education globally and capturing them within this book will support coach developers3, policy makers, and other key stakeholders in making informed decisions related to the implementation of educational provision (McKenna, 2009). Although some research has began to draw comparisons between coach education programmes globally (see Callary et al., 2014), to date only one comparative study of football coach education provision across the world (Scotland and the United States) exists (Nash, 2003), suggesting further exploration into the value of this process is required.

However, as opposed to making direct comparisons and in adopting a non-versus stance, the principle aim of this book is to make readers aware of the current state of football coach education across the world, acknowledging contemporary issues of a conceptual, theoretical, and practical nature which occur within programmes globally. When reflecting upon pedagogical activities such as facilitating the learning of football coaches within coach education, unfortunately there are no ‘quick fixes’, therefore, this book does not attempt to present prescriptive approaches or a panacea for football coach education. Rather, I believe this book can offer stakeholders and organisations critical insight into the ‘what’, ‘when’, ‘how’, and ‘why’ of football coach education, alongside providing ‘lessons learned’ from football NGBs, which may help to guide and inform the construction of more bespoke, meaningful, and effective learning opportunities for football coaches worldwide.

**What is coach education?**

Coach education forms the essence of this book and is vital to supporting the learning and progression of football coaches globally. But what exactly is coach education? What can be defined as coach education for coaches, and what do we know about its importance for coaching practice? To begin, coach education as a term lacks definitional clarity and can mean different things, to different people, within different cultural contexts. For example, the term coach education is often used interchangeably or in conjunction with phrases such as coach learning, coach development, coach training, and continuing professional development (Lyle & Cushion, 2017; Piggott, 2015). However, key distinctions can be made to provide some consensus. Coach learning emphasises the individual and encapsulates how coaches learn idiosyncratically through engaging with various situations, experiences, and activities, such as through practical coaching experience or discussions with colleagues (Lyle & Cushion, 2017). In contrast, coach education can be considered a subcategory of coach learning (Piggott, 2015), forming one of the many situations, experiences, and activities which contribute towards coach learning. Therefore, coach education as a ‘loose’ synonym generally refers to learning which occurs within formalised and mediated settings where the primary purpose is learning (Cushion & Nelson, 2013; Piggott, 2015), with typical examples including NGB delivered certified courses or higher education degree programmes.

Despite coach education’s importance as a quality assurance mechanism and role in supporting the professionalisation of sport coaching, in comparison to other situations, experiences, and activities which contribute towards coach learning, such formal provision generally ranks low when reflecting upon coaches’ preferences and actual engagements (Van Woezik et al., 2021). Lyle and Cushion (2017) have drawn upon the work of Buckley and Caple (2000, p. 2) to suggest that (coach) education should provide “theoretical and conceptual frameworks designated to stimulate an individual’s analytical and critical abilities”. However, much coach education is more reflective of training and indoctrination, which potentially contributes towards its limited appeal to coaches (Cushion & Nelson, 2013; Lyle & Cushion, 2017). Training and indoctrination encourage uniformity, where courses contain common features, such as promoting a single coaching style or philosophy; prescriptive approaches regarding how to coach; linear progressions through certification, overly assessment driven, and restricted time for critical debate with coaches viewed as recipients rather than co-constructors of knowledge (see Chapman et al., 2020; Cushion et al., 2021; Dempsey et al., 2021; Williams & Bush, 2019).

Consequently, because of these criticisms, research has consistently demonstrated that knowledge acquired through practical coaching experience, in addition to activities such as mentoring, reflection, and discussions with others forms the basis of much coach learning (Lyle & Cushion, 2017; Van Woezik et al., 2021). However, relying solely on experience and informal, unregulated learning situations and experiences is problematic and may reinforce ideological interpretations of coaching uncritically (Webb & Leeder, 2021). As such, coach education should complement and help accelerate “the learning that takes place from experience” (Lyle & Cushion, 2017, p. 300), recognising that individuals arrive at coach education courses with unique experiences and dispositions, meaning courses will impact upon learning in variable ways (Stodter & Cushion, 2017; Webb & Leeder, 2021). This perspective is not new, with historical research suggesting that at the end of the 19th century newly formed sport governing bodies developed coach education initiatives to ensure coaches did not rely solely on craft knowledge, which may have lacked theoretical underpinning and scientific accuracy (Day, 2013). In sum, while acknowledging that coach learning is idiosyncratic and involves a blend, rather than separation, of multiple situations, experiences, and activities (Stodter & Cushion, 2017), it remains surprising that sport coaching generally overlooks the need for rigorous coach education provision (Callary & Gearity, 2020), despite its potential to support optimal coach learning.

Coach education is a social construction, meaning it is influenced by a battery of social, cultural, political, and economic factors (Cushion et al., 2021). Indeed, recent conceptualisations of coach education have positioned it as a system (Culver et al., 2019; Dempsey et al., 2021). Such a perspective is useful as it recognises the micro, meso, and macro factors which (re)structure coach education provision. Coach education is never neutral, with any provision involving multiple stakeholders including policy makers, course designers, and coach developers (Culver et al., 2019; Dempsey et al., 2021; Williams & Bush, 2019), who each struggle for control over course format, delivery, and the underpinning theoretical perspectives and beliefs (Chapman et al., 2020; Dempsey et al., 2021). NGBs are often ‘walking a tightrope’ that attempts to meet both individual and system needs (McKenna, 2009), resulting in ‘winners and losers’, where the same courses both support and thwart the learning of individual coaches (Dempsey et al., 2021). Thus, in positioning coach education as a social construction (Cushion et al., 2021), influenced by micro, meso, and macro issues of a social, cultural, political, and economic nature, it is important research continues to understand how coach education “manifests in different contexts and what the impact will be at ground level for coaches and athletes” (Moustakas et al., 2021, p. 15). This stance is especially pertinent to coach education within football, which the focus of this chapter now turns.

**Coach education in football: The current state of play**

Research has indicated that across all domains, football coaching is a complex social, emotional, and micro-political endeavour, ridden with issues associated with the struggle for power, agency, and evolving identities (Cushion & Jones, 2014; Potrac et al., 2012; Potrac et al., 2016). Consequently, there is a need for football coach education to recognise the insecurity and complexity of the role, while incorporating a mixture of learning mechanisms which appreciates the idiosyncratic and biographical learning journeys of football coaches (Christensen, 2014; Watts & Cushion, 2017). However, this is generally not the case, with football coach education provision largely subject to several damning criticisms within the literature, ultimately reducing both its appeal and effectiveness in enhancing football coach learning.

Historically, football coach education has been critiqued for its authoritarian, oppressive, and prescriptive nature which promotes a ‘right way’ to coach (Chapman et al., 2020), resulting in course participants engaging in strategies of studentship and impression management (Chesterfield et al., 2010). Coach education’s impact on football coaches’ learning is suggested to be marginal at best, where changes to knowledge might be evident despite limited alterations to behaviour, indicating a theory-practice divide (Stodter & Cushion, 2017, 2019). When considering coach behaviours and its connection to practice design in greater depth, football coaches tend to use larger proportions of training-form activities despite engagement with coach education content (Stodter & Cushion, 2019), alongside coach-centred approaches where players are objectified and high levels of instruction are common features (Cushion & Jones, 2014). More problematically, football coach education is flawed with issues related to both the marginalisation and discrimination of individuals. For example, evidence suggests that football coach education is plagued with racial inequalities (Bradbury et al., 2018), gender discrimination and inappropriate cultural practices (Lewis et al., 2018), alongside inadequate sociocultural content and gendered homophobia (Norman, 2013), which all contribute towards negative participant experiences.

Football coach education does not operate in a social vacuum, with historical, cultural, and structural factors influencing beliefs regarding how football ‘should be played’, which in turn, dictates the format, content, and delivery of formalised provision (North, 2016). Viewed critically, coach education can be considered a primary mechanism which enables football NGBs to reproduce coaching norms and values, which may relate to specific pedagogical approaches, coaching philosophies, or organisational beliefs (Cushion & Nelson, 2013; Cushion et al., 2021; Norman et al., 2018). For example, the English Football Association (FA) have indicated that their England DNA4 framework will “guide all football education in the country, leading the content and methodology of FA courses and FA continuous professional development” (Allison, 2016, p. 3). National traditions, perspectives, and beliefs are seemingly reproduced through football coach education programmes, which can structure the behaviours, practices, and norms of football coaches within a designated cultural context (North, 2016). However, empirical research and comparative studies into the conceptual, theoretical, practical, and contemporary issues within football coach education across the world remain restricted (Armour et al., 2016; North, 2016). Thus, the remainder of this chapter outlines the structure of this book and describes the themes and content which aim to address this gap within the literature, before finishing with an identification of the book’s use and intended readership.

**Book structure**

The 20 chapters within this book are authored by a blend of sport coaching academics, researchers, and practitioners. Chapters are grouped together and placed within specific sections relating to a broad thematic area. The 8 sections of the book are as follows:

1. Introducing football coach education
2. High-performance football coach education
3. Youth and amateur football coach education
4. Supporting the progression of female football coaches
5. Critical reviews of current football coach education provision
6. ‘Lessons learned’ from empirical research into football coach education
7. Technological and pedagogical developments within football coach education
8. Conclusion

Although the focus of each chapter within a thematic section will show some similarities, each chapter will highlight and explore a designated country’s football coach education programme, addressing the key challenges and opportunities which exist for coaches, coach developers, and policy makers alike. It is hoped that structuring the book in this manner will enable readers to understand similar conceptual, theoretical, and practical issues which occur across football coach education programmes globally, while appreciating the importance of context and culture. This book contains a combination of discussion-based chapters (e.g., literature reviews, historical overviews, critical appraisals), alongside chapters examining empirical research projects (e.g., data collected directly by the authors) to stimulate critical reflection and thought amongst readers.

Section 1 aims to introduce the essence and content of the book, while outlining some initial conceptual and practical issues related to coach education broadly, and football coach education more specifically. Following the present chapter (Chapter 1) which provides a rationale for the development of this book, Chapter 2 presents an evolving framework for supporting the development of politically astute football coaches, which draws upon the work of Hartley and colleagues. After critically analysing a range of pertinent issues within football coach education, the key components of Hartley and colleagues’ theorising of political astuteness are defined, before discussing their implications for football coach learning and practice.

In Section 2 the reader’s attention is directed towards high-performance football coach education. Chapter 3 offers an overarching review of empirical research conducted with one of the Scottish Football Association’s (SFA) UEFA Pro Licence cohorts, exploring aspects related to career planning, educational development, and leadership within the context of elite football management. In Chapter 4, the unforgiving culture of professional football coaching in Brazil is highlightled, with the concept of ‘learning organisations’ presented as a potential strategy for football clubs to adopt when looking to enhance internal coach development. Finally, Chapter 5 outlines the current elite football coach education system in Singapore, through the perspectives of various elite football stakeholders (e.g., coaches, coach developers, and sport administrators).

Section 3 explicitly focuses on youth and amateur football coach education provision. Chapter 6 adopts a novel creative fiction method to demonstrate how the evolution and progression of football coach education in England has impacted upon the learning and development of Brian, a fictitious youth coach, to provide an innovative way to highlight the nuances of football coach education. Stemming from two decades of interdisciplinary research and coaching experiences with amateur/grassroots 55–65+ small-sided football in Canada and diverse international settings, Chapter 7 provides a conceptual framework coupled with practical examples for enhancing strategic team and player development in amateur/grassroots 55–65+ small-sided football contexts. In returning to youth football, Chapter 8 utilises principles of secondary analysis to critically review coach education, learning, and support mechanisms for Swedish youth football coaches, while discussing how such provision can be enhanced further.

Section 4 addresses the contemporary issue of understanding meaningful approaches to support the progression of female football coaches. In acknowledging the unique challenges that female coaches face, Chapter 9 discusses both implemented and planned female coach education initiatives and pathways within the Football Association of Ireland (FAI), highlighting how the FAI adopt a constructivist, learner-centred approach when providing female-only coach education. In addition, Chapter 10 focuses on the historical development of women football coaches in South Africa. In addition to analysing international trends in women’s football, the chapter uncovers the history of sport during the apartheid and post-apartheid eras, while contemplating the challenges female coaches face related to coach education within South Africa.

Within Section 5, current football coach education programmes are critically analysed. In Chapter 11, the football coach education provision of Botswana is reviewed, while acknowledging the unique opportunities and challenges that exist for football NGBs operating within developing countries. Chapter 12 includes longitudinal data from the Netherlands exploring the sustainability and implementation of course content over time. The authors of the chapter adopted a bottom-up approach to design and deliver a coach education course to football coaches over a decade ago. Having contacted a selection of football coaches who completed the course, the chapter describes how course content may construct coaching knowledge and practice overtime. Section 5 ends with Chapter 13, which provides an overview of football in Australia, focusing on the advancement of the game, and the development of coaching pathways and coach education. Drawing upon several cross-sectional, longitudinal, and intervention studies conducted in Australia, the chapter also provides a review and critical analysis of research in the field, while introducing the MASTER Coach Development programme.

Section 6 presents findings from empirical research into football coach education, providing ‘lessons learned’ which may be of use to both practitioners and academics. Having identified an issue with the current coach education provision in Norway, Chapter 14 analyses the implementation and evaluation of a coach education initiative among Norwegian grassroots football coaches, which aimed to increase coaches’ ability to strengthen the quality of motivation and the psychosocial functioning among young players. Chapter 15 demonstrates the possible benefits which occur when higher education institutions collaborate with NGBs and organisations. Set within the United States, the chapter analyses a graduate soccer coach education programme delivered via a blended (online-residential) format, by focusing on the pedagogical approaches used within the programme, including problem-based learning, communities of practices, and reflection. Finally, Chapter 16 includes the voices of two female coach developers, who reflect upon their experiences of delivering a participatory action research project and coach education programme to Masters football coaches in Colombia. The authors critically reflect upon their ‘lessons learned’ which relate to gaining respect as women practitioners and researchers in the Colombian culture, giving respect as foreign coach developers, in addition to understanding the importance of facilitating evidence-informed practice to Spanish-speaking male football player-coaches.

Next, Section 7 introduces readers to some of the nuances and challenges involved when attempting to embed pedagogical and technological advancements within football coach education curriculums. To begin, Chapter 17 is based on the premise that effective football coaching should involve accurate recognition of game situations based on football tactics. The authors propose the use of a tactical analysis system in football using a numerical model as a tool to facilitate high-quality discussions among coaches and coach developers within courses in Japan. Chapter 18 outlines US Soccer’s Play-Practice-Play (PPP) model, which draws upon the principles underpinning games-based approaches to coaching. Within the chapter, methods to support the development of coaches seeking to adopt the PPP model are suggested. To finish, Chapter 19 investigates professional and non-professional football coaches’ use of mobile devices within their practice, alongside the factors which influence their usage. Implications to enhance coach education and practice regarding the competent handling of mobile devices and additional technologies are discussed.

Section 8 concludes the book with Chapter 20, which offers some closing reflections on football coach education globally, while presenting an innovative approach forward for practitioners and academics by introducing the concept of rhizomatic learning, derived from the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. The notion of rhizomatic learning is outlined as a possible framework to support the design and delivery of future football coach education provision which overcomes common critiques often cited within the literature.

**Use of the book and intended readership**

This book is designed in a manner which hopefully appeals to a global readership, due to its international focus. The structure of the book enables it to be read in its entirety, exposing readers to a variety of conceptual, theoretical, and practical issues impacting upon football coach education across the world. Despite this, it is appreciated that some chapters will undoubtedly appeal to readers over others, therefore, it is possible for readers to ‘dip in and out’ of this book to explore and understand a contextually bound contemporary issue of interest in greater depth.

Modules explicitly focusing on coach education are becoming frequently embedded within many undergraduate and postgraduate sport coaching degree programmes, while higher education courses specifically geared towards football coaching are increasing. Furthermore, research on coach education, coach learning, and coach development is undoubtedly growing (Callary & Gearity, 2020). Consequently, this book will appeal to students, academics, and researchers with an interest in sport coaching, coach education, and football. Due to the book’s accessibility and emphasis placed on ‘lessons learned’ and practical recommendations, this book will be of value to coaches, coach developers, policy makers, and any stakeholders involved in the design and delivery of football coach education systems. While the book explicitly focuses on coach education programmes within football, there is no doubt that the themes and issues analysed, in addition to the practical recommendations proposed, will be of interest and benefit to individuals from other sporting cultures.

Whoever reads this book and in whatever format they wish, I hope it proves to be an insightful read and supports individuals in understanding the nuances and complexities involved in educating football coaches. Thank you for reading.

**Notes**

1. Throughout this book, the sport of association football will be referred to as football. However, within some chapters soccer is used if that is the most appropriate term within that local context (e.g., Chapters 15 and 18).
2. Grassroots football is a term frequently used to describe youth and adult football which occurs within the participation coaching domain (Lyle & Cushion, 2017). For example, Porter (2019, p. 18) suggests grassroots football is “characterised principally by small football clubs, playing in organised competition at junior level against similar clubs from the same locality in district leagues… such clubs are essentially recreational with members paying to play rather than receiving wages or some other form of remuneration”.
3. Throughout this book, the terms coach developer, coach educator, and tutor are used by chapter contributors. While appreciating the complexity of the role and issues with definitional clarity, each of these terms are used to describe individuals who are involved in the delivery of football coach education provision. The most appropriate term within the local context of each chapter will be used.
4. Launched in 2014, the FA’s England DNA framework reflects their fundamental beliefs in relation to five core elements (values, sport-specific tactics, sport-specific techniques, coaching methodology, physical and psychology support) which directly influences coach education policy and provision across all pathways and levels. There is an expectation that coach developers delivering FA courses will encourage learners to engage with its core elements.

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