

Coaches' Migration: Decisions and Perceived Importance of International Experience

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Abstract

The migration of coaches is a topic that has seen increasing research interest in recent years. Discussions are evolving around the factors driving coaches' migration, their experiences, and perceptions held by other sports stakeholders. This study aimed to explore the decision-making processes of coaches regarding migration and their views on the phenomenon. A total of 68 coaches, both with and without international experience, participated in the study. Data collection involved an online survey comprising closed-ended questions. For data analysis, we employed a One-Way ANOVA to draw comparisons across independent variables. Interestingly, coaches with international experience have been more frequently approached with offers than their counterparts without such experience. Nevertheless, the majority of the coaches did not perceive foreign coaches as essential to sports development. Coaches with international backgrounds expressed a belief that native coaches should exclusively coach their national teams. Overall, coaches did not highly value international placements or experience. These unexpected findings have significant implications for coach training programs globally. The results are further explored in the context of the expertise required to work in a globalised sports setting and interact with stakeholders from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Keywords: Migration; Manager; Sport; Cultural diversity; Transnationalism

The phenomenon of coaches' migration has acquired increased research attention (Borges et al., 2015; Borges et al., 2020; Griggs & Gibbons, 2012; Orłowski et al., 2016a; Orłowski et al., 2016b; Smith, 2016; Taylor, 2010; Wicker et al., 2018). While these studies have inspired discussions, previously centered around athletes (Bullough et al., 2016; Love & Kim, 2011; Maguire, 1999), they began by examining factors behind coaches' migration, their experiences, and perceptions of them by other sports stakeholders. Nevertheless, there's a gap in understanding coaches' actual migration decisions (Orłowski et al., 2016a; Wicker et al., 2018; Rojo et al., 2022) and their self-perception and perception of peers within this context. This distinction is crucial since coaches' migration decisions appear to diverge from the prevailing

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views held by other sports stakeholders. Furthermore, past research has highlighted the need for quantitative studies (Borges et al., 2015; Samuel et al., 2021). While migrant coaches often perceive their roles as pivotal in advancing the sport in host nations (Borges et al., 2015; Sain et al., 2022), local media frequently label them as opportunistic "mercenaries" with weak ties to the sport and culture of their adopted countries (Borges et al., 2022b; Griggs & Gibbons, 2012; Vincent et al., 2006).

Past research has used typologies to categorise the motivations of migrating sports professionals, (Maguire, 1999; Magee & Sugden, 2002; Love & Kim, 2011). These typologies were based on the push-pull theory of migration. This theory focuses on the "push" factors that drive players out of their home countries (e.g., lack of opportunities, economic challenges, or political instability) and "pull" factors that attract them to destination countries (e.g., better salaries, competitive leagues, or advanced training facilities). From these, eight distinct types of migrants have emerged: Mercenary, Cosmopolitan, Settler, Returnee, Exile, Expelled, Ambitionist, and Pioneer (Magee & Sugden, 2002). Interestingly, upon application to elite handball and football coaches, motivations predominantly clustered into three main categories: Ambitionists, Cosmopolitans, and Pioneers (Borges et al., 2015). However, an unexplored dimension remains: how do coaches see themselves within these typologies?

The decision to migrate frequently intertwines with cultural and socio-economic drivers. Social networks, spanning from the early 1900s to the present (Taylor, 2010; Borges et al., 2015), often play a pivotal role. Coaches, like athletes (Elliott & Maguire, 2008; Elliott & Weedon, 2010), frequently use informal recruitment channels rooted in social connections both in their home and adopted nations (Taylor, 2010). Other significant factors include job-related opportunities, the quest for new experiences, competitive reasons, potential for higher income, contract stability, and language proficiency (Orlowski et al., 2016a). Stereotyping of foreign coaches compared to native ones remains a concern. The former are sometimes portrayed as detached mercenaries by host-country media (Griggs & Gibbons, 2012), while the latter are celebrated as patriotic and genuine advocates for their national sport. Efforts must be made to eliminate these biases and educate stakeholders accordingly (Borges et al., 2023).

Cross-cultural training, already adopted by professionals in other sectors (Cushner & Brislin, 1997; Li et al., 2013; Reiche et al., 2014), could be invaluable for migrant coaches. Depending on the chosen method, be it didactic or experiential, such training can provide cognitive understanding or practical exposure to cross-cultural interactions. International exposure definitely raises intercultural skills and awareness (Crowne, 2008; Shannon & Begley, 2008; Engle & Crowne, 2014; Şahin et al., 2014). Such experiences, which might arise from short visits or extended work periods abroad, enable individuals to navigate varied cultural values, languages, and leadership dynamics more effectively (Li et al., 2013). This reciprocal transfer of skills and knowledge, often termed "brain-exchange" (Beaverstock, 2005), has notable implications in sports. As elite coaches increasingly traverse national borders (Smith, 2016), clubs value those with varied experiences spanning playing styles, strategies, and organisational cultures.

Studying the migration decisions and perceptions of coaches is essential to understand why coaches choose to move. This can help sports organisations and educational institutions to develop their coaches. Also, coaches who migrate bring with them relevant knowledge from their home countries. Studying their decisions and perceptions can help shed light on the



differences and similarities in training techniques, strategies, and philosophies across different cultures. The sports bodies can gain insights into the career aspirations and paths of coaches, helping them to better design development programs and to develop strategies to make their environments more welcoming for coaches from different backgrounds. This study aims to dissect coaches' migration-related decisions and perceptions. Key research questions encompass motivations to work abroad, factors influencing such decisions, self-identification with their roles, and overarching views on migration and international experience.

Methods

Participants

A total of 72 individuals participated in the online survey over a 5-month period. Out of these, four datasets were incomplete, leaving 68 validated datasets for data analysis. Of these participants, 60 were male and 8 were female, with ages ranging from 22 to 57 years (mean = 35.02; SD = 7.65). They represented 6 native countries and participated in both individual (e.g., sailing, gymnastics, golf) and team sports (e.g., basketball, football, handball). Of them, 14 had prior international experience as professional coaches. Regarding certification, 26 held levels 1 or 2, while 42 had levels 3 or 4. In terms of education, 19 had less than a higher education qualification, 31 held a higher education degree, and 18 possessed a post-graduate degree or higher.

Variables

The primary independent variable was "international experience" (with or without). Dependent variables covered aspects such as decisions to work abroad, offers received for overseas roles, and perceptions of foreign and native coaches.

Survey Design

The survey, administered online, probed areas like decision-making factors related to migration, perceptions of professional identity, and views on foreign and native coaches. The questions drew inspiration from prior studies on both athlete and coach migration. Three PhD-credentialed experts with extensive experience in sports, coaching education, and migration independently reviewed the survey for relevance and bias mitigation. After incorporating their feedback, the survey was translated into Portuguese using a committee approach translation methodology (Vallerand, 1989; Banville et al., 2000). The final version consisted of 37 questions, covering dichotomous, multiple-choice, and Likert scale formats. Questions explored decision-making processes, self-perception, migration views, and demographic details. The survey was hosted on the LimeSurvey platform and secured approval from the Ethics Committee of the School of Applied Sciences.

Figure 1. Screenshot of the first section of the online survey.

Data analysis

Initial data scrutiny ensured distribution normality, homoscedasticity, and checked for outliers and missing values. Data from the survey's closed-ended questions underwent quantitative analysis using SPSS 26. One-way ANOVA tests were conducted at a significance level of $p < .05$. Effect size determination employed η_p^2 (eta partial squared).

Decision Making

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Have you ever worked abroad as a sports coach? *

Please choose **only one** of the following:

Yes

No

[] **Did you have any offers? ***

Please choose **only one** of the following:

Yes

No

[] **Did you look for work abroad? ***

Please choose **only one** of the following:

Yes

No

[]

What influenced your Decision Making?

(Please think of the factors that influenced your decision to work abroad or stay in your home country)

Select the 3 most important ones. *

Please choose **all** that apply:

Age

Social and economic environment of the country abroad

Social and economic environment of the native country

Recruitment logistics and bureaucracies (e.g. visa)

Financial proposal and benefits (e.g. salary, health insurance)

Living conditions (e.g. housing, transport, school for children)

Professional relationships and network abroad (e.g. managers, coaches, agents)

Professional relationships and network in the native country (e.g. managers, coaches, agents)

Personal relationships and family abroad

Personal relationships and family in the native country

Language and communication abroad (eg, second language, gestures)

Cultural factors (e.g. food, religion)

The status of the sport (e.g. popularity, level of competition)

Professional status (e.g. unemployed, well-employed)

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How satisfied are you with your decision to go or not go abroad? *

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

Very dissatisfied Dissatisfied Unsure Satisfied Very satisfied

Level of Satisfaction:



Results

International Experience and Decision to Work Abroad

Coaches with international experience showed a higher inclination to work abroad (mean = 1.64; SD = 0.5) than their counterparts without such experience (mean = 1.2; SD = 0.41; $F(1, 66) = 11.819, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .543$). They also reported receiving more offers to work abroad (mean = 1.93; SD = 0.27) in comparison to those without international exposure (mean = 1.11; SD = 0.32; $F(1, 66) = 78.304, p = .000, \eta_p^2 = .152$).

Factors Influencing Migration Decisions

Differences emerged regarding the motivations behind decisions to migrate. Coaches with international experience placed greater importance on the social and economic environments of foreign countries (mean = 1.29; SD = 0.47) when compared to those without such experience (mean = 1.07; SD = 0.26; $F(1, 66) = 5.009, p = .029, \eta_p^2 = .071$). Their decisions were also influenced more by professional relationships abroad (mean = 1.71; SD = 0.47) as opposed to coaches without international experience (mean = 1.04; SD = 0.19; $F(1, 66) = 70.363, p = .000, \eta_p^2 = .516$). In contrast, coaches lacking international experience based their decisions more on professional networks in their native countries (mean = 1.26; SD = 0.44) and personal and familial ties (mean = 1.57; SD = 0.50) than their counterparts with international experience (mean = 1.00; SD = 0.00 for professional networks and mean = 1.07; SD = 0.27 for personal ties; $F(1, 66)$ for professional networks = 4.756, $p = .033, \eta_p^2 = .067$ and $F(1, 66)$ for personal ties = 13.118, $p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .166$).

Satisfaction with Migration Decisions

Coaches with international experience expressed greater satisfaction with their migration decisions (mean = 4.07; SD = 1.27) compared to those without (mean = 2.37; SD = 0.78; $F(1, 66) = 39.671, p = .000, \eta_p^2 = .533$).

Table 1. Coaches decision-making factors to migrate or not.

Items	International experience			
	without		with	
	M	SD	M	SD
Age	1.13	0.34	1.14	0.36
The social and economic environment of the country abroad	1.07	0.26	1.29	0.47
The social and economic environment of the native country	1.17	0.38	1.29	0.47
Recruitment logistics and bureaucracies (e.g., visa)	1.11	0.32	1.00	0.00
Financial proposal and benefits (e.g., salary, health insurance)	1.30	0.46	1.29	0.47
Living conditions (e.g., housing, transport, school for children)	1.22	0.42	1.21	0.43
Professional relationships and network abroad (e.g., managers, coaches, agents)	1.04	0.19	1.71	0.47
Professional relationships and network in the native country (e.g., coaches)	1.26	0.44	1.00	0.00
Personal relationships and family abroad	1.11	0.32	1.07	0.27
Personal relationships and family in the native country	1.57	0.50	1.07	0.27
Language and communication abroad (e.g., second language, gestures)	1.24	0.43	1.14	0.36
Cultural factors (e.g., food, religion)	1.02	0.14	1.07	0.27
The status of the sport (e.g., popularity, level of competition)	1.11	0.32	1.21	0.43
Professional status (e.g., unemployed, well-employed)	1.37	0.49	1.29	0.47

Professional Identity

Internationally experienced coaches identified as being more adaptable to new professional environments. In contrast, those without international experience predominantly viewed

themselves as promoters and developers of their sport. When expressing a desire to work in their native countries, coaches without international experience showed a stronger preference (mean = 1.33; SD = 0.48) compared to those with such experience (mean = 1.07; SD = 0.27; $F(1, 66) = 3.893, p = .053, \eta p2 = .056$).

Table 2. Conceptions on professional identity

Items	International experience			
	without		with	
	M	SD	M	SD
<i>Nomadic</i>				
I am someone who is always moving between countries	1.13	0.34	1.14	0.36
<i>Pioneer</i>				
I am someone who wants to promote and develop the sport	1.65	0.48	1.64	0.50
<i>Mercenary</i>				
I am someone who seeks fast profits and lucrative deals	1.07	0.26	1.00	0.00
<i>Cosmopolitan</i>				
I am someone who seeks multicultural experiences	1.20	0.41	1.36	0.50
<i>Returnee</i>				
I am someone who wants to return to my native country/culture	1.00	0.00	1.07	0.27
<i>Settler</i>				
I am someone who wants to remain in the country abroad	1.17	0.38	1.07	0.27
<i>Ambitionist</i>				
I am someone who wants to have a professional career	1.48	0.50	1.57	0.51
<i>Expelled</i>				
I am someone who was forced to migrate due to sport-related problems	1.00	0.00	1.00	0.00
<i>Native settler</i>				
I am someone who likes to work in my native country	1.33	0.48	1.07	0.27
<i>Monocultural</i>				
I am someone who does not like multicultural experiences	1.02	0.14	1.00	0.00
<i>Cultural chameleon</i>				
I am adaptable to new professional environments	1.56	0.50	1.79	0.42

Conceptions on Coaches and Migration

No significant statistical differences were found between the two groups concerning perceptions about foreign and native coaches, the broader context of coaches' migration, or the value of international experience. However, it's notable that both groups were sceptical about the importance of foreign coaches in native countries. Furthermore, while coaches with international experience leaned towards native coaches exclusively coaching national teams, both groups were ambivalent about the essentiality of international experience for coaches.



Table 3. Conceptions on foreign and native coaches, coaches' migration, and international experience

Items	International experience			
	without		with	
	M	SD	M	SD
<i>Foreign Coaches</i>				
Coaches who work abroad are valued in their native countries	2.09	1.12	2.21	1.37
Coaches who work abroad are valued in their countries abroad	2.13	1.18	2.07	1.33
Coaches who work abroad are the coaches of the new global era	2.06	1.09	2.43	1.16
Coaches who work abroad are more successful than native coaches	2.59	1.09	2.57	0.94
Coaches who work abroad are more likely to work in higher leagues	2.09	1.07	2.43	0.94
Coaches who work abroad work mainly with stakeholders of their nationality	2.04	0.95	2.29	0.82
Coaches who work abroad create internal groups of nationalities in their teams	2.52	1.00	2.43	0.85
<i>Native Coaches</i>				
Coaches who work in their native country should be the only ones coaching their national team	3.15	1.48	3.57	1.55
Coaches who work in their native country work mainly with national stakeholders	2.22	1.33	2.21	1.31
Coaches who work in their native country create internal groups of nationalities in their teams	2.41	1.14	2.57	1.09
<i>Coaches' migration</i>				
Coaches' migration in general is good for sport development	1.98	1.34	2.36	1.50
Coaches' migration, in general, is good for the development of the sport of the country abroad	2.13	1.35	2.57	1.45
Coaches' migration, in general, is good for the development of the sport of the native country	2.31	1.26	2.64	1.34
<i>International Experience</i>				
I think it is important for coaches to work abroad to develop their professional career	2.83	1.31	3.07	1.21
I think it is important for coaches to follow training and education about sport migration	2.96	1.33	3.36	1.08
I think it is important for coaches to do a placement abroad as part of their coaching training	2.11	0.98	2.36	0.93
I think it is important for coaches to have sports experiences abroad	2.85	1.45	3.00	1.24

Discussion

The findings from this study highlight the significance of both individual and social factors in coaches' decisions to migrate. While this mirrors existing research on athletes and coaches, our results investigate deeper into the nuances of these decisions.

Coaches' choices seem to be driven largely by social factors like professional networks and the socio-economic environment of the potential host country when deciding to migrate. Conversely, decisions against migration are more rooted in personal considerations like familial ties. Significantly, the influence of language and communication barriers also stood out, suggesting potential benefits for coaches in obtaining language training to facilitate their migration (Borges et al., 2022a; Borges et al., 2023).

While previous research has shown that football and handball coaches value their overseas experiences, our study found that coaches without international experience disagree with this view. This perhaps implies an underlying desire to work abroad, which might be constrained by their current personal or professional situations. The evident disparity in job offers between coaches with and without international experience likely also plays a role, hinting at the

influential power of established international networks (Borges et al., 2015; Orłowski et al., 2016b).

Our results reveal a notable divergence between the actual motivations of migrant coaches and the perceptions held about them by their peers. Participating coaches held predominantly negative views regarding the contributions of foreign coaches to sport development, aligning with media stereotypes of foreign coaches as inferior to their national counterparts (Griggs & Gibbons, 2012; Vincent et al., 2006). Yet, past research has identified migrant coaches as being largely motivated by ambitions to develop their sport in multicultural environments (Borges et al., 2015). These contrasting perspectives underscore the persistence of biased views that favour native coaches over their foreign counterparts.

The data suggests that the coaching community might be overlooking the increasing globalisation of elite coaching roles. With elite clubs increasingly seeking coaches familiar with diverse playing styles and cultures (Smith, 2016), and evidence from other fields suggesting the benefits of international experience for professionals (Shannon & Begley, 2008; Li et al., 2013), there's a compelling case for the value of cross-cultural coaching experiences.

This study sheds light on the complex factors influencing coaches' migration decisions and underscores the importance of challenging prevailing biases in the coaching profession. It highlights the need for further research and potential initiatives to bridge the gap between perception and reality when it comes to international coaching experiences.

Conclusion

The primary objective of this study was to explore the factors influencing coaches' decisions to migrate, alongside their perceptions concerning the broader phenomenon of coach migration. Our findings delineate that coaches with international experience display a stronger inclination to work abroad, receiving more job offers in comparison to their counterparts without such experience. Factors like professional networks abroad, socio-economic climates, financial propositions, and professional stature greatly influence the migration decision. On the other side, personal relationships in the native country, professional stature, and monetary benefits predominantly determine the decision against migration. Interestingly, coaches with international experience not only displayed contentment with their migration decisions but also perceived themselves as adaptable to diverse professional settings. In contrast, coaches without this experience showed dissatisfaction, identifying more with the desire to enhance and propagate their sport domestically.

In terms of perceptions about foreign versus native coaches and the overarching idea of coach migration, a consensus emerged across groups against the notion of foreign coaches being pivotal for sport development. Those with international experience leaned towards the exclusivity of native coaches leading national teams. Both categories neither fully endorsed nor rejected the idea that international experience is essential for coaches. Placements abroad as part of coaching training received low importance.

The implications of these findings are particularly relevant for global coaching training programs. As coach migration becomes more prevalent, it's imperative that training initiatives underscore the variety of advantages arising from skills exchange across borders. Such exchanges not only serve as tools for knowledge dissemination but also catalyse meaningful dialogues about how global knowledge circulation can enhance sports. Given the bidirectional



nature of coach migrations, cultural training should be prioritised for both migrating and domestic coaches.

However, this study is not without its limitations. The use of a relatively modest sample size lends an exploratory nature to the research. Subsequent investigations would benefit from a larger sample, investigating deeper into training requirements and assessing cultural intelligence. Moreover, dissecting the influence of variables like gender, age, academic credentials, and coaching level could offer a more nuanced understanding of the intricacies of coach migration. Future work could also benefit from longitudinal designs, focusing on the impact of prolonged international experience or the outcomes of implementing cultural training programs on a coach's cultural intelligence.

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