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# Challenges to Fitness and Coaching During Covid-19

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**Abstract** *COVID-19 pandemic has halted fast-forwarding activities of the world. Everything has been confined to homes with limited physical activity. The imposition of lockdowns has paralyzed activities and public interaction. Consequently, physical fitness has been disadvantaged compromising public health. Restrictions of COVID-19 also put down coaching and sports. Physical training and interaction between players and coaches are significant to improve players' performance. The sports sector affected by pandemics due to the low-level education of the players and coaches and lacking knowledge of modern training programs. Technological illiteracy has also added to the adversity, preventing players from getting effective benefits from online training programs. This study explores the challenges to coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research also explores a comparison between direct coaching and online training in this regard. The research emphasizes the scope of maintaining physical fitness during pandemics. Findings of the interview conclude that Covid-19 has compromised the coaching and sports performance of athletes, and concepts like distance training remain ineffective due to the purely physical nature of the matter.*

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## Introduction

This study explores challenges faced to maintain physical fitness and to coach in sports during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The end of 2019 left an outbreak of pandemics called COVID-19. This respiratory syndrome originated in China's Wuhan city. However, within a short period of time, it spread into the whole world with a number of causalities (Zu, et al., 2020). The WHO's declaration of a world health emergency led to the imposition of worldwide lockdowns limiting public interaction (World Health Organization., 2020). Therefore, the year 2020 began with a strange situation around the world. This condition gradually caused sports to freeze, postponing different sports events and banning training and practices as well (Corsini, Bisciotti, Eirale, & Volpi, 2020).

The collective decision across the world resulted when isolation or least interaction of the people was perceived as the only solution. In such circumstances, along with spectators health of athletes, coaches and trainers were prioritize. Despite financial and social chaos caused by the pandemics, players and coaches were asked to leave all practices and training sessions to abide by isolation rules imposed by the government. However isolation, definitely, doesn't ensure normal training of players posing certain fitness issues for them (Jukic, et al., 2020).

Similarly, lack of systematic training, absence of proper interaction between players and coaches, unsuitable training conditions caused by pandemic has adverse effects on the sports performance of athletes. Apart from these adversities, of COVID-19 situation can be turned into a useful means to improve the fitness of players (Chen, et al., 2020).

To cope with the dynamic prevalence of the COVID-19 pandemic, certain adaptive decisions at national and international levels are

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required. Being consistent with the existing circumstances, personal, social and organizational adaptations can serve the purpose (Adam, 2020).

Physical education experts are more likely to familiarize the students with technological gears like the internet, social media networks, video games, virtual reality replications etc. moreover, tools like laptops, iPad, mobiles tablets can be incorporated to boost the learning of physical exercises (Krause, O'Neil, & Jones, 2019 ).

Similarly, such an adaptive method can be helpful to continue coaching and training of physical activities like self-defence. For this purpose, a planned and effective model of distance learning (online) is required (Koerner & Staller, 2020).

However, physical activities like coaching and training "self-defence" appear to the misfit in the substitutional means of virtual learning as these are entirely based on bodily movements and physical participation. Therefore there exists confusion at social and professional levels, for the notion of distance-learning continues to be a vague idea in coaching physical exercises (Koerner & Staller, 2020).

## Research Objectives

This study focuses on the following research objectives;

- To explore the difficulties faced by athletes and coaches during COVID-19 regarding sports education.
- To analyze the use of technology for coaching in the context of physical distancing in Pakistan.

## Research Questions

RQ1: How did COVID affect coaching and sports education in Pakistan?

RQ2: Is technology an alternative for physical training and coaching in Pakistan during COVID-19?

## Literature Review

"Training reversibility", loss of training, either stops or reduces physical training, damaging formerly developed training adaptations. In this way, athletic ability and performance are adversely affected (Hawley & Burke, 1998).

While there is a collective decision to impose lockdown and minimize physical interaction to slow the corona pandemic, the consequent measures bring a number of challenges for different areas of life. (Robert-Koch-Institut (RKI), 2020). Particularly physical training like coaching self-defence is badly affected by the present restricted social interaction (Andreucci, 2020). For it is highly dependent on the direct physical interaction of the participants (Krabben, 2019).

Similarly, even the easing restrictions of physical interaction during COVID-19 are insufficient to resume physical training and coaching effectively. Yet, the prediction of returning to regular training like pre-COVID days is still uncertain, especially when new waves are expected. The situation could lead to prolonged restrictions on direct training endangering physical coaching (Heiden & Buchholz, 2020).

There are a variety of ways in which coaching and training of the players are done all across the world. By employing certain techniques, coaches contribute to a greater extent to improve the performance of the players. However, the present situation of Covid-19 has altered the mode of training altogether. Therefore the need to adopt such techniques that can help to cope with the current situation. There is required to train such coaches and trainers that can still impart players with values and other sports-oriented skills to keep the course of training and coaching with effectiveness. Such mandates are badly needed, especially in the present situation where restrictions and physical distance has strained the coaching patterns and sports performance. Such standards can help the coaches to make them well prepared for their present as well as future responsibilities towards training sportsmen and keeping up their motivation high. However, conducting special sessions for the coaching and training as well as coach education programs have become difficult during pandemic (Santos, Cardoso, Pereira, & Strachan, 2021).

The central most responsibility of the coaches is to familiarize such development and practices that can assist training and introduce the concepts of self-defence among the civilian as well police domains. Therefore for this purpose, the learning state of trainees needs to be addressed in accordance with their level of motivation, knowledge and personal interest (Koerner & Staller, 2020).

Across the colleges and polytechnic foundations are responsible for developing mentor preparation programs in a wide range of


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nations. In the Portuguese context, for example, mentor preparation programs are communicated in a variety of ways. Some mentor preparation programs are distributed by public and commonplace game associations, for example, sports leagues and affiliations. Furthermore, colleges and polytechnic organizations can provide mentors through graduate and post-graduate projects in the field of game sciences. This is the most common methodology in the Country of Europe, but other countries also use it, such as the United States. (Gaion, et al., 2020).

Given the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, there is a need to reflect on the advancements made to mentor preparing programs in the Portuguese setting, which have sometimes been unfavorable for applicant mentors' learning or incredibly creative and relevant. These choices will critically affect (a) What mentors realize inside the Covid19 pandemic – they will be mentors and expected to mentor in a unique situation while youth have complex formative necessities; (b) Their capacity to encourage sport-explicit abilities and abilities all through the Covid-19 pandemic and past; and (c) Youth encounters and results now and later on (Santos, Cardoso, Pereira, & Strachan, 2021).

Currently, it is obvious that the Covid-19 pandemic will have negative short- and long-term specifically on their learning, emotional well-being, and public participation (Chaturvedi, Kumar, & Singh, 2021).

As a result, the most difficult task for coaching is to assist adolescents in developing emotional regulation and empathy are examples of psychosocial abilities, which are critical for teenagers attempting to grow up in the Covid-19 epidemic. Today's youth, for example, are exposed to a variety of environments, including e-learning classes and a variety of chores at home (such as assisting parents with the care of a younger brother), as well as a variety of social situations dealing with other obstacles posed by the Covid19 epidemic, which are constantly changing. It's worth noting that athletes from Generation Z have shown a lack of social skills and resilience, which could be exacerbated by the Covid-19 epidemic, as well as a lack of face-to-face interaction with coaches, classmates, teachers, and schools. The development of psychosocial abilities is thought to be essential for improved mental health and prosocial conduct (Gould, Nalepa, & Mignano, 2019).

Athletes also have a variety of additional developmental needs, for example, lacking physical fitness, which coaches should address. Coaches that participated in Covid-19 pandemic coach training programmes still need to understand how to assist athletes in achieving a variety of goals. Such a notion has driven coach development programmes in rethinking their learning approaches and reorganizing their curricula (Dunton, Do, & Wang, 2020).

This is a critical distinction since stakeholders may have differing views on what constitutes learning, affecting their decisions. As a result, a question must be asked: Is delivering courses sufficient for meaningful learning? Coaches that were trained during coaches in the Covid-19 pandemic will continue to be qualified, and they will require to be able to add to their athletes' development. Today's challenges could even be described as urgent and difficult. University professors, coach developers, and other stakeholders must provide adequate support to these applicant coaches. As a result, it's important to talk about how courses have been or could be presented. Coach training programmes that are partially or entirely provided asynchronously courses with non-simultaneous or continuous sessions should be carefully chosen. There is an e-learning culture in nations like Many coach training programmes and programmes are already available online in Canada and the United States of America (Strachan, MacDonald, & Cote, 2016).

However, caution is required in nations; for example, in Portugal, e-learning is not frequently used and is a rare tool for coach training programmes. In other words, it may be unrealistic to expect candidate coaches are able to find resources on their own, appraise them, practise reflexive skills without synchronous coaching, and therefore develop. The major issue of the goal of asynchronous course formats is to provide a solid platform for students to participate in meaningful activities assignments without direct teacher supports. It emphasized that, due to the prominence of technology in our everyday lives, society in general, and candidate coaches in particular, are today confronted with the issue of ubiquitous information (Roberts, 2019).

However, in many specific situations, mentor preparation necessitates practical learning opportunities and "learning by doing" (i.e., instructing and playing a given game), which

has been a critical component for excellent preparation. As a result, internet learning has limitations, and practical learning may be required. The balance of online and practical learning should be maintained while foreordained answers and crystallized convictions should not dim partners' decisions and dynamics; they should be considered in a unique setting and in light of competitor mentors' requirements. Furthermore, the teaching method, funding, and strategy should collaborate with competitor mentors' well-being (i.e., significant mentor learning results) as a primary concern, which is a test during the competition—the pandemic of Covid-19. However, academic convictions and feelings should not be restricted or misconstrued because of monetary or other interests (Roberts, 2019).

Much of the time, the Covid-19 pandemic opens up opportunities to have consultations about the best academic methodology and systems used to assist mentors in figuring out how to cultivate competitor improvement, which is a good thing. These segments are critical for effective mentor preparation programs. As previously stated, simply directing applicant mentors to materials is unlikely to address the issue of sufficient assistance for significant learning, particularly in the current situation where distance learning is the primary basis of learning Following that, we ask college educators and mentor designers to consolidate a variety of informal and non-formal learning methodologies, such as in-class conversation discussions, online training networks, and Include competitor mentors in reflections on real-world issues and course material application just as effectively (Dunton, Do, & Wang, 2020).

A coach, for example, may prepare sessions and incorporate tactics to promote sport-specific values and skills. This workshop might be introduced to other aspiring coaches; starting discussions on how to incorporate such ideas in competitive youth sports must be implemented in a methodical manner. These revelations have far-reaching ramifications for students who must prepare to adopt learner-centred approaches and accept these demands (Dunton, Do, & Wang, 2020).

The basis and preparation climate of police and non-military personnel self-preservation have changed as a result of the states of lockdown and distance guidelines. Self-defence practices and police use of power allude to relational danger and struggle elements in the open arena, which may be influenced and transformed by contact limitation proportions, for example, The following new situations and related consistency are possible as a result of Covid-19: (a) spatial confinement could prompt an increase in occurrences of aggressive behavior at home and less accessible help administrations. The distinguishing proof of these and other logical and situational boundaries of common struggles provides explicit insights for the preparation climate of police and non-military personnel self-preservation practices to extend and separate the extent of what to be instructed, for example, adapting to explicit crown situations within the portrayed limitations. (Usher, Bhullar, Durkin, Gyamf, & Jackson, 2020).

However, sighting health hazards, especially physical fitness, it is suggested to formulate such cautious ways that ensure a return to normal ways of training and coaching. As supported by the aforementioned studies, technological adaptations have limited implications in terms of physical training and coaching same applies to Pakistan with more adversity. This study intends to fill the prevalent research gap in this regard.

## Methodology

For this study, a qualitative method has been applied. The interview method provided an in-depth stance of the sports coaches and players on the topic. An open-ended questionnaire comprising of ten questions was used as a tool of the study.

### Key Observations

Different key observations have been made during the interview. It has been observed that respondents of the interview mentioned different challenges faced in overall fitness maintenance as well coaching and training in this regard. All the respondents agreed unanimously that technology could never serve as an alternate means of coaching. Rather coaches and players suggested that despite prolonged restriction of COVID-19 direct training is the only way to ensure effective physical training. Therefore such policies should be made to handle situations with the least adversity towards coaching and physical fitness.

## Results and Findings

Different sub-categories were formulated to analyze the responses of the participants of the interview. All categories and sub-categories were carefully developed to meet the purpose of the study.

Table 1. Summary of Categories and Sub-Categories of Interview

| Categories | Sub-categories |
|---|---|
| Sports education and physical restrictions | • Postponing sports events<br>• Shutting down training camps<br>• Isolation rules<br>• Limited space in the home |
| Distance training and coaching | • Online interaction<br>• Ineffective coaching |
| Detraining of players | • Passive life routine<br>• Detachment from normal training sessions |
| COVID-19 and sports performance | • Lack of concertation<br>• Limited practice routine<br>• Loss of determination |
| Comparisons between normal coaching and distance coaching | • Technological illiteracy of players and coaches<br>• Poor access to technological resources |

### Sports Education and Physical Restrictions

All respondents unanimously believed that COVID-19 had brought disastrous impacts on sports. Different national and international events were postponed. Training camps and coaching sessions were closed, resulting in a lack of poor physical fitness of the players. As a direct interaction between player and coaches have been lost, the training routine went missing. The respondents also related that since they have to follow restrictions imposed on physical interaction, their physical fitness has been compromised. *"Coaching is not possible under lockdown",* responded one of the players among participants. Proper coaching and is only possible with direct interaction between players and coaches, impossible due to COVID-19 restrictions.

### Distance Training and Coaching

Physical restrictions of COVID-19 have promoted distance interaction among the people, but respondents believed that the idea of distance learning is invalid for coaching and training of players. They stressed that for proper training, there must be a direct interaction between coaches and players, which is impossible in distance training sessions through technology. Distance training leads to ineffective coaching with minimal outcomes, following the suggested SOP's disabled proper coaching of the players during a pandemic. Maintaining distance and getting training from coaches is something unusual and ineffective in nature. Similarly, teamwork spirit is also lost while practising in isolation with no interaction with team members.

### Detraining of Players

Noted in a study, "The concept of detraining refers to the total or partial loss of the training-induced adaptation achieved through training" (Mujika & Padilla, 2001).

The pandemic proved to be the carrier of isolation and least public interaction. Among others, sportsmen and coaches suffered to a greater extent. The respondents of the interview agreed upon the notion that isolation caused detraining of the players. Players develop a training routine and avoid missing it, but their routine underwent distortion. Confined to homes, they adopted a passive domestic routine. They also unanimously supported that an athlete may undergo transitions during their course of a career, health issues, sports injuries, and many other factors can lead to detraining, but nothing could beat the role of COVID-19 in this regard. For players "stay home, stay safe" approach brought adverse consequences.

### COVID-19 and Sports Performance

Restrictions brought about by the pandemic negatively affected the performance of players. Respondent agreed that insufficient physical

training and coaching reduced the physical potential of the players leading to minimal performance reliability. The passive life routine of athletes distorted their determination and passion for productive performance. Players agreed that chances of failure had been increased in these circumstances. A lot of distractions caused by isolation and physical restrictions discouraged athletes to try hard to win.

## Comparisons between Direct Coaching and Distance Coaching

While comparing direct coaching during normal circumstances, and distance coaching amid the corona pandemic, participants of the interview preferred direct coaching techniques. They believed that effective coaching requires direct interaction with coaches and other team members, impossible during a pandemic. They asserted that no doubt distance learning ightbe effective for other things, but it can never serve as a substitute to physical coaching for sports. Close mutual interaction is required to practice sports events not possible during normal circumstances. As for as distance learning is concerned, the concept is often associated with technological assistance, but in Pakistan, coaches and players either lack in technological literacy or are unequipped. Similarly respondents also believed that in Pakistan technology is not so advanced or upgraded to ensure effective coaching for athletes. Access to technology is also huge trouble in this regard. However despite technological advancement it can never replace direct coaching methods.

## Conclusion

Coaching and training is effective way not only to maintain physical fitness of athletes but also yields good performance. However Covid-19 pandemic disrupted the course physical coaching and training inducing negative outcomes in this regard. Imposition of lockdowns, postponing sports events, halting coaching camps and confinement to homes make things difficult for athletes and their coaches. Based on the findings of the interview, this study concludes that pandemic has brought multiple challenge with regards to coaching and sports performance of the players. Distance learning, technological illiteracy unavailability, detraining of athletes and following physical restrictions have led to poor quality of coaching. Coaching is entirely physical in nature lack of direct physical interaction or limited physical collaboration can never meant the purpose of coaching. Distance learning (online) is a vague idea when it comes to physical coaching and sports training. No substitute can be as effective as the retrieval of the physical training and coaching system. Therefore direct coaching need to be resumed with systematic and planned approaches to avoid adversity in sports caused by Covid-19 pandemic.

## Limitation of the Study

- Since a qualitative method (i.e. interview) has been applied personal bias of the respondents should not be ignored.
- Response of one participant can affect the opinion of other respondents.
- One characteristic of the respondents may induce certain judgment about the response.

## Recommendations

- The proposition of distance training session and limiting the number of participants can help the situation with greater effectiveness.
- Personal training session and home based coaching can also produce contractive effects with regards to present situation of distorted training and coaching.

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