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Developing cultural intelligence in sport: A qualitative study of coaches' perceptions of cross-cultural training

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ABSTRACT

Coaches worldwide are required to interact frequently with people from different cultures. This can create some personal and professional challenges for coaches working with foreign athletes. Coaches' training programmes have the responsibility to give them the right skills and prepare them to work in a global sports market, which involves several cross-cultural interactions. A cross-cultural training programme for sports coaches was implemented with 56 coaches from a Portuguese-speaking country. This research focuses on the qualitative evaluation of a cross-cultural training programme, using Thematic Analysis and NVivo software. The themes identified in the qualitative analysis were: a recommendation of training to other coaches; the importance of the coaching role; the important role of cultural training; the importance of growing as an individual and as a coach; and a recommendation for the training to be part of the coaching courses. The themes related to the Reflective Practice were the following: the experience with different cultures; learning from the cultural experience; and the importance of planning cultural experience beforehand. Future studies should consider recruiting more coaches with international experience during their careers. Interviews or focus groups should also be considered to get more in-depth information about the coaches' perceptions of cross-cultural training.

KEYWORDS: cultural competence; coaching practice; professional development; coach education; qualitative inquiry.

INTRODUCTION

Coaches worldwide are required to interact frequently with people from different cultures (Borges et al., 2020), and they need to adjust to different coaching systems (Lara-Bercial et al., 2020). This can create some personal and professional challenges for coaches working in a foreign country or working in their native country with foreign athletes (Borges et al., 2015; Borges, Rosado, & Oliveira, 2022; Kerr & Moore, 2015). Coaches working in a foreign country are required to adjust to cultural differences, language barriers, and unfamiliar sporting structures. Those coaching foreign athletes in their native country face challenges in integrating diverse training methodologies while ensuring inclusivity and the adaptation of athletes to local sporting contexts. However, the concept of cultural difference extends beyond nationality, and distinct cultural identities may exist within the same national or regional contexts. The concept of cultural intelligence (CQ) gained attention as the capability to respond effectively to different cultures (Borges et al., 2024; Borges, Rosado, Lobinger, et al., 2022; Maderer et al., 2014). A lack of cultural intelligence among coaches may result in miscommunication, ineffective leadership, and an inability to promote an inclusive and supportive environment for athletes from diverse backgrounds. In fact, some coaches often struggle to adjust their knowledge and skills to new cultural environments (Samuel et al., 2021; Tao et al., 2019). In this regard, coaches' training programmes have the responsibility to give them the right skills and prepare them to work in a global sport market, which involves several cross-cultural interactions (Woodburn et al., 2023). Cultural intelligence, as the capability of a person to respond effectively to different cultures and countries, is more than just cultural awareness (Earley & Ang, 2003; Earley & Peterson, 2004). According

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to Early and Ang (2003), cultural intelligence consists of four dimensions: metacognition, cognition, motivation, and behaviour. Metacognitive cultural intelligence is a person's capability to be culturally conscious during interactions with individuals from a different culture, which includes awareness, planning, and checking. Cognitive cultural intelligence refers to a person's knowledge about the cultural aspects of a country, which includes an understanding of the cultural systems, cultural values, language, and leadership. Motivational cultural intelligence is the person's interest in interacting with people from a different culture, which includes intrinsic/extrinsic elements and self-efficacy. Behavioural cultural intelligence is the capability to adjust actions when interacting with people from a different culture, which is based on the non-verbal, verbal, and speech adaptation in interactions involving other people from a different culture (Van Dyne et al., 2012).

Cultural training has a positive impact on people when interacting with different cultures and countries (Black & Mendenhall, 1990) by providing them with the necessary cross-cultural communication skills, which allows them to recognise both differences and similarities among cultural groups. It is seen as a way of helping people display suitable behaviours, deal with unforeseen events, manage potential conflicts, and create realistic expectations before relocation (Reiche et al., 2014). According to previous studies with university students (Bhawuk & Brislin, 2000; Gohi et al., 2022; Littrell & Salas, 2005; Moon et al., 2012; Ott & Michailova, 2016; Reichard et al., 2015), training interventions and international experience have a positive impact on all aspects of cultural intelligence, particularly those interventions based on experimental approaches that include face-to-face contact (MacNab, 2012; MacNab et al., 2012). The experiential CQ training developed by MacNab (2012) is based on seven stages. The first three stages involve awareness, for the understanding of key concepts (e.g., culture, CQ) using lectures, reading, and discussions. The fourth stage is related to experience, which includes an opportunity to engage with the topic using meetings to discuss it. The fifth stage is internationalisation, which involves a reflection on the experience. The sixth stage is related to communication, with a synthesis of the experience and an opportunity to receive feedback about the learning outcomes. In the seventh stage, social sharing, there is a group discussion that provides an opportunity for a forum to share thoughts about the experiences.

Similar approaches that do not include face-to-face contact had a negative impact on some aspects of cultural intelligence, such as cognitive and metacognitive cultural intelligence (Fischer, 2011). An adequate training programme should not focus on developing cultural awareness and skills but also on improving the overall knowledge of relevant topics, such as the legal and economic systems (Cushner & Brislin, 1997). Raising awareness is key as it helps to identify how peoples' interactions and perceptions are influenced by their own biased views and values. Berardo and Deardorff (2012) provide introductory activities focused on understanding cultural differences. The work of Hofstede (2001), alongside the Bennett Model of cultural competence (Bennett, 1986), has been used as the basis to inform people (particularly university students and expatriates in the business sector) on how to respond adequately to other cultures. Considering that coaches are currently working in a global market, which includes those who are working abroad or in their native countries with multicultural teams, these models should be included in their training programmes. The Hofstede model of national culture is made up of six dimensions: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, long/short-term orientations, and indulgence/restraint. The Bennett scale (Bennett, 1986) was developed to explain the reactions and behaviours people adopt when facing different cultures and describes six different phases of cultural competence: denial, defence, minimisation, acceptance, adaptation, and integration. Language skills are also central to better communication, and this seems to be consensual in the literature. However, Reiche et al. (2014) questioned whether the training programme should be delivered in English or whether it would be best to adopt the language of the country in which the sessions are being hosted. The authors refer to language choice in cross-cultural training programmes, specifically whether English should be the default or whether the host country's language would be more appropriate. They highlighted this issue as a critical consideration in programme design, noting that language choice can significantly influence participant engagement, comprehension, and cultural integration. Based on this, it is important to assess the linguistic context and participant profiles when determining the language of delivery. Knowledge about cultural values and national traditions is also crucial (Livermore & Van Dyne, 2015). Given the variety of backgrounds, cultural differences and languages spoken, it would be unrealistic to expect that everyone would have an in-depth knowledge of the cultural values of all the different countries and be able to speak any language, hence the importance of cultural training to fill in those gaps. Also, while national culture may offer a shared framework of values, individual cultural identities are often shaped by diverse regional, ethnic, and personal factors. Cultural diversity within national boundaries also presents significant challenges and opportunities for coaches.

Regarding training approaches, these can be categorised as experiential or didactic, depending on the method chosen (Cushner & Brislin, 1997). The didactic approaches focus on the cognitive understanding of the concepts related to cross-cultural interaction. Examples include lectures, videos, and culture assimilator exercises. Traditionally, didactic training has been provided by experts on cross-cultural training, but former expatriates and host country colleagues have also been suggested as adequate facilitators to deliver these sessions (Reiche et al., 2014). The experiential approaches involve people learning by practice and trainees receiving feedback from their mentors along the way. Examples are secondments in a foreign country, meetings in a foreign country, or intercultural workshops. Also, new technologies such as the use of computer software and the internet (Reiche at al., 2014) have played a crucial role in this area. It is worth noting that training approaches should consider all the stages of an international assignment (pre-, during, and post-assignment) and should also include all the members involved in the assignment (assignee, family, and host country colleagues). For instance, during these stages, it would be helpful for assignees and their partners to attend seminars on repatriation and get individual mentoring to help them develop their career plan. Cross-cultural training was traditionally delivered exclusively through formal lectures containing detailed facts and information about cultural differences. However, whilst this type of training can be useful, its effectiveness could be compromised when people relocate to other cultures. In fact, some authors questioned this approach and suggested a more experiential training approach (MacNab et al., 2012).

Coaching training in various foreign contexts could inform the development of cross-cultural training directed at sports professionals. Several studies provided some indications on the approaches used when delivering training to sports coaches (Camiré et al., 2020; Falcão et al., 2017; Santos et al., n.d. ; Taylor et al., 2023; Turgeon et al., 2020). The delivery of online training has been found to be successful according to the views of its participants, due to its flexibility (Santos et al., n.d.). It has also been proven to be relevant to improve coaches' relationships with their athletes (Turgeon et al., 2020) and to help them learn about how to teach their athletes life skills (Camiré et al., 2020). In some cases, the training had a duration of two hours, using group discussions, videos, practical coaching examples, and learning from empirical studies (Falcão et al., 2017). According to the authors, this approach is suggested to increase youth sport coaches' competencies to use humanistic coaching. Reflective practice has also been used after the sessions to understand coaches' experiences of implementing the content that has been delivered (Clements & Morgan, 2015). Also, coaches have been using online approaches to coach their athletes (Taylor et al., 2023), which could mean that they are familiarised with this approach. It is also important to notice that coach education programmes are currently giving less attention to cross-cultural components in their training (Zakrajsek et al., 2015). This is the case for the components delivered in the coach education in Portugal, which are focused on a general component, a sport-specific component and an internship component (Resende et al., 2016). It seems that the programme does not include components that could support the coaches to interact with sports stakeholders from different cultures, when working abroad or even in their native country. Something also to consider is that a coach education programme in Portugal could be different from a coach education programme in China (Chen & Chen, 2022) or in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa (Hassanin & Light, 2014).

In the context of sports coaching, CQ seems to be relevant to prepare coaches for the complexities of globalised sport, where interactions with athletes, colleagues, and institutions from diverse backgrounds are inevitable (Ryba et al., 2016). Sports coaching is embedded within socio-cultural structures, meaning that effective cross-cultural training programmes should provide coaches with practical strategies for adaptation, communication, and leadership in multicultural environments (Schinke & McGannon, 2015). Theoretical models, such as Hofstede's cultural dimensions and Earley and Ang's CQ framework, offer valuable insights into how cognitive, motivational, and behavioural components of CQ influence coaching effectiveness (Earley & Ang, 2003). Training programmes must ensure that these theoretical constructs are effectively translated into practical applications, guaranteeing that concepts such as cultural intelligence, cognitive adaptability, and intercultural communication are not merely abstract but directly applicable to real-world coaching environments, practice-based learning that equips coaches with the skills to face cross-cultural interactions dynamically.

Overall, cross-cultural training for sports coaches should take into consideration what has been done regarding the studies on coach education, so it can be an effective process to develop their cultural intelligence. In this way, coaches would have the opportunity to apply the cross-cultural skills they learned in the training sessions in their daily interactions with sports stakeholders from different cultures. This level of exposure will help them develop their cultural capabilities (Ang et al., 2007), impacting their cultural intelligence positively. However, the impact of these experiences relies on individuals' willingness to engage in thoughtful reflection and take meaningful action

based on their understanding (Van Dyne & Ang, 2009). It is important to note that studies on cross-cultural training tailored for sports professionals are lacking, and there is a need to design and assess new approaches in this specific area. The aim of this research was to implement and evaluate a cross-cultural training programme for coaches. To develop this work, a qualitative study was conducted to examine the perceptions of football coaches on the implementation of a cross-cultural training programme. The goal was to gain knowledge that can be used in the development of the cultural intelligence of sports professionals.

METHOD

Philosophical assumptions

To examine the perceptions of football coaches on the implementation of a cross-cultural training programme, we adopted a relativist ontology and subjectivist/transactional epistemology (Bazeley, 2020; Sparkes & Smith, 2013). By adopting a relativist ontology, we were considering the social reality as being constructed and shaped in multifaceted ways (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). An open-ended online survey was utilised to enable coaches to anonymously assess their experiences with the training programme and reflect on their interactions with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds (Braun et al., 2021) without the possibility of identification or association with their evaluations of the training programme or their experiences. This approach facilitated the inclusion of coaches who would have been otherwise unreachable via face-to-face interviews due to geographical dispersion or professional commitments. According to our relativist ontology, we believe that the coaches' views are dependent on their culture and their lived experiences. By adopting a subjectivist and transactional epistemology, we were taking into consideration the researcher and the researched as something that exists together, and that the values are always part of what we can understand (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). From this perspective, we took into consideration our own lived experiences and preconceptions, as coaches who have worked in their native country and abroad, in our analyses of the football coaches' evaluations and reflections about their experiences. The researcher's familiarity with the topic shaped their views about how the training programme can impact coaches' views about their experiences interacting with other cultures.

Participants

Fifty-six coaches participated in the study, fifty-four male and two female, which is an example that there is an under-representation of women in coaching (Reade et al., 2009). This sample should be considered between a "lower end" and a "mid-range" for a qualitative survey (Braun et al., 2021), and it was considered to understand the views of the coaches who had experience coaching abroad and coaching in their native country with people from other countries (Table 1). In this investigation, "international experience" encompasses both the geographical and cultural dimensions of a coach's professional engagement. It refers to instances where coaches work outside their country of origin, and to situations in which they operate within domestic contexts alongside athletes of diverse national or cultural backgrounds. This definition aims to reflect the complex realities of coaching across cultural boundaries, whether those differences arise from geographic relocation or from the cultural diversity within a team.

Table 1. Demographic characterisation of the sample.

Total number of coaches	*N* = 56
Gender	Male = 54
	Female = 2
Age	39.96 (7.76)
Nationality	Angolan = 17
	São Toméan = 9
	Portuguese = 27
Athlete experience in the home country	14.33 (4.81)
Athlete experience in a foreign country	3.22 (5.26)
Coaching experience in the home country	8.46 (5.67)
Coaching experience in a foreign country	3.89 (3.68)
Destination countries	Cyprus, Portugal, Egypt, Angola, South Korea, Romania, Slovenia, Italy, Saudi Arabia, Greece, Poland, Brazil, Lithuania, Cape Verde, and Bahrein.
Current role	Coaches (33), sixteen were Assistant Coaches (16), Goalkeeper Coaches (3), Coaching Coordinators (2), Fitness Coach (1), Sporting Director (1).
Academic Qualifications	Masters = 3
	Bachelor = 41
	No higher education degree = 12
Coaching Qualifications	Level 4 = 3 (Top-tier coaching qualification)
	Level 3 = 12
	Level 2 = 23
	Level 1 = 18

Cross-cultural training for coaches

A cross-cultural training programme, developed by Borges et al. (2018) based on a review of relevant literature and European football coaches' perceptions of their cross-cultural training needs (Borges et al., 2024), was implemented and facilitated by the first author. The previous study justified the need for a cross-cultural training programme based on the needs identified by the coaches. The online surveys used to collect the views of the coaches on their cross-cultural needs, suggested that the coaches need them to work with athletes from other countries, considering that they were coaching abroad or in their native country with multicultural teams (Table 2). The training programme was designed to be broadly accessible, offering relevance to both experienced and inexperienced coaches. It provided a reflective framework for those with prior intercultural exposure, while serving as a foundational introduction for those anticipating future engagement in diverse contexts. The programme was also applicable to coaches working in predominantly monocultural environments, recognising that cultural plurality often exists at the local level. Prior intercultural experience was not a prerequisite. The training aimed to foster inclusive practice and cultural sensitivity across varied coaching profiles.

Data collection

After getting ethical approval (Application ID: ETH2122-0109) from the Applied Sciences Ethics Panel at the London South Bank University, the Football Associations from Portuguese-speaking countries were contacted by email. Two of them agreed to participate in this study. The data collection has been conducted with coaches from the Angolan Football Association and the São Tomé and Príncipe Football Association. Two online meeting sessions of four hours were conducted in July and October 2023. Microsoft Teams was used for these meetings with each of the football associations. The meetings were held separately with each Association. Also, the training programme has been recorded online, with a duration of approximately two hours, allowing the remaining two hours for the participants to complete the assessment of the training programme and the reflective practice related to an international experience. While relatively brief, the session was intentionally designed as an introductory intervention, aiming to raise initial awareness of cross-cultural dynamics in coaching. Data was also collected from December to January using convenience sampling, followed by a snowball sampling approach, targeting Portuguese coaches either working in

Table 2. Aims, outcomes and contents of the cross-cultural training program for coaches.

Training program	Description
Aims	• To increase coaches' cross-cultural awareness of different cultures and their ability to relate to culturally diverse situations; • To improve coaches' communication to interact with different foreigner stakeholders; • To provide appropriate tools and strategies to help coaches function effectively in a variety of cultural contexts; • To improve coaches' confidence, drive and resilience to adjust their coaching style to multicultural situations.
Outcomes	• Coaches will acquire knowledge and understanding of: • The different cultural values, traditions, behaviours and leadership styles of foreign coaches; • The different tools and techniques available to adjust their coaching philosophy accordingly; • The different ways to check the efficacy and adequacy of their coaching philosophy on an ongoing basis; • The need to evaluate their leadership style when interacting with sports stakeholder from a different country; • The increase in motivation and self-confidence to deal with foreign stakeholders and overcome any potential resistance. • The development of their communication skills to enable them to adapt their verbal and nonverbal communication and also the pace of speech to stakeholders from different cultural backgrounds.
Contents	• Understanding the impact of globalization in the career of coaches • Main factors influencing migration patterns • The functions and dynamics of the migration process • The different stages of the migration process and planning strategies • Challenges of working with different cultures • Strategies to plan the migration process • Support and resources available • National culture and sport – differences and similarities across countries • New language, cultural values and traditions • Leadership styles and communication across countries • Coaching methodologies across countries • The relation between foreign coaches and the media • Cultural Intelligence and its importance to sports stakeholders • What is cultural intelligence? • The importance of developing and promote cultural intelligence • How to develop cultural intelligence? • The importance of developing a reflective practice and learn from cultural experience.

their native country or with experience coaching abroad. This training had an asynchronous training component. This phase followed the initial synchronous sessions held in July and October. The asynchronous format allowed participants to accommodate scheduling constraints and was designed to extend programme participation. Coaches conducted a post-training assessment, incorporating reflective practice and programme evaluation, via an online survey hosted on the Online Surveys platform managed by Jisc. Portuguese coaches participating in the asynchronous phase conducted their post-training assessment independently upon completion of the digital materials, allowing for flexible engagement and alignment with the programme's self-paced format. For the synchronous sessions delivered to the Angolan and São Tomé e Príncipe Associations, the post-training assessment was completed immediately following the training, within a structured four-hour engagement. Their evaluation of the training experience was structured around a set of five post-experience questions (MacNab, 2012). The coaches were required to complete a reflective practice regarding the following aspects: 1) *Describe the cultural experience that you have had*; 2) *Identify the positive and negatives aspect of this experience*; 3) *Explain the main learnings points and try to refer to all the dimensions of Cultural Intelligence* (Metacognitive CQ, Cognitive CQ, Motivational CQ and Behavioural CQ); 4) *Identify an action plan to use in future interactions*. The coaches also completed an evaluation of their experience of attending the training programme based on a set of five post-experience questions (MacNab, 2012): 1) *I would recommend this cross-cultural training for other coaches interested in improving their cross-cultural skills*; 2) *this cross-cultural training is meaningful for my coaching role*; 3) *this cross-cultural training allowed me to better understand abstract concepts related to cultural interaction in sport*; 4) *I consider this cross-cultural training an intellectual growth experience as an individual and as a coach*; 5) *this cross-cultural training should be part of the courses for football coaches*. For each of the questions mentioned before, the coaches were asked to justify their answers by providing written comments. The answers of the coaches generated a total of 3058 words, resulting from the reflective practice (1668 words) and the evaluation of the training programme (1390 words).

Data analysis

Qualitative data were analysed using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clark, 2019) and NVivo software. We used Thematic Analysis because it allows data reduction by simplifying data from a large sample into themes that represent the data set. The analysis followed the six phases of thematic analysis and considered the checklist criteria proposed by the authors. To get familiarised with the data, the researcher read the data to understand the coaches' views. In this phase, the data collected were reviewed to ensure that they had been correctly imported into the software. During the immersion phase, the data were coded using raw quotes about coaches' views and by aligning the code groups with the theoretical framework. The key themes were identified, and a thematic map was then created to provide a visual representation of the themes and subthemes. The themes and subthemes were reviewed to ensure they matched the coded extracts. After defining the themes and subthemes, a final check was conducted to ensure the story was well organised and that the extracts illustrated the analytical claims. A table was created for each theme to provide a clear summary of the data. This process was undertaken to facilitate coaches' reflective practice on their cultural experiences and to evaluate the effectiveness of the training programme.

RESULTS

Reflective practice assessment

Qualitative data analysis was conducted regarding the reflective practice assessment completed by the coaches at the end of the training. Table 3 shows a summary of the themes, sub-themes, and quotes related to the coaches' reflections on their cultural experiences.

The challenges experienced with different cultures

The experiences with different cultures were mentioned by the coaches. These were related to some constraints, barriers and challenges faced during their journey.

Experience challenges

Several challenges were faced by the coaches during their cultural experiences, but these were resolved and managed by both parties.

> *We had some setbacks in the early stages of the process but then there was an adaptation*. (Coach 2)

It is interesting to identify that despite experiencing several difficulties, the adaptation eventually occurred. However, they have not stated how the challenges were overcome to allow for a smooth adaptation. The aspects that contributed to a difficult period of adaptation were mostly related to language, the overall environment, and food habits.

> *I had an experience working in my country with foreign players. It was a complicated experience because they did not speak the native language, and they had difficulties adapting to the environment. For example, the food, and other aspects interfered with the training process. However, these players had a very strong mindset and managed to overcome the difficulties.* (Coach 9)

These elements have been found in previous studies with migrant coaches (Borges et al., 2015). It is understandable that people who don't speak the native language can face some difficulties interacting with the locals in the sports context. As coach 4 mentioned "it was difficult to adapt to a new language" and other coaches also reiterate this idea, for example:

> *Not knowing the language caused some difficulties with communication, adaptation, and team cohesion.* (Coach 54)

The hot environment can be difficult to adapt to if the migrant is from a country where the environment is cooler. As coach 6 mentioned, "a negative is the hot weather". Also, the environment can have an impact on how people behave, and this has been mentioned by a coach.

> *Because it is a country with more sun, people wake up early. Players like to train in the morning, not at night.* (Coach 3)

Different food habits can also be an element to consider, particularly if there are no alternatives to cook or buy food that he/she is used to. However, after a while, this was no longer a challenge. As Coach 3 mentioned:

> *This has been a positive experience and a great cultural adaptation. For example, I have used the language in the right context; I have adapted to the constant hot environment, the club structure, the philosophy, and the working methodology of the club and country; I have perceived and interpreted the mentality in general and specifically to the sport.* (Coach 3)

Challenges working with people from different cultures

Challenges working with people from different countries were identified by the coaches, and these were related to cultural differences.

> *The most recent experience I had was with a senior women's soccer team where I had five Congolese athletes. It has been a challenge for me as they have different characteristics.* (Coach 5)

These results suggest that these challenges could be related to a lack of cultural intelligence, in particular to the metacognition dimension. This might be related to the lack of awareness in relation to the bias that people can have regarding other cultures. So, by not being aware of this, the coaches can perceive other cultures as difficult to deal with because they don't recognise their own preconceptions. This suggests the need to have training on unconscious bias that can unravel some potential

Table 3. Themes, sub-themes, and quotes related to the coaches' reflections on their cultural experiences.

Themes	Sub themes	Quotes
The challenges experienced with different cultures	Experience challenges	We had some setbacks in the early stages but then there was an adaptation. (Coach 2)
	Challenges to working with people from different cultures	It has been a challenge for me as they are people with very peculiar characteristics (Coach 5)
	The need to prove their competency	Being accepted by the natives in a foreign country (Coach 6)
	The role of natives in helping with the adaptation to the host country	The hospitality of the people that received me in their country (Coach 4)
Learning from the cultural experience	Learning new skills	Learning a new language and improving my leadership and emotional intelligence (Coach 5)
	Learning from the cultural intelligence dimensions	The cultural experiences help us to take into account the issues of nationality, ethnicity, and organisation management using the cultural intelligence dimensions. (Coach 9)
	Work with athletes from the region or foreigners close to the borders	During my coaching career, I opted to have in my teams 70% of players from the region and within the coaching staff five people that are proficient in that regional language. Also, I always opt for foreign players that are close to our borders. (Coach 7)
	Being humble	The freedom that they engage with the people and the humble way they work. (Coach 3)
Planning cultural experiences	Evaluate the pros and cons	Listen, understand the advantages and disadvantages, and present my point of view. (Coach 2)
	Gain cultural knowledge	Arrive days before and adapt to the time zone, food, and traditions. (Coach 3)

bias that someone can have in relation to a particular culture and the reasons behind these preconceptions.

In some cases, the coaches referred that they have made an effort to adjust to other cultures. As Coach 2 mentioned, "having to go against my principles to gain the trust of expatriates". These findings suggest that, according to the model, individuals should uphold their own principles while engaging with people from different cultural backgrounds. This suggests the need for training on the cultural intelligence dimensions to try to work on how to approach interactions with people from other cultures while maintaining the authentic self.

The need to prove their competency

The need to constantly prove their competency was also mentioned by some coaches. This appears to be linked to the scepticism with which native sports stakeholders regarded the work of migrant coaches. This could be why the coaches feel the constant need to prove their value to be accepted by the native sport's stakeholders. Some examples are, "some scepticism about my qualities" (Coach 4), "a constant challenge to prove my value and my competence. This is the most outstanding aspect of my experience" (Coach 3), and "being accepted by the natives in a foreign country" (Coach 6). The perspective of the migrant coaches is that they are seen as "outsiders" by the native sport's stakeholders. This perspective has been theorised by Elias and Scotson (1994) in their work about the established and the outsiders. Similarly, a study of the media's views on foreign coaches also found that the native media have some preconceptions when it comes to foreign coaches (Borges, Rosado, & Oliveira, 2022; Griggs & Gibbons, 2012; Vincent et al., 2010). These views can have an impact on the perspectives of the migrant coaches about themselves and add some pressure to deliver results or show their competency and, ultimately, be accepted by the native sport's stakeholders.

The role of natives in helping with the adaptation to the host country

Native people play a crucial role in the adaptation of migrants to their host country. They can help facilitate the integration of the migrants into a new cultural context by removing some potential barriers. Some coaches identified the importance of this support in their migration journey.

> *My cultural experience was quite positive. I had some difficulty adapting but with the help of friends and new acquaintances, it was possible to have a good experience.* (Coach 4)

Previous studies have emphasised the role of native sports stakeholders in facilitating athletes' adaptation to the host country (Schinke et al., 2011). According to the authors, native country stakeholders should provide sufficient time for immigrants to build their confidence and enhance their skills. In addition, to become part of the group, sports immigrants should actively engage with their new team from day one, seeking opportunities for better integration to gain their trust and develop a sense of connection.

Learning from the cultural experience

Several coaches mentioned that they have learned from their cultural experiences and gained new skills in their field.

Learning new skills

The coaches identified that their cultural experiences have expanded their knowledge and given them additional skills. As coach 10 stated, "the cultural experiences were positive to gain new knowledge at different levels". This knowledge and these skills could be related to learning a new language if this is required, or even improving the way coaches display their leadership skills in a different cultural context. Coach 5 identifies that "a new language, improving the leadership and emotional intelligence" could be some aspects to improve from cultural experiences. Coach 6 adds that "learning can result from multidisciplinary experiences in various dimensions, like emotional and human development, to transform myself". The coaches identified that this knowledge could result from their interactions with people from different cultures, highlighting the importance and positive impact of international experience on coaches' cultural intelligence (Borges, Rosado, Lobinger, et al., 2022). As Coach 4 mentioned:

> *Learning by interacting with a cultural environment different from mine and sharing my knowledge and experience with the people I have interacted with.* (Coach 4)

In addition to learn from these cultural experiences, it is also interesting to note that coaches believe that they acquired knowledge and skills that can then be passed to others. As coach 9 stated:

> *Learning with these experiences in terms of strong mentality and the ability to adapt quickly, and being able to pass this on to other sports stakeholders.* (Coach 9)

Learning from the cultural intelligence dimensions

The coaches noted that they have learned some of the content delivered in the training related to the cultural intelligence dimensions. As Coach 9 stated:

> *The cultural experiences help us to consider the issues of nationality, ethnicity, and organisation management using the CQ dimensions.* (Coach 9)

From the four CQ dimensions, the CQ motivation was highlighted by the coaches. As Coach 11 mentioned, "It has motivated me to interact with people from other countries". Another coach also mentioned motivations to work abroad to learn new coaching approaches.

> *I moved abroad because I wanted to develop my career as a coach. Also, I was motivated to experience new approaches to football.* (Coach 41)

However, some coaches identified some needs regarding CQ knowledge and CQ Metacognition. For example, "I didn't have previous knowledge about the culture of the countries that I moved to, which caused some difficulties in the adaptation. I never planned or prepared for my interactions with people from other cultures. This was something new to me." (Coach 41)

Also, coaches working in their home country with athletes from other cultures identified some needs regarding the CQ dimensions.

> *There was motivation to work with foreign athletes because they were committed to training. However, there was no knowledge from my side on how to deal with foreign athletes and how to better integrate them with the team.* (Coach 51)

Work with athletes from the region or foreigners close to the borders

Coaches who have not had migration experience also identify their cultural experiences from interacting with people from other regions in their home country. As coach 7 stated:

> *Despite not having experience in a foreign country, I have experience in my country, where there is quite high cultural diversity in the different regions (mainly in the border regions). For this reason, during my coaching career, I opted to have in my teams 70% of players from the region and within the coaching staff five people that are proficient in that regional language. Also, I always opt for foreign players that are close to our borders.* (Coach 7)

This is an interesting perspective because it shows that cultural intelligence goes beyond the ability to interact with people from other countries. In this example, the coach refers to cultural differences across various regions within the same country. Another interesting point is the view that geographical proximity can contribute to better cultural adaptation (Borges et al., 2015). However, this can be the case in terms of language, food habits, or environmental characteristics. It might be that some specific cultural characteristics and traditions are very different, requiring greater adjustment from the foreign athlete/coach (Borges et al., 2024).

Being humble

Being humble has been identified as a relevant trait to learn from the cultural experiences. The coaches identified that there were some challenges faced during the adaptation journey, but they identified humbleness as a way to surpass the difficulties. As coach 2 and Coach 3 mentioned.

> *I had a very positive cultural experience for one month, in my country, working with a sports director from Brazil, a Spanish technical director, and a head coach both from Portugal. We had some setbacks in the early stages but then there was an adaptation. The secret was being humble.* (Coach 2)

Planning cultural experiences

The coaches shared some interesting inputs and ideas on how best to deal with the cultural experiences and how to be prepared for them beforehand.

Evaluate the pros and cons

The coaches suggest that an evaluation of the pros and cons should be made when thinking about interacting with people from different cultures. As Coach 2 mentioned, "listen, understand the advantages and disadvantages, and present my point of view". Another coach shared a similar view.

> *Understand who has working experience outside your region and gather feedback. Be aware of the budget plan and examine if it is efficient. Promote an integrative cultural communication that should be diversified to the people who receive the message.* (Coach 7)

They also identify some aspects that need to be considered when working in the football area with people from other countries.

> *Know the culture of the country and the coaching methodologies of the training and the playing style which is*

often used. Understand how adaptations can be made to the coaching philosophy. Get to know the athletes individually to understand how to treat them individually. (Coach 16)

Gain cultural knowledge

The coaches identified the importance of the cognitive aspect by identifying some general and specific knowledge that can help with the interactions in different contexts.

Gain in-depth knowledge of the country, the people, their habits, and traditions. (Coach 8)

Study the cultural context, understand the passions and beliefs of the host country and prepare to adapt to the cultural context. (Coach 5)

The importance of knowing the country in advance was identified by the coaches. As stated by Coach 3:

Arrive a few days before and adapt to the time zone, food habits, and traditions. (Coach 3)

The coaches recognise the importance of acquiring cultural knowledge when interacting with different cultural experiences. This suggests the importance of cultural intelligence training to provide the coaches with the right knowledge and skillset (Borges, Rosado, Lobinger, et al., 2022). However, some coaches consider that their previous interactions with people from other countries have given them the skills to interact with other cultures going forward.

Abroad and in my country, I have been interacting with players from other countries. I have never had training in this area, but I think I am able to communicate with everyone around me, regardless of their culture. (Coach 15)

Cross-cultural training programme assessment

Qualitative data analysis was conducted regarding the coaches' assessment of the cultural training programme. Table 4 shows a resume of the themes and quotes that resulted from the analysis of the data.

Recommend the training to other coaches

The coaches recommended the training to other coaches because they believe it was important for them "to grow culturally" (Coach 2) and "to know how to work with athletes from other countries" (Coach 51). They believe that the training offers the opportunity to deal with the adversities that they could encounter when interacting with people from other cultures. As Coach 4 stated, "it allows coaches to acquire competencies and skills to deal with certain cultural environments". They also see a need for cross-cultural training, considering the global context of the football industry. For example, coach 52 mentioned, "we are working more and more in a globalised world, so it is important to have the capacity to adapt to other cultures". There is a general idea that the training can open opportunities for the coaches to work nationally and internationally:

It is a window of opportunity for coaches' careers (…) In our context, we have two regions with different cultures that certainly deserve specific attention (…) The coaches need to be attentive to these differences when they work with the athletes. (Sporting Director)

They also recommend the training because they consider it relevant for their overall success, particularly for those working in foreign countries. As Coach 5 and Coach 6 stated.

Sometimes, success or adaptation is not overcome by a lack of preparation or intercultural interaction of coaches when accepting proposals in other countries. (Coach 6)

Table 4. Themes and quotes related to the coaches' assessment of the cultural training programme.

Theme	Quote
Recommend the training to other coaches	It is always important to acquire knowledge, to be prepared for all the adversities of life and that our profession offers. (Coach 3)
Importance to the coaching role	It will help me improve the way I interact with my collaborators, players and prepares me to work outside my cultural environment. (Coach 4)
Contribution of the cultural training	For being led to reflect on the intercultural dimension in sport (Coach 2)
Important for growing as an individual and a coach	It will help me a lot in framing people from different cultures (Coach 10)
Recommending the training for the coaching courses	For its degree of importance and pertinence, it represents the sports phenomenon in our days (Coach 4)

The coaches also highlight the importance of the various topics mentioned during the training programme. As Coach 13 mentioned, "this training allowed me to better understand the issues related to sports migration and helped me to understand what cultural intelligence is and how to put it into practice". However, some coaches don't see the training as fundamental. For example, Coach 15 referred, "I think it is important, but I have been working as a football player and as a coach without this training. I think it make me think a little bit more about some issues related to cultural aspects and how to interact with foreigners". Also, some coaches value the experiences more than the training itself.

> *I believe that having international experience is the most important element. However, I think that is good to gain some knowledge about how to interact with other cultures so that we are better prepared to interpret our experiences abroad.* (Coach 16)

Previous studies also found that one of the strongest arguments in favour of cross-cultural training was related to career opportunities and progression (Borges et al., 2024). Coaches were aware of the need to adjust to different cultural contexts to maximise their career prospects (Borges et al., 2015).

Importance to the coaching role

Coaches stated that the training was relevant to the role. They refer to the training as an opportunity to learn how to interact in different cultural contexts with other sports stakeholders. As a coach stated:

> *As a coach, I need to deal with foreign athletes and intercultural knowledge can be useful to understand the athletes' motivations and to lead my team.* (Coach 13)

The coaches looked at this training as an opportunity to acquire a skillset that will support them in their interactions with their athletes. As coach 51 mentioned, "I need to know how to deal with all my athletes in the same way, so for this I need to know the cultures from the foreign athletes." Coaches also consider that the training should be continuous because it is important for them to be better coaches and achieve success. As the following coaches stated:

> *Training should be continuous and comprehensive in many areas for better performance.* (Coach 7)

The main idea is that the coaches will acquire new information and skills, and that will allow them to better interact with other sports stakeholders if they need to work abroad.

> *The coaches will be more aware of how to adjust their activity to the contexts that they will find in their country or abroad. A coach that will move to Gabon, Angola, or Nigeria will need to consider the cultural realities on the job.* (Sporting Director)

Contribution of the cultural training

Coaches identified the positive impact of the training programme on their profession. They believed that it was relevant "to know the other cultures better" (Coach 10). As Coach 5 stated:

> *I think that knowing more about the cultural element will help us to do a better job.* (Coach 5)

The training has been recognised as an opportunity to gain in-depth knowledge about this topic, which can then be put into practice in their future careers.

> *The coaches never know when they will need to face a different reality. They need to be open to learning about intercultural aspects. This will open new opportunities for them so that they can be more attentive to the specificities of their work.* (Sporting Director)

They stated the importance of cultural knowledge for their profession, as Coach 2 stated, "to reflect on the intercultural dimension in sport". They consider the importance of recognising the specificities of the sport in different cultures. As coach 4 stated, "sport cannot disregard the habits and customs of those who practice it and its contexts".

Important for growing as an individual and a coach

Coaches considered the training important for their development as individuals and coaches. The coaches stated the importance of this training for their "personal development" (Coach 6) and "added knowledge to their work" (Coach 7). They believe that the training has allowed them to increase their knowledge and better understand people from other cultures. As Coach 8 and Coach 10 stated: "it gave me the opportunity to increasing my knowledge" (Coach 8), and "it will help me a lot to read people from different cultures" (Coach 10).

The coaches noted that this training has allowed them to rethink their leadership and communication style when interacting with other sports stakeholders. For example, Coach 13 mentioned, "sometimes we don't know why our

foreign players behave a certain way. This training helped me to acquire new information to help me lead my players, particularly the foreigners."

The training also helped them to reflect on themselves as coaches and how to communicate with others in an international setting. As Coach 14 mentioned, "the training gives me an idea about the motivations of the football coaches to migrate and helped me to reflect about my own circumstances as a coach. It was important to understand that in some international tournaments I need to have more knowledge on how to deal with different cultures in football." Coach 15 also mentioned the importance of understanding the culture to communicate with the media. For example, "I should understand the way the media looks to the foreign coaches so that I know how to communicate with them and with my players." (Coach 15)

The coaches also recognise the importance of some concepts mentioned in the training for their coaching. For example, "the concepts related to the cultural intelligence and national identity are new to me and I think they can be useful to better understand other cultures." (Coach 51). There is also an idea that the training can contribute to providing awareness in relation to different playing styles that could be found in different countries. The coaches need to be aware of these differences when coaching their diverse teams.

> *We have athletes in our national team playing in Europe, Africa and Latin America and the national team coach apart from considering their physical and technical aspects needs also to understand how to make these players work together. The athletes will be learning from other cultures in Latin America or in Europe and the coach needs to look at all aspects in order to better manage the team.* (Sporting Director)

They also think that the training will help them improve their performance and achieve their professional goals. As Coach 2 mentioned, "my goals are to win in other contexts, so I need to learn how to live in other contexts".

Recommending the training for the coaching courses

The coaches recommended the training to be implemented in the coaching courses "to allow for a better interaction with people from other cultural contexts" (Coach 2). They considered that the training should be included "as a theme for the psychology modules" (Coach 5). They particularly focus on the importance of the motivational and cognitive aspects of the cultural intelligence dimensions. As Coach 3 mentioned, "it offers us tools from a motivational and intellectual perspective".

They believe that by integrating this training into the coaching courses, the coaches will be better prepared to work with sports stakeholders from other cultures. As Coach 8 mentioned, "coaches will have a better understanding of their future colleagues from other countries".

The coaches recognise that this training could be useful in several contexts, but particularly for coaches who "work abroad" (coach 41) or are working with foreign athletes in their native country. For example, Coach 51 mentioned, "I think this training should be part of the coaching courses, or it could be a training that could be provided specifically for coaches that need to know more about how to deal with players from other countries." The Sporting Director also considers that this type of training could be included in the coaching courses as an individual module.

> *I think this could be a module integrated into the coaching courses because we never know where a coach will be working. For example, the great majority of Portuguese football coaches are now working abroad in Africa, South America, Asia, or Europe. So, this is without a doubt an aspect to consider in the coaching courses.* (Sporting Director)

However, some coaches consider the training programme as relevant for all coaches:

> *I think it should be part of the coaching courses because we coach individuals with different characteristics and backgrounds. These differences sometimes are related to the players' nationalities or even regional differences in the same country.* (Coach 13)

These results are similar to a previous study conducted with students (MacNab, 2012). In this study, the participants also mentioned that their experience was overall positive and they tend to recommend it to others. Some coaches value more international experience to prepare them to interact with other cultures, but they also mentioned that it is important to bring awareness to the coaches for these issues and to provide them with the right skills to reflect on their international experiences.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this research was to implement and evaluate a cross-cultural training programme. A qualitative study was conducted to examine the perceptions of football coaches on the implementation of a cross-cultural training programme. The goal was to gain knowledge that can be used

in the development of the cultural intelligence of sports professionals. The study emphasises the importance of cultural intelligence (CQ) and its role in coaches' professional experiences. It highlights the need for structured, comprehensive training to ensure coaches are well-prepared to thrive in diverse cultural settings.

Regarding the reflective practice assessment completed by the coaches at the end of the training, there were some aspects to take into consideration. Language has been consistently highlighted as one of the primary barriers. The ability to communicate is foundational in coaching, making this barrier significant. Previous studies on migrant coaches across various sports have also identified similar communication challenges (Bespomoshchnov et al., 2024; Borges et al., 2015; Kim & Tak, 2024; Orlowski et al., 2016; Samuel et al., 2021; Tao et al., 2019). It is important that coaches get support to learn other languages to be able to effectively communicate effectively with other sports stakeholders. Factors such as weather, time zone differences, and food can also influence both a coach's ability to perform and their overall well-being. These challenges are often related to evident differences in behaviour, expectation, and tradition across different cultures. For coaches, these differences can affect both training methodologies and interpersonal relationships with athletes and staff. Previous studies have found that gymnastic coaches faced some challenges in adjusting their coaching methodologies, acquired in their native country, to those that were established in their host country (Kerr & Moore, 2015). The exposure to a new culture often forces an individual to develop new skills, whether that is learning a new language, adapting to a different style of leadership, or understanding a new methodology of coaching. The essence of being humble was repeatedly noted as a significant contributor to successful cultural adaptation. This humility might manifest in recognising one's own biases, being open to new ways of doing things, or simply acknowledging that there's always more to learn. Previous studies on migrant coaches have identified adaptability as a crucial strategy for engaging with individuals from different cultural backgrounds and successfully integrating into their host country (Bespomoshchnov et al., 2024; Borges et al., 2015; Kim & Tak, 2024; Orlowski et al., 2016; Samuel et al., 2021; Tao et al., 2019). Proactive planning seems to be a significant contributor to successful cultural experiences. This involves everything from gaining cultural knowledge to weighing the pros and cons of a potential opportunity. Coaches found value in understanding and applying CQ dimensions. This underlines the importance of structured learning in developing CQ. Previous studies found that cross-cultural training can be effective in developing some or even all CQ dimensions of their participants (MacNab, 2012; MacNab et al., 2012; Ott & Michailova, 2016).

Regarding the coaches' assessment of the cultural training programme, there were some suggestions provided by the coaches. Coaches broadly viewed the training as beneficial, not only for their professional roles but also for personal development. The acknowledgement that CQ is crucial for navigating a globalised sports world was evident. Recommendations included incorporating such training in mainstream coaching courses. This could be a testament to its perceived value and importance. Recognising the importance of CQ and providing structured training for coaches can lead to smoother transitions and better overall team dynamics. It might also serve as a proactive step in avoiding potential cultural misunderstandings and conflicts. Being open to learning and development in CQ could open up broader career opportunities in an increasingly globalised sports industry. Embedding CQ in coaching curriculum ensures future coaches are better equipped to navigate varied cultural landscapes. Exploring the long-term impacts of CQ training, especially its effects on team performance, athlete satisfaction, and coaching career trajectories, would be valuable. Previous studies with university students also found that cross-cultural training programmes are considered to be useful and helpful to support people's interactions with others from different cultures (MacNab, 2012).

This study represents one of the first attempts to qualitatively analyse the implementation of a cross-cultural training programme for football coaches. Some limitations could be identified in this study, considering the early development of this topic in the sports context. The qualitative analysis taken in the present study could compromise the generalisation of the results. Also, the participants being only from Portuguese-speaking countries could have some limitations on how the findings could also be related to coaches from countries that speak other languages. Something to consider is that some of the participants never had experience working in a foreign country. In the future, it will be essential to provide cross-cultural training to sports professionals working in a foreign country or working with multicultural teams in their native country to increase their cultural intelligence.

The complexity of cultural intelligence development may suggest the need for extended and interactive training interventions. However, the two-hour programme was not intended to provide exhaustive coverage but rather to initiate critical reflection and introduce foundational concepts relevant to intercultural coaching. The findings reinforce the necessity for more sustained and contextually embedded learning opportunities to consolidate and advance

cultural competence in coaching practice. Future research may also investigate the potential contribution of the training program to the development of CQ capabilities among different groups in the sports context (e.g., athletes, sports directors, etc). While the cross-cultural training programme examined in this study was designed for general applicability across coaching contexts, it is acknowledged that intercultural dynamics may vary substantially depending on the specific sport. Future adaptations of the training programme may benefit from sport-specific tailoring to enhance contextual relevance and practical efficacy. Future research may further monitor the coaches' progress over time to check if the development of the CQ dimensions related to the training maintains or even improves. Further research could also investigate the effectiveness of online asynchronous training, considering that this could be a relevant option for coaches across the world. However, the use of online surveys enabled the collection of data from a geographically diverse sample and facilitated timely participation; it is important to acknowledge the methodological limitations in this approach. I might restrict opportunities for probing responses or capturing non-verbal cues. While this method was chosen for accessibility and efficiency, we recognise that the absence of direct interpersonal engagement may limit the understanding of participants' experiences. The limited representation of female coaches may reflect prevailing gender imbalances within the sporting organisations, raising questions concerning equity and access in professional development opportunities. Similarly, the predominance of European (specifically Portuguese) coaches may have shaped the thematic focus of the data, privileging certain cultural interpretations over others. It is plausible that cultural variations influenced both engagement and implementation. These disparities highlight the importance of inclusive sampling and culturally responsive methodologies in future investigations.

CONCLUSIONS

It seems beneficial to consider cultural intelligence and cross-cultural training for sports coaches. The findings of this study indicate that coaches perceive such training as potentially valuable, not only for their coaching role but also as an opportunity for personal and professional development. This training could support their interactions with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, contributing to their learning and planning within cross-cultural contexts. Given that research on cross-cultural training and cultural intelligence in sports is still in its early stages, further investigation is warranted to explore the most effective approaches for assisting coaches in engaging with sports stakeholders from different cultural settings.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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