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Research Article

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Status of Gender Equity in Different Areas of Football Coaching in Kenya

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ABSTRACT
Sports coaching is a viable gender neutral career option, however, its implementation takes place in a masculine environment which deters most women from pursuing coaching as a career. This phenomenon creates a gender disparity in sports coaching where male coaches are the majority while female coaches remain the minority. This study sought to investigate the status of gender equity in football coaching in Kenya. A mixed method research design was used and data was gathered from randomly sampled women football coaches in Kenya. Gender inequality was reported by majority of the respondents, with limited opportunities, stereotyping, discriminatory hiring and unequal pay identified as the most common forms. Respondents generally perceived male coaches to receive more favorable treatment across coaching domains. Nearly all respondents supported organizational action and education to promote gender equity in coaching. It is recommended that gender sensitive programs and policies should be created and implemented to improve the gender gap in football coaching. Researchers will build upon this study to improve a growing interest in developing an understanding of gender equity in sports coaching as a body of knowledge.

Keywords: *Gender equity; Sports coaching; Women sports coaches, Inclusivity, underrepresentation*

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INTRODUCTION

Gender equity has become a significant priority in sport governance; however, sports coaching continues to exhibit substantial gender disparities worldwide where male coaches remain dominant (Reade et al., 2009; Serpell et al., 2023). Despite growth in women's participation in sports as evident by the many women sports clubs, sports leagues and sports competitions for women across the globe (LaVoi & Baeth, 2018), empirical evidence indicates that these gains have not been accompanied by proportional increases in women's representation in coaching. This suggests that increased participation alone is insufficient to expand the pool of

women coaches, as organizational, structural, and socio-cultural barriers continue to impede women's transition from athlete to coach (Burton, 2015a; LaVoi, 2016; Norman, 2021).

Existing research consistently shows that women remain underrepresented in coaching and remain the minority in nearly all sports and at all levels due to barriers they face (LaVoi & Baeth, 2018). The underrepresentation of women in sports coaching has been seen as a persistent problem for sports organizations. Barriers that hold women back from pursuing careers in sports coaching have been identified and these barriers erode women's coaches' confidence, commitment and aspirations so they tend to coach at lower levels regardless of whether they hold advanced qualifications in coaching (Jowett et al., 2022). The gendered macroaggressions and masculinity in sports coaching provide very little prospects for growth and progression for women sports coaches because it makes them appear to feel excluded, marginalized and outnumbered (Norman & Simpson, 2023).

Despite increasing attention to gender equity in sport, coaching remains one of the most gender-segregated occupations within the sport industry. A significant body of evidence demonstrates that women continue to be underrepresented across coaching contexts, particularly in elite sport, where their representation declines as the level of competition increases (Burton, 2015a). Moreover, women coaches remain disproportionately concentrated in coaching female athletes, youth, and children's sport, while opportunities within men's sport and high-performance coaching continue to be dominated by men (Aly & Breese, 2018; LaVoi & Baeth, 2018). These patterns suggest that gender disparities in coaching are not solely a reflection of participation rates but are embedded within broader structural, organizational, and cultural systems that influence women's access to and progression within coaching careers. Although the reviewed literature has advanced understanding of gender inequality in coaching, much of the empirical evidence is drawn from North American, European, and Australian sport systems. This geographical concentration limits the extent to which existing findings explain the experiences of women coaches in different socio-cultural and institutional contexts, particularly within African football environments.

In Kenya, emerging evidence indicates that women remain underrepresented in sport coaching and leadership positions (Kariuki et al., 2023; Kimaiyo & Wekesa, 2022; M'mbaha & Chepyator-Thomson, 2019). However, existing Kenyan studies have largely focused on describing gender disparities rather than examining the specific factors influencing women's access to coaching opportunities, career progression, leadership participation, and organizational support. Consequently, there remains limited empirical understanding of how gender equity is currently experienced and operationalized within Kenyan football coaching structures.

The persistence of gender imbalance has prompted scholars to advocate for organizational inclusion and diversity strategies as mechanisms for transforming coaching environments and achieving a more gender-balanced workforce (Norman, 2021; Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2018). While this scholarship has been valuable in shifting attention from identifying inequalities towards addressing them, empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of specific strategies remains limited, particularly within developing sport systems. Moreover, although relational approaches such as gender allyship are increasingly recognized as important mechanisms for challenging inequitable practices and supporting women's professional advancement, their role within football coaching contexts remains underexplored.

Coaching is also widely recognized as a viable career pathway for athletes transitioning from competitive sport (Wasend & LaVoi, 2019). However, the continued underrepresentation of women coaches indicates that increased female participation in sport does not automatically translate into equitable representation within coaching roles. This suggests that barriers to women's coaching careers extend beyond the athlete pipeline and are shaped by institutional practices, gendered professional networks, cultural expectations, and organizational environments. Although coaching is formally considered a gender-neutral profession (Lyle, 2020), its implementation often occurs within masculinized sporting cultures that may privilege male experiences, leadership styles, and career pathways, thereby limiting women's entry, retention, and advancement (Purdy, 2017).

While these challenges are increasingly documented in global and African contexts, empirical evidence describing the current status of gender equity specifically within football coaching in Kenya remains insufficiently developed. The existing evidence gap relates to limited empirical assessment of gender equity across key dimensions, including access to coaching opportunities, career progression pathways, leadership representation, and organizational support mechanisms available to women coaches. Addressing this gap is critical for evaluating progress towards gender-inclusive coaching systems and generating context-specific evidence to guide national football development strategies, institutional practices, and sport policy interventions.

This study therefore seeks to assess the current status of gender equity in football coaching in Kenya and identify areas requiring policy and institutional action. By examining women's representation, career experiences, opportunities, and support structures within football coaching, the study contributes empirical evidence necessary for developing more inclusive and equitable coaching environments.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive cross-sectional research design using a convergent parallel mixed-methods approach. The mixed-methods design enabled the simultaneous collection and integration of quantitative and qualitative data, allowing the study to quantify the current status of gender equity in football coaching while also exploring contextual factors influencing coaching opportunities, career progression, and professional support among coaches in Kenya. The study was done on women football coaches in Kenya in the year 2025 and a sample of 203 women football coaches were randomly chosen to represent eight (8) Football Kenya Federation regions. A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data and a focused group discussion was also used to collect qualitative data to supplement data from the questionnaire. After relevant permits were obtained, the participants were contacted and given information on the exact dates when the questionnaires were to be distributed and collected in their respective regions. The participants were given instructions on how to complete and hand back the questionnaire. The questionnaires were distributed and the participants given time to fill and return them. A focused group discussion was held with key informants.

A five point Likert scale was used to score the responses where the respondents were asked to rate if male and female coaches get equal treatment in nine (9) different areas of football coaching namely: Hiring, Recruitment and Selection into coaching Positions; Positioning into high-status coaching roles; Pay packages, wages & salaries; Access to opportunities; Positive working environment; Media coverage and profiling; Training and development; Coaching mentorship;

Advise and support. The respondents also responded to qualitative questions in the questionnaire. Quantitative data was coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 25. Before processing, the coded data were verified to check on double entry and cleaned to control quality. The basic descriptive parameters were calculated (frequencies and percentages) to give a summary of characteristics. Responses on the closed ended gender equity questions were also presented in frequencies and percentages.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In addressing the study objective, which aimed to establish the status of gender equity in football coaching in Kenya. Respondents were asked questions and responses were reported under the following sub topics: Their perceived feelings of gender treatment in different areas of football coaching and their experiences of gender disparities in football coaching. Table 1 below reports the perceived feelings of gender treatment in the nine different areas.

Table 1: Perceived Feelings of Gender Treatment in Football Coaching Practices

Areas of coaching	Both males and coaches are treated equally	Female coaches are treated favorably	I don't know	Male coaches are treated favorably	Neither gender are treated favorably
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
Hiring, Recruitment and Selection into Coaching Positions	26 (12.8)	4 (2)	6 (3)	163 (80.2)	4 (2)
Positioning into high-status coaching roles	27 (13.3)	3 (1.5)	6 (3)	161 (79.2)	6 (3)
Pay packages, wages and salaries	24 (11.8)	3 (1.5)	12 (5.9)	159 (78.3)	5 (2.5)
Access to opportunities	29 (14.3)	3 (1.5)	8 (3.9)	152 (74.9)	11(5.4)
Positive working environment	36 (17.7)	7 (3.4)	10 (4.9)	144 (70.9)	6 (3)
Media coverage and profiling	42 (20.7)	8 (3.9)	12 (5.9)	129 (63.5)	12 (5.9)
Training and development	64 (31.6)	4 (2)	7 (3.4)	119 (58.6)	9 (4.4)
Coaching mentorship	55 (27.1)	5 (2.5)	16 (7.9)	119 (58.6)	8 (3.9)
Advise and support	**47 (23.2)**	**18 (8.9)**	**13 (6.4)**	**105 (51.7)**	**20 (9.9)**

The table 1 above indicates that most respondents perceived male football coaches to receive preferential treatment over female coaches across all nine identified coaching areas. Relatively fewer respondents reported equal treatment between male and female coaches, while only a small proportion selected "I don't know" across most items. The areas most frequently identified as favoring male coaches were hiring, recruitment, and selection into coaching positions, as reported by 163 respondents (80.2%); placement into high-status coaching roles, reported by 161 respondents (79.3%); and pay packages, wages, and salaries, reported by 159 respondents (78.2%). Although still perceived to favour male coaches, the proportions were comparatively lower for advice and support, cited by 105 respondents (51.7%); coaching mentorship, cited by 119 respondents (58.6%); and training and development, also cited by 119 respondents (58.6%). These quantitative findings were complemented by responses from the focus group discussion, in which the key informants were asked about their thoughts on whether male and female football coaches are treated equally across coaching practices. The responses

pointed to inequitable treatment of coaches, with male coaches receiving favorable treatment compared to female coaches. One participant noted, “On paper, everyone is portrayed as equal, but when decisions are made, men are usually given priority” (FGD Participant 3, Q1).

In establishing the women coaches’ experiences of gender disparities in football coaching. Respondents were required to answer closed-ended yes-or-no questions and multiple-choice questions. The findings are organized and reported under the following sub-themes: instances of gender inequality witnessed in coaching; the role of sports organizations in promoting gender equity in coaching; the role of advocacy and education in promoting gender equity; and gender equity in coaching opportunities. Table 2 below summarizes varied responses to questions on gender disparity in football coaching.

Table 2: Women Coaches’ Experiences of Gender Equity in Coaching

Sub Topic	Questionnaire Items	Response	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Instances of inequality witnessed in coaching	Have you witnessed gender inequality in coaching?	Yes	184	90.6
		No	19	9.4
	What Instances of inequality have the respondents witnessed?			
	Access to opportunities		161	79.3
	Stereotyping and prejudice		155	76.4
	Discrimination in the selection and hiring process		153	75.4
	Unequal pay		152	74.9
	Lack of access to resources		130	64.0
	Lack of mentorship and support		129	63.5
	Lack of media coverage		125	61.6
The role of sports organizations in promoting gender equity in coaching	Do you think sports organizations can promote gender equity in coaching?	Yes	197	97.0
		No	6	3.0
	What steps can sport organizations take to promote gender equity in coaching?			
	To provide equal resources and support for both male and female coaches.		178	87.7
	Increase female representation in leadership roles.		175	86.2
	Implement equal pay		172	84.7
	Offer gender sensitive training programs.		168	82.8
The role of advocacy and education in promoting gender equity in coaching	Can addressing gender inequality lead to greater participation and success of female coaches?	Yes	201	99.0
		No	2	1.0
	Can education and awareness promote gender equity in sports?	Yes	203	100
		No	0	0
	In what ways can individuals advocate for gender equity in sports coaching?			
	Advocate for equal and equitable opportunities for all coaches		185	91.1
	Raise awareness about gender inequality in coaching		184	90.6
	Support female coaches		167	82.3
	Challenge gender stereotypes in sports coaching		167	82.3
Gender equity in coaching opportunities	Are there enough opportunities for women to participate in coaching at the professional level?	Yes	112	55.2
		No	91	44.8
	Do you believe there is gender equity in coaching opportunities?	Yes	129	63.5
		Unsure	57	28.1
		No	17	8.4

Note. N= 203. Multiple responses were allowed therefore the total percentages may exceed 100%.

Respondents were asked whether they had personally witnessed gender inequality in football coaching. The majority, 184 (90.6%), reported that they had observed gender inequality in football coaching. They identified several specific forms of inequality. The most frequently reported was unequal access to opportunities, cited by 161 respondents (79.3%), followed by stereotyping and prejudice, reported by 155 (76.4%), and discrimination in the selection and hiring process, reported by 153 (75.4%). Unequal pay was also commonly mentioned by 152 respondents (74.9%). Other challenges identified included limited access to resources, reported by 130 respondents (64.0%); lack of mentorship and support, reported by 129 (63.5%); and limited media coverage of female coaches, reported by 125 (61.6%).

Participants in the focus group discussion further confirmed the existence of gender inequality in football coaching. The discussion revealed that women are often marginalized in leadership roles, which in turn affects the representation of women in coaching positions. As one participant explained: “Most sports organizations have constitutions, but these constitutions rarely incorporate the issue of women in leadership. Even where they do, only a few opportunities are given to women. A case in point is the Football Kenya Federation, where there is only one position for women representative on the National Executive Council. This means that she oversees all 48 branches. She is expected to influence all the women under her tutelage, and that is a difficult task. Moreover, when she sits in those national executive meetings, her voice may not be heard because she is one woman among many men on the committee” (FGD Q2, Participant 7). Respondents’ opinions were sought on whether sports organizations can promote gender equity in football coaching. An overwhelming majority, 197 respondents (97.0%), agreed that sports organizations can play an important role in advancing gender equity in coaching. They were further asked to identify the steps that sports organizations should take to promote gender equity in football coaching. The findings showed strong support for several organizational strategies, including providing equal resources and support for male and female coaches (178; 87.7%), increasing female representation in leadership roles (175; 86.2%), implementing equal pay policies (172; 84.7%), and offering gender-sensitive training programs (168; 82.8%). Findings from the focus group discussions also confirmed that sports organizations have a critical role to play in promoting gender equity in football coaching. One participant noted:

“I was privileged to work in an organization that favored more women in sports compared to men, and that is one out of a hundred. I observed the structure during recruitment, and the focus was more on giving women an opportunity because, basically, they were dealing with women’s empowerment” (FGD Q5, Participant 3).

In addressing whether gender inequality can lead to greater participation and success among female coaches. Respondents expressed strong support for advocacy and education as key mechanisms for promoting gender equity. Nearly all participants, 201 (99.0%), agreed that addressing gender inequality would result in greater participation and success of female coaches. In addition, all 203 respondents (100%) agreed that education and awareness can promote gender equity in sports. Consistent with these views, respondents strongly supported advocating for equal

and equitable opportunities for all coaches (185; 91.1%) and raising awareness about gender inequality in coaching (184; 90.6%). Support for female coaches and challenging gender stereotypes in sports coaching were also strongly endorsed, with 167 respondents (82.3%) supporting each of these measures.

Participants were asked whether there are enough opportunities for women to participate in coaching at the professional level. Perceptions regarding gender equity in coaching opportunities were mixed. Slightly more than half of the respondents, 112 (55.2%), indicated that there are sufficient opportunities for women to participate in professional coaching, while 91 (44.8%) reported that such opportunities are insufficient. When asked whether gender equity exists in coaching opportunities, 129 (63.5%) responded affirmatively, 57 (28.1%) were unsure, and 17 (8.4%) indicated that gender equity does not exist. This discrepancy could be attributed to the barriers that prevent women coaches from accessing the available opportunities thereby creating a gender imbalance in sports coaching for women coaches.

Findings from the focus group discussions further suggested that, although opportunities do exist, the processes and systems in place tend to disadvantage female coaches. One participant observed:

"Men are more frequently appointed to head coach or senior coaching positions. Also, women coaches rarely lead men's teams even though they are qualified and trained as football coaches" (FGD Q4, Participant 5).

In discussing the results, it is reported that the uptake of sports coaching as a career path has increased for women coaches. However, the landscape remains predominantly male, with women coaches often facing personal challenges, cultural biases, and systemic barriers that hinder their advancement in the career path (Callary & Gearity, 2024). Statistical disparities that highlight the gender imbalance in coaching positions have been reported (Ballester Esteve et al., 2024) and according to (Vaquero-Cristóbal et al., 2024) female coaches still report marginalization in sport which is evidenced in insufficient resources, visibility and recognition.

In relation to hiring, recruitment, and selection, the predominance of male coaches was established by findings in Table 1 and confirmed by participants in the focused group discussion who observed that women coaches are denied elite coaching experience and are later excluded because they lack high level experience (FGD Gender Equity Q1-Participant 8). This suggests that access to coaching positions is controlled through informal networks that favor men. From a social closure perspective, this reflects exclusionary closure, where established male actors within football systems monopolize opportunities by privileging those within their social and professional circles. Despite policy frameworks such as the National Policy on Gender and Development (2019), these informal mechanisms continue to shape recruitment outcomes, thereby limiting women's entry into coaching roles.

This study's finding support the previous studies that reports the preference of male coaches (Gerretsen et al., 2023) and how informality and networks intensify biased recruitment in football (Jowett et al., 2022).

In relation to positioning into high status coaching roles, this study finding reveal that male coaches are favored in head coach selection as women remain in subordinate roles. Participant 7 FGD Gender Equity Q2 noted that: "Women can have qualifications and are certified at high level but they will still struggle to be seen as fit for head coach roles, if they are appointed, the appointments are often on

temporary basis or on acting roles. The women coaches are largely excluded from elite clubs and national team head coach positions and if they are appointed as head coaches, senior male coaches are planted as their guide and supervisors" This was supported by another participant (FGD Gender Equity Q1-Participant 1) who noted the following: "Women coaches are mostly channeled into assistant coaching roles, youth teams and women only teams and the selection criteria is fashioned to exclude women coaches requiring women coaches to prove they can coach").

Unequal positioning of male and female coaches into high-status roles further illustrates processes of social closure. Male coaches' dominance in elite and leadership positions indicates the preservation of status and authority within a closed group. Women, on the other hand, are often confined to lower-status roles or women's teams, reflecting usurpationary exclusion, where upward mobility is restricted. This aligns with the "glass ceiling" phenomenon and supports findings by (LaVoi et al., 2019) that structural barriers continue to limit women's advancement in sport leadership. It also aligns with the global evidence that women are underrepresented in high status coaching roles (Krahenbühl & Luz Alencar, 2023; Sisjord et al., 2021). Within institutions such as the Football Kenya Federation, such patterns suggest that leadership pathways remain unevenly accessible.

In relations to pay packages, the results of this study showed that male coaches still receive better pay packages compared to women coaches in the same roles. Participant 4 FGD Gender Equity Q2 pointed that during her tenure as a national team head coach, she never had any contract and it was not clear how much or what she needed to expect from her employer in terms of salary, allowances and bonuses. The head coach for the men's national team on the other hand, had a contract with a huge salary and allowances including a house, a vehicle and a driver.

The disparities observed in pay, wages, and salaries can also be understood through social closure where male coaches' higher earnings reflect the monopolization of economic resources within men's football, which is more commercially developed and institutionally supported. This form of closure ensures that financial benefits remain concentrated within the dominant group, while women's coaching roles often associated with less-resourced women's football are undervalued (Burton, 2015b). This finding aligns with earlier studies by (Norman, 2021) which found that women in sports coaching often face systemic bias, including unequal pay. Other studies by Özaydın, (2022) and Zha, (2023) found that women coaches experience undervaluation in regards to pay and compensation. Studies by Jansen (2023) and Traugutt et al., (2018) also revealed that female coaches often lack access to the same contractual protections and benefits as male coaches, leading to inequitable pay structures. Ballester Esteve et al., (2024) and Sisjord et al., (2021) further revealed that the small percentage of female coaches in the labour force limits their ability for collective bargaining and visibility.

The Kenyan football governance structure intensifies the inequity in pay patterns where female coaches are more often engaged without contracts, are paid less, experience late payments and arrears and are not entitled to non-cash benefits such as medical cover, insurance, housing vehicle. Analyzing inequality in wages and pay package for women football coaches is important because of the implications it has on the women football coaches. Without proper compensation, they are not able to pay for courses making them depend on sponsors which creates a vulnerable

environment. They eventually can become demotivated and exit coaching prematurely.

In accessing opportunities, this study established that women coaches receive less access to coaching opportunities compared to male coaches, it confirms inequality in coaching pathways for women football coaches. Opportunities in this study meant formal opportunities such as appointments to national teams and elite clubs; development opportunities such as Confederation of African Football (CAF) coaching licenses and informal opportunities such as being invited into networks, being considered in shortlists and getting a nod when a vacancy arises.

The lack of access to opportunities could be attributed to the existing informal networks where many opportunities are not publicly advertised but are circulated through the informal networks. These opportunities are shared in male networks and women are outside of the networks. The findings on access to opportunities can be linked to the social closure theory (Witz, 1992) where male football coaches who are the dominant group control access to opportunities for female coaches. They maintain monopoly over high status coaching roles through exclusionary strategies and hoarding of opportunities.

This study aligns with previous research studies that established inequality in access to opportunities areas in football coaching which includes coaching licensing, roles in the national teams, coaching in elite clubs, inclusion in committees and in travel opportunities (Lord & Kavaliauskas, 2023) and that male coaches get access to coaching opportunities including coaching positions in women teams yet female coaches face barriers in accessing both male and female teams leading to significantly underrepresented women coaches (Yiapanas, 2025). Even with initiatives under FIFA and national programs aimed at developing women's football, the uneven distribution of opportunities suggests that inclusion efforts have not fully dismantled entrenched barriers. In Kenya the realities that deepen lack of access to opportunities are resource constraints in resources, politics in the football federation and generally low investment in women's football.

This study established that women coaches receive less media coverage and profiling compared to their male counterparts. The coverage accorded to women coaches mostly focuses on their physical appearance and personal life, rather than on their technical abilities and tactical prowess. The study also established that women football coaches are visible mainly during exceptional wins rather than consistent profiling, that women coaches are not interviewed regularly and are often labelled as the first women coach to achieve specific milestones. One participant reported that when she was appointed as the head coach for a boys' team, the local media did a feature on her but it lacked in depth story of her abilities as a coach, as the story mostly focused on her personal life and other soft narratives (Participant 4 FGD Gender Equity Q2). Disparities in media coverage and profiling also reflect symbolic dimensions of social closure. The greater visibility of male coaches in Kenyan football reinforces their dominance and legitimacy, while the underrepresentation of female coaches limits their recognition and influence. From a social closure perspective, control over visibility and narratives serves to maintain the status hierarchy, as media exposure is closely linked to power, sponsorship, and career advancement (LaVoi & Baeth, 2018).

These findings are consistent with the literature that highlights a gendered media portrayal in sports where women are given less visibility and profiling (Sharma & Singh, 2024). And that the media often trivializes women's achievements and emphasizes their appearance (Taylor, 2025). The Kenyan media narratives reinforce gendered profiling by often focusing on male coaches, and if they give visibility to women coaches, it is more about their personal life compared to professional abilities.

Further, findings of this study reveal that women football coaches compared to male coaches have challenges navigating the work environment. Positive work environment in this study meant autonomy in decision making. Making decisions in coaching environments are a preserve for male Technical Directors and executives as pointed out by Participant 6 FGD Gender Equity Q2 as follows: "During my tenure as the head coach of a team, the executive would not let me and my technical bench make decisions, instead, they would dictate to us tactics and even players to field and how we should respond to media questions during interviews". This constrained autonomy in coaching roles for women football coaches affect their effectiveness and professional identity.

The findings on workplace environment further reinforce the relevance of social closure theory. Female coaches' experiences of less supportive and inclusive environments indicate the presence of organizational cultures that favor the dominant (male) group. Such environments may function as subtle mechanisms of exclusion, discouraging women's participation and retention. This study agrees with earlier research work where (Burillo et al., 2024) established that women football coaches globally report unfavorable working coaching conditions, they are undermined, they lack authority and most of the time they need to prove their competence. Football intensifies this because of the masculinity in hierarchy, public interest in the sport and the high political and financial stakes involved in football, In Kenya, the governance patterns and interference in clubs and the football federation disadvantages women football coaches.

On training and development, findings of this study show that women football coaches receive less preferential treatment in training and development than their male counterparts. This is evident in access to CAF coaching courses, where male coaches dominate the higher- level coaching licenses, such as CAF A, B, and C. The respondents also reported that women coaches are less likely to be nominated for elite coaching courses and workshops and that they often lack the financial capabilities to pay for elite coaching. The limited access to training, development, mentorship, and professional support reported by female coaches further illustrates how closure operates across institutional structures. Training and development are critical for career progression, and when these opportunities are distributed unequally, they reinforce existing inequalities by restricting women's ability to acquire the skills, knowledge, and connections necessary for advancement.

The male dominance of mentorship networks in Kenyan football exemplifies how social capital is preserved within a closed group. In the Kenyan context, although policies such as the National Policy on Gender and Development (2019), the two-thirds gender principle, and initiatives by the Football Kenya Federation aim to promote inclusion, the findings suggest that informal practices of social closure continue to override formal policy intentions. This highlights a key argument of Social

Closure Theory: inequality persists not only through formal exclusion but also through subtle, institutionalized practices that maintain group advantage.

The findings of this study align with previous research that identified inequality and gatekeeping in training through decisions about who gets nominated, funded, exposed and licensed in football coaching and showing that women football coaches experience exclusion from training and development because of selective invitations and biases in nomination (Ms. Lalita Sharma & Dr. Kunal Singh, 2024). The Kenyan football set up promotes inequality in training and development because of inconsistent funding for women's football, gaps between policy and practice and limited support from the federation. Inequity in training contributes to increased attrition and slow progression among women coaches. As a result, development pathways for women leaders in football remain weak, coaching approaches lack diversity, and girls have fewer role models in coaching. Ultimately, this stagnates progress toward gender equity goals.

This study found gender inequity in coaching mentorship, with women football coaches reporting limited mentorship programs compared to their male counterparts. This study examined mentorship in terms of access to structured mentorship programs and found that men benefit more from both formal and informal mentorship networks. Women mentors are scarce, and the mentorship available is often not linked to the career progression of women coaches.

Football mentorship provides technical and tactical learning, exposure and access to networks, legitimacy and career guidance, sponsorship and psychosocial support. Mentorship remains unequal for women coaches because institutions lack structured mentorship programs, women are underrepresented in senior roles, leading to a shortage of women mentors who can share lived experiences and understand gender - specific barriers, and existing mentorship networks are male dominated. In addition, women may mentorship but still not be nominated for opportunities, making mentorship motivational rather than transformational.

This finding support literature that widely confirms mentorship as a crucial component for women's advancement in sport leadership and coaching, while also showing that access to mentorship is inequitable and often informal (Banwell et al., 2019). Football intensifies these dynamics because of its hierarchical structure and masculine culture. In Kenya, there are limited structured development programmes, few women in technical leadership roles, and overreliance on personal networks. Weak mentorship programs contribute to slower skill development among women coaches, reduced confidence and a diminished sense of belonging. They also create an overreliance on male coaches and result in fewer role models for young women in football.

The study examined gender inequities in the provision of advice and support for football coaches in Kenya. The findings reveal a persistent gender gap in access to professional guidance and institutional support. Female coaches reported significantly fewer opportunities to receive both formal and informal support compared to their male counterparts. This dynamic can be understood through Social Closure Theory (Witz,1992), which explains how dominant groups maintain advantages by restricting access to valuable resources. In the Kenyan football context, male-dominated networks function as closure mechanisms that reinforce gendered hierarchies and restrict women's progression. These findings are

consistent with broader research indicating that gender inequalities in sport across Africa are deeply embedded within structural and cultural systems (Burnett, 2023). Studies also report that advice and support have a profound impact on women coaches' development (Banwell et al., 2019).

Importantly, the findings highlight a disconnect between policy commitments and lived experiences. Kenya has established several policy frameworks that explicitly promote gender equity in sport. For example, "The Sports Act, 2013," mandates gender equity and affirmative action in sports governance. More recently, the Draft National Sports Policy (2025) acknowledges persistent gender disparities, including unequal funding, limited visibility, and structural barriers facing women in sport. Despite these frameworks, participants in this study reported that institutional support structures remain insufficient and often fail to address the specific needs of female coaches. Coaching development programs and support initiatives were described as gender-neutral in design but ineffective in practice. This aligns with the Physical Education and Sport Policy for Basic Education (2022), which identifies gaps in capacity and resource allocation that disproportionately affect women. Furthermore, while the 2023-2027 Strategic Plan for State Department for Gender and Affirmative Action promotes gender mainstreaming across sectors, its impact within football coaching structures appears limited. From the perspective of Social Closure Theory, this gap between policy and practice reflects the persistence of informal exclusionary mechanisms. While formal policies advocate inclusion, entrenched social networks, cultural norms, and institutional practices continue to restrict women's access to mentorship, information, and career advancement opportunities. These findings suggest that policy frameworks alone are insufficient to dismantle gender inequities unless accompanied by deliberate efforts to challenge underlying power structures.

On women coaches' experiences of gender disparities in football coaching, the findings on this section were discussed under the following sub-themes: instances of gender inequality witnessed in coaching, the role of sports organizations in promoting gender equity in coaching; the role of advocacy and education in promoting gender equity and gender equity in coaching opportunities. The findings reveal that a significant majority of respondents, had experienced gender inequality in football coaching and that inequality manifests in many forms. Unequal access to opportunities was reported as the most prevalent, followed by stereotyping and prejudice and discrimination in the selection and hiring process at formed the top three most areas where inequality is experienced. This could be attributed to the gate keeping and systemic barriers that prevent women from accessing the opportunities. Similar trends have been observed in prior research. (Light & Georgakis, 2023) highlighted that gender inequality in sports manifests through limited access to resources, stereotyping, and exclusion from leadership opportunities while (Cunningham et al., 2019) reported that women coaches are less likely to be mentored or promoted and often face systemic barriers in accessing training and professional development. Thus, the study corroborates earlier evidence that gender inequity in sports is structural, systematic, and persistent.

The study findings also revealed that sports organizations are central to promoting equity in sports coaching. An overwhelming majority agreed that sports organizations can play a role in promoting gender equity in coaching through policy

enforcement, targeted training, mentorship, and awareness programs. This suggest that policy interventions from sports organizations are a gateway to equity in sports coaching. The current findings are largely consistent with previous research studies that emphasized the importance of mentorship, sponsorship, and structural support programs to address gender inequity (LaVoi & Baeth, 2018) and that stressed on organizational responsibility in policy development, equitable pay, and professional development opportunities (Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2018). While this study confirms many global patterns, it adds specific insights into football coaching in Kenya.

In relation to advocacy, findings of this study revealed that advocacy and education are important mechanisms for promoting gender equity in sports coaching. Respondents overwhelmingly endorsed the view that addressing gender inequality would lead to greater participation and success among female coaches and that education and awareness can promote gender equity in sports. Consistent with these views, respondents supported advocating for equal and equitable opportunities for all coaches and for raising awareness about gender inequality in coaching. Supporting female coaches and challenging gender stereotypes in sports coaching were also strongly endorsed, with 167 respondents (82.3%) advocating for both. This aligns with previous research indicating that coach education is a widely acknowledged mechanism for promoting equity; however, its current structure often lacks depth and practical applicability (Norman, 2021; Norman & Simpson, 2023). The current study extends these findings by demonstrating that, without continuous advocacy, gender equity interventions may remain superficial. Overall, the findings suggest that, while advocacy and education are essential components in promoting gender equity in sports coaching, their effectiveness depends on how they are designed and implemented. Educational programmes must adopt more critical, intersectional, and practice-oriented approaches, while advocacy efforts should target both individual attitudes and institutional structures.

Findings also revealed that while opportunities for women to participate in coaching at the professional level was available, there was gender disparities in positioning women coaches to the available coaching opportunities. These findings align with existing literature, which demonstrates that sports coaching remains a male-dominated profession, particularly at elite levels, due to entrenched organizational practices and gendered norms (Cunningham et al., 2019). Similarly, (Burton, 2015b) argued that organizational cultures within sport frequently strengthen male dominance by privileging traditionally masculine traits associated with leadership, thereby limiting women's access to coaching opportunities. Overall, the findings suggest that achieving gender equity in coaching opportunities requires more than increasing participation numbers; it necessitates systemic change within sport organizations.

CONCLUSION

This study provides empirical evidence on the status of gender equity in football coaching in Kenya by demonstrating that gender disparities extend beyond the underrepresentation of women coaches to include unequal access to coaching opportunities, career advancement, professional development, and institutional support. The findings indicate that persistent gender stereotypes, discrimination,

unequal access to resources, limited female role models, systemic and institutional barriers, as well as power dynamics and perceptions of competence continue to hinder women's career progression in football coaching. These inequalities contribute to career stagnation, economic disparities, limited professional visibility, and a less supportive working environment for women coaches. Although several organizations have introduced gender-related policies, their implementation remains insufficient to address the structural barriers affecting women's participation and advancement. This study therefore fills an important gap in the African sports literature by providing context-specific evidence from Kenya and highlights the need for coordinated efforts among football governing bodies, government agencies, educational institutions, and coaching organizations to strengthen gender-equitable policies and practices. Priority should be given to the effective implementation of gender-sensitive recruitment, promotion, remuneration, and resource allocation policies, the expansion of educational and leadership opportunities for women coaches, and the establishment of mechanisms that ensure equal pay and professional support. These measures are essential for creating a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable football coaching system in Kenya.

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