

Beyond the Whistle: A Phenomenological Study of National Winning Sports Coaches

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of national-winning teacher-coaches in their journey toward achieving success in national sports competitions during the academic year 2025–2026. It specifically examined how teacher-coaches experienced and interpreted their coaching journeys, the challenges they encountered, and the factors that enabled them to attain and sustain national-level success. Using a phenomenological research design, the study gathered and analyzed the experiences of national-winning teacher-coaches to identify the meanings and patterns underlying their coaching journeys. The findings revealed that sustained coaching success extends beyond technical expertise and is shaped by enduring commitment to athletes, resilience in overcoming challenges, continuous professional growth, and a strong sense of purpose. The experiences of the participants further demonstrated that coaching involves not only the pursuit of athletic achievement but also mentorship, service, and holistic athlete development. These findings suggest that effective coaching is a long-term commitment that requires dedication, perseverance, adaptability, and selfless service. The study provides insights for educational leaders, sports administrators, policymakers, and aspiring coaches in strengthening institutional support, enhancing professional development opportunities, and developing coaching practices that promote both athletic excellence and the holistic development of athletes.

Keywords: teacher-coaches, lived experiences, phenomenology, coaching excellence, sports competitions, athlete development

INTRODUCTION

Sports programs in schools are an important component of learners' holistic development. Participation in sports provides opportunities for students to develop athletic abilities while strengthening discipline, teamwork, leadership, resilience, sportsmanship, and other skills that contribute to personal and social development. In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) recognizes sports as part of learners' holistic development and supports programs that provide opportunities for students to participate in sports and competitions (Department of Education [DepEd], 2024). Among these initiatives is the Palarong Pambansa, which provides student-athletes opportunities to demonstrate their abilities while representing their schools, divisions, and regions. Beyond competition, such programs promote values including perseverance, discipline, resilience, sportsmanship, and teamwork (DepEd, 2024). Supporting these programs are teacher-coaches who contribute their time, expertise, and commitment to developing student-athletes while simultaneously fulfilling their responsibilities as classroom teachers. To strengthen their capacity to perform these roles, DepEd has implemented training programs aimed at enhancing the skills and competencies of teacher-coaches in providing sports instruction and guidance (DepEd, 2021).

The role of a teacher-coach extends beyond technical instruction in sports. Teacher-coaches may be responsible for identifying and developing athletic talent, preparing training programs, mentoring student-athletes, organizing competitions, communicating with parents and school administrators, and supporting students' overall development. These responsibilities may require substantial time and effort beyond regular

teaching duties. As a result, teacher-coaches must navigate the competing demands of classroom instruction and sports coaching while responding to institutional expectations and the needs of their athletes. Mellor et al. (2021) noted that the dual teacher-coach role may create role conflict when the demands associated with teaching and coaching are not effectively managed. This dual responsibility highlights the complexity of coaching within school settings and the personal and professional demands associated with sustaining success.

Existing research on school sports in the Philippines has addressed areas such as participation in sports programs, physical education, athlete performance, and coaching competencies. However, comparatively limited attention has been given to the lived experiences of teacher-coaches who have achieved success at the national level. In particular, there remains a need for qualitative inquiry into how national-winning teacher-coaches manage the demands of teaching and coaching, respond to institutional and logistical challenges, support their athletes, and sustain excellence throughout their coaching careers. Examining these experiences is important because national-level coaching success involves more than competitive outcomes; it also reflects the personal values, professional practices, relationships, and commitments that shape the coaching journey.

National-winning teacher-coaches represent individuals who have successfully guided student-athletes to high-level competitive achievement while maintaining their responsibilities within the educational system. Their experiences may provide valuable insights into the motivations, challenges, coping strategies, professional development, and forms of institutional support associated with sustained coaching excellence. Understanding these experiences may also contribute to a broader view of coaching as an educational practice that encompasses athlete development, mentorship, leadership, and service.

Guided by a phenomenological research design, this study explored the lived experiences of national-winning teacher-coaches in their journey toward achieving success in national sports competitions during the academic year 2025–2026. It sought to understand how these teacher-coaches experienced and interpreted their coaching journeys, the challenges they encountered, and the factors that enabled them to achieve and sustain national-level success. By examining the meanings participants attached to their experiences, the study aimed to illuminate the essence of coaching excellence from the perspective of teacher-coaches who have successfully navigated the demands of teaching and competitive sports.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study explored the lived experiences of national-winning teacher-coaches in their journey toward achieving and sustaining success in national sports competitions during the academic year 2025–2026. Although existing literature has examined teacher-coach responsibilities, coaching competencies, athlete development, and sports participation, limited attention has been given to the lived experiences of teacher-coaches who have attained national-level competitive success while simultaneously performing their responsibilities as classroom teachers. In particular, there is a need to understand how these teacher-coaches interpret their experiences, respond to role demands and institutional limitations, develop resilience, and sustain their commitment to coaching.

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

- How do national-winning teacher-coaches describe their lived experiences in their journey toward achieving success in national sports competitions?
- What challenges and sacrifices do national-winning teacher-coaches experience while performing their teaching and coaching responsibilities?
- How do national-winning teacher-coaches respond to setbacks, competing responsibilities, and institutional limitations?
- What sources of motivation, support, and professional learning contribute to their continued commitment to coaching?
- What meanings do national-winning teacher-coaches attach to coaching success, athlete development, and their role as teacher-coaches?

- What common experiences and patterns characterize the journey of national-winning teacher-coaches toward sustaining coaching excellence?

Understanding these experiences is significant because national-level coaching success may require sustained personal commitment, professional learning, resilience, and support from schools and other stakeholders. By examining the experiences of teachers who have successfully navigated these demands, the study may contribute to a deeper understanding of coaching as both an educational and professional practice. The findings may also provide a basis for strengthening institutional support, professional development, teacher-coach recruitment and retention, and policies that recognize the demands associated with combining teaching and coaching responsibilities.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research methodology using a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of national-winning teacher-coaches. Phenomenology is concerned with understanding how individuals experience, interpret, and assign meaning to a particular phenomenon. This approach was appropriate because the study focused on the coaching journeys of teacher-coaches who had achieved success in national sports competitions, including the challenges they encountered, the ways they managed competing teaching and coaching responsibilities, and the factors that contributed to their sustained success.

Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews that encouraged participants to provide detailed accounts of their experiences. The interview data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes representing the shared experiences of the participants. The combination of a phenomenological orientation and thematic analysis enabled the researcher to examine the meanings participants attached to their experiences and develop an understanding of the common elements underlying their coaching journeys.

The participants were national-winning teacher-coaches employed by the Department of Education who possessed direct experience of the phenomenon under investigation. Criterion purposive sampling was employed to intentionally select participants who met predetermined eligibility requirements and could provide information-rich accounts relevant to the research questions. Purposive sampling involves selecting participants based on characteristics and experiences relevant to the objectives of the study (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025), while criterion sampling involves selecting participants who meet specific criteria established by the researcher (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024).

Participants were included if they: (1) were currently employed as teacher-coaches in the Department of Education; (2) had successfully coached an athlete or team that achieved victory in a national-level sports competition; (3) had at least three years of experience as a teacher-coach; (4) voluntarily agreed to participate and provided informed consent; and (5) were able to articulate and describe their coaching experiences. Individuals who did not meet these criteria or declined participation were excluded.

Five (5) teacher-coaches participated in the study. The sample size was considered appropriate for a phenomenological inquiry because the purpose of the study was to obtain rich and detailed descriptions of a shared lived experience rather than to achieve statistical representation. Participants were deliberately selected because they possessed direct and substantial experience of the phenomenon under investigation.

The adequacy of the sample was also considered in relation to information power and data saturation. Because the participants met specific and relatively homogeneous criteria, had direct experience of national-level coaching success, and were able to provide detailed accounts of their coaching journeys, a smaller sample could provide substantial information relevant to the research questions. During data collection and analysis, the researcher monitored the emergence of new information, codes, and meanings across interviews. As the interviews progressed, recurring patterns concerning coaching purpose, sacrifice, role demands, institutional limitations, resilience, relationships, and professional growth became evident. The later interviews primarily reinforced and elaborated previously identified patterns rather than introducing substantially different

dimensions of the phenomenon. This indicated that sufficient information had been obtained to address the research questions and develop the final themes.

Thus, the decision to include five participants was based not solely on numerical considerations but on the depth, relevance, and adequacy of the information obtained from participants. In phenomenological research, a smaller, information-rich sample is appropriate when participants have experienced the phenomenon directly and can provide detailed descriptions of its meaning and significance.

The researcher served as the primary instrument for data collection and interpretation. In qualitative inquiry, the researcher directly engages with participants, establishes rapport, conducts interviews, asks probing questions, and interprets participants' narratives. Reflexivity was therefore maintained throughout the research process to enable the researcher to critically examine personal assumptions and potential biases and to support an accurate representation of participants' experiences (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022).

A researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide served as the primary data-gathering instrument. The guide consisted of open-ended questions aligned with the research questions and objectives and focused on participants' coaching journeys, challenges, coping strategies, professional development, and experiences of achieving success at the national level. The semi-structured format ensured that core questions were consistently addressed while allowing the researcher to use follow-up and probing questions when participants provided significant or relevant responses.

The interview guide was reviewed by five (5) specialists with expertise in qualitative research, educational management, and sports education. They evaluated the questions for relevance, clarity, appropriateness, comprehensibility, and alignment with the study objectives. Their recommendations were incorporated into the final version of the guide. The revised guide was also pilot-tested with teacher-coaches who possessed characteristics similar to the target participants but were not included in the actual study. The pilot test was conducted to assess the clarity, sequence, and appropriateness of the interview questions.

With participants' permission, interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accurate documentation of their responses. Field notes were also maintained to capture relevant contextual information and observations during the interviews.

Data collection commenced after obtaining the necessary approval from the research adviser and appropriate institutional authorities. Eligible teacher-coaches were identified based on the established inclusion criteria and were invited to participate. The researcher explained the purpose, scope, procedures, confidentiality measures, potential risks and benefits, and voluntary nature of participation. Written informed consent was obtained before each interview.

Interviews were conducted at a time and location convenient for the participants. Participants were allowed to use their preferred language to facilitate the natural and detailed expression of their experiences. The researcher established rapport before each interview and conducted the semi-structured interview using the approved guide. Core questions were presented to all participants, while probing questions were used when clarification or elaboration was necessary.

With permission, each interview was audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were checked against the recordings to ensure accuracy and completeness. Participants were also given the opportunity to review their respective transcripts and clarify or correct information when necessary. The finalized transcripts and field notes were organized and prepared for thematic analysis.

The interview data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis. This approach provided a systematic process for identifying, organizing, reviewing, and interpreting patterns within the participants' narratives.

The first phase involved familiarization with the data through repeated listening to the recordings, transcription, and repeated reading of the transcripts and field notes. The second phase involved generating

initial codes by identifying meaningful statements and segments relevant to the research questions. In the third phase, related codes were grouped to develop potential themes representing recurring patterns across participants' experiences.

The fourth phase involved reviewing the preliminary themes against the coded extracts and the complete dataset to determine their coherence, distinctiveness, and relevance to the phenomenon. In the fifth phase, the researcher defined and named the final themes according to their central meanings and relationship to the research objectives. The sixth phase involved producing the report by presenting the themes and supporting them with selected participant quotations. This process enabled the researcher to develop an interpretive account of the shared experiences and meanings expressed by the national-winning teacher-coaches.

The trustworthiness of the study was addressed using the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability associated with Lincoln and Guba's framework.

Credibility was supported through in-depth semi-structured interviews, probing questions, transcript review, and member checking. Participants were given an opportunity to verify the accuracy of their interview transcripts and clarify their responses. These procedures helped ensure that the findings reflected participants' experiences and perspectives.

Transferability was supported through detailed descriptions of the research context, participant characteristics, sampling procedures, and research processes. Providing sufficient contextual information enables readers to assess the applicability of the findings to settings with similar characteristics.

Dependability was addressed through the maintenance of an audit trail documenting methodological decisions, interview procedures, field notes, transcription, coding, and theme development. This documentation provided transparency regarding how the research process was conducted and how analytical decisions were made.

Confirmability was supported through reflexive practice, a reflective journal, and the maintenance of research records. The researcher critically examined personal assumptions and potential biases throughout the research process. Interview transcripts, field notes, coding records, and analytical documents were retained to demonstrate that the findings were grounded in participants' accounts rather than solely in the researcher's interpretations.

Ethical principles were observed throughout the research process to protect participants' rights, dignity, autonomy, and well-being. Prior to data collection, the researcher obtained the necessary institutional approval and informed consent from all participants. Participants were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study, the expected duration of the interviews, the use of audio recording, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality measures, and their right to decline questions or withdraw from the study without penalty.

Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained through the use of pseudonyms or participant identifiers rather than real names in transcripts and the presentation of findings. Identifying information, including participants' schools, was treated confidentially. Audio recordings, transcripts, field notes, and other research materials were securely stored with restricted access and will be retained and disposed of in accordance with applicable institutional requirements.

Permission to audio-record each interview was obtained before recording began. Participants were informed that the data would be used solely for research purposes and that selected excerpts could be included in the presentation of findings without identifying them. During the interviews, the researcher maintained professionalism and sensitivity, particularly when participants discussed challenging or emotionally significant experiences. Participants were permitted to pause an interview, decline to answer a question, or discontinue participation at any time. Reflexive practices were also maintained throughout the study to promote ethical and responsible interpretation of participants' experiences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The analysis of the participants' narratives generated three overarching themes that describe the lived experiences of national-winning teacher-coaches: (1) Embracing Coaching as a Lifelong Calling, (2) Bearing the Weight of Coaching Excellence, and (3) Sustaining Excellence Through Resilience. Each theme consisted of three interconnected subthemes that captured the meanings participants attached to their coaching journeys.

Theme 1. Embracing Coaching as a Lifelong Calling

The first theme describes how participants gradually developed coaching from a professional responsibility into a meaningful personal and professional calling. Their narratives showed that coaching required considerable time, effort, sacrifice, and commitment, yet they did not primarily experience these demands as burdens. Instead, they found meaning in influencing the lives of student-athletes, developing their character, and helping them pursue educational and personal opportunities. Success was therefore understood not only through championships but also through athletes' growth in confidence, discipline, resilience, and life aspirations.

Discovering Purpose Through Coaching

Participants described a gradual transformation from simply fulfilling an assigned coaching responsibility to developing a strong sense of purpose and identity as coaches. Their motivation was not primarily associated with recognition or status but with their passion for sports, relationships with athletes, and opportunities to contribute to athletes' development.

Participant 5 described how an initially assigned responsibility eventually became a personal passion:

"What initially started as an assigned responsibility gradually developed into a personal passion and lifelong commitment... Seeing athletes succeed, both in competitions and in their personal aspirations, continues to inspire me to remain committed to the profession."

Similarly, Participant 3 emphasized the sacrifice and dedication required to develop athletes, while Participant 4 associated coaching with technical mastery, perseverance, and continuous professional development. Participant 1 further described coaching as a transformative experience that challenged personal as well as professional capacities.

Taken together, these accounts indicate that coaching purpose developed through repeated experiences, athlete-coach relationships, challenges, and opportunities to witness the effects of coaching. Participants increasingly identified themselves not merely through their competitive achievements but through the impact they had on young people. Purpose consequently became a foundation for sustained commitment, resilience, and willingness to make sacrifices for athletes.

This finding suggests that coaching became increasingly meaningful as participants experienced the positive effects of their work on student-athletes. Rather than being motivated primarily by recognition or competitive achievement, participants described coaching as an opportunity to serve, mentor, and contribute to the future of young people. This perspective is consistent with Ryan and Deci (2020), who emphasized the importance of internally meaningful motivation in sustaining engagement. In the present study, passion for sports, commitment to athletes, and the perceived value of coaching contributed to the development of a strong coaching identity. Thus, the participants' commitment to coaching may be understood not simply as compliance with an assigned responsibility but as an internally meaningful professional purpose.

Finding Fulfillment in Athletes' Growth and Success

Participants consistently identified the development and success of their athletes as their greatest source of fulfillment. Although national championships represented important accomplishments, participants placed greater value on seeing athletes become confident, disciplined, resilient, and determined individuals.

Participant 5 explained:

“What inspires me to continue coaching is my love for arnis and my desire to see children excel in sports. Sports become their ticket to a better future because many of them earn scholarships and continue their education.”

Participant 1 similarly explained that an athlete’s achievement was more rewarding than personal recognition, noting that an athlete’s success reflected the effort and sacrifices invested in the training process. Participant 2 further emphasized that successful coaching extends beyond technical instruction to the development of discipline, responsibility, humility, and respect.

These accounts indicate that participants understood coaching as a relational and educational practice. Their fulfillment was derived from contributing to athletes’ academic, athletic, personal, and social development. Thus, coaching success was not defined solely by competitive outcomes but by the enduring influence coaches had on the lives and future opportunities of their athletes.

This finding reinforces the view of coaching as an educational practice rather than merely a competitive function. Participant 5’s observation that sports could provide athletes with opportunities for scholarships and continued education illustrates how participants connected athletic development with broader life outcomes. The International Council for Coaching Excellence (2021) emphasizes athlete-centered development and the professional responsibilities of coaches in supporting athletes beyond technical performance. The participants’ experiences similarly demonstrate that their sense of achievement was closely connected to the personal growth, character development, and future opportunities of the athletes they served.

Growing Through Experience and Continuous Learning

Participants also viewed coaching excellence as a continuing process of learning and self-improvement. National-level success was described not as a single achievement but as the product of years of experience, reflection, adaptation, and professional development. Each competition, whether successful or unsuccessful, provided opportunities to refine coaching methods, improve technical knowledge, and develop leadership capacities.

Participant 4 stated:

“Every competition is a learning experience. As coaches, we also need to improve ourselves because the athletes depend on our knowledge and preparation.”

Participant 1 similarly described every experience as an opportunity for personal and professional improvement, while Participant 3 emphasized that every athlete and competition provided new lessons.

The findings suggest that reflective practice and openness to learning were important elements of sustained coaching excellence. Exposure to different competitions, coaches, athletes, and training contexts encouraged participants to continually evaluate and adapt their practices. These findings are consistent with Lara-Bercial and McKenna (2022) and the International Council for Coaching Excellence (2021), which emphasize meaningful relationships, reflective practice, and sustained commitment to athlete development as characteristics of effective coaching.

Participant 4’s statement that “Every competition is a learning experience” further illustrates that professional growth was embedded in the participants’ everyday coaching experiences. Rather than viewing national-level achievement as the completion of their development, participants continued to seek new knowledge and improve their practices. This pattern suggests that reflective learning contributed to their ability to adapt to changing athlete needs and competitive demands. Continuous professional development therefore formed an important part of their sustained coaching excellence and strengthened their capacity to integrate technical expertise with mentorship and leadership.

Overall, Theme 1 demonstrates that national-winning teacher-coaches understood coaching as more than a job responsibility. Their commitment was strengthened by purpose, fulfillment derived from athlete development, and continuous professional learning.

Theme 2. Bearing the Weight of Coaching Excellence

The second theme captures the demanding realities underlying national-level coaching success. Participants described years of sacrifice, competing responsibilities, and institutional limitations that accompanied their achievements. Despite these challenges, their commitment to athletes remained strong. The theme consists of three subthemes: Making Personal and Professional Sacrifices, Balancing Multiple Roles and Responsibilities, and Working Beyond Institutional Limitations.

Making Personal and Professional Sacrifices

Participants described sacrifice as an enduring component of their coaching experiences. Training frequently occurred before or after classes, during weekends, holidays, and school breaks. These demands reduced opportunities for recreation, family involvement, and personal relaxation, yet participants generally interpreted such sacrifices as necessary investments in athlete development.

Participant 3 stated:

“My journey from becoming a coach to achieving national success is not easy. It requires time, effort, sacrifices, and dedication. There were many challenges before reaching the national level, but seeing the athletes improve made every sacrifice worthwhile.”

Participant 1 described coaching as a transformative process, while Participant 4 emphasized dedication, perseverance, patience, and emotional commitment. These accounts indicate that sacrifice was not experienced solely as hardship but as part of the coaches' commitment to their athletes and their professional identity.

Although participants interpreted their sacrifices as meaningful contributions to athlete development, these experiences also reveal potential sources of occupational strain. Extended training hours, weekend and holiday commitments, and reduced opportunities for rest may create conditions that increase the risk of exhaustion when sustained over long periods. Mellor et al. (2021) noted that the dual teacher-coach role may involve competing demands and role pressures. The present findings support this concern by showing that participants frequently extended their responsibilities beyond regular teaching hours to meet the needs of their athletes. However, because burnout was not directly measured in this study, the findings are more appropriately interpreted as evidence of workload and role-related pressures that may contribute to burnout rather than as evidence that participants experienced burnout itself.

Balancing Multiple Roles and Responsibilities

Participants also experienced the complexity of simultaneously fulfilling teaching and coaching responsibilities. Beyond classroom instruction and technical sports training, they assumed roles as mentors, motivators, organizers, disciplinarians, counselors, and parental figures. These overlapping responsibilities required planning, flexibility, time management, and personal sacrifice.

Participant 5 described coaching as a continuation of the educational role:

“Coaching is a commitment. Even after classes, training continues because the athletes depend on our guidance. We need to make sure they are physically and mentally prepared for every competition.”

Participant 2 similarly emphasized that coaching involved guiding athletes toward responsible behavior, while Participant 4 described the difficulty of managing teaching and coaching responsibilities simultaneously.

Rather than treating teaching and coaching as entirely competing roles, participants gradually integrated them into a shared professional purpose centered on the holistic development of learners. This finding is consistent with literature describing teacher-coaches as professionals who simultaneously perform instructional, leadership, mentoring, and emotional-support functions. It also demonstrates that national-winning teacher-coaches manage these responsibilities through a strong commitment to student development.

The participants' experiences also illustrate the tension between role conflict and role integration. On one hand, teaching and coaching require time, preparation, emotional energy, and attention, creating circumstances in which demands from one role may interfere with the other. On the other hand, participants increasingly perceived both roles as connected through their shared goal of developing learners. This suggests that a strong professional purpose may help teacher-coaches integrate their responsibilities; however, personal commitment alone may not eliminate the pressures created by excessive workload. Institutional arrangements that provide adequate preparation time, reasonable scheduling, and administrative assistance may therefore be necessary to make role integration sustainable.

Working Beyond Institutional Limitations

Participants encountered institutional constraints involving financial resources, training facilities, sports equipment, and logistical requirements. However, they responded to these limitations through resourcefulness, collaboration, innovation, and perseverance.

Participant 3 explained:

"There were many times when resources were limited. We had to be resourceful and continue preparing because stopping was never an option. Our athletes still deserved the best training we could provide."

Participant 4 similarly emphasized maximizing available resources, while Participant 5 highlighted the importance of school administrators, parents, local government units, and the community:

"The support of the school administration, parents, local government, and the community is very important because coaching success cannot be achieved by one person alone."

These experiences indicate that coaching excellence was achieved despite, rather than always because of, ideal institutional conditions. Participants compensated for resource limitations through adaptability, collaboration, and commitment. The findings are consistent with Mellor et al. (2021) and Westmoreland (2024), who identified workload, institutional demands, role conflict, and personal sacrifices as challenges encountered by coaches. The present findings further demonstrate how national-winning teacher-coaches navigated such constraints within the public-school context.

The participants' accounts highlight the importance of institutional support in sustaining coaching excellence. Participant 5's statement that "coaching success cannot be achieved by one person alone" demonstrates that national-level achievement depended on a broader support network. Administrative assistance, parental involvement, local government support, adequate facilities, equipment, transportation, and financial resources can reduce the extent to which individual teacher-coaches must compensate for institutional limitations through personal sacrifice. Thus, institutional support should not be viewed merely as an additional benefit but as an important condition for sustaining effective coaching and protecting teacher-coaches from excessive workload and prolonged occupational strain.

The findings therefore extend the discussion of teacher-coach role demands by demonstrating that institutional conditions shape how these responsibilities are experienced. When resources and organizational support are limited, teacher-coaches may be required to rely heavily on personal initiative and resourcefulness. While such adaptability contributed to the participants' success, continuously depending on individual sacrifice may not be sustainable for all teacher-coaches. Stronger organizational support may help schools retain experienced coaches and sustain coaching programs over time.

Theme 3. Sustaining Excellence Through Resilience

The third theme describes resilience as a central element in sustaining coaching excellence. Participants experienced financial constraints, administrative demands, competing teaching and coaching responsibilities, athlete-related concerns, and the emotional demands of preparing young athletes for national competition. Rather than viewing these challenges as reasons to discontinue coaching, they interpreted them as opportunities for learning, adaptation, and growth.

This interpretation is consistent with Fletcher and Sarkar (2022), who emphasized the role of adaptive responses in maintaining functioning under challenging conditions. In the present study, resilience was evident in the participants' willingness to reflect on unsuccessful experiences, identify areas for improvement, and modify their preparation and coaching practices. Their responses suggest that resilience developed through an ongoing process of experiencing difficulty, learning from it, adapting, and continuing toward valued goals. Consequently, resilience was not simply an inherent personal quality but a process shaped by experience and the meanings participants attached to adversity.

Learning and Growing Through Setbacks

Participants consistently described setbacks as opportunities for reflection and improvement. Losses, unexpected difficulties, and unsuccessful competitions encouraged them to evaluate their practices, improve preparation, and strengthen their commitment.

Participant 4 stated:

“Continuous training is important to achieve success... You cannot win every game, but you can learn from everything.”

Participant 5 similarly encouraged athletes to learn from mistakes and return stronger. These experiences indicate that resilience was developed through repeated cycles of challenge, reflection, adaptation, and renewed commitment. Participants did not define setbacks as permanent failures but as experiences that contributed to professional and personal growth.

This interpretation is consistent with Fletcher and Sarkar (2022), who emphasized the role of adaptive responses in maintaining functioning under challenging conditions. In the present study, resilience was evident in the participants' willingness to reflect on unsuccessful experiences, identify areas for improvement, and modify their preparation and coaching practices. Their responses suggest that resilience developed through an ongoing process of experiencing difficulty, learning from it, adapting, and continuing toward valued goals. Consequently, resilience was not simply an inherent personal quality but a process shaped by experience and the meanings participants attached to adversity. From a phenomenological perspective, resilience emerged through the meanings participants attached to adversity. Challenges became transformative experiences that strengthened confidence, emotional endurance, and professional identity. Thus, resilience was experienced as an ongoing process rather than a fixed personal characteristic.

Drawing Strength from Relationships and Support Systems

Participants emphasized that national-level coaching success was not achieved individually. Their resilience was strengthened by relationships with athletes, fellow coaches, families, school administrators, local government units, and other community stakeholders. These relationships provided emotional encouragement, professional knowledge, practical assistance, and shared responsibility.

Participant 5 highlighted the importance of family, teammates, the school, and local government support:

“For the greatest support, I think number one is the family support coming from the families of our players, the team, the co-players, of course our school and our LGU as well.”

Participant 2 described athletes themselves as a source of motivation, while Participant 4 emphasized learning from fellow coaches. These narratives demonstrate that resilience was relational and socially reinforced. Support systems helped participants maintain confidence, develop professionally, and continue pursuing excellence despite challenges.

This finding further demonstrates that resilience should not be understood solely as an individual capacity. The participants' experiences show that perseverance was strengthened by access to people and institutions that provided emotional, practical, and professional support. This is particularly important in the context of teacher-coaching, where the demands of training and competition are added to regular teaching responsibilities. Support from administrators, families, fellow coaches, and community stakeholders may reduce the burden placed on individual coaches and provide resources that enable them to continue performing effectively. Thus, resilience and institutional support appear to operate together rather than as separate influences on coaching sustainability.

Remaining Anchored in Purpose, Passion, and Faith

The final subtheme demonstrates that participants' resilience was sustained by a strong sense of purpose, passion for coaching, and, for some participants, faith. Despite demanding schedules, resource limitations, setbacks, and personal sacrifices, participants continued to view coaching as a meaningful vocation rather than merely a professional obligation.

Participant 5 explained:

"My inspiration is my love for arnis and my love to see children excel in sports. Sports become their ticket to the future because many of them earn scholarships and continue their education."

Participant 1 described coaching as a lifelong process of personal transformation, while Participant 4 emphasized that athletes' dedication motivated continued coaching. Participant 3 similarly expressed continued commitment because of the potential he saw in young athletes.

Several participants also identified faith as a source of strength during uncertainty and disappointment. Their accounts suggest that resilience was supported by personal conviction and a belief that their work served a larger purpose. The findings are consistent with Ryan and Deci (2020) regarding intrinsic motivation and purpose and with Fletcher and Sarkar (2022) regarding resilience and psychological adaptability under adversity. From a phenomenological perspective, purpose, passion, and faith formed an important part of the participants' coaching identity. These meanings influenced how they interpreted challenges and sustained their commitment to serving student-athletes. Resilience, therefore, was experienced not simply as the capacity to endure difficulty but as the ability to transform adversity into continued growth and purposeful service.

The findings across the three themes collectively suggest that purpose, motivation, resilience, and support were interconnected in the participants' coaching journeys. Purpose gave meaning to their sacrifices, continuous learning enabled them to improve their practices, resilience helped them respond to setbacks, and relationships with others provided support during demanding periods. This interconnectedness helps explain how participants were able to sustain coaching involvement despite competing responsibilities and institutional limitations. At the same time, the findings indicate that personal resilience should complement, rather than replace, institutional responsibility for providing appropriate resources and working conditions.

Theoretical Interpretation of the Findings

The findings can be interpreted through the concepts of intrinsic motivation and resilience that guided the understanding of participants' experiences. Ryan and Deci's (2020) perspective on motivation provides a useful lens for explaining why participants remained committed to coaching despite substantial demands and limited external rewards. Participants repeatedly described passion for their sport, fulfillment from athlete

development, and a strong sense of purpose. These experiences suggest that coaching was internally meaningful to them and became an important part of their professional identity.

The findings also align with the concept of resilience discussed by Fletcher and Sarkar (2022). Participants demonstrated the ability to respond constructively to setbacks, resource limitations, competing responsibilities, and unsuccessful outcomes. Resilience was expressed through reflection, adaptation, continued learning, and renewed commitment. Importantly, the findings indicate that resilience was not experienced solely as an individual characteristic. Relationships with athletes, families, colleagues, administrators, and community stakeholders contributed substantially to participants' ability to persist. The findings further complement the literature on teacher-coach role conflict. Mellor et al. (2021) emphasized the competing demands that may arise when teaching and coaching responsibilities overlap. The present study confirms that these demands can involve time pressure, additional workload, personal sacrifice, and competing expectations. At the same time, participants demonstrated that role integration was possible when teaching and coaching were understood as interconnected components of their commitment to student development.

Taken together, the findings suggest that coaching excellence emerges from the interaction of personal motivation, resilience, professional learning, relationships, and institutional conditions. Personal commitment may initiate and sustain coaching engagement, but supportive environments are necessary to enable teacher-coaches to maintain their effectiveness without relying excessively on individual sacrifice. This interpretation reinforces the view that national-level coaching success should be understood as both an individual and organizational phenomenon.

LIMITATIONS

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the study involved only five (5) national-winning teacher-coaches. Although the sample was appropriate for an in-depth phenomenological inquiry and provided rich information concerning the phenomenon, the findings are not intended to represent all teacher-coaches or all coaches involved in national sports competitions. The depth of the participants' experiences was prioritized over statistical generalizability.

Second, the study focused on teacher-coaches employed by the Department of Education within one Schools Division in the Negros Island Region. The single-region focus provided a specific contextual understanding of teacher-coaching experiences but may limit the transferability of the findings to other regions, school divisions, educational systems, or sports contexts where institutional policies, available resources, and organizational cultures may differ.

Third, as with qualitative research, researcher interpretation may have influenced the coding and development of themes. Although reflexivity, an audit trail, transcript review, member checking, and research records were used to strengthen credibility and confirmability, complete elimination of researcher bias is not possible because the researcher served as the primary instrument for data collection and interpretation.

Fourth, the study relied primarily on participants' self-reported experiences. Participants may have emphasized particular experiences, selectively remembered events, or presented their coaching practices in ways that reflected positively on themselves or their institutions. The use of in-depth interviews and opportunities for transcript clarification helped address this concern, but self-report remains an inherent limitation.

Finally, the study focused specifically on national-winning teacher-coaches. Their experiences may differ from those of teacher-coaches who have not yet achieved national-level success or who have discontinued coaching. Consequently, the findings primarily illuminate the experiences associated with sustained and successful coaching rather than the full range of teacher-coach experiences.

Implications for Teacher-Coach Recruitment, Retention, and Support

The findings have implications for how schools and education authorities recruit, retain, and support teacher-coaches. Recruitment may be strengthened by identifying teachers who demonstrate not only technical

competence in sports but also commitment to learner development, communication skills, adaptability, mentoring capacity, and willingness to engage in continuous professional learning. Coaching assignments may be more sustainable when teachers' interests, competencies, and previous coaching experiences are considered rather than relying solely on availability.

For retention, schools may consider recognizing coaching responsibilities as a significant professional contribution. Participants' experiences demonstrate that coaching frequently extends beyond regular teaching hours and involves considerable personal sacrifice. Appropriate recognition, workload consideration, opportunities for advancement, and access to professional development may help sustain teacher-coaches' motivation and reduce the likelihood that experienced coaches leave coaching roles because of prolonged workload pressures.

Institutional support should also include practical mechanisms such as access to appropriate training facilities and equipment, transportation assistance, competition-related logistical support, scheduling arrangements, and adequate preparation time. Administrative support may be strengthened by allowing reasonable adjustments to teaching and coaching schedules during intensive training and competition periods. Professional development programs may focus on both technical and non-technical coaching competencies. Training can include athlete-centered coaching, sports psychology, injury prevention and safety, communication, mentoring, leadership, conflict management, stress management, competition preparation, and reflective coaching practice. Peer mentoring and communities of practice may also provide opportunities for experienced teacher-coaches to share strategies and support less experienced coaches.

At the policy level, education authorities may consider developing clearer guidelines that define teacher-coach responsibilities, workload expectations, recognition mechanisms, professional development pathways, and institutional support. Policies may also encourage collaboration among schools, local government units, parents, sports organizations, and other stakeholders to distribute the financial and logistical demands of competitive sports more equitably.

These measures are important because the findings show that national-level coaching success should not depend primarily on the willingness of individual teacher-coaches to make personal sacrifices. Sustained excellence is more likely when personal commitment is supported by organizational systems that recognize coaching as an important educational responsibility.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- For Schools and School Administrators. Schools may establish clearer mechanisms for supporting teacher-coaches, including reasonable scheduling arrangements, access to facilities and equipment, transportation and logistical assistance, and coordination of coaching responsibilities with teaching assignments. Administrators may also recognize coaching contributions through appropriate institutional recognition and professional development opportunities.
- For the Schools Division Office. The Schools Division Office may strengthen programs specifically designed for teacher-coaches by providing regular technical and professional development activities. These may include coaching methodology, athlete development, sports psychology, leadership, injury prevention, competition preparation, communication, and stress and workload management.
- For Professional Development Programs. Training programs may incorporate mentoring and peer-learning components in which experienced national-level coaches share practices, strategies, and lessons with beginning and developing teacher-coaches. Continuous learning opportunities may be offered before, during, and after major competitions to encourage reflection and improvement.
- For Teacher-Coach Recruitment and Retention. Schools may consider teachers' sports expertise, coaching experience, interpersonal skills, commitment to learner development, and willingness to undergo professional development when assigning coaching responsibilities. Retention efforts may include

recognition, workload consideration, professional growth opportunities, and stronger administrative support.

- For Policy Makers and Education Authorities. Relevant authorities may develop or strengthen policies that clarify teacher-coach workload, responsibilities, incentives or recognition, training requirements, and institutional support. Such policies may help ensure that coaching responsibilities do not depend excessively on personal sacrifice.
- For Community and External Stakeholders. Schools may strengthen partnerships with parents, local government units, sports organizations, and community stakeholders to provide resources, facilities, transportation, and other forms of support needed for athlete development and competition participation.
- For Future Researchers. Future studies may examine teacher-coach experiences across multiple Schools Divisions or regions and include coaches with different levels of competitive achievement. Studies may also use longitudinal, mixed-methods, or comparative designs to examine coaching workload, burnout, retention, institutional support, and professional development over time.

CONCLUSIONS

The lived experiences of national-winning teacher-coaches demonstrate that coaching develops from a professional assignment into a meaningful vocation when teachers find purpose in serving and developing student-athletes. Participants understood success not only through championships but also through athletes' growth in confidence, discipline, resilience, character, education, and future opportunities. Their experiences show that coaching identity is strengthened through meaningful relationships, accumulated experience, continuous learning, and intrinsic motivation.

At the same time, national-level coaching success involved substantial personal and professional demands. Participants experienced sacrifices in time, finances, family and personal activities, and professional workload while managing the overlapping responsibilities of teaching and coaching. Consistent with literature on teacher-coach role conflict, these competing demands may create conditions for occupational strain. Although participants demonstrated strong commitment and resilience, their experiences indicate that dedication should not be relied upon as a substitute for adequate institutional support.

Resilience emerged as a central feature of sustained coaching excellence. Participants responded to setbacks by reflecting, learning, adapting, and continuing their efforts. Their resilience was strengthened by relationships with athletes, families, fellow coaches, administrators, local government units, and community members. Passion, purpose, and, for some participants, faith also provided sources of meaning that helped them persist through challenges.

Overall, the study concludes that national coaching excellence is not produced by technical expertise or individual determination alone. It emerges from the interaction of purpose-driven motivation, continuous professional development, resilience, supportive relationships, and institutional conditions. The findings therefore position teacher-coaches not simply as sports instructors but as educators, mentors, leaders, and advocates for the holistic development of student-athletes.

The experiences of the participants further suggest that sustaining coaching excellence requires a shared responsibility between teacher-coaches and the institutions that support them. While personal commitment remains essential, schools and education authorities have an important role in providing appropriate resources, manageable workloads, professional development, recognition, and organizational support. Strengthening these conditions may help schools retain experienced teacher-coaches and enable them to pursue athletic excellence while maintaining their broader educational responsibilities.

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