

ORIGINAL SCIENTIFIC PAPER

Preparedness of Future Coaches for Professional Performance in Children and Youth Sports Schools

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Abstract

The modern system of children's and youth sports imposes increased demands on the professional preparedness of coaches capable of working effectively with children and adolescents in children and youth sports schools. In this context, the problem of forming the readiness of future coaches for professional activity, which combines theoretical training, practical skills, and personal qualities, is of particular relevance. Objective. The aim of the study is to provide a theoretical substantiation and empirical study of the level of readiness of future coaches for professional activity in the conditions of children and youth sports schools. Methods. The study employed theoretical analysis and generalization of scientific and methodological literature; questionnaires and surveys of students majoring in "Physical Culture and Sports"; pedagogical observation during internships; and methods of mathematical statistics for processing the obtained data at a statistical significance level of $p < 0.05$. The study involved 72 third- and fourth-year students aged 20–23. Results. It was established that an average level of readiness among future coaches for work in children and youth sports schools prevails. A discrepancy was revealed between a sufficient level of motivation for coaching and the insufficient development of practical skills necessary for the independent organization of the training process. Conclusions. The study results indicate the need to improve the professional training of future coaches by strengthening practice-oriented learning and expanding pedagogical internships in children and youth sports schools.

Keywords: professional training, coaching, sports education, pedagogical internship, professional adaptation.

1. Introduction

The system of children's and youth sports plays a leading role in shaping the physical, mental, and social development of the younger generation, as well as in training the country's sports reserve. In this context, children and youth sports schools serve as the fundamental link in sports education, combining educational, training, upbringing, and socialization components. The key figure in this process is the coach, whose level of professional preparedness largely determines the effectiveness of the sports development of children and adolescents (Lyle, 2002; Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Gould & Carson, 2008).

Modern socio-economic conditions, the transformation of the higher education system, and the integration of the Ukrainian sports space into global practice lead to increased demands on the professional activity of coaches (Shevchuk, Kohut, & Marynych, 2025). Future specialists are expected to possess not only a thorough mastery of the theory and methodology of sports training but also developed pedagogical skills, communicative abilities, the capacity to work with different age groups, the ability to individualize the training process, and the competence to ensure safe training environments (Cushion, Armour, & Jones, 2003; Cruickshank & Collins, 2020; Yefremenko et al., 2025).

In scientific research, the problem of future coaches' readiness for professional activity is examined from various perspectives. Some authors focus on the formation of professional competencies as the foundation of coaching mastery (Lyle, 2002; Kiprych & Proskurnin, 2024), while others emphasize the development of personal qualities, the motivational sphere, and pedagogical reflection (Gould & Carson, 2008; Kostenko et al., 2023). At the same time, the scientific discourse maintains a debate regarding the balance between theoretical and practical components of coach training, the optimal amount of pedagogical practice, and the criteria for evaluating the level of professional readiness (Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Jůva, Jakubcová, & Roček, 2023).

Special attention is required for the issue of future coaches' readiness specifically for work within children and youth sports schools, which possesses a number of specific features. A coach in a CYSS (Children and Youth Sports School) performs not only the function of training an athlete but also acts as an educator, mentor, and organizer of the educational and training environment (Novopysmennyi & Kononets, 2025; Osadchenko, 2023). Meanwhile, practical results and scientific data indicate that higher education graduates face difficulties during adaptation to the real working conditions of sports schools, which necessitates a revision of approaches to the professional training of coaching staff (Modern Science and Research, 2023; Shevchuk, Kohut, & Marynych, 2024).

Scientific literature lacks systematic empirical data on the level of students' readiness for coaching in children's and youth sports, and the pedagogical conditions that ensure the effective formation of such readiness during professional training are insufficiently highlighted (Chen, 2025; Kiprych & Proskurnin, 2024). This creates a scientific problem consisting of the discrepancy between modern requirements for a coach's activity in a CYSS and the actual level of readiness of future specialists to perform their professional duties.

Thus, the relevance of the study is determined by the need for a scientific substantiation of the essence and structure of future coaches' readiness to work in children and youth sports schools, as well as the need to identify the actual state of its formation among students of higher education institutions specializing in physical culture and sports (Shevchuk et al., 2025; Novopysmennyi & Kononets, 2025). Resolving these issues is of significant theoretical and practical importance for improving the system of training coaching staff and enhancing the quality of children's and youth sports.

The aim of the article is to theoretically substantiate the essence and structure of future coaches' readiness for work in children and youth sports schools and to determine the level of its formation among students of physical education and sports higher education institutions.

2. Materials and Methods

The study was conducted to examine the level of readiness of future coaches for professional activity in children and youth sports schools. The research methods were selected in accordance with the objective and were limited to the material available at the time of the study's development.

The following methods were used in the study:

- Theoretical analysis and generalization of scientific and methodological literature. At the first stage of the research, an analysis of modern scientific sources on the problems of professional training of physical culture and sports specialists, coaching activities, and the formation of professional readiness was carried out.

- Questionnaires and surveys of students. To study the level of readiness of future coaches for work in children and youth sports schools, the questionnaire method was applied. The study involved 72 third- and fourth-year students majoring in "Physical Culture and Sports" (38 men and 34 women) aged 20–23.

The questionnaire consisted of 20 closed-ended and semi-open-ended questions and was aimed at assessing readiness for coaching activities. The survey was conducted in a classroom setting, adhering to the principles of voluntariness and anonymity. Before the start of the survey, all participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided informed consent to participate.

The study was conducted in compliance with the ethical standards and principles outlined in the World Medical Association (WMA) Declaration of Helsinki. Student participation was voluntary, and all data obtained were used exclusively in an aggregated form for scientific purposes.

Methods of Mathematical Statistics. For the processing and interpretation of the results, methods of mathematical statistics were applied: calculation of percentages, mean values, and testing of the statistical significance of the results. Statistical analysis was performed using the significance criterion at a level of $p < 0.05$, which ensured the objectivity and reliability of the study's findings.

3. Results

The survey results showed that 61.1% of students demonstrate a steady interest in working as a coach in children and youth sports schools (CYSS) and consider this field a priority for their future professional activity. 26.4% of respondents indicated partial interest, citing doubts regarding working conditions, the level of responsibility, and the need for constant self-improvement. 12.5% of those surveyed do not plan to work in a CYSS after graduation, primarily motivating this by insufficient practical training and high demands placed on the coach.

Regarding theoretical preparation, 54.2% of students assessed their knowledge of the theory and methodology of sports training as sufficient for working with children. 31.9% rated their level of knowledge as average, and 13.9% as insufficient, particularly concerning the age-specific characteristics of child development, as well as planning and structuring the training process at the initial stages of sports training. These data indicate a need to strengthen the cognitive component of preparation through additional courses and practical sessions on coaching methodology.

The analysis of practical readiness showed that only 19.4% of students feel completely confident in their ability to independently organize and conduct training sessions in a CYSS. 58.3% of respondents indicated partial readiness and a need for mentorship from an experienced coach, while 22.3% admitted to being unready for independent coaching activity due to limited practical experience. These data emphasize the need to expand pedagogical practice, including the modeling of training sessions and supervision in the student training process.

Based on the analysis, it was established that a high level of readiness is characteristic of 17.8% of students who demonstrated steady motivation for coaching, a sufficient volume of theoretical knowledge, and confidence in their ability to independently organize and conduct the training process.

The average level of readiness, identified in 54.2% of respondents, is characterized by a positive attitude toward future professional activity and basic theoretical knowledge, yet it is accompanied by insufficient development of practical skills and a need for methodological support and mentorship from experienced coaches.

A low level of readiness was found in 26.3% of students, indicating limited professional motivation, fragmentary knowledge of the theory and methodology of sports training, and a lack of confidence in their own professional capabilities regarding work with children (Figure 1).

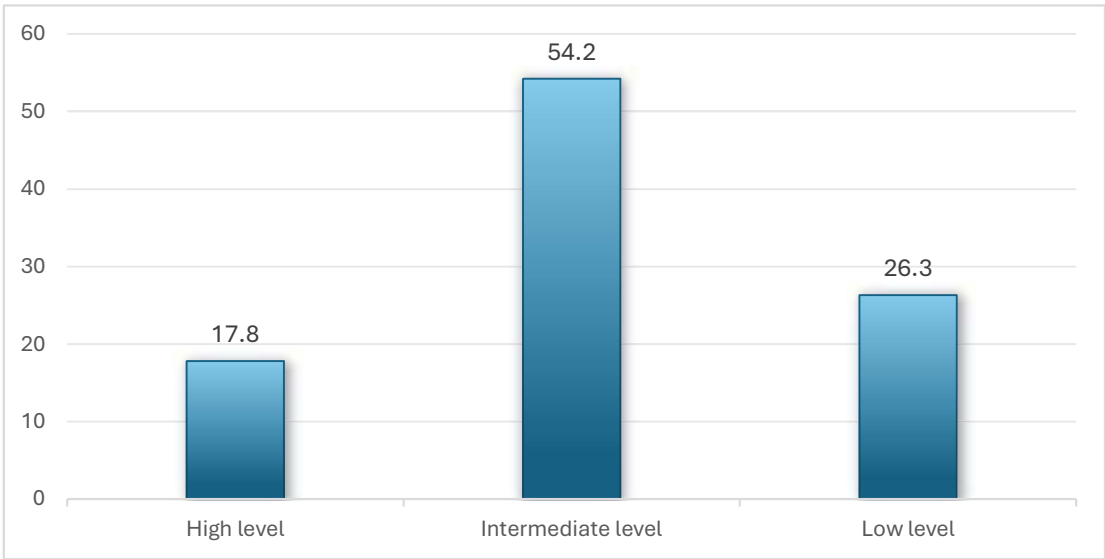


Figure 1. *General level of readiness of future coaches for professional coaching activity*

Overall, the results obtained indicate a predominance of an average level of readiness among future coaches, which necessitates a purposeful improvement of the professional training system with an emphasis on the development of practical skills and the integration of learning with real-world operating conditions in sports schools.

The findings demonstrate a prevalence of an average readiness level among future coaches. This underscores the need to enhance the professional training system by strengthening the practical orientation of education, expanding pedagogical internships in sports schools, and building students' confidence in their own professional capabilities.

Additionally, it is worth noting that the operational (activity-based) component proved to be the most problematic aspect of readiness, while the motivational and cognitive components were better developed. This disproportion indicates the need for targeted work on students' practical skills and their adaptation to real-world work with children.

4. Discussion

The results of the study confirm the relevance of the problem regarding the formation of future coaches' readiness for professional activity within children and youth sports schools. The identified dominance of the average level of readiness is consistent with the findings of scientific works that emphasize the insufficient practice-oriented nature of coaching staff training in higher education institutions specializing in physical culture and sports (Cushion et al., 2003; Modern Science and Research, 2023).

The imbalance between the students' motivational orientation toward coaching and their confidence in their own professional capacity deserves special attention. A similar trend is described in studies noting that a positive attitude toward the profession is not always

accompanied by the development of practical skills necessary for effective work with children (Gould & Carson, 2008; Chen, 2025). This indicates the need to rethink the role of practical training within the structure of future coaches' professional education.

The obtained data also align with modern approaches, according to which a coach's readiness is viewed as an integrative construct formed through the combination of theoretical knowledge, practical experience, and the development of personal qualities (Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Kostenko et al., 2023). The insufficient level of the operational component identified in the study supports the position of scholars regarding the need to expand opportunities for students to independently organize the training process during their undergraduate studies (Cruickshank & Collins, 2020).

In the context of modern youth sports practice, the study results emphasize the importance of early student involvement in real working conditions within sports schools. Practice shows that direct interaction with trainees, participation in planning training sessions, and responsibility for the outcomes of the educational and training process contribute to increasing the level of professional readiness of future coaches (Jůva et al., 2023; Shevchuk et al., 2024).

Thus, the research findings confirm the propositions in contemporary scientific literature that forming future coaches' readiness for work in children and youth sports schools requires a systemic approach. This approach entails the integration of theoretical training with practical activity, as well as the development of reflective and pedagogical skills (Lyle, 2002; Kiprych & Proskurnin, 2024). The identified trends can be used to improve educational programs for coach training and meet the current needs of the modern youth sports system.

5. Conclusions

The conducted study confirmed that the majority of future coaches demonstrate an average level of readiness for professional activity in children and youth sports schools, indicating a need to improve the specialist training system. Although the motivational component of students' readiness is sufficiently high, the operational (activity-based) component is characterized by low development, limiting the ability to independently organize and conduct the training process. The results of the questionnaires and pedagogical observation revealed a gap between theoretical training and students' practical capacity, highlighting the necessity of integrating practice-oriented measures into the educational process. The obtained data suggest that the effective formation of future coaches' professional readiness for work in sports schools is possible through strengthening practical training, expanding pedagogical internships, and developing reflective skills. The identified trends can be utilized to enhance educational programs for coaching staff training and improve the quality of children and youth sports in modern conditions.

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