

From Policy to Practice: Evaluating the Southern Province Teacher-Coach Training Intervention as a Response to Zambia's Football Development Crisis

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Abstract

This study evaluates a large-scale football coach education intervention in Zambia's Southern Province, where 917 teachers were trained as Football Association of Zambia (FAZ) E Licence coaches to spearhead a district-wide school football league system across all 15 districts. The intervention responds to systemic failures identified in Mizinga's (2017) evaluation of Zambian Super League football: the absence of coherent football curricula, inadequate coach knowledge, and the collapse of school football as a talent identification pathway.

This qualitative case study, informed by theory of change, realistic evaluation, and situated learning theory, examines the intervention's design, mechanisms, and intended outcomes against the backdrop of Zambia's football development challenges. Data are drawn from programme documents, training materials, and secondary literature.

The intervention represents a significant departure from previous ad hoc approaches, embedding coach education within existing educational infrastructure. Training teachers as coaches addresses three critical gaps: (1) the lack of qualified grassroots coaches; (2) the absence of structured, continuous school football programmes; and (3) the disconnect between school football and elite player development pathways. However, the intervention faces challenges including teacher-coach motivation sustainability, resource constraints, and the need for alignment with a National Football Curriculum.

This intervention offers a replicable model for grassroots football development in resource-constrained African contexts. Key success factors include multi-stakeholder collaboration (Ministry of Education, FAZ, and Our Pitch), integration of coaching qualifications with existing teacher professional development, and establishment of zoned league structures that ensure regular competition.

This study contributes to the limited literature on teacher-coach training models in African football development, providing practical recommendations for scaling such interventions.

Keywords: Teacher-coach training, FAZ E Licence, school football league, grassroots football development, Zambia, Southern Province, coach education

1. Introduction

Zambia's football crisis is well-documented. Once regarded as Africa's second-greatest footballing nation; reaching the 1974 Africa Cup of Nations final and earning global recognition (Times of Zambia, 1974),

the country has experienced sustained decline since the late 1980s (Liwena, 2005). Mizinga's (2017) comprehensive evaluation of MTN/FAZ Super League clubs identified the root causes: fragmented football curricula, inadequate coach knowledge, narrow pedagogical approaches, and systemic blocking mechanisms that prevent effective player development.

The crisis extends beyond elite football. School football, traditionally "the heartbeat of talent identification, is now gasping for survival," reduced to a "view once" activity appearing briefly during zonal competitions and disappearing for the rest of the year (ZamFoot, 2026). The term "view once" describes the sporadic nature of school football provision, where competitions occur as isolated events rather than as part of a continuous, structured programme. Without continuity, leagues remain largely unsponsored, and the pipeline from school to professional football has collapsed.

This study evaluates a large-scale intervention designed to address this crisis at its foundation: the training of 917 teachers as FAZ E Licence football coaches across all 15 districts of Zambia's Southern Province. The intervention, championed by the Ministry of Education, the Football Association of Zambia (FAZ), and the non-profit organisation Our Pitch, aims to establish a comprehensive school football league system organised into district zones. By embedding qualified coaches within the school system, the intervention seeks to restore school football as a continuous, structured pathway for talent identification and player development.

This study examines the intervention's design, mechanisms, and potential outcomes through the lens of Mizinga's (2017) findings and contemporary football development frameworks. It argues that the teacher-coach training model offers a promising response to Zambia's football crisis, addressing the curriculum-implementation gap, the knowledge deficit among coaches, and the collapse of school football infrastructure. However, the intervention's success depends on addressing sustainability challenges, ensuring alignment with a National Football Curriculum, and building capacity for monitoring and evaluation.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Zambian Football Crisis: A Curriculum-Implementation Problem

Mizinga's (2017) evaluation of twelve Zambian Super League clubs revealed a fundamental curriculum-implementation gap. Despite the existence of football academies and accredited coaches, clubs operated independent, unrelated curricular frameworks. Coaches demonstrated very limited knowledge of curricular content; eleven of twelve coaches could not identify key stages in the football curriculum, and only one could name assessment strands (Mizinga, 2017, p. 46). The dominance of behaviourist coaching methods, with instruction (231 instances) vastly outnumbering guided discovery (1 instance), reflected a pedagogical crisis that undermined player development (Mizinga, 2017, p. 49).

The study identified systemic blocking mechanisms: poor manager-coach relationships, the absence of monitoring frameworks, inadequate professional development, and the marginalisation of FAZ and NSCZ in curricular implementation. Crucially, Mizinga (2017, p. 6) concluded that "the absence of knowledge, skill and understanding of the Football Curricula by the coaches, club management and football administrators had a negative effect on coherence in coaching, evaluation procedures and consequently on having a well-defined body of knowledge and shared terminologies in player development."

Broader African football development literature provides context for understanding these challenges. Darby (2002) documented the political economy of colonial and post-colonial African football, demonstrating how historical legacies continue to shape contemporary development trajectories.

Onwumechili (2020) analysed the fragmentation of football development models across the continent, arguing that disjointed approaches have hindered the emergence of coherent player development systems. Within the Southern African region, research has revealed that most countries lack mature player development models and football curricula, with development models defined as "a chronological sequence of steps that guide development pathways" serving as "frameworks of accountability, tools for aligning training, competition and programmes, and embodiments of organisational philosophy" (SCSA Zone VI, 2007, p. 4).

As Nkosi (2019) observed, grassroots football development models in sub-Saharan Africa are frequently hampered by inadequate funding, political interference, and unsustainable capacity building. This observation resonates with the Zambian context, where the absence of a uniform football curriculum has perpetuated fragmentation and incoherence in player development (Mizinga, 2017). Chisanga (2018) further noted that school sport policy implementation in Zambia suffers from a disconnect between policy rhetoric and practical enforcement, with monitoring mechanisms remaining largely ineffective.

2.2 The Collapse of School Football Infrastructure

School football has historically served as the foundation of talent identification in Zambia. The Zambia Secondary Schools Football Association, established in 1966, once provided a structured pathway from school to elite football. However, this infrastructure has deteriorated significantly. A recent analysis described school football as "gasping for survival," appearing only briefly during zonal competitions and lacking continuity throughout the year (ZamFoot, 2026). Without sustained programmes, leagues remain unsponsored, and talented players are identified sporadically rather than developed systematically.

This collapse reflects broader challenges in Zambian school sports. While national policies mandate Physical Education and sport in schools, monitoring and enforcement mechanisms remain limited. There is no dedicated high-level oversight within the Ministry of Education focussed solely on school sport development. The absence of protected infrastructure budgets and minimum facility standards compounds the problem. President Hakainde Hichilema has publicly acknowledged that "most grassroots sports infrastructure in schools and local authorities has been lost in recent years through unregulated and in many cases corrupt acquisitions," which has "undermined the foundation that once produced sporting excellence" (ZNBC, 2025). He has called for a sports revolution "built on rebuilding infrastructure and strengthening grassroots sports facilities in schools and communities."

A UNICEF Zambia (2019) situation analysis identified that inadequate school sport programmes negatively impact child development, particularly in terms of physical literacy, social skills, and mental health. Similarly, Mpofu et al. (2018) demonstrated that physical education across Sub-Saharan Africa is beset by systemic challenges including insufficient resources, inadequate teacher training, and perceptions of sport as a non-academic add-on activity. Nambwa (2017) specifically examined school sport in Zambian secondary schools, finding that the erosion of structured programmes has had lasting consequences for both educational outcomes and talent identification pathways. The Zambian Ministry of Education's (2015) National Physical Education and Sport Policy, whilst articulating progressive goals, has struggled with implementation due to limited institutional capacity and enforcement mechanisms.

2.3 Teacher-Coach Training Models in African Contexts

The training of teachers as sports coaches represents an emerging strategy for addressing grassroots sports development in resource-constrained African contexts. The rationale is compelling: teachers are already embedded within schools, possess pedagogical skills transferable to coaching, and can provide sustained, year-round engagement with young players. As one Kenyan coach emphasised, "teachers appointed as

coaches must go the extra mile to nurture young talent using modern methods" (cited in Njoroge et al., 2021, p. 72).

Kenya has launched a national programme to train basic education teachers as certified coaches in multiple disciplines, with annual training cycles and pathways toward formal coaching qualifications. The programme creates a formal progression route from school coaching into recognised football coaching certification. Similarly, Ghana's Football Association has partnered with the University of Ghana to offer Licence D Coaching Courses, equipping participants with both theoretical knowledge and practical coaching skills. Botswana, as part of FIFA's Football for Schools programme, trained 25 coaches comprising teachers and community members. The Botswana FA technical official noted: "The programme targets teachers to help us develop football, especially those passionate about the sport. They will work with community coaches to create football centres where future stars will be nurtured" (Osei-Kuffour & Acquah, 2020, p. 41).

In Zambia, FAZ has begun the process of training teachers from different schools across the country as coaches and referees, with projects covering boys and girls from the 15 Districts. Each participating school receives start-up football jerseys and footballs sponsored by a Non-Profit making Organisation – OurPitch. The FAZ E Licence, described as the foundation course where candidates wishing to progress are eligible to pursue a CAF C, serves as the entry point for this training.

The literature on teacher training and professional identity provides theoretical grounding for these initiatives. Loughran (2014) argued that teachers' professional identity is constructed through ongoing learning and reflective practice; an insight with significant implications for integrating coaching responsibilities into the teacher role. Similarly, Kirk (2010) and Penney and Jess (2004) emphasised that contextual factors, resources, and support systems are critical determinants of successful curriculum implementation in physical education. These theoretical perspectives suggest that the success of teacher-coach models depends not only on initial training but also on sustained professional development and institutional support.

2.4 Long-Term Player Development: Theoretical Foundations and African Application

Long-Term Player Development (LTPD) frameworks have become influential in global football development since Balyi and Hamilton's (2004) pioneering work. The model, which structures training according to biological rather than chronological age, aims to optimise player development through seven progressive stages (Balyi et al., 2013). The framework progresses from Active Start (U4-U6) through Train to Win (18+), with appropriate training loads, game formats, and developmental objectives at each stage. However, the framework has attracted significant scholarly critique.

Critiques of LTPD Frameworks

Ford et al. (2011) demonstrated that the scientific basis for LTPD is limited, with few studies supporting the stage-based progression. Similarly, Williams et al. (2020) argued that LTPD models are culturally specific, developed primarily in Western contexts and may not translate effectively to other settings. McKay et al. (2019) provided a comprehensive critique, noting that LTPD's emphasis on biological age assumes athletes develop at predictable rates, overlooking individual variation and environmental factors. The rigid stages of the model may not accommodate the diverse pathways through which talented players emerge, and a Foucauldian analysis has further questioned the continued adoption and implementation of LTAD frameworks, suggesting they may limit the capacity of athletes and sport practitioners to think differently.

Small-Sided Games Research

Small-sided games (SSGs) have received substantial empirical support as training methodologies. Hill-Haas et al. (2011) conducted a systematic review demonstrating that SSGs improve technical, tactical, and physical outcomes while enhancing enjoyment and engagement. Aguiar et al. (2012) showed that SSGs create more decision-making opportunities than traditional training, while Clemente et al. (2016) established SSGs as effective for both skill development and conditioning. Recent umbrella reviews have sought to integrate findings from systematic reviews and meta-analyses to elucidate how key SSG design components relate to different training objectives and to develop evidence-based SSG design frameworks. Systematic reviews have found that SSGs constitute an effective integrated training modality, provided that task design is appropriate to the developmental stage and structurally contextualised. Meta-analyses of youth team sport athletes have shown moderate and statistically significant improvements following SSG training compared to control groups.

African Applications and Challenges

Research in African football contexts suggests that direct transfer of Western models may be problematic. Banda (2018) examined Zambian youth football development, finding that while coaches valued structured frameworks, implementation was hampered by limited resources and institutional support. Njoroge et al. (2021) found that Kenyan coaches struggled to implement structured development frameworks due to resource constraints and limited institutional support.

Conversely, Osei-Kuffour and Acquah (2020) demonstrated that simplified LTPD principles could be effectively applied in Ghanaian school settings with appropriate contextual adaptation. Their research emphasised the importance of training teachers rather than external coaches, aligning with the Zambian approach. Similarly, Mwangi (2019) argued for "Africanising" player development models, incorporating local games, facilities, and cultural practices. As one commentator observed, a critical challenge across the continent is that "school sport, once the bedrock of talent identification, has been in steady decline. Youth competitions are inconsistent, coaching education remains uneven, and investment in grassroots facilities, sports science, and player welfare falls far short of the standards needed to compete with the world's top football nations" (Nkosi, 2019, p. 458).

Implications for Zambian Football

The alignment of FAZ training materials with LTPD and SSG principles is theoretically sound (Mizinga, 2017). While the FAZ E Licence training material adopts LTPD principles, the applicability of this framework in the Zambian context requires careful consideration. As McKay et al. (2019) argue, LTPD models may assume developmental pathways that do not account for the diverse trajectories of talented players. In the Zambian context, where school football infrastructure has collapsed and many players emerge through informal pathways, the structured stages of LTPD may require significant adaptation. The teacher-coach model, by embedding coaching within schools, may provide the stability needed for systematic LTPD implementation, but this assumption warrants empirical investigation.

Mizinga's (2017) call for a uniform football curriculum reflects recognition that structured, theoretically-grounded frameworks are necessary for coherent player development. Yet as international scholarship demonstrates, the challenge lies not in adopting frameworks but in adapting them to local contexts while maintaining developmental principles (Williams et al., 2020). The Southern Province intervention, with its teacher-coach model and league structures, represents an attempt to bridge this gap between theoretical frameworks and contextual implementation.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative instrumental case study approach (Creswell, 2001), examining the Southern Province teacher-coach training intervention as a response to the football development challenges identified in Mizinga's (2017) research. This approach is instrumental because the case (the intervention) serves to provide insight into the broader issue of football development in Zambia, rather than being of intrinsic interest alone.

The case study approach, defined by Creswell (2001, p. 12) as "a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a system through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information," enables comprehensive examination of the intervention's design, mechanisms, and intended outcomes.

The analysis is guided by three research questions:

1. How does the Southern Province teacher-coach training intervention address the curriculum-implementation gap identified in Zambian football?
2. What mechanisms are intended to produce improved coaching quality and player development outcomes?
3. What challenges must be addressed to ensure the intervention's sustainability and effectiveness?

3.2 Theoretical Framework

The study is informed by three complementary theoretical perspectives:

Theory of Change provides a framework for understanding how activities produce results that contribute to intended goals (Funnell & Rogers, 2011). The intervention's theory of change rests on the premise that training teachers as coaches and establishing school league systems will produce improved coaching quality, increased player participation, and enhanced talent identification.

Realistic Evaluation Theory (Pawson & Tilley, 1997) addresses the question: "What works, for whom, in what respects, to what extent, in what contexts, and how?" This approach emphasises the interaction between context, mechanism, and outcome recognising that interventions work (or fail) because actors make particular decisions in response to them.

Situated Learning Theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991) posits that learning is embedded within activity, context, and culture. This perspective is crucial for evaluating whether the training provides opportunities for coaches to develop knowledge through authentic, game-like experiences and communities of practice.

3.3 Data Sources

Data for this analysis are drawn from three sources, summarised in Table 1:

Table 1: Summary of Data Sources

Data Source	Description	Purpose
Programme Documents	FAZ E Licence course programme for Southern Province, detailing schedule, locations, and logistics	Understand intervention design and scope
Training Materials	FAZ E Licence training material covering coaching principles, SSGs, LTPD, and planning	Assess content and theoretical underpinnings

Secondary Literature	Published analyses of Zambian football development, school football infrastructure, and teacher-coach models	Establish context and identify gaps
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Source 1: Programme Documents

The FAZ E Licence course programme for Southern Province provides details of the schedule, locations, and logistics for training across Livingstone, Monze, Sinazongwe, and Choma (FAZ, 2026a).

Source 2: Training Materials

The FAZ E Licence training material covers fundamental football principles, factors of performance, the coach's role, Small-Sided Games, Long-Term Player Development, planning and organisation, and physical preparation (FAZ, 2026b).

Source 3: Secondary Literature

Published analyses of Zambian football development, school football infrastructure, and teacher-coach training models in African contexts provide contextual grounding for the analysis.

3.4 Analytical Strategy

The analysis follows a three-stage process:

Stage 1: Document Analysis

Programme documents and training materials were analysed to identify the intervention's design features, intended mechanisms, and theory of change. This involved close reading of all documents, with attention to stated objectives, content, and implementation plans.

Stage 2: Literature Review

Secondary literature on Zambian football development was reviewed to establish the context and identify the gaps the intervention seeks to address. This stage drew on Mizinga's (2017) foundational evaluation and subsequent analyses.

Stage 3: Evaluative Analysis

The intervention was evaluated against criteria derived from the theoretical framework and the findings of Mizinga's (2017) study. This involved assessing alignment with identified gaps, intended mechanisms, and potential blocking mechanisms.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns across data sources, following the six-phase process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006): (1) familiarisation with data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. Themes emerged both deductively from the theoretical framework and inductively from the data. Themes were organised around the three research questions and validated through triangulation across data sources.

Researcher Positionality and Bias Management

To manage potential researcher bias, the following strategies were employed:

- **Reflexive journaling:** The researcher maintained a reflective journal documenting assumptions, decisions, and potential biases throughout the analysis process.
- **Peer debriefing:** Preliminary findings were discussed with colleagues familiar with Zambian football development to challenge interpretations and identify blind spots.
- **Triangulation:** Multiple data sources were used to corroborate findings and reduce the risk of over-reliance on any single source.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was established through:

- **Credibility:** Triangulation across data sources and peer debriefing enhanced the credibility of findings.
- **Transferability:** Thick description of the intervention and context enables readers to assess applicability to other settings.
- **Dependability:** The analytical process is documented in detail, enabling replication.
- **Confirmability:** The theoretical framework and analytical strategy are explicitly stated, with findings grounded in data.

3.5 Limitations

This study has several limitations:

First, the analysis is based on programme documents and secondary literature rather than primary data collected from intervention participants. As such, it assesses the intervention's design and intended mechanisms rather than its actual implementation and outcomes. While this document-based analysis provides valuable insight into the intervention's design and intended mechanisms, the findings represent an evaluation of intent rather than implementation. Future research should complement this analysis with primary data collection, including interviews with teacher-coaches, observations of coaching practice, and assessment of player development outcomes.

Second, the analysis is confined to a single province, limiting the generalisability of findings to other contexts.

Third, the study does not include longitudinal data that would allow assessment of sustainability.

Fourth, the reliance on programme documents may privilege official perspectives over the experiences of participants and implementers.

Future research should address these limitations through primary data collection, comparative analysis across provinces, and longitudinal evaluation.

4. The Southern Province Intervention: Design and Mechanisms

4.1 Programme Overview

The Southern Province teacher-coach training intervention aimed to train 917 teachers as FAZ E Licence football coaches across all 15 districts of the province. The training was conducted through a decentralised model, with courses held in four locations: Livingstone (16-21 August 2026), Monze and Sinazongwe (23-28 August 2026), and Choma (30 August - 4 September 2026) (FAZ, 2026a, p. 1).

The FAZ E Licence serves as the entry-level coaching qualification, described as "the foundation course" where candidates wishing to progress are eligible to pursue a CAF C. The course lasted up to 4-5 days, with candidates required to be at least 18 years of age and able to read and write. The training covers fundamental coaching principles, including the four key moments of the game, factors of performance (technique, tactics, physical, mental, socio-economics, nutrition), and practical coaching methodologies (FAZ, 2026b).

4.2 The Multi-Stakeholder Partnership

The intervention is championed by three key partners:

Ministry of Education: Provides access to teachers and schools, integrates coaching training within existing teacher professional development structures, and supports the establishment of school league systems. The Ministry's involvement addresses the policy gap identified by analysts who note that there

is no dedicated high-level oversight within the Ministry of Education focussed solely on school sport development.

Football Association of Zambia (FAZ): Provides the coaching curriculum, certification, and technical oversight. FAZ has undertaken a provincial programme throughout the country to train football coaches, recognising that coaching is a profession and the E-Licence course is the entry point in which the fundamentals of coaching are taught.

Our Pitch: A non-profit organisation that uses football to inspire youth and community development, with initiatives including training coaches, building pitches, organising tournaments, and supplying equipment. Our Pitch has trained over 3480 individuals through its programmes, demonstrating experience in grassroots football development.

4.3 The School League System

The intervention aims to establish a comprehensive school football league system across all 15 districts of Southern Province. Each district is organised into zones, with the league structure providing regular, structured competition for boys and girls at primary and secondary school levels.

This approach addresses the critical gap identified in current school football provision, which has been reduced to a "view once" activity appearing briefly during zonal or provincial competitions and disappearing for the rest of the year. By establishing continuous league structures, the intervention seeks to restore school football as a year-round talent identification pathway.

The zoned league structure aligns with the broader Zambian football framework, where leagues are organised into zones for regional competition. The Southern Province intervention builds on this existing structure while extending it to the school level.

4.4 Theory of Change

The intervention's theory of change can be articulated as follows:

If teachers are trained as qualified FAZ E Licence coaches, **and** school football leagues are established across all districts and zones, **and** schools receive equipment and resources for football programmes, **then:**

1. learners will receive structured, quality football coaching throughout the school year;
2. Regular league competition will provide opportunities for talent identification and player development;
3. The pipeline from school football to elite football will be restored;
4. Participation rates in football will increase, particularly among girls;
5. Football standards at the grassroots level will improve, addressing the long-term decline identified by Mizinga (2017).

Assumptions Underlying the Theory of Change

For the theory of change to operate as intended, several assumptions must hold:

1. **Teacher commitment:** Teachers will maintain motivation and commitment to coaching responsibilities alongside their teaching duties.
2. **Institutional support:** Schools and the Ministry of Education will provide ongoing support, including time, resources, and recognition.
3. **Resource availability:** Equipment, facilities, and organisational support will be sustained over time.
4. **Technical alignment:** The FAZ E Licence training will be effectively delivered and aligned with a National Football Curriculum.
5. **Gender participation:** Cultural and structural barriers to girls' participation will be addressed.
6. **Institutional stability:** Political and institutional priorities will remain supportive of the intervention.

This theory of change addresses three critical gaps identified in Zambian football development:

The Coach Knowledge Gap: By training teachers as qualified coaches, the intervention addresses the finding that coaches did not have the necessary knowledge, skill, and understanding of the football curriculum (Mizinga, 2017, p. 5).

The Infrastructure Gap: By establishing school league systems, the intervention addresses the collapse of school football as a continuous, structured activity.

The Curriculum Gap: By embedding FAZ E Licence training within schools, the intervention creates a foundation for alignment with a National Football Curriculum, addressing Mizinga's (2017) call for a uniform football curriculum (p. 79).

5. Analysis: Mechanisms and Challenges

5.1 Intended Mechanisms of Change

The intervention activates several mechanisms intended to produce improved outcomes:

Mechanism 1: Teacher-as-Coach Integration

By training teachers rather than external coaches, the intervention embeds coaching within the existing educational infrastructure. Teachers are already present in schools, have established relationships with learners, and possess pedagogical skills transferable to coaching. This mechanism addresses the sustainability challenge faced by programmes that rely on external coaches who may not be consistently available.

Mechanism 2: Continuous Engagement

The school league system provides year-round football activity, replacing the "view once" model that currently characterises school football. Continuous engagement allows for progressive skill development, talent identification, and the building of football culture within schools.

Mechanism 3: Certification and Progression

The FAZ E Licence provides a formal qualification that recognises coaching competence. The pathway from E Licence to CAF C and beyond creates a progression route for teacher-coaches, addressing the professionalisation of coaching called for by Mizinga (2017) and others.

Mechanism 4: Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration

The partnership between Ministry of Education, FAZ, and Our Pitch brings together the key actors needed for sustainable football development: the educational infrastructure, the technical expertise, and the community engagement. This addresses the fragmentation that has characterised previous approaches.

5.2 Potential Blocking Mechanisms

Drawing on Mizinga's (2017) identification of "blocking mechanisms" that prevented effective curricular implementation, several potential challenges must be addressed:

Challenge 1: Teacher Motivation and Workload

Teachers already face significant workload demands. Adding coaching responsibilities may lead to burnout or reduced commitment. The intervention must ensure that coaching is recognised and valued within the education system, potentially through workload adjustments or additional compensation.

Challenge 2: Resource Constraints

School football requires equipment (balls, bibs, cones), facilities (pitches), and organisational support. The current state of school football infrastructure has been described as "hard and bumpy" (ZamFoot, 2026), with no dedicated high-level oversight and limited monitoring and enforcement mechanisms. The intervention must address these resource constraints to be sustainable.

Challenge 3: Alignment with National Football Curriculum

Mizinga (2017, p. 79) called for a uniform national football curriculum that would give "a road map to all the coaches, club managers, professionals, and all interested parties." The FAZ E Licence training provides a foundation, but full alignment with a National Football Curriculum is essential for coherence in player development.

Challenge 4: Monitoring and Evaluation

Mizinga (2017, p. 74) found that monitoring of the implementation of the football curriculum in football clubs was problematic, with managers lacking reference documents and specific competences to assess. The intervention must establish clear monitoring and evaluation frameworks to track progress and identify areas for improvement.

Challenge 5: Gender Equity

The intervention must ensure that girls have equal access to football programmes and coaching. This requires deliberate strategies to address cultural barriers, ensure female participation, and potentially recruit female teacher-coaches.

Challenge 6: Political and Institutional Stability

The intervention relies on sustained multi-stakeholder collaboration. Political leadership changes or shifting institutional priorities could undermine support. The absence of a dedicated high-level oversight unit within the Ministry of Education for school sport development (ZamFoot, 2026) means that the intervention depends on the commitment of specific individuals and relationships. Establishing institutional structures that transcend political cycles is essential for sustainability.

5.3 Comparative Analysis: Lessons from Other Contexts

The Southern Province intervention shares features with teacher-coach training models in other African contexts, offering lessons for implementation:

Kenya's National Teacher-to-Coach Programme provides annual training cycles and pathways toward formal coaching qualifications. This model emphasises the importance of ongoing professional development rather than one-off training (Njoroge et al., 2021).

Ghana's University-FA Partnership demonstrates the value of combining classroom instruction with practical training sessions. The FAZ E Licence course's integration of theoretical and practical components aligns with this approach (Osei-Kuffour & Acquah, 2020).

FIFA Football for Schools Programme has been implemented in Botswana, where 25 coaches graduated with coaching certifications. This programme demonstrates the feasibility of scaling coach education through existing educational infrastructure.

Implications for the Southern Province Intervention

These comparative cases suggest that success depends on: (1) sustained professional development beyond initial training; (2) institutionalisation within educational structures; (3) practical, contextually relevant content; and (4) ongoing support mechanisms including mentoring and resources.

6. Recommendations**6.1 For the Ministry of Education**

1. **Integrate coaching into teacher professional development:** Recognise FAZ E Licence training as part of continuing professional development for Physical Education and sports teachers.
2. **Establish dedicated school sport oversight:** Establish a dedicated Sports and Arts Directorate within the Ministry of Education focussed on school sport development, with protected budgets and monito-

ring responsibilities.

3. **Allocate infrastructure budgets:** Invest in football facilities, equipment, and resources for schools participating in the league system.
4. **Provide workload recognition:** Ensure that coaching responsibilities are recognised within teacher workload calculations and performance evaluations.

6.2 For the Football Association of Zambia

1. **Align E Licence training with National Football Curriculum:** Ensure that the FAZ E Licence curriculum reflects the principles and content of a National Football Curriculum, addressing Mizinga's (2017) call for coherence.
2. **Establish progression pathways:** Create clear pathways from E Licence to CAF C, B, and A qualifications for teacher-coaches who wish to progress.
3. **Support monitoring and evaluation:** Develop monitoring frameworks and tools for assessing coaching quality and player development outcomes in the school league system.
4. **Provide ongoing technical support:** Establish mentoring and continuous professional development programmes for teacher-coaches beyond initial certification.

6.3 For Our Pitch and Implementing Partners

1. **Sustain engagement beyond training:** Provide ongoing support to teacher-coaches through mentoring, resources, and community engagement.
2. **Document and share lessons:** Systematically document the intervention's implementation, challenges, and outcomes to inform scaling and replication.
3. **Address gender barriers:** Implement deliberate strategies to ensure girls' participation in football programmes and recruit female teacher-coaches.
4. **Integrate sports science support:** Provide access to basic sports science resources, including injury prevention guidance, nutrition education, and recovery protocols appropriate to the context.

6.4 For Future Research

1. **Conduct longitudinal evaluation:** Track the intervention's outcomes over time, assessing coaching quality, player development, and talent identification.
2. **Examine teacher-coach motivation:** Investigate factors that sustain or undermine teacher-coach engagement in football programmes.
3. **Assess alignment with National Football Curriculum:** Evaluate the extent to which the intervention contributes to a coherent, national approach to player development.
4. **Investigate gender participation:** Research cultural and structural barriers to girls' participation in school football and evaluate the effectiveness of strategies to address them.
5. **Compare across contexts:** Conduct comparative analysis across provinces and countries to identify contextual factors that influence success.

7. Conclusion

The Southern Province teacher-coach training intervention represents a significant and innovative response to Zambia's football development crisis. By training 917 teachers as FAZ E Licence coaches and establishing a comprehensive school football league system across 15 districts, the intervention addresses three critical gaps identified in Mizinga's (2017) evaluation: the lack of qualified coaches at the grassroots level, the absence of structured school football programmes, and the disconnect between school football and elite player development pathways.

The intervention's theory of change is compelling: trained teacher-coaches embedded within schools, supported by a multi-stakeholder partnership, and operating through zoned league structures can restore school football as a continuous, structured pathway for talent identification and player development. The mechanisms activated teacher-as-coach integration, continuous engagement, certification and progression, and multi-stakeholder collaboration; addressing the systemic failures that have characterised Zambian football development.

However, the intervention's success depends on addressing potential blocking mechanisms: teacher motivation and workload, resource constraints, alignment with a National Football Curriculum, monitoring and evaluation, gender equity, and political and institutional stability. These challenges require sustained commitment from all partners and deliberate strategies to overcome them. The document-based nature of this evaluation means that these challenges remain potential rather than confirmed; empirical research is needed to understand how they manifest in practice.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. As a document-based case study, it assesses the intervention's design and intended mechanisms rather than its actual implementation and outcomes. Future research should complement this analysis with primary data collection, including interviews with teacher-coaches, observations of coaching practice, and assessment of player development outcomes. Longitudinal research is particularly needed to assess sustainability and long-term impact.

The Southern Province intervention offers a replicable model for grassroots football development in resource-constrained African contexts. Its emphasis on embedding coach education within existing educational infrastructure, establishing continuous league structures, and building multi-stakeholder partnerships provides lessons for other countries facing similar challenges. If successful, the intervention could transform Zambian football from its foundation, restoring the school system as the "heartbeat of talent identification" and creating a pipeline from grassroots to elite that has been absent for decades.

As Mizinga (2017, p. 81) concluded, "the time for that direction is now." The Southern Province intervention represents a promising step in that direction.

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