



Deaf friendly swimming: Communication experiences of Deaf/hearing impaired competitive swimmers and their coaches in South Africa

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Introduction and Rationale

Deaf/hearing impaired predominately refers to individuals who have damage to their auditory system that has affected their hearing (Palmer, 2018). Communication is integral to the functioning of any society and without effective communication, members of society are often excluded. Therefore, communication strategies are needed to achieve effective communication.

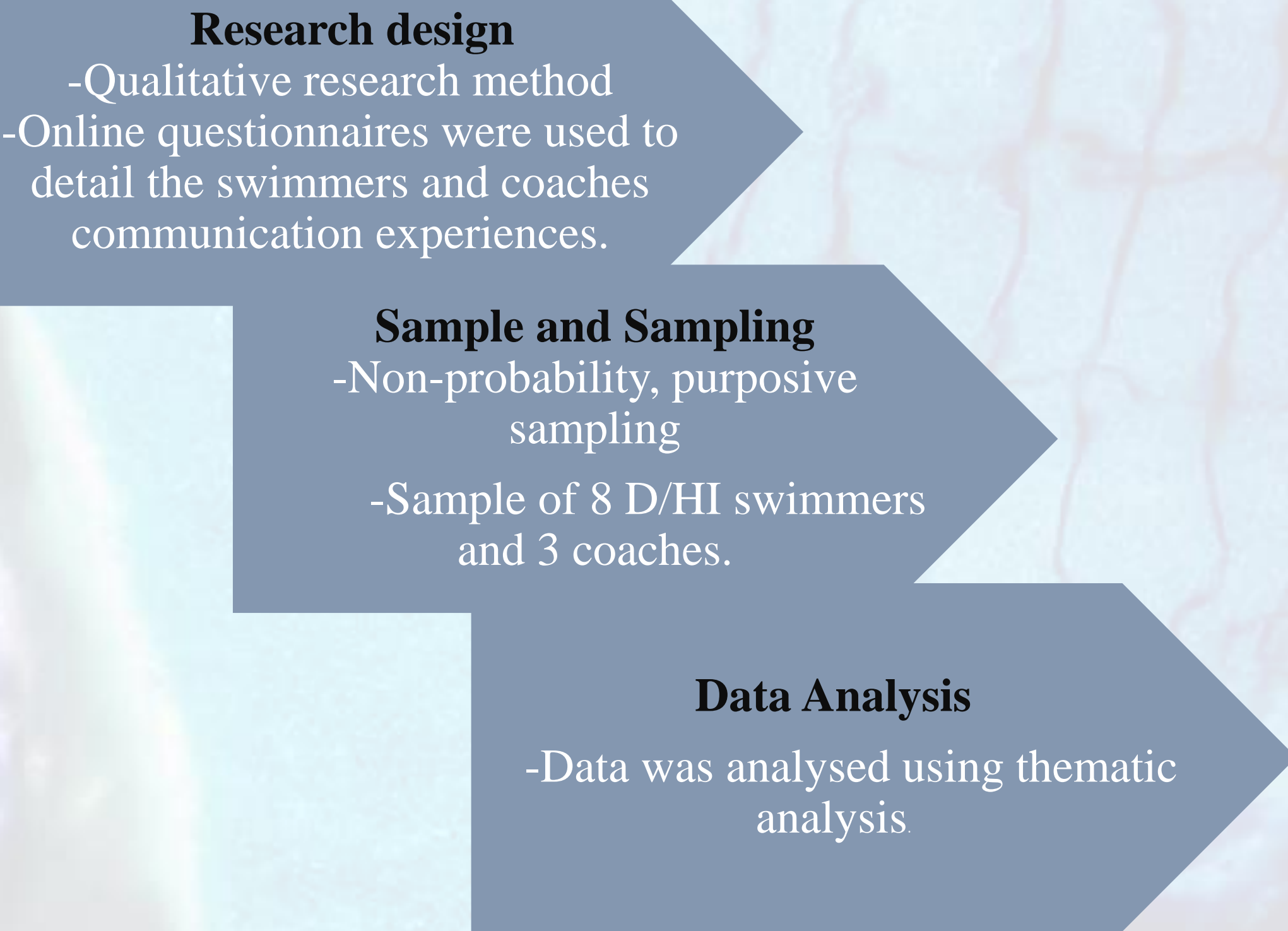
There is a dearth of research pertaining to the communication experiences of D/HI swimmers within the South African context. Thus, this study aimed to answer the following research question: *What are the communication experiences of D/HI competitive swimmers and their coaches in South Africa?*

Aim and Objectives

Aim: The aim of the study was to explore the communication experiences of D/HI competitive swimmers and their coaches in South Africa.

- Objectives:**
1. To explore the different communication strategies used between D/HI competitive swimmers and their coaches.
 2. To document any barrier in communication strategies that exist within competitive swimming.
 3. To document any facilitators in communication strategies that exist within competitive swimming.
 4. To explore if and how inclusivity of D/HI swimmers is employed within the sport.

Methodology



Results

9 Themes were identified

Theme 1: Common communication strategies used
“I have always been able to lip read, and my coach and I just formed this understanding of how we communicate. The writing on the white board is also just a quick easy way that is used for the whole team” (p3)

Theme 4: Coaches awareness of different communication needs
“The coach is also Deaf, and he is aware” (p6)

Theme 7: Building of relationships
“I’ve built a relationship with my coach to ensure an understanding on how I need to be communicated with.” (p1)

Theme 2: Use of sign language in the swimming environment
“I do not know how to speak sign language and nor do most people including coaches.” (p4)

Theme 5: Effective communication
“I make sure to give each group the communication they might need.” (p10)

Theme 8: Support and understanding from other hearing swimmers or coaches
“Hearing swimmers help us.” (p5)

Theme 3: Challenges faced by Deaf/hearing impaired swimmers and their coaches
“If the start of a race was a whistle blow, I was in trouble. The strobe light really helped a lot.” (p1)

Theme 6: Exclusion in the swimming environment
“My philosophy is to help everyone who trains in my squad. I will go the extra mile to help swimmers who share the same passion as I do. Everyone should get treated equally and fairly.” (p9)

Theme 9: Interactions with other D/HI impaired swimmers and their coaches
“New coaches sometimes get impatient, but overall positive.” (p10)

Discussion

- Integration of D/HI individuals into the hearing sport communities is restricted by the lack of awareness within the hearing population regarding Sign language (Foster et al., 2018).
- An athletes relationship with their coach is vital in achieving an inclusive environment as the coaches understanding of the athletes needs will be more individualised and inclusive.
- Team collaboration and integration is highly important for the inclusion of D/HI athletes.
- Consider visual sensory cues for D/HI athletes as this is a good way of getting their attention (Houinato, 2017).

Conclusion

- Overall, positive communication experiences within the swimming environment were noted for all participants despite some challenges and barriers. The coaches understanding and relationships with the D/HI swimmers plays a major factor in how effective communication within the swimming environment occurs.

Implications

Research into D/HI athletes within other sporting environments in South Africa as well as internationally is needed due to the lack of current research.

Limitations

- Small sample size
- South African participants only
- Use of questionnaires due to Covid-19

Reference: Palmer, C. (2018). "Creating Successful Experiences for Deaf Children in Physical Education and Athletics: A Review of the Literature". Kinesiology, Sport Studies, and Physical Education Synthesis Projects. 48. https://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/pes_synthesis/48

Foster, R., Fitzgerald, H., & Stride, A. (2018). The socialization and participation of Deaflympians in sport. *Sport In Society*, 22(12), 1904-1918. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2018.1530219>

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