

***BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION***



**FACULTY OF SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING**

**DEPARTMENT OF SPORTS SCIENCE**

**DEVELOPING A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK TO OPTIMIZE THE  
PERFORMANCE OF ZIMBABWE'S ELITE MEN'S FOOTBALL TEAM IN  
INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION**

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**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE  
MASTER'S DEGREE IN SPORTS MANAGEMENT**

**BINDURA**

**AUGUST 2023**

**DECLARATION**

I hereby attest that this thesis is wholly mine and that it has never been submitted, in whole or in part, with any other degree application. Unless otherwise mentioned in the references or acknowledgments, the material given is entirely mine.

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## **ABSTRACT**

The ultimate objective of the research was to develop a strategic framework that would optimise the performance of Zimbabwe's men's national football team in international games. The problem is that the Zimbabwe National Elite football team has a track record of delivering unrivaled outcomes at the international level, which is compounded by a need for more literature in the context of Zimbabwe Football optimisation to inform practice. Thus, the research was driven by a desire to solve practical and theoretical shortcomings discovered in the management of Zimbabwe's successful football team. The study made use of the ideas generated through qualitative and quantitative approaches. This research adopted the concurrent mixed-methods research design involving collecting both quantitative and qualitative data at the same time. Therefore, the collection of quantitative and qualitative data was independent of each other, and one type of data is not informing the collection of the other type of data. Thematic analysis for data gathered using semi-structured interviews was performed using the NVivo 12 software. Quantitative Data obtained from the questionnaires was analyzed using SPSS software version 20. The results show that the Zimbabwe National team lacked a consistent and reliable source of talent to assure the team's competitiveness at the International level. The present framework perpetuates the existing unfavourable opinions of Zimbabwe's Senior Football Team as stagnant and deteriorating. This has resulted in the departure of major players, coaches, and cooperate sponsors. The study recommends that the Zimbabwe Football Association should provide suitable conditions for players to develop their Physical Demands, Technical Demands, and Psycho-Social Demands in order for their performances to meet international practice. The study further recommends that the Zimbabwe Football Association should start a normative data collection that would control talent in local leagues and also generate the tools for talent development in Zimbabwe. The Zimbabwe Football Association is urged to construct high-performance facilities where it can train players from an early age.

Key words : Optimasation ; physical ;technical; psycho-social

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, who I appreciate for her patience, support, and tolerance during the whole process of doing this research, as well as to God the Almighty. This thesis is dedicated to my mother, who I appreciate for her patience, support, and tolerance during the whole process of doing this research, as well as to God the Almighty.

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***LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS***

**LTAD** -LONG TERM ATHLETE DEVELOPMENT

**PSL**-PREMIER SOCCER LEAGUE

**SMTD** -STANDARD MODEL OF TALENT DEVELOPMENT

**ZIFA** –ZIMBABWE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION

## **CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents a foundation of the study which includes the background of the study, statement of the problem, objectives, research questions, significance of the study, and delimitation of the study.

### **1.2 Background of the study**

Optimizing the performance of football players is a topic that has been extensively studied in sports science and management over the years. Accordingly, Till et. al (2022) defined optimizing players' performances as the process of enhancing an athlete's ability to perform their sport at the highest level. Dane et.al (2022) denote that optimizing football performance is the process of developing players' physical technical, tactical and mental skills. Hendricks et al. (2020) go on to say that enhancing performance involves a number of tactics, including putting in place efficient training plans, enhancing nutrition, reviewing game films, and offering psychological and emotional support. Guided by these definitions, it becomes apparent that performance optimization is not in its infancy, nor does it entirely hint at the use of gold-standard measurement instruments. Instead, it proposes the view that optimization entails improving a wide range of areas including training methods, recovery, strategies, injury prevention, and tactical analysis. This category pays attention to the athletes, their coaches, technical staff, and the strength and conditioning staff. De Fremery (2018) added that from the analysis of the game and pieces of training performance, another potential stakeholder could be the talent scouts with a desire of tapping into new talent.

As football has immensely gained popularity around the globe, football institutions and researchers are seeking to upgrade the overall performance of the players, maintain their health, and win more matches (Ric, Torrents, Goncalves, Torres-Ronda, Sampaio and Hristovski, 2017). The performance of players is under extensive surveillance in official and competitive games as part of local or global competitions (Amulla et al., 2020), and in unsanctioned games such as team training sessions, training matches among team players, and friendly games with other teams (Akenhead, Harley and Tweddle, 2016). Football coaches are more concerned with technical and health-related performance issues as both are critical when it concerns the quantification of the overall performance of the players (Nagahar, Morin, and Koido, 2016; Ric et al., 2017; Nagahar et al., 2016) explained that technical performance metrics consist of players' activities during the game which, among them include; the number of accomplished

passes, duration of ball possession, number of passes among players, and number of shots the player attempts to score a goal. In the case of health-related performance metrics, Akenhead et al. (2016); Ric et al. (2017) noted that the focus was on the total distance covered by players at moderate, high, and very high speeds.

Zimbabwe's senior football team, better known as the Warriors, recorded a single win in 16 matches, zero victories at home in two years, and only a single goal in the 2022 World Cup qualifiers, making the tale a very sad one. Since independence, Zimbabwe has failed to qualify for the World Cup with 2022 being labelled as a "disastrous ...campaign" (Kausiyo and Nyakwenda, 2021). The Warriors have since independence failed to qualify for the World Cup tournament and several reasons have been put forward in justifying the continued poor performance of the national football team. Some of these range from poor coaching staff to poor remuneration of players and poor administration of the game (Chikamhi, 2021). For instance, Magonde and Nhamo (2019) reported that on several occasions, the national football administrator, ZIFA, has struggled or even failed to facilitate the team's preparatory arrangements. However, no attention has been paid to trying to propose strategies that can be adopted to enhance the overall performance of players both at the local and national levels. Moreover, there is a paucity of literature in the context of Zimbabwe Football optimization to inform practice. Taking steps to close these gaps has a substantial influence on football player management. Athletes can learn what they have been doing successfully or unsuccessfully by using evidence-based data. Furthermore, this study is crucial in guiding the national team to make the correct decision at the right moment and achieve consistent results. It is against such a background that the study intends to develop a strategic framework to optimize the performance of Zimbabwe's men's national football team in international competitions.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

The researcher intends to develop a strategic framework to optimize the performance of football Zimbabwe's senior men's national team in international competitions. The problem is that Zimbabwe Football National team performances are evidently poor as shown by a series of losses in their previous outings. Zimbabwe's senior football team, better known as the Warriors, recorded a single win in 16 matches, zero victories at home in two years, and only a single goal in the 2022 World Cup qualifiers, making the tale a very sad one. Apparently, there is a paucity of frameworks earmarked to optimize the performance of the 'Warriors' game at International competitions. Hence, this research is motivated to explore the technical psychological, social-economic aspects, and health-related challenges and experiences of the

Zimbabwe National football team, with a view to developing a strategic framework to optimize the performance of Zimbabwe's senior men National team in International Competitions.

#### **1.4 Significant of the study**

Researching a topic that seeks to optimize the performance of Zimbabwe National football players is significant for several reasons. First and foremost, football is a highly competitive sport, and any small advantage can make a big difference in player performance. By conducting research on how to optimize player performance, coaches and trainers can develop training programs and strategies that can help players perform at their best. Secondly, football is a physically demanding sport, and injuries are common. Research on player performance can also help identify risk factors for injury and ways in which they can be prevented or minimized. By reducing the number of injuries, players can stay on the field longer, which can improve overall team performance. Thirdly, football is constantly evolving, and new strategies and techniques are being developed all the time. Conducting research on player performance can help identify new approaches that can push the boundaries of the sport and create new opportunities for players and teams. Finally, fans are a crucial part of football, and they want to see exciting and competitive games. By optimizing player performance, 'The Warriors' can put on a better show for their fans, which can improve the overall experience of watching and following the sport.

#### **1.5 Research Questions**

##### **1.5.1. Primary research question**

What strategic framework can be developed to optimize the performance of the Zimbabwe Senior men's football team?

##### **1.5.2 Subsidiary Research Questions**

1.5.2.1. What frameworks are currently being used to optimize the performance of the Zimbabwe Senior men's football team ?

1.5.2.2 What impact does the current framework being used to optimize the performance of the Zimbabwe Senior men's football team in Zimbabwe have?

1.5.2.3 How can the performance of the Zimbabwe Senior men's football team be optimised?

## **1.6 Objectives**

### **1.6.1. Primary objective**

To Develop a strategic framework to optimize the performance of the Zimbabwe Senior men's football team in Zimbabwe.

### **1.6.2.Subsidiary research objectives**

1.6.2.1 to identify existing frameworks that are currently being used to optimize the performance of the Zimbabwe Senior men's football team in Zimbabwe?

1.6.2.2 to determine the impact of the current framework being used to optimize the performance of the Zimbabwe Senior men's football team in Zimbabwe?

1.6.2.3 Develop a strategic framework to optimize the performance of the Zimbabwe Senior men's football team in Zimbabwe?

## **1.7 Delimitation**

The study focuses on developing a strategic framework to optimize the performance of the Zimbabwe Senior men's football team. The study used both current and former coaches ,players and administrators to inform the findings of this study The study made use of the ideas generated through qualitative and quantitative approaches.

## **1.8 Study outline**

The research focuses on developing a strategic framework to optimize the performance of the Zimbabwe Senior men's football team in Zimbabwe.

- Chapter 1 brings out the problem and the justification for carrying out this study
- Chapter 2 focuses on reviewing literature that informed this research on the nature of strategic frameworks to optimize performance in football, the methodology, and gaps in the previous research.
- In Chapter 3, the researcher presented the research methodology, where the data collection methods, instruments, and procedures were outlined
- The fourth chapter presents the findings of the data collected.
- Chapter 5 analyzed and discusses the results. New insights were also produced in this chapter.

- Chapter 6 presented conclusions and recommendations based on the results of the study.

### **1.9 Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided the problem and justification for carrying out this study. The major problem is the poor performance of the Zimbabwe National football team at the international level. The major objective is to develop a strategic framework to optimize the performance of the Zimbabwe Senior men's football team in Zimbabwe. The next chapter will delve into the review of work done by other scholars on optimizing the performance of football players.

## **CHAPTER TWO:REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the relevant literature surrounding optimising football performance in football . It began with conceptualization where key concepts surrounding the research topic were defined and further explained. The chapter also discusses theories, methodologies used in a related study and themes.

### **2.2 Conceptualization**

#### ***2.2.1 Long-Term Athlete/Player Development in Football***

The long-term athlete development (LTAD), also known as the long-term player development (LTPD) model is a framework for optimal training, competition and recovery program for each stage of athletic development (Till and Baker, 2020). Scantlebury, Till, Sawczuk, Phibbs and Jones (2020) perceive the model as a player-centered approach premised on scientific principles of human development and athlete training, consolidated with the knowledge of expert coaches. Accordingly, being player-centered entails that respect is accorded to the developmental needs of athletes as of utmost significance. More so, athletes are accorded with challenging opportunities for special talents so that they can develop their abilities and reach their full potential (Till, Lloyd, McCormack, Williams, Baker and Eisenmann, 2022). Under the LTAD model, athlete development takes effect when the developing players are exposed to the strategic capabilities of the organization and shown how to effectively apply taught skills (Eisenmann, Till and Baker, 2020). These skills are embedded within an organizations rules, routines and procedures, the implication being that the style or manner in which the organizations makes decisions and manages its internal processes to attain organizational objectives.

Talent development is anchored on providing individuals with an ideal environment that is conducive to learning with the expectation that potential is realized (Scantlebury et al., 2020). The creation of an ideal environment offers the strategic context for the value-creation activities. Eisenmann et al. (2021) posit that those intending to emulate the achievement within an academy system have attempted to copy accomplished practices given the provision of the system and services are perceived to be essential in the production of elite players.

Till et al. (2022) observe that principles of the LTAD model have been embraced by sports organizations as a framework for the ideal management of youth and adolescent growth and development processes and identified the critical periods of accelerated adaptation to training.

Eisenmann et al. (2020) suggest that at the initial phases of development, it is imperative that sport development initiatives are designed around critical periods of accelerated adaptation to training. These periods of development represent the moment when children are ready and able to develop fundamental sports skills and abilities such as jumping, running and throwing. In addition, they are capable of improving their agility, balance and speed which are related sports skills that will serve them in track and field as well as in other sports. It is within this context that Scantlebury et al. (2022) argue that children who fail to develop their fundamental motor skills by the age of twelve are not likely to attain their genetic athletic potential. Consequently, a lack of fundamental skills may imply the difference between a day on the couch against a day on the soccer field or the difference between a gold medal performance and a 16th-place finish at the Olympics (Till and Baker, 2020).

### ***2.2.2 Determinants of Developing an Elite Soccer Player***

Several factors have been identified as influencing the development of elite soccer players in line with the principles of the LTAD model. Some of these include; training factors, maturational factors, the relative age effect, the role of coaching and instruction, parental influences and cultural factors.

#### **Training Factors**

Concerning training factors, Akenhead and Nassis (2018) highlight the need for the availability of training infrastructure, experts in training methods and experienced coaches in order to produce elite soccer players. Scantlebury et al. (2020) aver that it is perhaps not surprising that high levels of training or practice are needed to expertise to accomplish or develop elite soccer players. Likewise, Wilson (2017) attests that adherence to a training principle is fundamental in the production of elite soccer players. The training stimulus or stress is greater than that which the individual is usually accustomed to.

#### **Maturation Factors**

Till and Baker (2020) noted that the presence of essential resources such as coaching and parental support, can immensely influence the ability to engage in the required amounts of high-quality training and development of elite soccer athletes. Another issue that seems to influence the acquisition of expertise is the relative age phenomenon. Initially illustrated in the academic domain, the relative age effect refers to variations in age among children born in the same calendar year (Till et al., 2022).

Seth (2018) contends that young soccer players classified as elite and non-elite, or as possessing high and low levels of soccer ability vary in body size and maturity, and in strength, flexibility and soccer-specific skills. However, size and maturity status are basically not controlled in comparisons of functional tests and sport-specific skills. Moreover, classifications as elite and non-elite or having high and low ability are generally anchored upon coach or staff evaluations or level of competition, and as such have a degree of subjectivity (Till et al., 2022). In soccer, skill is more complex than indicated by field tests, and level of competition among others, and includes a conglomeration of physical, functional, behavioural and perceptual features.

### **Parental Influences**

The significance of parental support for the development of the athlete has been highlighted in studies conducted in the last three decades. It has since been observed that talent development can be categorized into three stages namely the early years, the middle years and the later years. Till et al. (2022) posit that each stage is characterized by shifting demands on the child and parents. In the early years, parents have been observed to assume a leadership role by providing their children with the initial opportunity to take part in the domain and seek out their child's first formal teacher (Eisenmann et al., 2020). For the child-athlete, the emphasis during the early years is to have fun and enjoy learning basics skills.

The transition to the middle years is characterized by a greater commitment of both parents and the athlete to the athletic domain (Till and Baker, 2020). In this phase, parents assume a leadership role, for instance by seeking more accomplished teachers for their child while also committing more time and resources to the activity. It is also during these years that the child's talent dominates the family's routine. During the later years, parental involvement decreases as the athlete takes greater control of the decision-making process with regard to their future career (Vaughan, Mallett, Potrac, Woods, O'Sullivan and Davids, 2022). However, parents continue to offer support in a background role, as providers of financial as well as emotional support. Scantlebury et al. (2022) observe that one of the greatest significance is that parents provide a nurturing understanding environment for their kid to retreat, if necessary. More so, parents can ease the demands imposed on their child by the demands of training such as reduction of psychological stress by availing a supportive atmosphere.

Gherghel, Badau, Badau, Moraru, Manolache and Oancea (2021) proposed a sport-specific model of talent development. Their work with families of elite tennis players lead to the

conception that talent development in sport is composed of samplings years (ages six to twelve), specializing years (ages thirteen to fifteen) and investment years (ages sixteen and above). Accordingly, parental roles changed with the varying demands of each stage. Gherghel et al. (2021) explained that during the sampling stage, parents offered their kids the opportunity to sample a wide variety of sports hence despite the fact that parents encouraged participation in sport, the choice of sport was not significant. In fact, parents play a leadership role during the sampling years by initiating sports involvement (Eisenmann et al., 2020). During the specializing years parents in a facilitative role where they make financial and time devotions to their child's sport, support access to better coaches, equipment and training facilities (Salcinovic et al., 2022). Ultimately, during the investment stage parents are expected to play strictly an advisory and supportive role as the player commits to a higher level of training and competition (Akenhead and Nassis, 2018). Parents are expected to maintain a high interest in their kid's sport and are essential in offering emotional support to assist their child overcome setbacks, such as injuries, pressure and fatigue together with financial support for training. This esteemed level of emotional support during stressful periods is a key feature of the investment years (Hostrup and Bangsbo, 2023).

The above discussion has demonstrated that as a component of LTAD, parental support assists expert performers and elite players deal with the demands of the sustained deliberate practice essential to attain an expert level of performance. As such, the framework that is going to be proposed in this study will have to consider the evolving role of parents for instance from that of a leadership role, to that of a general supportive role. It has also been highlighted that players who fail to access certain emotional and financial resources encounter a qualitatively different road in order to attain the higher levels of practice needed for expert performance (Gherghel et al., 2021).

### **The Relative Age Effect**

Eisenmann et al. (2020) observed that sport programs for young people use cut-off dates to ensure that kids will receive age-appropriate instruction and to enable a fair competition. However, there is a great difference in the perceived capabilities of children who may compete in the same age group. For example, an Under-13 football player born in January may have a distinct advantage over an Under-13 football player born in December. Latif, Ghazali, Rahman, Mohamed and Fauzee (2022) contend that a 12-month difference in age significantly explains performance variations in youth competitions as a result of anthropometric differences. This is

regarded as the relative age effect and it may be demonstrated by both physical and psychological factors.

Pertaining to physical development Ghazali et al. (2022) noted that within the same age group, older children may possess greater size, speed and co-ordination simply as a result of being mature. Scantlebury et al. (2020) made the assertion that if junior athletes have a birth-date late in the competition year; these athletes are placed at a disadvantage within the organization of soccer participation. They assert that matching junior soccer players according to biological age is unrealistic and thus suggested the need for players to compete according to their body size.

Seth (2018) posits that a junior player's perceived potential and expected accomplishment in football are affected by the relative age effect. Till and Baker (2020) aver that in most instances talent identification and selection both seem to be significantly influenced by junior players' physical attributes rather than their social skills. Vaughan et al. (2022) note that the relative age effect may be demonstrated by the fact that older athletes are better in all physical aspects and they thus experience more achievements and rewards in the sport. This early accomplishment motivates the older athletes to remain in the sport, while the younger players drop out. It is also possible that older players get incorporated into esteemed competitive representational teams, where they get better facilities and training compared to their younger counterparts (Salcinovic et al., 2020).

Akenhead and Nassis (2018) state that early-maturing young athletes may also be given specialist coaching while late-maturing players are denied this opportunity at the same chronological age. Gherghel et al. (2021) discovered that in relation to the psychological effect of the relative age effect have been noted in diverse sports like basketball, ice hockey, soccer, swimming and tennis. The collective outcome of the relative age effect is accomplished through the notions of physical development advantage, socialization and the self-fulfilling prophecy. Slightly older athletes have a tendency of being superior physically and psychologically and as noted by Latif et al. (2022), this makes their selection more likely. These athletes are taught the appropriate skills and techniques, while being socialized into ideal attitudes for later accomplishment by capable coaches. Eisenmann et al. (2020) highlight that those athletes who are not selected fail to get exposure to this socialization and specialized training. The implication being that they have a higher risk of non-selection at subsequent player evaluations. Moreover in the event the slightly older athletes are told by coaches that

they are talented and therefore destined for elite participation, these athletes are more likely to train harder and longer to attain the elite level (Till et al., 2022). Hence in the quest of enhancing the performance of the senior national football team, this study will propose a framework that encompasses the relative age effect in the long-term development programs of soccer players.

## **2.3 Theoretical Frameworks**

### **2.3.1 Team Behaviors Models**

There are a limited number of models in the literature to describe team behavior. Hence in this study, we highlight the two prominent proposals for the team synergy hypothesis; the hypothesis of shared knowledge anchored in the socio-cognitive approach (Eccles, 2010) and the participatory sense-making hypothesis anchored in the enactive approach (Fonseca, Milho, Travassos, Araujo and Lopes, 2013). As explained by Eccles, the assumption of shared knowledge is predicated on the possession by group members of mental models that offer a basic shared understanding of how to attain desired performance outcomes. It is argued that team efficacy could multiply when a sophisticated, global and comprehensive mental representation of a performance context of a collective action is to some extent shared by all members and put into action (Araujo and Bourbousson, 2016).

Lack of coordination between the intentions of individual actors and those of the team entails that a shared cognitive state has yet to be accomplished, with resulting challenges in team performance (Eccles, 2010). In this context, it is the construction and updating of the individual's mental model that illustrate how numerous players may synchronously perform together (Bourbousson, R'Kiouak and Eccles, 2015). Accordingly, Araujo and Davids (2016) posit that as multiple team players are synchronously coordinating, the amount of similarity within individuals' representation together becomes a major feature, thus highlighting a state of shared understanding within the team. However, Fultot, Nie and Carello (2016) argues that knowing who is capable of what at each interval of a game would involve an immense computational load for a representational system. In particular, the mechanism to explain reformulations of a team member's schema, in cases where changes take effect in the content of another player's schema, has proved challenging to ascertain. A major challenge is to justify how mental representations exist beyond the mind of an individual organism and can be somehow shared in a collective representation (Fonseca et al., 2013).

Another alternative is the participatory sense-making hypothesis which suggests that group coordination processes should be examined by reconstructing how individual cognitions

articulate during performance atmospheres (Fonseca et al., 2013). With the assertion that an actor possesses a distinct interiority, this hypothesis has ushered in special attention to implicit means of how each actor experiences their ongoing activity. Participatory sense-making processes refer to how the meanings that each actor internally builds from their activity corroborate with the meanings simultaneously established by co-actors and how this participation in sense-making is experienced (Araujo and Bourbousson, 2016). From this perspective, the assumption is that putative participatory sense-making emerges from a cooperative effort (Fultot et al., 2016).

Players working together accomplish the experience of mutual agreement in real time. Any divergence in how each player experiences a performance situation leads to varied extents of participation in sense-making, differences in feelings of connectedness with the other, and differences in expectations for actions from others (Bourbousson et al., 2015). The enactive approach attempts to avoid representationalism by being anchored in the interiority of each member it needs to operationally define what the internal sense-making process is and compare it with representations of lived scenarios which are heavily reliant on memory. In essence, Bourbousson et al. (2015) argue that it should be explained why there is a need to add the label “sense-making” to the process of team coordination unless we are functioning in an approach that overstates the asymmetry of organism and environment. The conception suggested by enactive theorists that meaning (about the world) is internally built is not operationally defined in terms that exclude representations and thus may be subject to similar criticisms as the shared knowledge hypothesis concerning overreliance on mental representations, individual or collective.

Basically, both the participatory sense-making and the shared knowledge hypotheses depend on data from posteriori verbalizations of team actors. As such, the organization of behaviour, from these perspectives, is largely understood and drawn from the verbalized conceptions and perceptions about behavior, not from the actual behaviors themselves (Eccles, 2010). From these perspectives, overt behavior and its organization in contexts like team sports is a surrogate of verbalized shared sense-making or knowledge, without a self-organization of its own. In contrast to these perspectives, this study argues that behavior has an organization that transcends what a player possesses. Rather, it is deeply grounded in the specific scenarios of behavior, in which continuous player-environment interactions are not influenced by a single component of such a system. Ultimately, the formulation of the framework aimed at optimizing

the performance of the men's national football team will take into consideration the tenets of the behaviours, in particular with the need to enhance team coordination.

### ***2.3.2 Synergies and Ecologies Model***

A synergy is perceived as a functional concept, not a structural, component-based concept. In analyses of human movement it relates directly to explanations of coordination processes in multiarticular systems such as the body of an athlete or groups that compete in sport (Seifert, Komar, Araujo and Davids, 2016). Turvey and Fonseca (2014) described synergy as a group of relatively independent degrees of freedom that behave as a single functional unit, implying that the internal degrees of freedom take care of themselves, adjusting to their mutual fluctuations and to the fluctuations of the external force field, and so in a way that preserves the functional integrity of the team. Taking into consideration this definition, in a collective system, a synergy is a task-specific organization of persons, with degrees of freedom of each person having the potential for coupling, enabling the degrees of freedom of various persons to govern each other (Fonseca et al., 2013).

Seifert et al. (2016) aver that synergies require the modulation of fewer parameters compared to the separate control of each degree of freedom, so as bring about coordinated movement. This system capacity lowers the need for control of each degree of freedom and gives room for compensatory variability in a single element of the synergy by another. Most significantly, coordination processes that characterize a synergy are not predicted on the cooperativity of individual structural components, but rather on the cooperativity of their functional roles (Araujo and Davids, 2016). Put differently, synergies being task specific are not conceived by design, they are not hardwired to behave in a pre-arranged manner, and thus the context-dependent functionality of synergy components should always be recognized. Thus synergies are context-dependent, time-evolving dynamical systems that according to scenarios, self-organize several, individual system components in an ideal and timely manner (Turvey and Fonseca, 2014).

A significant attribute of group synergy is the capacity of each person such as a player in a team to influence behaviours of others (Araujo and Davids, 2016). Decisions and actions of athletes forming a synergy should not be perceived as independent, illustrating how multiple athletes synchronize activities in relation to the dynamic performance environments in fractions of a second (Silva, Chung, Carvalho, Cardoso, Aguiar and Davids, 2016). The coupling of athletes, as independent degrees of freedom, into synergies is grounded upon perception systems in a social context supported by the collective perception of shared affordances

(Turvey and Fonseca, 2014). Bourbousson et al. (2015) observed that inherent degeneracy, that is flexibility in perception-action systems offers the neurobiological basis for the diversity of actions needed to negotiate information-rich, dynamic social environments toward a task goal, as well as offering a huge evolutionary fitness advantage (Seifert et al., 2016). As such the relationship between the features of the environment and each person's skills and capacities can be captured in the perception affordance (Silva et al., 2016). System degeneracy between persons would reflect each person's actualization of an affordance through several coordination trends. The implication is that the same affordance can be actualized with various coordination trends as persons interact with task and environmental constraints (Eccles, 2010).

In line with this notion, an ecological dynamics perspective strives to predict conditions in which persons are better capable of coordinating movements with others, and which features of a scenario facilitate/perturb interpersonal coordination in completing some task (Turvey and Fonseca, 2014). This view has major implications for designing experiments for studying team performance behaviours, as well as for practice and training design (Silva et al., 2016). Ecological dynamics analyses of team sports have attempted to illustrate how interactions between players and information from the performance environment impede the emergence of trends of stability, variability and transitions in organizational states of such team synergies (Araujo and Davids, 2016). The emergent coordination patterns in team sports are channelled by surrounding constraints that structure the state space of all potential configurations present for the team match as a complex system. For instance, the surrounding patterned energy distributions that players can perceive as significant sources of information to support their decisions and actions such as reflected light from the ball (Bourbousson et al., 2015). In relation to this study and in the context of this theoretical rationale, a framework for optimizing the performance of the men's national football can be formulated by incorporating existing variables spatiotemporalio-temporal data by organizing it according to the team synergy model while synergy properties can also guide the discovery of new variables.

## 2.4 Methodological Review

*Table 2.1*

### *Methodological review*

<b>Researcher</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Purpose of Study</b>	<b>Models or Theoretical Frameworks Upon Which Study is Grounded Upon</b>	<b>Sample Type and Size</b>	<b>Methodology Approach</b>	<b>Methodological Gap</b>
Gonzalez-Ponce et al. (2022).	Switzerland	To propose an explanatory model of group dynamics in professional soccer using the conceptual framework to examine team sports.  to propose an	Conceptual framework for the study of sports teams developed by Carron and Eys (2012).	581 professional football players aged between 15 and 39 years and playing in the Spanish Soccer League. These were distributed as follows; 356 males from 18 teams and 225 females from 13 teams.	Analytic approach complemented with multi-section questionnaire assessing group dynamics variables.	The study was cross-sectional study in which the variables were measured at a single moment in the season. Considering that the variables are dynamic in nature, thus in order to provide additional indications of the direction of the relations, longitudinal studies are required to observe how the variables

						fluctuate over time.
Guard et al. (2022).	United States of America.	To provide a robust framework to provide a safe environment for return to training and competition of the US national soccer teams and international following domestic and international travel during a global pandemic.		Participants were drawn from nine training camps. They were composed of the senior men's and women's national teams as well as U23 men's youth national team and Paralympic national team. Ages ranged between 18 and 38. Training camp durations lasted between 7 and 30 days.	Observational	The size of the reference population is also smaller in this study, given that it accounts for a single national federation compared with the entire domestic leagues composed of multiple teams and athletes. Direct comparisons between sports and populations may involve reporting of testing data that use varying testing firms, and therefore protocols for PCR testing which is subject to inherent variation and differing

						levels of reliability.
Scelles and Andreff (2018).	United Kingdom	To verify that, despite these elements, the determinants of long-term performance are valid for short-term/game outcomes and latter have also game specific variables (home advantage and sporting prizes).		2584 international games over the 2011-2013 period.	Observational and regression of soccer games	The variables used in one particular period such as socio-economic may vary or dynamic during another period of time.
Seth (2018).	United Kingdom	To analyze the determinants of World Cup performances of teams.		Five World Cup tournaments staged between 1998 and 2014.	Linear Regression Model complemented by observation method.	The study incorporated socio-economic, cultural and demographic variables along with those of sport that are specific to football. There is need to focus on factors that are directly

						related to the sport and tournament.
Salcinovic et al. (2022).	Australia	To explore the factors influencing team function and performance across various industries and discuss findings in the context of high-performance sport support team setting.		Forty-six articles met the inclusion criteria and these used in extracting data for qualitative and quantitative analysis. These articles did report on a performance metric.	Systematic scoping review. This was used in conjunction with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analysis extension (PRISMA ScR) guidelines.	This review explored the effect of support team-teamwork/team function on injury incidence and availability of athletes; however, its effect on athlete or playing team sporting performance has not been commensurately discussed.
Wilson (2017).	United Kingdom	To synthesize a portfolio of published works which focus on the sporting and non-sporting performance of three of the top four,	Economic theory of professional sports.	Annual reports and financial statements of each of the clubs under investigation were used in data collection.	Positivism and quantitative research design.	This body of work examined factors affecting financial performance of three of top four revenue generating sports in England. However, factors influencing

		professional teams team sports in England (based on revenue generated and broadcast hours); (football, rugby league and rugby union).				performance extend to the decision making of boards of directors through setting business objectives and through governance considerations which affect financial performance at club level and league structure at league level.  Financial.
Zhou et al. (2023).	China.	To crawl fans' online comments on the performance of Chinese Men's National Football Team on social media (MicroBlog and HUPU).		A total of 2352 comments were on the performance of the Chinese Men's National Football Team in the 2022 FIFA World Cup were collected on the 15 <sup>th</sup> of July 2021.	Big data analysis method.	There was no access to gather comments from fans who were unwilling to express their views on the Internet. In addition, this paper only took the 2022 FIFA World Cup Qualification (Asian Division) as an example,

						the research conclusion cannot be extended to other football games.
Kin-Man et al. (2019).	Hong Kong.	To provide key implications for studying national success in sports.	Political-economic synergies.	Panel data from 121 countries for the 1999 to 2014 period was used for data extraction.	Fixed-effects models.	The market value of professional football leagues and football populations may affect national football rankings. Moreover, most data related with the market value of football leagues and football population were not available in the 121 countries, except for a few leagues and nations. Furthermore, the analyses focused exclusively on men's football.
Akenhead and Nassis (2018).	Qatar.	To provide information on the practices		Practitioners from 82 professional clubs from the	Survey.	A convenience sample was used. In

		and practitioners' perceptions of monitoring in professional clubs.		United Kingdom were selected as participants of the study.		addition, high-level football clubs were not approached.
Bhatia (2020).	United Kingdom	To examine the predictive effect of player transfers on the performance at the club and player levels.		A German website called transfermarkt.com was accessed to collect data. The website mass collects football transfer data.	Python package BeautifulSoup was used to web scrape the website.	The nature of football transfer spending is very complex. Several parties are such as owners, managers, scouts and agents are involved in every transfer and thus analyzing the impact of each party is difficult to understand.
Gherghel et al. (2021).	Switzerland.	To implement an athletic program to improve the explosive force in order to optimize physical fitness at		Ten Romanian athletes known to have outstanding performances in the world and having been among the European elite in singles, doubles,	Experimental design completed through the Opto Jump.	A relatively small number of athletes were included in the study. More so, only female athletes

		the level of elite football-tennis players and evaluate the progress made through specific tests using the Opto Jump.		mixed doubles, triples and mixed doubles in tennis over period of ten years were selected as participants of this study.		were included.
Latif et al. (2022).	Malaysia	To examine the relationship between cardiovascular endurance and mental toughness among football players of Academy Mokhtar Dahari (AMD).		Twenty players from AMD were selected as participants of this study.	Correlational design was adopted in conducting the study. This was complemented with the Yo-Yo test level 1 and Mental Emotional Bodily Toughness (MeBTough) questionnaires.	The respondents had less time in training,, there is need to have athletes who would have trained for more than ten weeks. This is because the longer the athlete has trained the better results of cardiovascular endurance and mental toughness the athlete will produce.
Till et al. (2022).	Italy.	To evaluate the		Participants of the study amounted to	Mixed methods survey.	A mixed method study

		knowledge, adherence, practices and challenges of practitioners responsible for delivering long-term athletic development.		236 practitioners and these were composed of sport coaches and physical education teachers.		utilizing a wide and varied cohort of participants fails to acknowledge the intricacies of context within long-term athletic development practices within specific settings such as secondary schools, football academies across different nations and systems. This information was however not available.
Vaughan et al. (2022).	Portugal.	To examine how the social and cultural seriousness associated with football acts as a constraint on player	Theory of ecological dynamics and the skilled intentionality framework.	Allmanna Idrottsklubben (AIK) FC Stockholm.	Ethnographic case study. This was consolidated with participant observation.	More teams from different localities and leagues need to be included in such studies

		development, cascading into athlete development environments, and influencing psychological wellbeing and skill development.				
Tikon et al. (2019).	Nigeria.	To determine the cohesion (Personal and Team) factors as determinants of team performance satisfaction of EI-Kanemi Warriors Football Club in Nigeria Premier League in 2017/2018 season.		35 registered players of EI-Kanemi Warriors Football Club for the 2017/2018 Nigeria Premier League Season.	Correlational Research Method.	Only a single team was used and this makes it difficult to generalize the results especially when considering that several variables are at play for instance resource-based variables.
Nicholls et al. (2019).	United Kingdom	To consider performance analysis and		Participants of the study were composed of 23 Performance	Mixed methods composed of quantitative	The inclusion of coaches would have been a noble

		feedback from the perspective of the performance analyst through the investigation of the 'what', 'how', and 'when' of practice within a selection of Olympic sports.		Analysts with working experience of between 4 and 6 years in high performance sport.	and qualitative designs were employed.	and prudent initiative as this would have allowed the use and value of feedback from the user's perspective. This would have also enabled the effective addressing of the demands of those utilizing the information to facilitate improvements.
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## Gaps in literature

The literature has shown that many of the researches were carried outside the boundaries of Zimbabwe and many of the findings may not resonate with Zimbabwe football since there is a bigger gap interms social, economic and political background. This research failed to identify literature the speaks to Zimbabwe football.

## 2.5 Thematic review

### 2.5.1 Performance Analysis in Football

Performance analysis is perceived as a relatively new addition to the contemporary multidisciplinary sports science support services available to the high-performance coaches. Moreover, performance analysis is now commonly embraced as an integral component of the coaching process (Hounsell, Oxenham and Mulvenna, 2021). Wright, Carling and Collin (2018) argue that inasmuch as the role and practical application of performance analysis in sport is well recorded, there is paucity in relation to academic investigations of coach

perceptions of performance analysis is somehow limited. In essence, there is a notable lack of performance analysis studies to have examined the effectiveness of performance analysis procedures from a playing perspective.

Yung, Arden Serpiello and Robertson (2022) posit that the major goal of undertaking performance analysis in football is to highlight strengths and weaknesses in performance and noted specific areas for improvement. In addition, Scelles and Andreff (2018) suggested that performance analysis can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of a certain training initiative, determine enhancements in competitive performance, and generate permanent and accurate records of performance over time. Essentially, performance analysis feedback can be used to assist and guide team preparation, prior to the match, and after a match (Wright et al., 2018). However, Badescu, Zaharie, Stoian, Badescu and Stanciu (2022) suggest the need for coaches to be aware of how their analysis complements their existing training and competition cycles and most significantly, the impact performance analysis may have on the coach-player relationship.

Badescu et al. (2022) aver that data can be gathered on forthcoming opposition in the form of match statistics and/or video footage. Performance analysts may gather statistics in order to note that the opposition is most effective, that is the team's playmaker. In cases where video footage is available, such footage is bound to support and amplify information, providing a picture of what is to be expected. It is also perceived that coaches find the application of video-based systems during training sessions beneficial as it enables them to immediately review and offer augmented feedback to athletes on team organization and tactics such as set pieces (Adern et al., 2022). Hounsell et al. (2021) however argued that the positive effects of performance analysis video feedback may take time to effectively materialize. They further highlighted that despite more than five decades of research in this area, current football performance analysis methods remain stifled by numerous issues, including a lack of standardized operational definitions, a lack of game context and the discrete measurement of isolated variables. McLean, Salmon, Gorman, Read and Solomon (2017) are of the view that research on performance analysis has had only limited impact on practice thereby suggesting a lack of transferability of research outputs to practice. In relation to football, McLean et al. (2017) suggest that this could be a result of there being a lack comprehensive description of football match performance. As such, there is a lack of substantial number of features that need to be defined and measured in football performance analysis to ascertain that the data are of benefit to practitioners.

Perhaps this is not surprising as Wright et al. (2018) posit that football matches possess multiple characteristics of complex sociotechnical systems. The implication is that there exists various interacting human and nonhuman components functioning within a dynamic and constantly changing match atmosphere. A corollary of this is that football performance is highly complex, multi-faceted and ultimately challenging to define (Yung et al., 2022). Given this, the degree at which soccer performance and the aspects influencing it are fully understood is questionable. Existing approaches to performance analysis can be perceived as reductionist and depend on taking the system apart so as to grasp the components such as players and passes, and then assess the performance of those components in isolation before rejoining them back into the entire system, on the tacit assumption that the entirety simply represents the totality of its parts (Badescu et al., 2022). Unfortunately reductionist approach impede on the development of a whole understanding of performance and the factors influencing it, nor do they enable the detection of new emergent behaviors that could augment performance (McLean et al., 2017).

Hounsell et al. (2017) opines that for performance analysis to offer valid assessments of football performance there is need to avail new methods for performance analysis especially when considering the fact the present approaches to performance analysis have been evolving over the last three decades. Although positive developments concerning athlete and team movement patterns are starting to emerge as modern technology becomes available, there is work to be carried out in properly integrating the measures (Hounsell et al., 2021). For instance, studies anchored in ecological dynamics theory allows for some understanding of non-linear dynamics of performance, by consolidating notational analysis with spatio-temporal analysis (McLean et al., 2017; Scelles and Andreff, 2018). Research into attacker-defender dyads, and the impacts of game constraints such as opposition, team members, the ball and goal posts inter alia on the emergent coordination patterns during team sports, have advanced traditional performance analysis approaches (Salcinovic et al., 2022). Indeed, this study suggests that the proposed framework for optimizing the performance of senior men's football team should ascertain the aspect of performance analysis has to align with other time demands and activities that impact upon athletes and coaches whilst the training facility such as conditioning, massage, physiotherapy, training and conditioning (Yung et al., 2022).

## ***2.5.2 Determinants of Optimizing Team Performance***

### **2.5.2.1 Team Dynamics**

Studies on team dynamics have highlighted the significance of group processes to attain team functioning. Accordingly, several approaches and variables have been examined to determine

what takes place in sports team so as to optimize performance (Galily, Samuel, Tenenbaum and Filho, 2021; Gonzalez-Ponce, Diaz-Garcia, Ponce-Bordon, Jiménez-Castuera and Lopez-Gajardo, 2022; Salcinovic et al., 2022). In this context, significant relationships have been noted among team variables involving coaches and athletes, which have highlighted a strong link with accomplished performance. As a result of concerns regarding relationships among the variables that influence sports teams' performance, Carron and Eys (2012) propounded a conceptual framework to examine sports teams, with three large, sequentially related blocks named as; inputs, throughputs and outputs. Carron and Eys described inputs as characteristics of the team's atmosphere and the attributes of individual team members. Throughputs were identified as group structure in reference to group position, group status, group roles, group norms and group leadership; group cohesion; and group processes in reference to team goals, team cooperation and competition, attribution in sport, group communication and collective efficacy. Thirdly, outputs, being the major consequences of teams, are personal outcomes and group outcomes. Most investigations on group dynamics are thus interested in determining how the relations between the different blocks, anchored mainly how some throughput variables identified herein are related to each other.

As indicated, the model propounded by Carron and Eys (2012) divided throughputs into three blocks identified as; group structure, group cohesion and group processes. Within group structure, it has been highlighted that the establishment of clear norms and roles, small team size, and proper coaching conduct are associated with improvements in team sports (Leo, Lopez-Gajardo, Pulido and González-Ponce, 2022). In relation to Carron and Eys' model, Gonzalez-Ponce et al. (2022); Leo, Gonzalez-Ponce, Sanchez-Oliva, Pulido and García-Calvo (2018) attested the coach behaviors of significance within a group structure as a guide to establishing ideal group cohesion. Yu, Zeng, Pan and Chen (2023) specifically analyzed authentic leadership, perceived justice and coaching competency and subsequently, these variables have attained importance to illustrate team dynamics in the sports setting. Authentic leadership, described as a pattern of leader's conduct, of greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, supporting positive self-development; demonstrates a simpler, more transparent and reliable leadership (Leo et al., 2022). In essence, the take-away here is that a leader's authentic conduct can attain benefits for the team.

On the flip side of the coin, roles have reflected a strong association with team functioning. In particular, role ambiguity which is perceived as a lack of clear information related with one's role, and role conflict described as the presence of incongruent expectations regarding an incumbent role; have been linked with positive such as group cohesion (Gonzalez-Ponce et al., 2022) and negative consequences in the form of burnout, dissatisfaction, less commitment or tension (Leo et al., 2022). In the sports setting, Carron and Eys (2012) noted that athletes who felt blurred concerning their role responsibilities perceived their team to be less integrated pertaining to its approach to team play, and they revealed lower levels of attraction to the team. Thus in cases where athletes are not sure concerning their functions, and they conceive contradictory information regarding what they are expected to do, this causes a lack of coordination among them and reduces their cohesion when resolving situations during competition (Yu et al., 2023).

As such, coach behaviors in the form of leadership, perceived justice and coaching competency; and role in the form of role ambiguity and role conflict within a group structure consciously predict group cohesion (Leo et al., 2018). Such group cohesion is the key factor of Carron and Eys's model and thus this construct has been depicted as a dynamic process that is reflected in the tendency for a team to stick together and remain united of its instrumental objectives and for the satisfaction of member affective needs (Yu et al., 2023). In essence, group cohesion or team conflict can both have an effect on group processes, being the third block of throughputs within Carron and Eys's model (Galily et al., 2021; Gonzalez-Ponce et al., 2022). Yu et al. (2023) posits that within this block are variables of a distinct nature such as team goals, group communication or collective efficacy. The aim of this study will encompass exploring the team dynamics of the senior national football team's dynamics and subsequently propose an explanatory framework that integrates group dynamics in the overall framework entailed to optimize the team's performance.

### **2.5.2.2 Microenvironments of Athletic Development**

Multiple athlete development microenvironments are entangled within and influenced by the neoliberal corporate capitalist macrosystem. Vaughan et al. (2022) attest that at all levels, sport performance environments are becoming increasingly embedded with the agendas of the advertising, media, multinational corporations and politicians. They argue that this messy entanglement has exposed young athletes to increased forms of commodification promoting individual competition above all else. Austin (2019) revealed that the prioritization of financial

profit and power, perceived as the desire to dominate people and exploit resources, has the potential of suppressing values that support the nurturing of children and ultimately their talent. Likewise, Bhatia (2020) is of the view that to the detriment of players and coaches in sport, neoliberalism has witnessed a traditional emphasis on collectivism; being teamwork, camaraderie and an ethos of discovery and exploration, progressively pave way to a wave of competitive individualism and corporate managerialism. Galily et al. (2021) sees the upheaval of performance analytics and Big Data methodologies being able to amplify the issues, with statistics and metrics enhancing surveillance, intrusive rankings and comparisons of performance to the extent where teammates and colleagues are often perceived as competitors. Consequently, Kin-Man, Ka-U and Thung-Hong (2019); Wilson (2017) share the view that an obsessive emphasis on numbers, manifest for instance in the number of social media followers, number of passes, dribbles or tackles inter alia made, a form of “dataveillance”, turns out to be dehumanizing, over individualizing team sports, influencing how players relate to one another and how they perceive themselves.

It is within such cultural contexts that the standard model of talent development (SMTD) has emerged. As explained by Bailey and Collins (2016), the SMTD is characterized by early selection into exclusive training schedules that often perpetuate hyper-specialization and result into ultimate deselection. While there is increasing support for diverse experiences beyond the SMTD, Hounsell et al. (2020) notes that a majority of football academies remained attached to this approach. The SMTD often exposes young people to being evaluated, assessed and categorized by adults as soccer players and as competitive under the age of five years, a situation which Austin (2019) believes fosters a Darwinian form of competition, being the survival of the fittest. Pressure to conform, comply, perform and specialize, from a very tender age increases the risk of physical and psychological harm; in most instances accelerating players towards events that lead to deselection (Salcinovic et al., 2022). Vaughan et al. (2022) argues that this has resulted in modern societies experiencing serious challenges with the recruitment and transitions of players into professional sport, with however little changes to address these issues.

Kin-Man et al. (2019) observes that the moral bankruptcy of youth sport initiatives appear to be deeply engrained with cultural and systemic transitions towards neoliberal ideology, increased commodification and extreme individualism. While there is no doubt that these cultural influences have determined athlete development practices and pathways away from notions of “play”, they have also consolidated an ontological naivety of sport; a naivety that

has been fostered and abetted by the continued creation and application of sport research that is de-contextualized and dehumanized, the mono-disciplinarity of which narrows our knowledge by constraining our comprehension of human behavior and development (Guard et al., 2022; Vaughan et al., 2022). This disciplinary hiccup has resulted in a majority of sport science and talent development practices such as SMTD ignoring the reality that, as in all human behaviors, fluctuations in development trajectories of players and related inclines, pauses and declines in performance are naturally emerging aspects of a non-linear and complex development process.

The specific of soccer business system is reflected by the structure of football microenvironment. This view is shared by Vaughan et al. (2022); Wilson (2017) who stress the relationships of business unit with other business partners through the perspective microenvironment, which is composed of multiple stakeholders such as competitors, customers, distributors, groups of interest and suppliers who rely on the performance of a firm in attaining their goals. In the soccer industry, every element of the microenvironment is specific only to soccer. The specific of soccer industry is first of all reflected by the coherence of football industry processes (Bhatia, 2020; Gonzalez-Ponce et al., 2022). Accordingly, most elements in the football microenvironment are often perceived as elements of sports and only the actors of soccer industry such as clubs, associations and federations emphasize the business aspect.

In football, suppliers as the element of football business have been identified as soccer players who are the major factor that influences the existence of soccer club or league (Galily et al., 2021; Guard et al., 2022). The interest of soccer players to participate in football business and their professional skills influence the success and profitability of soccer club or league. Similarly, soccer schools can also be perceived as suppliers, which supply professional soccer players for multiple soccer leagues (Austin, 2019). Customers, as a standard element of microenvironment in the soccer industry turn to fans/spectators, who are the users of product that is made in the soccer industry, the particular form of leisure time spending (Zhou, Wang, Hu, Tian and Xiao, 2023). Soccer players in the soccer business can also be perceived as customers and it is particularly relevant in amateur soccer business, where a soccer athlete becomes the main source of sponsorship for the soccer club. In the elite football the role of the player as a customer becomes less significant, but the player still remains one of the users of

the product that is created in the soccer industry system, meaning players are supposed to be interested in playing soccer, hence there must be used promotion tools for them (Leo et al., 2022).

The function of distributors as elements of microenvironment in the soccer industry is assumed by the soccer industry infrastructure, which can be categorized into two main groups. Wilson (2017) notes that the services that ascertain the soccer match performance being the soccer stadium and its supplements, football industry administration activities which are essential for the functioning of the entire soccer industry system; have been identified as the major distributors. Competitors in soccer industry can also be categorized into two levels. In this regard, Trecroci et al. (2022); Zhou et al. (2023) explains that on the level of individual football club, the competitors are identified as other soccer clubs that take part in the same league. There is a permanent competition for fans so as to add to the income of the club as much as possible. The economic outcomes of this competition are tightly linked to sports outcomes of the club in particular the proportion of wins and losses in the league. On the level of a soccer league or association, the competition between different forms of sports and even between different ways of spending free time can be noticed (Vaughan et al., 2022).

Every industry or venture is related to various groups of stakeholders. Some stakeholders are corporations that represent corporate interests such as associations and cartels, others may represent specific public orders (Bailey and Collins, 2016; Kin-Man et al., 2019). There also exist distinct groups of interests in the soccer industry and these are in the form of football associations/federations and these are responsible for organizing sports activities and representing the interests of soccer clubs (Leo et al., 2022). Other interest groups are in the form of external entities, which often confront the participation of business system's units such as consumerism services. In any case, soccer clubs must take into account the interests of those stakeholders, given they usually bear strong authority and influence in the society or business (Salcinovic et al., 2022). As put forward by Scelles and Andreff (2018), meeting the requirements of the interests of other groups and members of society should be considered. Likewise, the present study seeks to establish the framework being used to optimize the performance of the men's national soccer team by examining the microenvironment of the team. Ultimately, this will be done with the major goal of formulating a framework that will be expected to optimize the team under study.

## **2.6 Chapter summary**

The chapter has critically looked at models premised on the development of the players. The player-centered approaches and determinants for developing players were discussed. The methodological review and the thematic literature informs the study on the current views surrounding football.

## **CHAPTER 3:RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1. Introduction**

The chapter focused on methodologies that were used in the development of a strategic framework to optimize the performance of the Zimbabwe Senior men's football team in Zimbabwe. The major highlights of the chapter include the Research purpose, Research philosophy, Approaches to theory development, Time horizons, Primary research strategy, Population and sampling, Data collection, Data analysis, Validity, Reliability/Trustworthiness, and Ethical Considerations.

### **3.2 Research Purpose**

This research adopted the exploratory research approach which is used when the researcher has little or no prior knowledge of the topic or when the topic is relatively unexplored. The justification for using an exploratory research approach is that it allowed the researcher to generate initial ideas and hypotheses about the topic. This can help to identify potential research questions and inform the development of more specific research methods and techniques (Sekaran, 2017). According to Leedy and Omrod (2016), exploratory research can also be used to identify key variables and relationships between them, which can be useful for designing more focused research studies. Hence, this research gained an initial understanding of technical and health-related challenges and experiences of the Zimbabwe National football team. The study also had an interventional purpose. Developing a strategic framework to optimize the

performance of the Zimbabwe Senior men's football team in Zimbabwe can be justified as means by which existing problems in Zimbabwe football can be resolved.

### **3.3 Research Philosophy**

The research adopted a Pragmatism philosophical approach. Pragmatists focus on addressing research questions and solving practical problems rather than on selecting methods to meet requirements associated with qualitative or quantitative research (Ivakova 2016). The study made use of the ideas generated through qualitative and quantitative approaches. Robson (2011) argues that researchers do not have to be the prisoner of a particular research method or technique. Ultimately, this research has action agenda in which the results of the study can perhaps influence coaching and the management of the Zimbabwe Warriors.

### **3.4 Approaches to theory development**

The research adopted an abductive approach to theory development informed by Saunders et al. (2023) who highlighted that a topic about which there is a wealth of information in one context but far less in the context in which one is researching may lend itself to an abductive approach. This approach enabled the researcher to modify an existing theory. The inductive approach was used when new insights from the current study were used to customize the Zimbabwe Football team's ways of running their daily business.

### **3.5 Time Horizon**

This study adopted the cross-sectional research design. In this study, the investigator measured the outcome and the exposures in the study participants at the same time, hence the collection of data from many different individuals at a single point in time. In cross-sectional research, the researcher observes variables without influencing them. The benefit of a cross-sectional study design is that it allowed the researcher to compare many different variables at the same time.

### **3.6 Primary Research Strategy**

This research adopted the concurrent mixed-methods research design involving collecting both quantitative and qualitative data at the same time. Therefore, the collection of quantitative and qualitative data are independent of each other, and one type of data is not informing the collection of the other type of data. Mixed methods may be employed to produce a robust description and interpretation of the data, make quantitative results more understandable, or understand the broader applicability of small-sample qualitative findings. Strengths of the concurrent triangulation design include its efficiency of time and the that data can be conducted independently which is both quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell and Plano Clark 2018).

## **3.7 Population and Sampling**

### **3.7.1 Population**

The population consists of former and current Zimbabwe National Team players, coaches, and team managers.

### **3.7.2 Sampling**

The researcher chose participants for the qualitative and quantitative strands using both purposive and stratified random selection methods. Since the population was unknown and homogeneous by nature, purposeful sampling was used to help identify research participants who may help offer information on the study's primary phenomena (Creswell, 2016). For the questionnaire survey, stratified random sampling was used. Stratified random sampling assisted the researcher in subdividing the research population into different sub-groups, also known as strata, and then selecting the required number of items or people from within each sub-group using random sampling techniques (Denscombe, 2017). Respondents in this survey were classified into four (4) fundamental strata: Zimbabwe Football administrators, team managers, coaches, and athletes. fifty (50) participants were randomly chosen from the sub-groups to participate in the study. Robinson (2014) supported the concept that a small sample size allows for an intense investigation of the problem. Still, a large sample size allowed for the formulation and testing of a general theory in research, which guided the sample size of 50 questionnaire participants.

The qualitative sample was determined using purposeful or judgmental sampling procedure. The sample consisted of ten (10) football administrators, managers, coaches, and athletes who were in the best position to provide the required and relevant data based on their expertise, experience, and perceptions in the field of Zimbabwe football, specifically the Warriors. The sample sizes were determined using theoretical sampling methods. Following the guidelines of Neumann (2015), Bush and Burns (2010), and Saunders et al. (2013), the sample was chosen based on a judgmental choice of instances that best permit the answering of research questions and satisfy research objectives.

## **3.8 Data Collection Procedures**

### **3.8.1 Pilot Study**

The researcher conducted a pilot study to test research protocols and data collection instruments in preparation for the larger study. This was a small-scale preliminary study conducted to test the feasibility, design, and methods of a larger research study. The researcher conducted a pilot

study with 10 football referees who supplied the necessary feedback on the instruments in order to verify the questionnaire and interview guide. Therefore, the instruments were fixed, and the exercises helped the beneficial transition from the pilot to the actual research-gathering procedure while becoming familiar with the actual processes and surroundings prior to the major data-collection phase. Accordingly, the pilot study was done before the main study to identify potential problems or limitations that may arise during the study and to refine the research questions. The main purpose of a pilot study was to ensure that the main study was well-designed and executed and to identify any issues that needed to be addressed before the main study begins.

### **3.8.2 Instrumentation**

The interview guide designed for management in football was used as a data collection instrument. The questionnaire designed for football players was used to complement the interview.

#### **3.8.2.1 Interviews**

Production and collection of data in the study were made possible through the use of interviews. The goal to seek ideas, expertise, experience, and opinions of football coaches inspired the choice to employ interviews as a data-gathering strategy in this study. In the present study, the need to use the interview as a data collection instrument was motivated by the desire to solicit the thoughts, knowledge, experiences, and views of individuals responsible for handling or dealing with the management of football players. These were engaged through the interviews with the intention of attaining a better and more informed understanding of their attitudes, experiences, and perceptions relating to the ways to improve the performance of football players in Zimbabwe. The researcher collected data, reread transcripts, and answered questions during the interviews as directed by the interview guide. In-person interviews were done by the researcher with individuals who lived within the reach of the researcher. The researcher had audio chats with individuals who were located outside the reach of the researcher. Using a handheld recorder and a notebook, the researcher made notes during the interviews. The researcher then archived the audio recordings and interview notebook for later use. In addition, the researcher was in charge of making sure that interview sessions didn't last more than 15 minutes. The interview enables the researcher to acquire more information, and clarity thereby reducing cases of misunderstandings and misconceptions of questions and words. As a result, the interview gives the researcher the platform of acquiring clearer responses.

### **3.8.2.2 Questionnaire**

In the study, questionnaires were used with the aim of reaching out to a relatively large number of respondents. Barton (2016) described the questionnaire as a document that contains questions aimed at soliciting information ideal for analysis. Within a week, the surveys were given to and collected from each participant. Participants who were out of reach of the researcher received questionnaires by postal internet surveys and completed the questionnaire form online, whilst those who were reachable received the questionnaire form in person. Since distance was a problem, the fact that they could be sent by email or the post guaranteed anonymity and made them a suitable research tool. Due to the fact that most surveys were completed without the researcher's presence, it is challenging to confirm that the respondents who were carefully chosen for the survey actually completed the questionnaire.

The questionnaire items for this study were a five-point Likert scale. According to Collis and Hussey (2015), a Likert scale refers to a series of gradations, levels, or values that describe various degrees of an entity. It is an ordered scale from which respondents choose one option that best aligns with their view. The Likert scale was used in this study for the structured items to allow for fairly accurate assessments of beliefs and opinions from the respondents. The rating scales were used to manage the degrees of response, the intensity of the response, and the move away from dichotomous questions (Gillham, 2015). A Likert scale provides a range of responses to a given question or statement and the responses are used to register the extent of agreement or disagreement with statements of attitude, belief, or judgment (for example, strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree and strongly disagree (Barton, 2016). The categories need to be discrete and to exhaust the range of possible responses which respondents may wish to give.

### **3.9 Data Analysis and Presentation**

Thematic analysis for data gathered using semi-structured interviews was performed using the NVivo 12 software. Quantitative Data obtained from the questionnaires was analyzed using SPSS software version 20. The data was presented in the form of tables, pie charts, and graphs.

### **3.10 Validity, Reliability, and Trustworthiness**

The researcher engaged in several steps with the goal of ensuring that the data generated and collected was trustworthy, credible, dependable, transferrable, and confirmable. Barton (2016) indicated that the concept of trustworthiness of data has to do with the consistency and error-free of information which leads to the generation and acquisition of more relevant data in the

eyes of the reader. To determine the dependability of the research, the researcher interviewed other respondents capable of providing the study with relevant information but not from the same study area. A pilot study accorded the researcher the platform for fine-tuning the research questions and presenting them in such a manner that was understood by the respondents. This process enabled the researcher to make certain changes that ensured that the data would be dependable and attain relevant data.

More so, the act of administering the interview guide on a sample that was not part of the study area was perceived as a means of determining the element of transferability (Gillham, 2015). The implication in this instance is that the research instruments would be expected to produce similar findings in the event of being administered in a different research site. The credibility of data was enhanced by way of incorporating personnel responsible for coaching the Zimbabwe Football National Team. This bolstered the credibility of data on the grounds that data solicited was based on the professional experiences and views of persons deemed as having the daily experiences of implementing and handling issues related to coaching and managing the Warriors. The questions presented in the interview guide were formulated in consultation with the research objectives and this further acted as a means of improving the credibility of the data to be acquired (Coolican, 2016).

### **3.11 Ethical Considerations**

The process of collecting data in the study was initiated by sourcing all the required documents necessary in facilitating the collection of data. The documents that were sourced include study authorization letter obtained from Bindura University of Science Education (BUSE). The same introductory letter was subsequently used in seeking authorization from relevant football authorities such as PSL, ZIFA, and football clubs. Furthermore, the introductory letter was used by the researcher to make his case known to the research participants. In this instance, the researcher took the opportunity in seeking the consent of the respondents by assuring the participants of their right to voluntarily take part in the study, and that they would be free to either take part or withdraw from the study. Furthermore, more, the identities of the respondents were protected and hence were kept confidential. In this aspect, the principle of anonymity was preserved by prohibiting the mentioning or writing of names by the respondents on any research documents at all stages of the research. The researcher also considered acknowledging sources and also distinguishing where the source of information ends and where the researchers' opinion ends. This is an academic convention that applies integrity, which is about honesty.

### 3.12 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented detailed steps in which this research was practically conducted. Data collection, presentation, and analysis procedures were clearly outlined. The next chapter will delve into data presentation.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the response rate, demographic data and findings linked to the research objectives. The questionnaire responses were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS.29.0), while the qualitative data was analysed using the NVivo Version 12 analytic tool.

### 4.2 Response Rate

*Table 4.1*

#### *Interview Response Rate*

*N=10*

Respondents	Target sample	Interviewed	Response rate
Football managers	3	3	100%
Coaches	3	3	100%
Players	2	2	100%
ZIFA board members	2	2	100%
Total	10	10	100%

The table 4.1 presents the response rate of interview participants. The table shows that all expected participants were interviewed giving the data comprehensiveness and richness. This is also important to the study since it provided data reliability and validity because different perspectives were created by different participants.

*Table 4.2*

Respondents	Questionnaire distributed	Questionnaire returned	Response rate
Football managers	5	5	100%
Coaches	10	8	80%
Players	25	23	93%
ZIFA board members	10	10	100%
Total	50	46	92%

Table 4.2 shows the questionnaire response rate. According to the table, 92 % of the participants returned the questionnaire. Accordingly, reliability and validity of the data was enhanced. Moreover, all the strata were represented giving data-wide response and the opportunity to generalise the results toward the sample.

**4.3 Demographic Data**

The demographics of the main participants were established by the researcher. Gender, age, and academic level were utilized to guide the demographic variable analysis.

**Table 4.3**

*Gender Composition of the Interviewees*

Variable	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Male	10	19.2	100.0	100.0
Missing System	42	80.8		
Total	52	100.0		

The gender of the interviewees is displayed in Table 4.3. Men make up the whole sample. This is a blatant sign that women are having trouble breaking into the masculine world at every turn.

**Table 4.4**

*Gender Composition of the Questionnaire Respondents*

Variable		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	42	80.8	84.0	84.0
	Female	8	15.4	16.0	100.0
	Total	50	96.2	100.0	
Missing	System	2	3.8		
Total		52	100.0		

The gender makeup of questionnaire responses is seen in Table 4.4. The table shows that 42 (84%) are males, while 8 (16%) are females. In general, male respondents outnumbered females, indicating that fewer women have broken into the male game.

#### **4.3.2 Ages of Respondents**

*Figure 4.1*

*Age range of interview respondents*

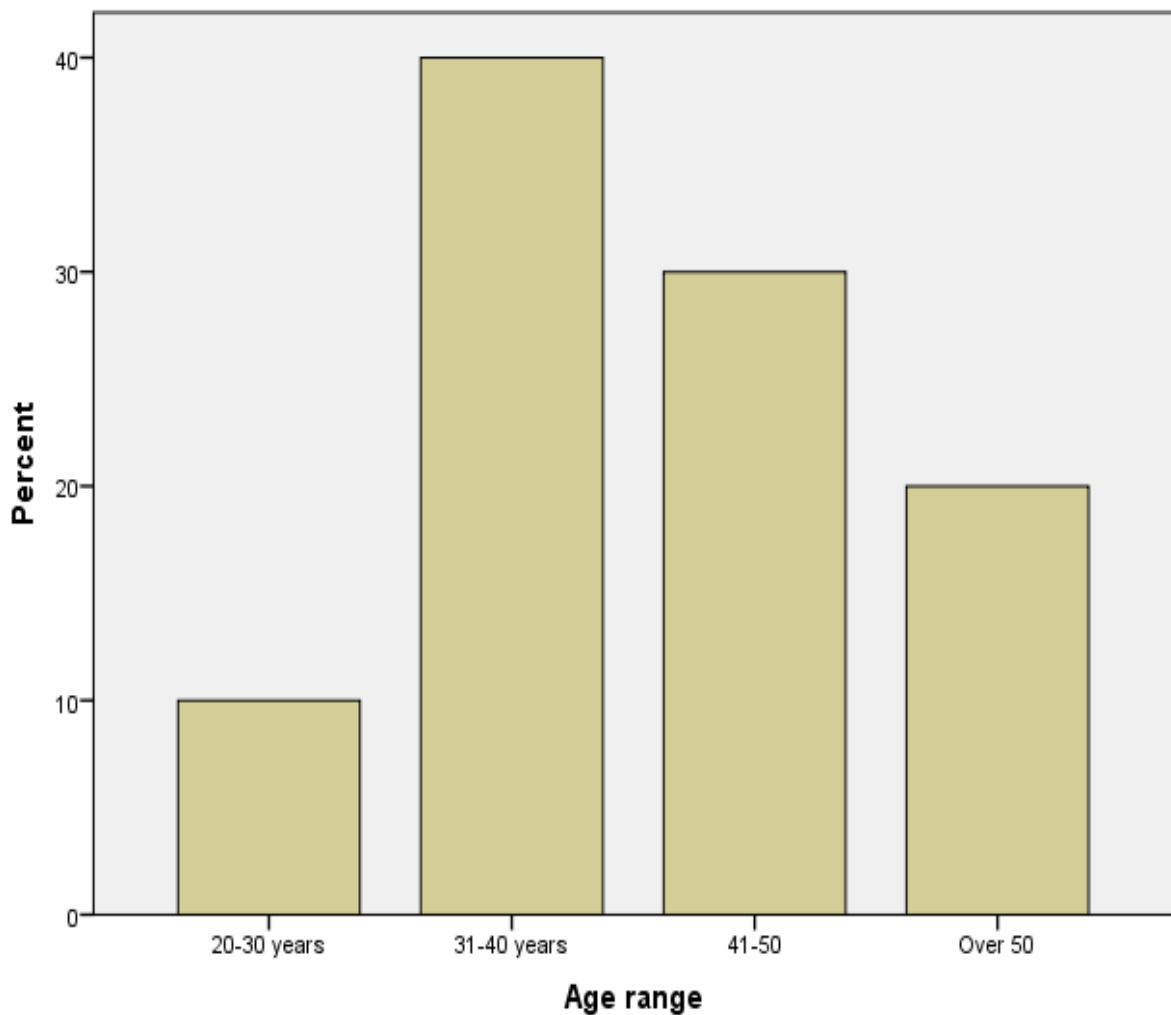


Figure 4.1 depicts the age range of the interview participants. The majority of respondents (40%) are between the ages of 31 and 40. The 41-50-year-old age group accounts for 3 (30%) of the total. The over 50s are the third smallest group, accounting for 2 (20%) of the responses. The 20-30 year age group is the smallest, accounting for 1 (10%) of the responses. Since all groups were optimally represented, the reliability and validity of the data were strengthened.

**Figure 4.2**

***Age range of questionnaire respondents***

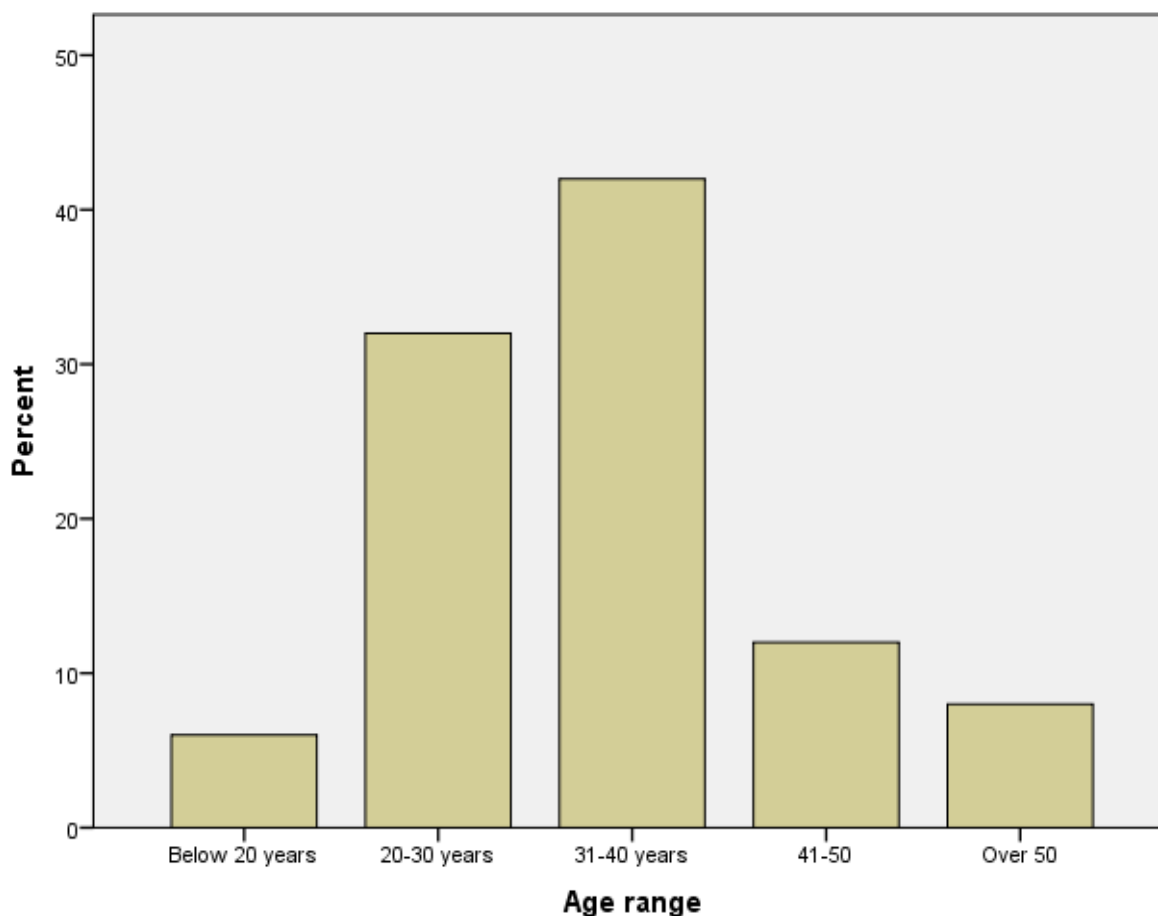


Figure 4.2 shows the age ranges of questionnaire respondents. The majority of responders (41%) are between the ages of 31 and 40. This age group is followed by the 20-30 year age group (32%). There are 6 (12%) participants in the 41-50 year age group. Participants over the age of 50 account for 4 (8%) of the total, while those under the age of 20 account for 3 (6%). The results reveal that all age groups were represented, which increases the trustworthiness of the results.

#### 4.3.3 Professional qualifications of respondents

##### *Figure 4.3*

##### *Interviewée Professional qualifications*

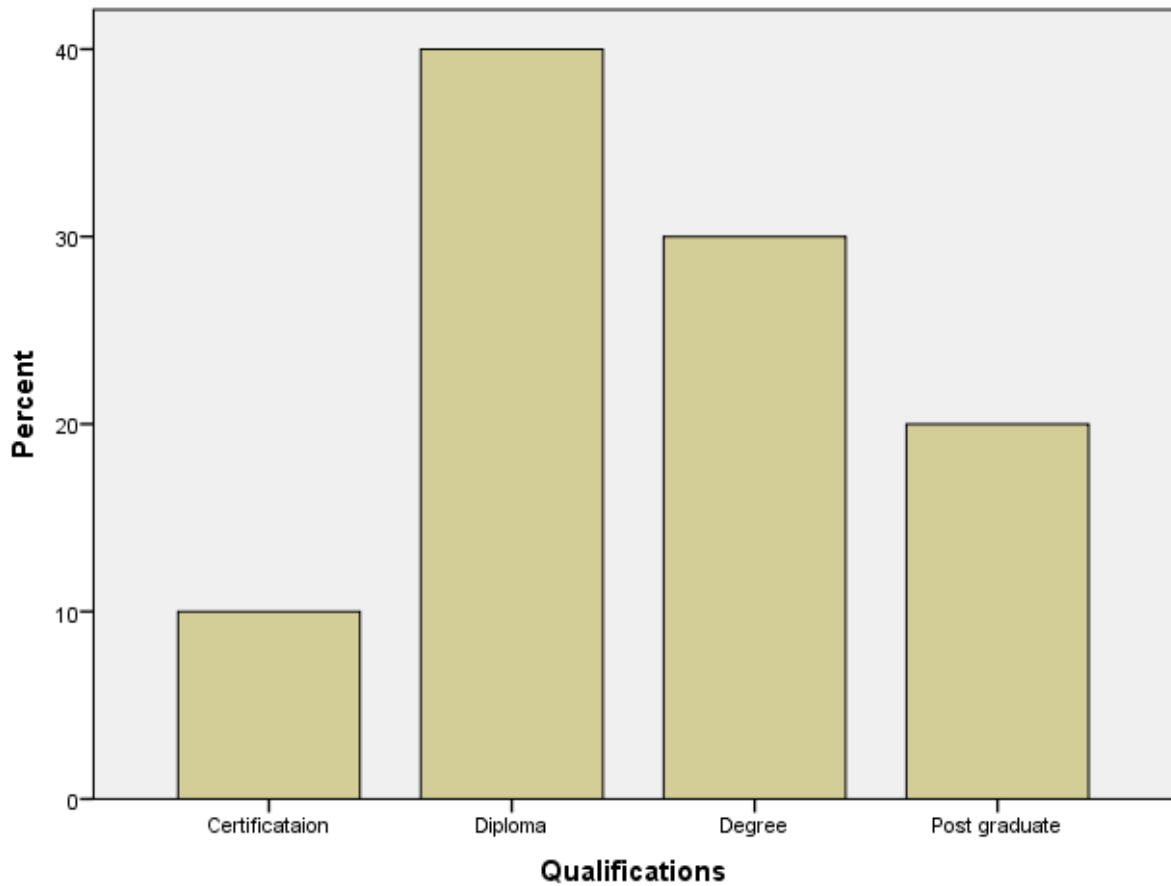
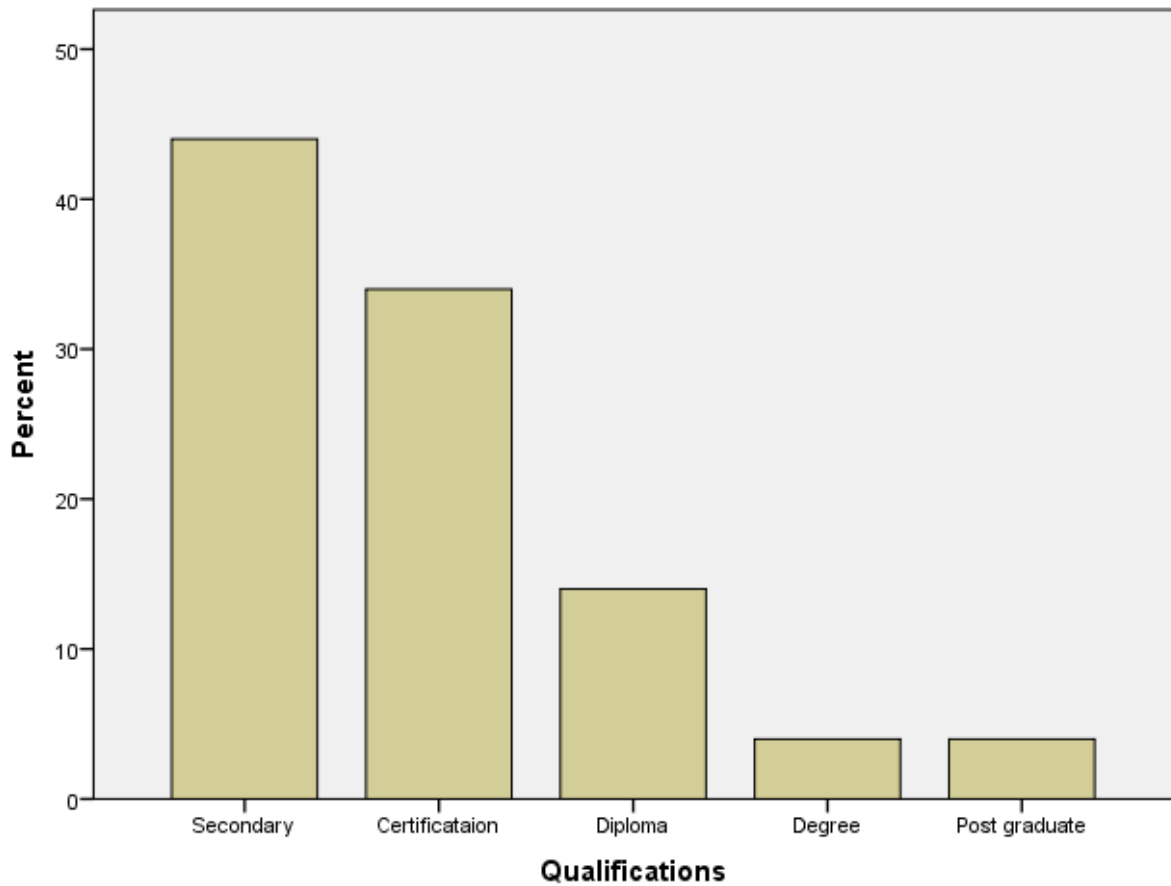


Figure 4.3 illustrates the professional qualifications of the interviewed respondents. The majority of respondents (4 (40%) finished diploma studies, 3 (30%) finished degree studies, 2 (20%) finished postgraduate studies, and just 1 (10%) obtained certification. There is a common assumption that all of the participants are highly literate, which means they can react to the interview guide on their own.

**Figure 4.4**  
**Qualifications of Questionnaire respondents**



The professional backgrounds of questionnaire respondents are shown in Figure 4.4. 22 (44%) of the respondents have a secondary education, 17 (34%) are certified football players, and 7 (14%) have earned a diploma. Only 2 (4%) and 2 (4%) people have successfully finished postgraduate degrees, respectively.

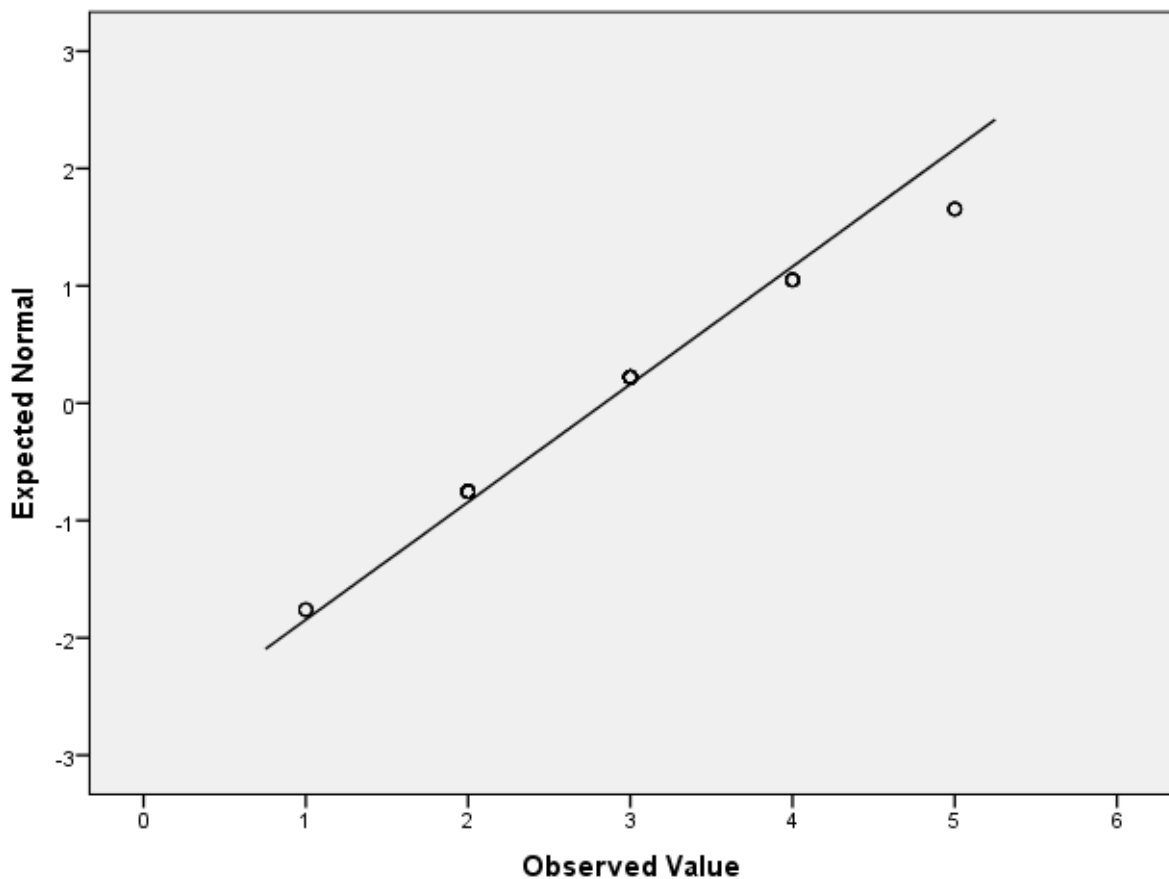
#### 4.4 Test for Normality of Data

**Table 4.5**  
*Test for Normality (Quantitative)*

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
	.236	50	.000	.888	50	.120

Using the independent variables of gender and educational attainment, the Shapiro-Wilk test was employed to examine the normality of age on the data of those people classed as both male and female. As the Shapiro-Wilk column's significance value of 0.120 is more than 0.05. We can infer that the age of this specific group of people is regularly distributed.

**Fig 4.5**  
**Q-Q Plot Test for Normality**



The Q-Q Plot demonstrates that the data is normally distributed since it closely follows the diagonal line and lacks a non-linear pattern. As a result, the information gathered is quite reliable, and the results may be applied to the entire population.

## **4.5 Analysis and presentation of data linked to research questions**

### **4.5.1 Reliability Statistics**

**Table 4.6**

***Cronbach's alpha reliability statistics***

<b><i>Cronbach's Alpha</i></b>	<b><i>No of items</i></b>
<b>744</b>	<b>27</b>

Cronbach's Alpha data are shown in Table 4.6. The coefficient.744 indicates a rather strong internal consistency. Therefore, the questionnaire is trustworthy and may be utilized to obtain comparable findings in different situations.

***Table 4.7***

***Interpretation of the 5-point Likert Scale Measurement***

<b>Likert-Scale Description</b>	<b>Likert Scale</b>	<b>Likert Scale Interval</b>
Strongly disagree	1	1.00-1.80
Disagree	2	1.81-2.60
Neutral	3	2.61-3.40
Agree	4	3.41-4.20
Strongly agree	5	4.21-5.00

***4.5.2 Research Question 1: What frameworks are currently being used to optimize the performance of the Zimbabwe Senior men's football team?***

Respondents in the quantitative strand emphasized a lot of dissatisfaction indicating that an unfavourable framework is being utilized to optimize the performance of the Zimbabwe Senior men's football team. To determine the current framework in use, a one-sample test was utilized.

**Table 4.8**

***One sample statistic on the frameworks currently being used in Zimbabwe***

Item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
------	---	------	----------------	-----------------

Adopting international facility standards	50	1.66	.917	.130
---	----	------	------	------

The mean of 1.66 reflects that participants strongly disagree that the Zimbabwe National Football Team has adopted international facility standards.

**Table 4.9**

**One sample test**

H<sub>0</sub>: Zimbabwe National Football Team adopted international facility standards

H<sub>1</sub>: Zimbabwe National Football Team has not adopted international facility standards

**One-Sample Test**

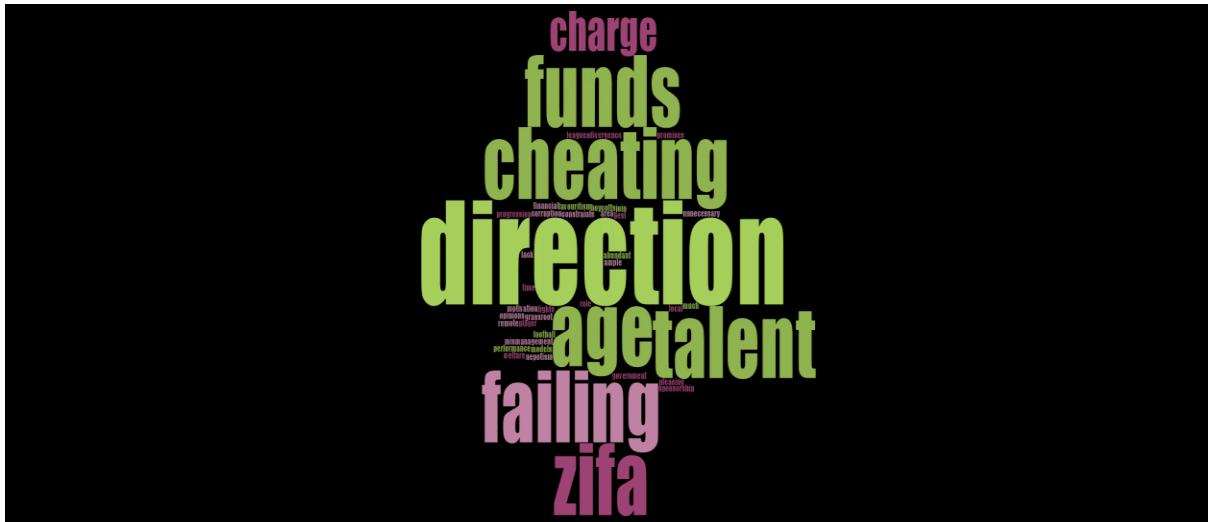
Item	Test Value = 0.05					
	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Adopted international facility standards	-12.412	49	.000	1.610	1.35	1.87

The test's findings indicate a no of 49 and std. of .917. The confidence interval percentage for the test is 95%, and the test value is .05. The null hypothesis that the Zimbabwe National Football Team adopted international facilities standards is rejected because the test result of -12.412 is less than the sig. level of 0.05. As a result, international facilities standards have not been embraced by the Zimbabwe National Football Team.

The interviewees were asked to explain the current frameworks being used to optimize the performance of the Zimbabwe Senior Men's Football team. The resultant data was subjected to a Word Cloud in NVivo 12 as presented in Figure 4.6.

**Figure 4.6**

*Word Cloud Results on the current framework being used to optimize the performance of the Zimbabwe Senior men's team.*



The national team's preferred intervention framework was not produced by Word Cloud. Participants instead suggested that there may be fraud in player development along with insufficient funding for innovation projects. More specifically, participant opinions have shown poor management of the business of the employees and players such as age cheating.

Both qualitative and quantitative views suggest that Zimbabwe National Team is operating without a known framework to optimize the performance of football players.

***4.5.3 Research Question 2: What impact does the framework being used to optimize the performance of the Zimbabwe Senior men’s football team in Zimbabwe have?***

In order to better understand how the existing framework for maximizing the performance of the Zimbabwe Senior Men's Football Team is being used, questionnaires were employed to gather input from respondents. The resulting data were analyzed using the one-way ANOVA to see if there were any discernible differences in the responses given by the two samples.

**Table 4. 10**

***One-way ANOVA Results on the impact of the current framework being used to optimize the performance of the Zimbabwe Senior Men’s Football team***

Item		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	Mean	Sig.
Injuries	Between Groups	6.249	1	6.249	2.94	.109
	Within Groups	112.571	48	2.345		

	Total	118.820	49			
Lack of motivational support	Between Groups	.214	1	.214	3.90	.646
	Within Groups	48.286	48	1.006		
	Total	48.500	49			
Inability to retain experienced players	Between Groups	6.640	1	6.640	3.54	.028
	Within Groups	61.780	48	1.287		
	Total	68.420	49			
Inability to secure sponsorship	Between Groups	17.745	1	17.745	3.74	.053
	Within Groups	85.875	48	1.789		
	Total	103.620	49			
inability to get social support	Between Groups	.126	1	.126	1,76	.758
	Within Groups	62.994	48	1.312		
	Total	63.120	49			
Strengthening existing unfavourable impressions about Zimbabwe's Senior Football Team	Between Groups	1.101	1	1.101	3.44	.484
	Within Groups	106.119	48	2.211		
	Total	107.220	49			
Inability to retain competent human resources	Between Groups	6.640	1	6.640	3.54	.028
	Within Groups	61.780	48	1.287		
	Total	68.420	49			

The calculated P-value of 109 is larger than the significance level 05, hence there are no statistically significant differences in the replies of the two samples for the first question. The median score of 2.94 is within the range of 5 points on the Likert scale, which corresponds to the 'neutral' Likert description, indicating that both men and women were apathetic about whether the existing framework causes an injury or not.

The computed P-value of .646 is greater than the significance threshold of 05, indicating that there are no statistically significant differences between the two samples' responses to the second question. The median score of 3.90 on the Likert scale is within the range of 5 points,

which corresponds to the 'agree' Likert description, suggesting that both men and women felt that the current framework caused the team to lose motivational support.

The estimated P-value of .028 is larger than the significance threshold of .05, suggesting that there are no statistically significant variations in the replies to the third question between the two samples. The median Likert scale score of 3.55 is within the range of 5 points, which corresponds to the 'agree' Likert description, indicating that both men and women believed the present framework had resulted in the National team failing to retain experienced players.

The estimated P-value of .053 is larger than the significance threshold of .05, suggesting that there are no statistically significant variations in the replies to the fourth question between the two samples. The median Likert scale score of 3.74 is within the range of 5 points, which corresponds to the 'agree' Likert description, indicating that both men and women believed the present framework had resulted in the National team failing to secure sponsorship.

The estimated P-value of .758 is larger than the significance threshold of .05, suggesting that there are no statistically significant variations in the replies to the fifth question between the two samples. The median Likert scale score of 1.76 is within the range of 5 points, which corresponds to the 'strongly disagree' Likert description, indicating that both men and women believed the present framework has not resulted in the National team failing to secure social support.

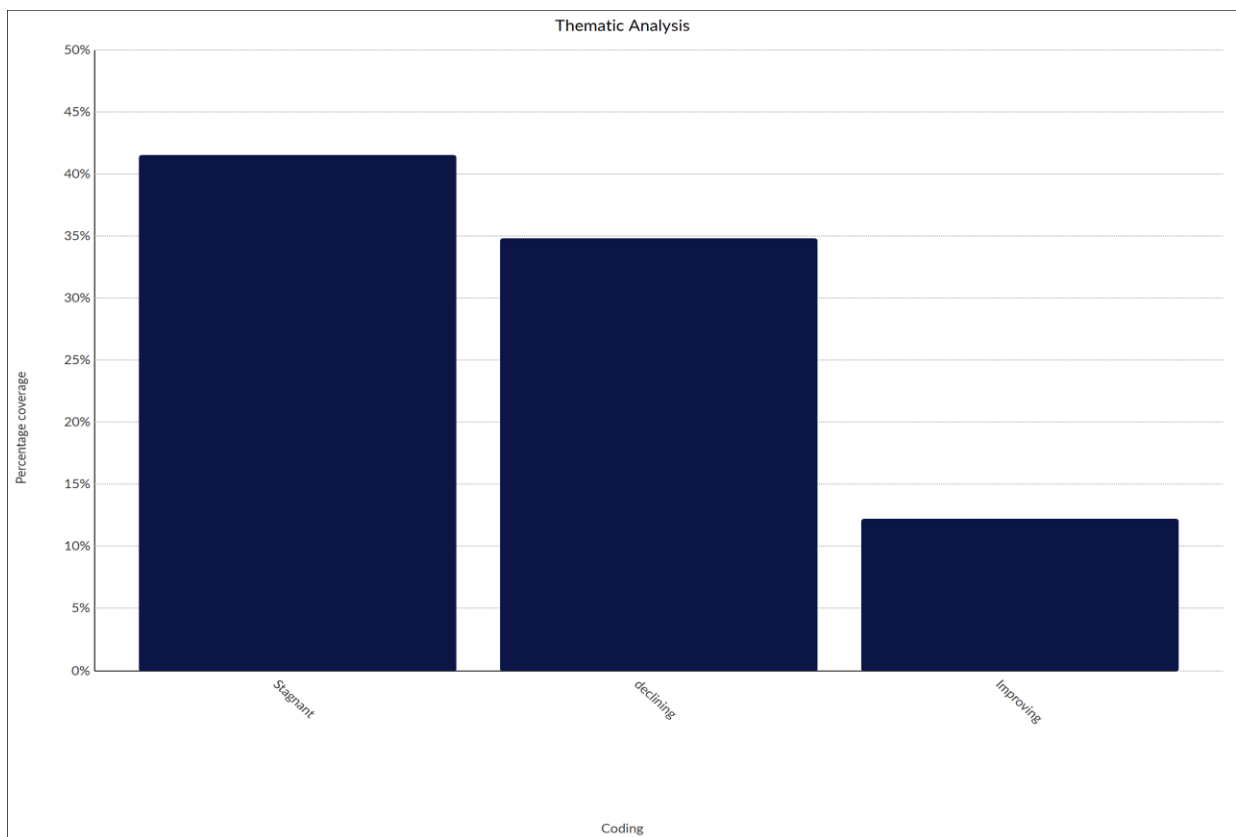
The estimated P-value of .484 is larger than the significance threshold of .05, suggesting that there are no statistically significant variations in the replies to the sixth question between the two samples. The median Likert scale score of 3.34 is within the range of 5 points, which corresponds to the 'agree' Likert description, indicating that both men and women believed the present framework has strengthened existing unfavourable impressions about Zimbabwe's Senior Football Team.

The estimated P-value of .028 is larger than the significance threshold of .05, suggesting that there are no statistically significant variations in the replies to the seventh question between the two samples. The median Likert scale score of 3.54 is within the range of 5 points, which corresponds to the 'agree' Likert description, indicating that both men and women believed the present framework has not been able to retain competent human resources.

In the qualitative strand of the study, the interview participants were called to explain the impact of the current framework being used to optimize the performance of the Zimbabwe Senior Men's Football team. The resultant themes were created by NVivo 12 presented in the figure below

**Figure 4.7**

***The impact of the current framework being used to optimize the performance of the Zimbabwe Senior Men's Football team***



According to the themes in Fig 4.7, the existing framework is claimed to have led the National team's performance to remain stagnant (40%). The majority of respondents in this area believed that the National Team's performance was falling (35%), while a minority believed that it was rising (10%). There is a widespread belief that the existing performance framework is causing a decline and that there is little progress in some cases.

The Zimbabwe National Team's unfavourable trajectory on and off the pitch is reflected in both qualitative and quantitative data. Performance has been described as either deteriorating or stagnating.

**4.5.4 Objective 3: How can the performance of the Zimbabwe Senior men’s football team be optimised?**

**Table 4. 11**

**Cross Tabulation on the strategies that can be used to optimize the performance of the Zimbabwe Senior men’s football team**

Physical demands * Technical demands * Psychosocial demands Crosstabulation							
Count							
Psychosocial demands			Technical demands				Total
			Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Strongly Disagree	Physical Demands	Strongly Disagree				2	2
		Disagree				2	2
		Agree				1	1
	Total					5	5
Disagree	Physical Demands	Strongly Disagree		4	0		4
		Disagree		0	3		3
	Total			4	3		7
Agree	Physical Demands	Strongly Disagree			9	0	9
		Disagree			4	0	4
		Agree			5	8	13
	Total				18	8	26
Strongly Agree	Physical Demands	Strongly Disagree	0	2		0	2
		Agree	1	0		3	4
		Strongly Agree	6	0		0	6
	Total		7	2		3	12
Total	Physical Demands	Strongly Disagree	0	6	9	2	17



As a result, the qualitative and quantitative data appear to be related in the sense that the coaching process of football players is being encouraged to meet their demands and further embrace scientific technology to optimize the players' performance.

#### **4.6 Chapter Summary**

The data collected through questionnaires and interviews were presented in this chapter. Although qualitative and quantitative data were provided separately, there was a consistent association between the outcomes of each subject covered. The following chapter will go into further detail on these topics.

# 1. CHAPTER 5 :DISCUSSION

## 5.1 Introduction

The results are thoroughly discussed in this chapter. This chapter also incorporates the literature review in order to clarify some of the problems shown in the findings section. Most significantly, depending on the opinions of the participants, frameworks to improve the senior football team's performance will be created.

## 5.2. Discussion

### *5.2.1 Research Question 1: What frameworks are currently being used to optimize the performance of the Zimbabwe Senior men's football team?*

Both the qualitative and quantitative participants expressed dissatisfaction with the present framework. A One-Sample T-test demonstrates that the Zimbabwe National Football Team has not embraced worldwide facilities standards, supporting Table 4.8. Participants in the qualitative strand demonstrate that it is difficult to develop potential and find candidates for the national squad. Several of the participants said

*'...as long as we don't bring back youth development sides, Zimbabwe will remain uncompetitive.'*

*'the framework is now random, I remember basing our recruitment with local players primarily from Dynamos and Highlanders during the Dream Team era, and our ranking was respected....now some talk about British Brigade...sometimes taking players from South Africa.'*

*'After producing Musona and Billiat around 2009 who else was produced to put Zimbabwe back on the sorting map...'*

The argument was that the Zimbabwe National team lacked a consistent and reliable source of talent to assure the team's competitiveness. Football development contradicts the principles of Till and Baker (2020); Scantlebury et al. (2020), who created a long-term athlete development framework for optimal training, competition, and recuperation programs for each level of athletic growth. Athlete development occurs under the LTAD paradigm when emerging athletes are exposed to the organization's strategic capabilities and shown how to effectively use taught skills (Eisenmann, Till, and Baker, 2020). These abilities are ingrained inside an organization's norms, routines, and procedures, with the implication that the style or method in which the company takes choices and administers its internal operations in order to achieve organizational goals.

### ***5.2.3 Research Question 2: What impact does the current framework being used to optimize the performance of the Zimbabwe Senior men's football team in Zimbabwe have?***

According to the findings, the existing framework has produced yet another source of unhappiness. The structure, according to Table 4.10, has caused the squad to lose motivational support, acquire sponsorship, and retain experienced players. As a result, the framework is expected to reinforce current negative perceptions about Zimbabwe's Senior Football Team. Figure 4.7 depicts the National team's performance as stagnant and declining to a larger extent. According to the interviewee, the success of the National squad has separated the squad from organizations with an interest in the team.

Some said, *"The Warriors are always disappointing with their poor performance and no one wants to be associated with that..."*

*'Many sponsors have withdrawn their willingness to work with the National team for reasons best known to them,'*

According to the findings of this study, they resulted in the loss of experienced players. According to Vaughan et al. (2022), this has resulted in modern cultures facing major obstacles with player recruiting and transitions into professional sport, with little adjustment to address these concerns. According to Vaughan et al. (2022) on restricted sponsorship, sport performance settings are becoming increasingly integrated with the objectives of advertising, media, multinational businesses, and politicians at all levels. They suggest that this tangled web has exposed young athletes to new types of commodification that promote individual competition. Therefore, without intellectual property rights and commercialization, it would remain a pipeline dream to achieve optimization of the Zimbabwean National team. In terms of training aspects, Akenhead and Nassis (2018) emphasize the importance of having access to training infrastructure, training technique specialists, and experienced coaches in order to generate great soccer players. According to Scantlebury et al. (2020), it is probably unsurprising that significant levels of training or practice are required to achieve or create great soccer players.

### ***5.2.4 Objective 3: How can the performance of the Zimbabwe Senior men's football team be optimised?***

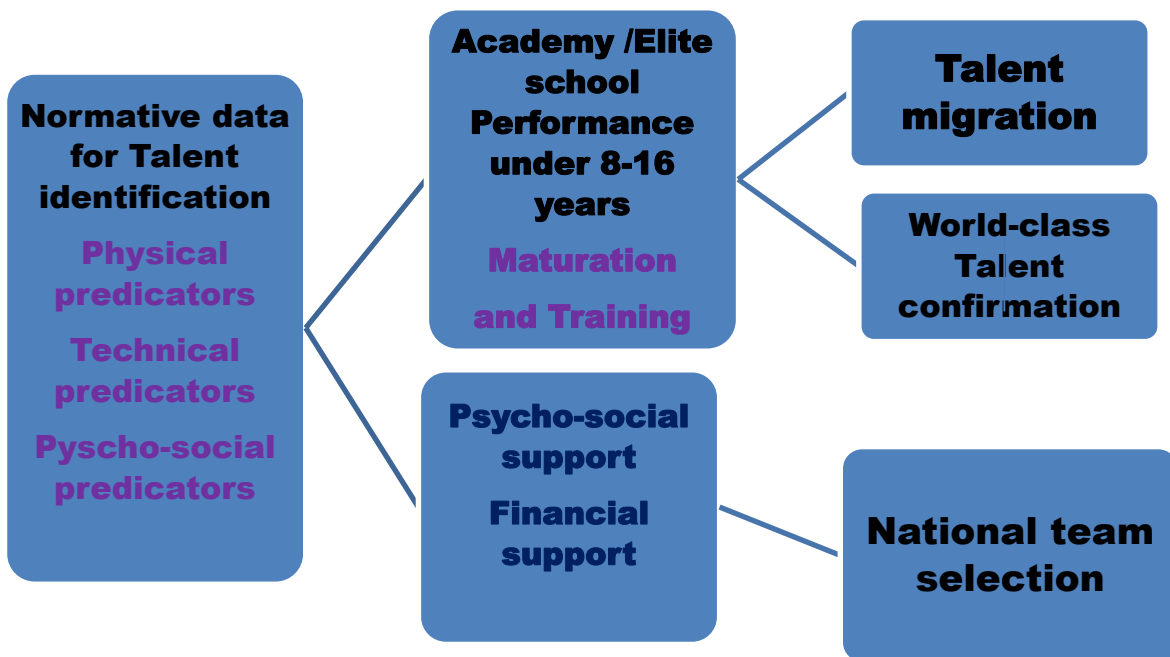
Table 4.11 in the quantitative strand suggested a framework that addresses the Physical Demands, Technical Demands, and Psycho-Social Demands of players so that their performances match international practice. Meanwhile, the qualitative strand (Fig 4.8) informs the study to develop a framework that requires scientific training techniques to discover, select,

and develop football potential. These participants' views are in line with modern trends. Scelles and Andreff (2018) suggested that performance analysis can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of a certain training initiative, determine enhancements in competitive performance, and generate permanent and accurate records of performance over time. Essentially, performance analysis feedback can be used to assist and guide team preparation, prior to the match, and after a match (Wright et al., 2018).

### 5.3 New insights

**Fig 5.1**

**The strategic Conceptual Model to optimize the performance of the Zimbabwe Senior Men's football team.**



The framework states that the national team must be supported by structures for the Zimbabwe football team. Only successful talent should migrate, and only players who match the requirements should be picked for the National team. The players are determined after having gone through the academy to grow. Future talent identification procedures are thought to be extremely dependent on normative data.

### **5.3.2 The Significance of the Framework**

The framework aids the Zimbabwe Football Association in managing the growth of the football talent that it would eventually choose for the National Team. However, the framework could have a flaw in that it might be challenging to implement in nations that are already at an advanced level of growth.

### **5.4 Limitations**

There are a number of disadvantages to self-completion questionnaires that should be explored in the quantitative study strands. It's possible that some responders didn't understand the questions' intended meaning. The researcher used 5-point Likert-type scale instruments to lessen the challenges associated with meanings. Neuman (2008) describes a "response set" as a circumstance in which respondents choose to answer questions in the same way, either out of laziness or a psychological predisposition. Nevertheless, there was a danger in this situation. Completed questionnaires were thoroughly evaluated to lessen this influence, and those that tended in this direction were disregarded from the study.

Male respondents made up the majority of the research sample, which indicates that female opinions weren't as evenly represented as male ones. Therefore, it's possible that gender disparities had minimal effect on the accuracy of the results. Due to the inclusion of women in this study, the researcher was nevertheless able to develop the conceptual framework despite this restriction.

The design of this inquiry is cross-sectional. It is therefore impossible to observe changes in the levels at which ZIFA develops players for international events.

### **5.5 Chapter Summary**

A clear picture of the outcomes was provided by the chapter. As a result, it offered a conceptual framework that could be used to enhance the international performance of the members of the Zimbabwe Football national team.

## **2. CHAPTER 6 :CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The chapter's emphasis is on delivering closing comments and recommendations for improving practice.

### **6.2 Conclusions**

#### **6.2.1 Research Question 1: What frameworks are currently being used to optimize the performance of the Zimbabwe Senior men's football team**

The Zimbabwe National Team lacked a continuous and dependable source of talent identification mechanisms that would ensure the team's competitiveness. It has abandoned its paradigm that relied on local players in favour of one in which international players dominate the club. However, as compared to the late 1900s, the team selection has failed to enhance the National Ranking.

#### **6.2.2 Research Question 2: What impact does the current framework being used to optimize the performance of the Zimbabwe Senior men's football team?**

The present framework perpetuates the existing unfavourable opinions of Zimbabwe's Senior Football Team as stagnant and deteriorating. This has resulted in the departure of major players, coaches, and cooperate sponsors.

#### **6.2.3 Objective 3: How can the performance of the Zimbabwe Senior men's football team be optimised?**

The research finds that the Zimbabwe Football Association should provide suitable conditions for players to develop their Physical Demands, Technical Demands, and Psycho-Social Demands in order for their performances to meet international practice. Furthermore, employing scientific approaches for identifying potential and managing homegrown athletes.

### **6.3 Recommendations**

- The Zimbabwe Football Association should start a normative data collection that would control talent in local leagues and also generate the tools for talent development in Zimbabwe.

- The Zimbabwe Football Association is urged to construct high-performance facilities where it can train players from an early age.
- It is advised that the Zimbabwe Football Association invest in the junior league to make sure that young players are ready before joining the national squad.
- The selection of the national squad should be based on scientific evidence.
- Integrate sport science into coaches' training methods so that they can learn the scientific techniques used to identify and select talent
- Talent sports scientists should help policymakers develop and implement a more streamlined pathway for talent identification and player selection.
- National team coaches should priorities physical, physiological, psychological, and technical training methods.
- Local coaches in Zimbabwe's football competitions are being challenged to follow new trends in player growth and development.
- Local governments are being pushed to enhance football facilities and training centres so that young players may exhibit their abilities.

### **6.3.2 Recommendation for future study**

Future studies are recommended to validate the ‘Strategic Conceptual Model’ to optimize the performance of the Zimbabwe Senior Men’s football team’ which was produced in this study.

Future research should be conducted in order to develop normative grades that the future National Team may use for talent identification and management.

### **6.4 Chapter Summary**

The chapter has concluded and provided recommendations for the Zimbabwe Football Association and future researchers.

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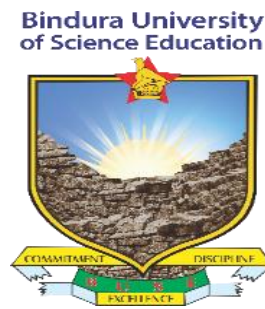
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## APPENDIX 1 : INTERVIEW GUIDE



### Instructions

Codes will be used to identify every participant. During the interviews, neither the interviewers nor the interviewees may disclose their names, positions held, or employers. You are not allowed to use any personal information or examples that might be used to pinpoint you or any other attendees. The discussions will be recorded and then typed up. There are no mandatory responses, and all views are kept completely private.

1. How would you rate Zimbabwe's senior men's football team's overall performance in international competitions?
2. How would you rank the Zimbabwe Senior Men's Team's playing strategies in international competitions?
3. Do you believe physical and technical demands are responsible for the Zimbabwe Football Senior Men's Team's current performance levels?
4. What role did human and material resources play in determining the senior men's football team of Zimbabwe's current performance levels in international competitions?
5. In what ways does competitive game time shape the current performance levels of the Zimbabwe Football Senior men's team in international competitions?
6. What effect, in your opinion, is professional player retention having on the Zimbabwe Football Senior Men's team's current performance levels?
7. What effect, in your opinion, does the Zimbabwe Football Senior Men's team's current performance levels have on the ability to retain qualified human resources?
8. How do the present performance levels of the Zimbabwe Football Senior Men's team impact corporate and societal support?
9. Which strategies do you believe should be used to improve the Zimbabwe Football Senior Men's team's performance in international competitions?

## APPENDIX 2 : QUESTIONNAIRE FOR FOOTBALL PLAYERS AND COACHES



### QUESTIONNAIRE FOR FANS AND ATHLETES

I am Chirara Admire (B212282B), a student at the Bindura University of Science Education who is currently studying towards a Master of Science Degree in Sports Management. I am conducting research titled ‘**Developing a strategic framework to optimize the Performance of Zimbabwe Football Senior Men National Team in International Competitions**’. You are kindly asked to respond to the questionnaire items below. Your contributions will be used solely for scholarly purposes and will be kept completely confidential.

#### SECTION A: SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC DATA (TICK WHERE APPROPRIATE)

1. Gender: Male  Female
2. Age: Below 20  20-30  31-40  41-50  Over 50
3. Please indicate your professional qualifications: No formal education  Primary   
Secondary  Certification  Diploma  Degree   
Postgraduate
4. Occupation: Player  Coach
5. Date.....

#### SECTION B

##### Instructions:

Please tick (✓) the relevant answer or fill in.

The questionnaire will make use of a 5-point Likert scale listed below

Key: SD= Strongly Disagree; D= Disagree; N= Neutral; A= Agree and SA= Strongly Agree

6. Mark the column that best represents the current performance levels of the Zimbabwe Football Senior Men's team in international tournaments with a tick.

<b>Current performance of Zimbabwe Football Senior Men's team</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
Poor playing styles					
Lack of unity and common purpose					
Lack of sound administration					
Lack of professional acumen					
Failing to qualify in regional and international tournaments					
Failing to attract corporate and social support					

7. Mark the column that best explains the variables that have shaped the present performance levels of the Zimbabwe Football Senior Men's team in international events with a tick.

<b>Factors affecting the current performance of the Zimbabwe Football Senior Men's team</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
Physical Demands					
Technical demands					
Psychosocial demands					
Lack of competitive league and participation in regional competitions					
Injuries					
Lack of qualified human resources					
Lack of motivational support					
Lack of resources					

8. Mark with a tick the impact of the current levels of performance levels of the Zimbabwe Football Senior men's team in international competitions on the development of football in the country

<b>Impact of current performance Zimbabwe Football Senior men's team the development of football</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
Failure to retain players at the senior level					
Failure to retain skilled human resources					
Failure to attract sponsorship					
Failure to attract social support					
Reinforcing prevailing negative perceptions about Zimbabwe Football Senior team					

9. Mark with a tick the column which best describes intervention strategies that can be used to performance levels of the Zimbabwe Football Senior men’s team in international competitions.

Strategies to optimize the Performance of Zimbabwe Football Senior Men’s Team.	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
Adopting international training standards					
Considering the unique demands across positional groups					
Establish high-performance centers’					
Improving the mental health of athletes					
Improving injury prevention strategies					
Introducing motivational support interventions					

**Thank You!!!!**

## APPENDIX 3 : AUTHORIZATION LETTER

Department of Sports Science

**BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION**



**FACULTY OF  
SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING**

P. Bag 1020

**BINDURA, Zimbabwe**

Tel: 263 -0662106134

Fax: 263 -0662107552/6007

Cell: 263-77291671

**9 November 2022**

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**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN.**

**RE: MASTER OF SCIENCE IN SPORTS SCIENCE DISSERTATION STUDY ACCESS REQUEST.**

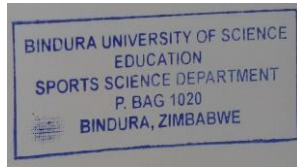
This is to certify that Admire Chirara (**B212282B**) is a bona fide Master of Science in Sports Science student in the Department of Sports Science at the Bindura University of Science Education. He is conducting an action research study entitled: **‘Developing a strategic framework to optimize the performance of Zimbabwe Football Senior Men National Team in International Competitions’**

We are kindly requesting your organization to partner with him in the study by participating in the data collection and intervention strategy development process. Participation in this research is completely voluntary and you may choose to withdraw from the research at any time. The information from your organization will only be used for academic purposes and be kept private and confidential. Codes will be used to identify participant organizations. This is meant to ensure that information would not be linked to the providers. Password-protected computers will be used to store any identifiable information that may be obtained from your organization. Data will also be analyzed at the group level, so as to ensure anonymity. Your support will be pivotal to the success of the study.

If you have any queries regarding this project, please phone me at 0772916712, or [lysiastapiwacharumbira1968@gmail.com](mailto:lysiastapiwacharumbira1968@gmail.com) or [lcharumbira@buse.ac.zw](mailto:lcharumbira@buse.ac.zw). We would like to thank you in advance for the support.

Yours Sincerely

*JE*



Lysias Tapiwanashe Charumbira (Dr.)Chairperson.

## APPENDIX 4 : INFORMED CONSENT FORMS



### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

#### **Purpose of study:**

You are being asked to participate in a study that seeks to **‘Developing a strategic framework to optimize the performance of Zimbabwe Football Senior Men National Team in International Competitions’**

#### **Conditions for Participation:**

1. I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by the Sports Science Department at Bindura University of Science Education.
2. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation.
3. I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
4. I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
5. I understand that in any report on the results of this research, my identity will remain anonymous.
6. I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the research report and subsequent publications.
7. I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.
8. I understand that original audio recordings and data transcripts will be retained at Bindura University of Science Education for six months, thereafter, the material will be deleted.
9. I understand that signed consent forms will be retained at Bindura University of Science Education.
10. I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.
11. I understand that my identity will be protected and I will be assigned a code name or number
12. By signing this form I am attesting that I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study and fully understand the nature and character of my involvement in this research and I freely give my consent to participate in the study.
13. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

**Name of Research Participant:** .....**Signature:**..... **Date:**.....

**Name of Principal Investigator:** .....**Signature:**..... **Date:**.....

## APPENDIX 5 :CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT



### CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

This agreement is between: Admire Chirara (**B212282B**)

**Individuals Receiving the Information:**

and

**Name of Individual Disclosing the Information:**

.....

for

**A Research Project Entitled:**

**‘Developing a strategic framework to optimize the performance of Zimbabwe Football Senior Men National Team in International Competitions’**

### AGREEMENT

1. For purposes of this Agreement, the term "**Confidential Information**" means any of the following:

- (i) nonpublic information relating to the Parties’ technical or non-technical data, know-how, algorithms, formulas, patterns, compilations, programs, devices, methods, research and development data, computer source and object code, trade secrets, recipes, techniques, drawings, processes, products, services, or lists of actual or potential customers or suppliers, technology, business plans and methods, promotional and marketing activities, finances and other business affairs;
- (ii) third-party information that the Parties are obligated to keep confidential; and (Personal information is under the custody or control of the Parties.

2. The Discloser intends to disclose confidential information to the Recipient for the study.

3. The Recipient undertakes not to use the confidential information for any purpose except the purpose of the study, without first obtaining the written agreement of the Discloser.

4. Strong password-protected computers will be used to store identifiable information.

5. Only two members of the research team who are signatories to this agreement shall have access to the two computers.

6. Identifiable information will also be used in a manner that would not be linked to the providers.

7. Confidential Information shall be returned to the Disclosing Party at the request of the Disclosing Party or shall be destroyed within thirty days after the completion of the study.

8. In cases of breach of this agreement by the Receiving Parties, the Disclosing Party shall be entitled as a matter of right, to injunctive relief, including specific performance.

**SIGNED:**

**a. Individuals Receiving the Information:**

- 1. Name.....Signature .....Date.....
- 2. Name.....Signature .....Date.....
- 3. Name.....Signature .....Date.....
- 4. Name.....Signature .....Date.....
- 5. Name.....Signature .....Date.....
- 6. Name.....Signature .....Date.....

**b. Individuals Disclosing the Information:**

- 1. Name.....Signature .....Date.....

**c. Witness:**

- 1. Name.....Signature .....Date.....