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**Factors Affecting the Performance of 110-Meter Hurdles in Pakistan: A Qualitative Case Study of Hurdles and Coaches**

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**Keywords:** 110-Meter Hurdles, Technical Development, Qualified Coaching, Psychological Status, And Socio-Economic Status

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#### Abstract

Hurdling is an exciting and explosive event in track and field competitions. Athletes display power and outstanding mind body coordination to get to the finish line as fast as possible. It is modified sprinting. Hurdling is a very technical and energy-demanding, exciting, and challenging event. A qualitative study was conducted with 10 participants, 7 elite hurdles, and 3 coaches from national training camps at Islamabad and Lahore. The data was collected through interviews (semi-structured). Five themes were extracted from the data, technical development, lack of qualified coaches, lack of competition structure, psychological status, and socio-economic status of 110m hurdles in Pakistan. Enhancing techniques over hurdles, coaching education system, provision of sports psychologists and mental training, and improving financial incentives in terms of scholarships and funding from the government, could enhance the performance of 110-meter hurdles to an international level.

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## Introduction

Athletics is a sport that can be enjoyed by everyone. Every individual Athlete should be encouraged to find their strengths in athletics broad selection of running, jumping, and throwing events. The high hurdles (110m hurdles) are an explosive and exciting event in which the athlete demonstrates power and agility to get to the finish line as fast as possible (Coh & Zvan, 2018). Hurdling is a very technical and energy-demanding,

exciting, and challenging event. The technical component of hurdling is clearly much greater than only sprinting, specifically rhythm to efficiently hurdle crossing and maintain speed. The stride pattern of Olympic and world champions for sprint hurdling was 8 strides, but now most of the world-class hurdles adopt 7-stride patterns to the first hurdle, followed by a 3-stride pattern between the hurdles. High hurdles have an extraordinary demand on the hurdles, for sprinting, explosive strength, special co-ordination and rhythm. A



lot of authors have already been interested in hurdling techniques. They agree that hurdling inevitably needs to minimize the velocity loss during the take-off phase and mainly during the landing phase at touchdown. As base parameters for the technique economy evaluation in these phases are usually use the angle of take-off and landing angle at the moment of touchdown. Individual analysis of the technique and rhythm of the hurdling is done on a sample of the world's best hurdles . (Claringbould, Knoppers, & Jacobs, [2015](#))

The study on 110m hurdles has always been one of the most popular topics in the sport research field, both domestically and internationally. Modern competitive sports are distinct from previous sports in the way that they are established in the background of science and technology with active penetration. The scientific training we advocated is not only scientific selection, systematic training, but more importantly, to put forward effective monitoring and diagnosis of the training effects of the implementation in the training process of hurdles (López del Amo, Rodríguez, Hill, & González, [2018](#)). At present, both domestic and foreign outstanding 110m hurdles are becoming more meticulous and rationalizing their skills, and the level of competition is also getting close to the athletes' physiological limit. Therefore, further study of mutual relations among aspects of competitive abilities and correctly grasping the development directions and rules are the basis to construct a more excellent hurdler competitive ability structure model to promote the hurdles ' level. Understanding and grasping of the 110m hurdles can make the scientific and rational choice of training methods to gain good training effects, to achieve the expected goals. (Tsiokanos, Tsaopoulos, Giavroglou, & Tsarouchas, [2018](#)).

The research journal of personality and social psychology revealed that family, peer groups, coaches and familiarity with competitive environment are very important for performance enhancement in sports. The success of athletes is the reflection of all these factors, like supportive family, a coach's confidence in athletes, and the athlete's circle of social gatherings, achievements, and learning from experiences.

A supportive family, a confident and supportive coach, an athlete's internal motivation for training and competition, able the athlete to perform and serve as a critical facilitative factor for performance.

Along with all these factors, hard work and belief further reflected skills development and working as good team members also led to success which was demonstrated by the participants (Gilbert & Côté, [2013](#)). In reference to the above factors, they contribute

to performance enhancement, factors that contribute to reducing performance similar in different sequences. These factors were psychological fitness, strength and conditioning, lack of family support, and other barriers related to peer groups (Avner, Markula, & Denison, [2017](#)). Personal and family relationships are rooted in athletes' early sporting experiences and play an important role in helping athletes cope with the demands of elite sport throughout their careers. Practices that prevent or limit family and personal relationships threaten not only athlete performance but also long-term well-being. Athletes should be actively encouraged and allowed to make time and space for personal and family relationships alongside their sports careers (Čoh, Bončina, Štuhec, & Mackala, [2020](#)).

In the past, the material for study was books, periodical research journals, and computers for analysis in the early years. Computer analysis was an extremely cumbersome process of filming with a high-speed camera. After developing the film, the sports scientist had to do a frame-by-frame transfer on graph paper. The sports scientist then use digital frame on graph paper and punches that detized coordinates on a computer card (Denison, [2010](#); Smith, [2020](#)).

In today's modern and digital era, coaches use biomechanical softwares like DartFish and Kinovea. Coaches make videos and download the videos of competition or training sessions in the software and then work on the weakness of hurdles . Due to the scientific approach of coaches in the last two decades has significantly improve the understanding level, technique, and training planning. From last twenty years Dr. Ralph Mann is working with sprint and hurdles coaches through seminars and workshops every year. Every year, the elite-level coaches learn from him and take new knowledge, compare it with previous knowledge, and apply it to their training plan and workouts for improvement for the next season improvement in performance (Kim & Cruz, [2016](#)).

## Material & Methods:

### Study Design

The study design was a qualitative case study. The data were collected from the 110-meter elite hurdles and coaches of national level through structured interviews. The data were collected from the National Athletics team Training Camps in Islamabad and Lahore.

### Duration of Study

The duration of the study was 6 months as the training camps were in two venues.

## Sampling

By using the convenience sampling method, a total of 10 participants, including 7 male 110-meter hurdles and 3 national camp hurdles coaches, were actively involved with competitive hurdles .

## Inclusion Criteria

Current only male elite level 110-meter hurdles of National level and national level coaches were included in the study. The hurdles who were injured at the time of research but were of a national level were also included in the study.

## Exclusion Criteria

All those who were 110-meter hurdles and coaches who were not at the national level were excluded from the study.

## Ethical Consideration

The study was approved by the Advanced Studies and Research Committee (ASRC) of Isra University, Islamabad campus. Written informed consent was signed by all participants.

## Date Collection Procedure

After the approval from advanced study & Research Committee (ASRC), Isra University, Islamabad campus. Seven hurdles and three Coaches from National Athletics Training Camps in Islamabad and Lahore, as per the inclusion and exclusion criteria, were recruited in the study. The tool for data collection was semi-structured interviews. All the participants were interviewed in a separate session. The advantage of individual interviews was that they allow for closed communication between the interviewer and the athlete/Coach providing a rich depth of information.

## Data Analysis

From the opinions of the respondents through semi-structured interviews, themes were generated from the responses of the participants, 7 hurdles and 3 coaches. These themes greatly affect the performance of 110-meter hurdles in Pakistan. The themes were Inadequate hurdling techniques, lack of qualified coaching, less exposure to national and international competitive environment, psychological status, and socio-economic status of hurdles in Pakistan.

## Results

Interviews were conducted to explore the most

common factors that affect the performance of 110-meter hurdles in Pakistan. Interviews were conducted separately with three (03) coaches and seven (04) 110-meter hurdles from National Athletics Training Camps in Islamabad and Lahore, satisfying the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The following were the main themes from the responses of the respondents.

## Themes of the Study

1. Inadequate Hurdles Technique
2. Lack of Qualified and scientifically updated coaches
3. Insufficient competition structure and exposure
4. Low psychological support and readiness
5. Low socio-economic status

## Inadequate Hurdles Technique

Both the coaches and hurdles pointed out that poor hurdling techniques are the primary performance-limiting factor in 110-meter hurdles. Coaches reply that mostly Pakistani hurdles use outdated techniques (jumping over the hurdles) for crossing hurdles rather than adopting the science-backed sprinting over the hurdles, which causes longer flight time and loses the rhythm between hurdles. Coaches emphasized that the difference in reaching the first hurdle using 8 stride patron instead of 7 stride patron and the inconsistent rhythm between hurdles blocked the Pakistani hurdles from reaching world-class race timing. While hurdles on the other side said that there is no system for technical development at grassroot level, and the existing techniques the hurdles are performing are copied from senior athletes, mostly involve jumping over hurdles instead of keeping a sprinting rhythm, and to reduce the flight time over the hurdles. The lack of basic and correct techniques for hurdles and the rhythm between the hurdles limits the potential for performance at an international level.

## Lack of Qualified and Scientifically Updated Coaches

Another strong and persistent theme was the lack of qualified coaches and limited access to knowledge of scientific training methods. Mostly, national-level coaches lack formal education as well as coaching qualifications. There is no system for coaches' education on a regular basis. The selection for national camps and international competitions is often on a quota basis or personal references. The coaches use traditional training methods of the 1990s with a little adaptation to periodization and strength and conditioning, and very

little knowledge of biomechanics-based coaching and training.

The hurdles replied that coaches, both at grassroots or at the national level, are lacking in current scientific knowledge of long-term athlete development, modern hurdles techniques, and systematic training planning for performance enhancement. Many hurdles reported frustration with coaches. When they perform well, their progress is still stagnant because their coaches cannot help them correct technical faults and advance their performance above the national standards. Both the coaches and hurdles strongly recommend the coaches' education program on a regular basis from world athletics coaches education certification system and a system for hiring qualified foreign hurdles coaches for a short term to improve the national level performance capacity.

### Lacking Competition Structure and Exposure

Coaches and hurdles repetitively stated the lack of a proper competition yearly calendar and limited opportunities to compete at the international level in major competitions. They were of the view that there is no yearly national competition structure in accordance with the international competitions scheduled. Hurdles can only have one international competition in a calendar year. With limited exposure or without frequent competition, coaches and athletes can not evaluate their progress, the effects of training planning, and can not prepare a systematic training plan for major regional competition and the Olympic Games.

Hurdles are told that without a yearly schedule and regular postponement of national competitions increases frustration, disturb training program, and leads to serious injuries and psychological stress for athletes. Limited exposure to international competitions means that hurdles finally compete in international competition, overwhelmed by the international standards, new science-based techniques, and a new and unfamiliar environment.

### Low Psychological Support and Readiness

The interviews revealed that mostly Pakistani hurdles face psychological and low psychosocial support challenges during the early stages of their careers. Several athletes are psychologically unstable in high-pressure conditions and show high anxiety during competitions. Expectations from family, peers, and federation are a cause of anxiety about being dropped from the national team after poor performance and psychological stress.

Hurdles reported that they receive no or little support from family, peers, and society, who view athletics as having no secured feature as compared to professional education, MBBS, and engineering degrees, or cricket if in sports. Limited exposure to international competition shows a low level of experience with competitions expose them to anxiety at international events. Some hurdles explained the feelings they have at major international events, only for participation, which further damages confidence and motivation. Coaches and hurdles finally suggested that regular sports psychologists, mental training, and regular international competition exposure are required to manage hurdles' anxiety, build confidence, and improve performance to their potential.

### Low Socio-Economic Status

Socio-economic status was described as a great barrier to high performance in 110 meter hurdles. As there is no system for national salaried coaches or a structure for financial assistance or incentive for encouragement of long-term coaching, and a youth development system. Selection of coaches for national teams are often inconsistent and unfair.

Hurdles revealed that most of the hurdles come from average or lower middle-class families and have little or no financial support for training, nutrition, equipment, or travel to and from training and competition venues. Prize money and rewards for national champions are small cash awards, which are not enough for monthly expenses, which forces athletes to opt for secure jobs on a sports basis and to overperform at the international level. Specifically, as compared to cricket in our country, there is a disparity in prize money; they get substantial match fees, sponsorships, and a central contract from their respective board. Almost all the hurdles showed willingness to get departmental jobs on sports quota first and then started to focus on performing for maintaining employment rather than performing for international medals. Both the coaches and hurdles believed that financial support, sponsorships, and performance-based incentives are very important for developing an environment for athletes to train and perform at a high level.

### Discussion

The study examined the factors affecting the performance of 110-meter hurdles in Pakistan and identified five major themes.

## **Technical Development**

Technical development is the most important barrier to performance in the 110-meter hurdles. The coaches are unanimously of the view that Pakistani hurdles are technically very poor, and these technical inefficiencies appear as the most critical barrier. Both coaches and hurdles emphasized that Pakistani hurdles adopted outdated hurdle clearance mechanics despite sprinting over the hurdles to reduce flight time. Elite world-class hurdles transitioned from 8 stride to 7 stride pattern to the first hurdle to improve momentum consistent with take-off angles, ground contact time, and rhythm as important factors for performance. A system for working with the grassroots level and early correct technical training can solve the technical inefficiencies in Pakistani hurdles, which can lead to best competition time.

## **Coaching Quality and Scientific Training**

The most important factor that affects the performance is coaching. If the coach is qualified and has modern knowledge of training periodization, strength and conditioning, and biomechanical assessment, can become successful coaches. Coaching is the art of using scientific methods for the enhancement of performance. The world-class athletes and their federations hire qualified coaches to improve their athletes' performance. They also educate their local coaches with modern technologies and provide opportunities to become qualified coaches by attending different coaching courses offered by World Athletics (WA).

In our country, unfortunately, the coaches are neither educated nor qualified, which affects the performance very much. The coaches at the national level in athletics are lacking in basic education, due to which they have no access to modern technology and books. They have communication problems with other coaches at the international level to discuss matters of great importance. Today's world is a global village and a lot of researches are in progress for the betterment of the performance of their National hurdles.

The respondents replied that in Pakistan, we don't have a coach education system. They believed there must be a coach's education system locally in Pakistan. The coaches become well-trained, and then they attend the World Athletics Coaches Education Certification System (CECS). The federation should hire coaches based on the rating of IAAF courses. But unfortunately, they are not working on these issues. The federation hires all those coaches who have been working from last 15-20 years with the hurdles. They cannot bring change;

they can only run the system, because they are doing traditional coaching. The training camps are there, hurdles are going abroad for competitions, but the issue is the performance. Until and unless we work on coaches' education. Coaches' education is a common practice for the improvement of coaches' performances, which ultimately will affect hurdler performance.

## **Competition Structure and Performance Monitoring**

The competition structure helps athletes to regularly monitor their performance and psychological adaptation to high pressure environment. The primary limiting factor in the performance of 110 meter hurdles in Pakistan are lacking in frequent competitive environments, mostly limited to only one national championship per year. Limited competitions reduce performance standards, prevent psychological adaptation to high-pressure competition, and prevent hurdles from qualifying for international games. Literature showed that continuous seasonal training planning, performance monitoring, and exposure to high levels of competition are important for performance enhancement in hurdles. The lack of a competition calendar for the year will disturb the training planning and increase disappointment and burnout among hurdles. To prevent all these issues federation should develop a yearly competition program for all ages and levels. Structured competition will help the athletes and coaches to continue their training and performance monitoring, which will ultimately improve performance at the international level.

## **Psychological Readiness and Social Support**

The presence or absence of the factors that affect personnel and competitive environment (Family support, coach, competitive pressure), intrinsic motivation (dedication, perseverance in training), personal extrinsic motivation (Economic incentives, competitive success or failure, anxiety, lack of self-confidence, and physical condition (injuries, plateau performance can affect performance.

Sports psychology plays a vital role in the performance of a hurdler. If the hurdler is psychologically fit, he or she can perform well in any level competitions. Unfortunately, our athletes are not strong enough psychologically because of less exposure to a competitive environment. If an athlete has only one or a maximum of two competitions around the year, how can he be able to judge his strengths and weaknesses? The mental level of our athletes before or during

completion is very low because the standard level of performance is very low, and there is a lot of pressure and stress on hurdles. Because hurdles very rarely face this situation, there are very few competitions in athletics.

### Socio-Economic Constraints

The participants believed the mostly hurdles in Pakistan prioritize career security over performance at the international level and athlete development due to limited financial incentives. The financial incentives or rewards are insufficient to cover a hurdler's training expenses and are also not able to support their families. These financial constraints divert the attention of hurdles from performance to securing a job on sports quota and not striving for performance at the international level. Socio-economic pressure reduces the motivation of hurdles and restricts hurdles from elite sports. Attractive sponsorships and funding from the government and performance-based incentives would lead to enhancing performance by enhancing hurdles, and can reduce dropout from elite sports.

### Conclusion

From the opinion of the respondents, it is concluded that there are several reasons that affect the performance of 110-meter hurdles in Pakistan. Which include the following factors. The hurdles in Pakistan have no proper hurdling techniques; there are no qualified coaches, and a lack of scientific and systematic coaching and training programs. Pakistani hurdles are psychologically very weak and cannot cope with the

stress before and during competition due to a lack of competition at the national and international levels. Hurdles have rare chances of exposure to the international arena. Parental, peer group, and social influence also affect the performance of the 110-meter hurdles. Another important factor that affects performance the most is the low socio-economic status of the hurdles. The socio-economic pressure diverts their attention to career security instead of performance.

### Suggestions & Recommendations

1. The Federation should focus on coaches Education.
2. The federation should introduce the scientific training patterns by inviting internationally renowned athletes and coaches through seminars and conferences
3. The Government / Federation should provide enough opportunities for national and international competitions for the hurdles throughout the year to learn and interact with international-level hurdles familiar with competitive environments, to become psychologically strong.
4. The government should start kids' athletics Programs from grassroot level in Pakistan.
5. The Government/Federation should provide special packages for the hurdles to support their training costs and solve families' financial issues easily, so they can focus on their training only.

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