



The effectiveness of three teaching approaches in enhancing coaching confidence of Master's in coaching graduates in a South African university



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Orientation: Coaching is gaining popularity in South Africa, and more academic institutions are offering qualifications; however, limited research explores how different teaching approaches build coaches' confidence.

Research purpose: This research aimed to examine the effectiveness of three coaching education approaches – one-on-one coaching, coaching supervision and peer coaching – in enhancing the confidence of postgraduate coaching students enrolled in a master's in coaching programme at an academic institution in South Africa.

Motivation for the study: Given the growing need for effective coaching education, this study is motivated by the desire to understand which teaching approaches best enhance students' learning and confidence so that coaching programmes can better equip future coaches for success.

Research approach/design and method: Purposive sampling was employed to collect primary data from 12 master's in coaching students at a South African university through semi-structured interviews. The data were then analysed using thematic analysis.

Main findings: The key findings indicate that each of the three coaching dyads significantly enhances students' confidence while fostering the development of their professional development at various levels. It was evident that, although all three approaches played a role in student learning and confidence, participants perceived coaching supervision as the most effective approach in improving their confidence.

Practical/managerial implications: Institutions of higher education that provide coaching programmes should allocate additional resources towards coaching supervision to bolster the confidence of students.

Contribution/value-add: The study informs pedagogical approaches in coach education and enriches the broader field of coaching by deepening the understanding of teaching effectiveness.

Keywords: coaching effectiveness; coaching confidence; one-on-one coaching; peer coaching; coaching supervision; coach education.

Introduction

The purpose of the study is to explore the effectiveness of three coaching education approaches on enhancing the coaching confidence of master's students from a South African university.

Coaches pursue formal qualifications to enhance their practical skills and theoretical understanding of coaching models. At the postgraduate level, learners seek not only practitioner knowledge but also a deeper engagement with research and evidence-based coaching practices. Central to the personal and professional development of coaches is the cultivation of *coaching confidence*. This is a graduate competence critical for effective practice, which must be intentionally developed within coach education programmes.

In South Africa, the demand for professional coaching has prompted several tertiary institutions to offer formal coaching qualifications. Since 2011, the Wits Business School (WBS) launched a master's degree in executive and business coaching, catalysing similar programmes across the country and contributing to the professionalisation of coaching as a recognised component of

leadership development and organisational effectiveness (Attlee, 2013; Mashele, 2021; Schutte, 2019).

Despite this growth, the methods used to educate coaches remain varied, and there is limited empirical evidence on which teaching approaches most effectively foster coaching confidence. Moreover, many universities in South Africa emphasise accreditation and awards from organisations like the International Coach Federation (ICF) and European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) Global Quality Award (EQA) to establish credibility in coaching education (GIBS, 2025; University of Cape Town, 2025; University of Pretoria, 2025; University of Stellenbosch, 2025). While these institutions uphold specific industry quality standards that prepare graduates for professional practice, the development of a coach's confidence is often not explicitly highlighted in their programmes. Instead, confidence-building strategies appear to be implicitly integrated into the curriculum.

The coaching literature predominantly emphasises outcomes for coachees and general skills acquisition, often neglecting the development of the coaches themselves (Bachkirova et al., 2020). While professional bodies such as ICF, Coaches and Mentors of South Africa (COMENSA) and Graduate School Alliance for Education in Coaching (GSAEC) have developed guidelines for coaching competencies, adherence varies across institutions, leaving a gap in standardised approaches to coaching practice and the cultivation of coaching confidence as a core learning outcome. Thus, there is a need for research and scientific evidence on the importance of such a competence.

This study addresses that gap by investigating the effectiveness of three teaching approaches – one-on-one coaching, peer coaching and coaching supervision – in enhancing the coaching confidence of master's in coaching graduates. By examining these methods within a structured master's programme, the research seeks to determine which approach most effectively develops confidence, a critical attribute for professional practice. Insights from this study aim to inform coaching pedagogy, curriculum design and instructional strategies, ultimately strengthening the preparation of coaches for professional practice.

The primary research question guiding this study is: *Which coaching education approach is most effective in improving the coaching confidence of master's in coaching students?*

In this study, coaching education approaches refer specifically to the instructional strategies employed in the teaching of a master's degree in coaching, while coaching confidence is conceptualised as the learners' self-assuredness in applying their coaching knowledge and skills in professional contexts after they have completed their master's. A master's in coaching student in this study refers to an individual who has completed a master's degree in business and executive coaching at a recognised South African tertiary institution and had recently graduated at the time of the study.

Literature review

While existing literature on coach education has extensively addressed skill development, coaching models and outcomes for coachees, far less attention has been given to how coach education itself cultivates graduate competencies, particularly coaching confidence. The following review, therefore, examines relevant studies and theoretical foundations, focusing on how different coaching education approaches may support this overlooked dimension of coach development.

Theoretical framework

This study draws on Social Learning Theory (SLT), Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) to explain how coaching confidence can be developed in master's in coaching students through multiple learning modalities. Bandura (1977, 1986, 1991, 2008) and Asakura et al. (2020) emphasise that individuals learn not only through direct experience but also by observing others, highlighting the importance of vicarious learning in developing knowledge, behaviours and self-efficacy. SCT extends this perspective, positioning learners as proactive agents capable of directing their own development and reinforcing the belief in their capacity to succeed in mastering new skills (Moen & Allgood, 2009; Patrick, 2025).

Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) complements these social and cognitive perspectives by emphasising the transformation of experience into knowledge through iterative cycles of action, reflection, conceptualisation and application (Fazel, 2013; Kolb, 1984). This experiential approach supports active learning through practical engagement, reflection and continuous adaptation, particularly when conducted in psychologically safe environments (Dhar, 2025; Malik & Behera, 2024).

Together, these theories provide a framework for understanding how coaching can be taught effectively through diverse methodologies. One-on-one coaching and coaching supervision facilitate observational and social learning, enabling students to internalise effective practices and build confidence through guided interaction. Peer coaching exemplifies experiential learning, where students actively engage, reflect and apply skills collaboratively. Across all approaches, the combined insights of SLT, SCT and ELT underscore the dual importance of varied learning experiences and the learner's belief in their own capability, which this study conceptualises as *coaching confidence*.

The coaching confidence of master's in coaching graduates

Coaching success has been conceptualised at multiple levels – learning, reactions, behaviour and results – each of which can positively impact students by fostering independence, goal attainment, self-determination, self-awareness and self-confidence (Huffman et al., 2025;

Jarosz & Cartor, 2025). Self-confidence serves as a fundamental, overarching skill that significantly influences various domains of performance. It is this profound and lasting relationship to performance that underscores its importance in both personal and professional developmental contexts of executive coaching (Kane et al., 2021).

Effective coaching requires a thorough understanding of the coaching process, mastery of diverse techniques and the ability to align methods with the specific context of the coaching relationship (Bachkirova, 2015; Parsloe, 1999). Confidence – defined as the belief in one’s judgement, knowledge acquisition, task execution and performance – is critical for achieving both academic and professional outcomes (Ahmad et al., 2024; Gartner, 1989; Tuckman, 2003; Wolfe & Johnson, 1995). It is further important to note that confidence does not exist in isolation; rather, it is influenced by various contextual factors. As Kane et al. (2021) articulate, the dynamics of self-confidence are interconnected with social interactions and external perceptions.

Supporting this view, Groenewald (2024) argue that when an individual’s social self is threatened, it triggers cognitive, emotional and physiological responses, which can lead to a significant decline in self-confidence. This highlights the importance of recognising the relational aspects of confidence and the potential for its erosion when faced with challenges. As such, engagement and interaction with learning experiences are positively associated with improved self-confidence (Tett & Maclachlan, 2007). An effective coaching process significantly enhances individual development, as noted by Cidral et al. (2023). This process involves continuous assessment of the coachee’s engagement in collaboratively developed activities and strategies to achieve goals and overcome challenges.

By fostering open feedback, coaching enables coachees to internalise insights and facilitate the necessary behavioural changes for meaningful learning and growth, ultimately transforming their developmental journey (Cidral et al., 2023), and in this study, coachees are the coaches studying towards a coaching qualification.

Confidence in one’s skills and the strategic application of these competencies is central to enhancing students’ effectiveness as professional coaches (Humburg & Van der Velden, 2015; Lepistö & Ihantola, 2018; Tymon et al., 2020). Although coaching has been shown to enhance confidence (Asakura et al., 2020; Kovacs & Corrie, 2017; Lu, 2010; Norman & Hyland, 2003), few studies have examined its impact on master’s-level coaching students, particularly in the South African context, as a teaching approach.

Understanding which coaching approaches, such as one-on-one coaching, peer coaching, or coaching supervision, most effectively develop self-confidence is therefore crucial. The effectiveness of these approaches depends on both the educator’s skill in implementation and the students’ active

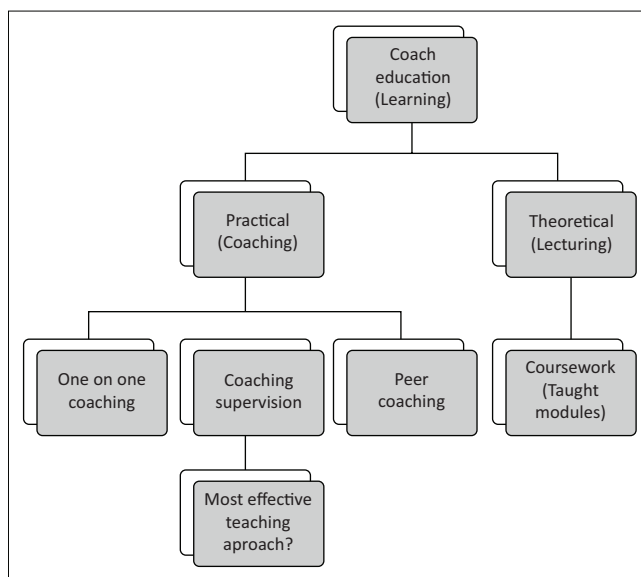


FIGURE 1: Various coaching education approaches.

engagement. Prioritising evidence-based teaching strategies enables educators to cultivate professional competence, foster personal development and strengthen coaching confidence among graduates, thereby preparing them for success in professional practice.

Three practical approaches for teaching coaching to master’s students

In this study, coaching education approaches are categorised into theoretical and practical teaching methods. The focus of this study is on practical coaching teaching approaches, including one-on-one coaching, peer-to-peer coaching and coaching supervision (Mashele, 2021).

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework, illustrating that coach education encompasses both theoretical and practical components. Theoretical knowledge is conveyed through coursework and lectures, while experiential learning is facilitated through practical coaching exercises that employ three methodologies: one-on-one coaching, peer coaching and coaching supervision.

One-on-one coaching

One-on-one coaching is a powerful catalyst for personal growth, promoting transformative learning and development (Bluckert, 2005; Griffiths, 2015; Parsloe, 1999). In South Africa, coaching is mostly delivered in a one-on-one format, aiming to support goal attainment and behavioural change (Schutte, 2019). This study argues that within personal development sits a need to develop coaching confidence.

Steinwedel (2001) found that college students who participated in weekly one-on-one coaching over 16 weeks reported enhanced goal achievement, improved stress management and reduced anxiety, which positively affected their academic outcomes (Huffman et al., 2025). Bandura (1977) and Hui and Sue-Chan (2018) emphasise that

individuals also develop skills through observational learning, which allows cognitive rehearsal based on observing others without immediate enactment (Hoover & Giambatista, 2009). In this study, observational learning occurred when students observed their coaches coaching them in real-life situations.

In this study, master's in coaching students participated in one-on-one coaching to fulfil the practical requirement of their master's qualification.

This study then aims to explore their perceptions of the effectiveness of the one-on-one coaching in enhancing their coaching confidence.

Peer-to-peer coaching

Peer coaching is a relational process in which two individuals of equal status actively support each other's development, grounded in trust and confidentiality (Parker et al., 2008, 2015). It facilitates the development of core skills such as self-awareness, active listening, adaptability, effective inquiry and leadership capabilities, while also enhancing self-confidence and personal growth (Boyatzis, 2024; Spence & Grant, 2007). Observational learning, reflective feedback and regular engagement are central to the process, allowing participants to practise new approaches, gain insights from their peers' experiences and continuously improve their own performance (Boström et al., 2024; Kolb, 1984; Terekhin & Aurora, 2025).

Empirical studies have demonstrated that peer coaching strengthens confidence through structured social interactions and mutual support. Jones and Wendt (2025) found that peer mentoring increased participants' sense of belonging, self-efficacy and confidence, particularly when peers shared similar professional or cultural identities. Armstrong and Geddes (2009) and Lawrence and Whyte (2014) similarly reported that peer coaching enhanced self-awareness, personal development and confidence through interaction with peers at different experience levels. Feddeck and Messer (2024) highlighted that although initial self-disclosure can be challenging, participants gain significant value as they become comfortable sharing experiences and supporting one another's goals. In light of these findings, it is evident that peer-to-peer coaching has a larger role to play within coach education than only developing the coaching skills of coaches and the self-efficacy of coachees. It can also enhance the coaching confidence of the coaching students as one of the key competencies for new, qualified coaches to succeed.

While peer coaching can present challenges, such as unhealthy competition or imbalance in engagement, these are mitigated through clear boundaries, confidentiality and commitment to the relationship (Parker et al., 2013; Terekhin & Aurora, 2025). In this study, master's in coaching students participated in peer coaching to fulfil the practical requirement of their master's qualification.

This study aims to explore the perceptions of master's in coaching graduates regarding the effectiveness of peer coaching in enhancing their coaching confidence.

Coaching supervision

Coaching supervision is a professional relationship in which a qualified coaching supervisor guides and supports a coach, or supervisee, to enhance their professional practice, ethical competence and overall effectiveness (Bachkirova et al., 2011; COMENSA, 2010; Ebewo et al., 2023; Hawkins & Smith, 2006). It provides both practical support, through sharing ideas and strategies, and emotional encouragement, fostering reflective practice and continuous professional development (Bluckert, 2005; Lewis, 2024). Drawing on Proctor's (2000) 'working alliance' framework, supervision enables the supervisor to utilise their expertise to guide the supervisee, fostering self-awareness, confidence, independence and professional capability (Armstrong & Geddes, 2009; Hawkins & Schwenk, 2006; Tkach & DiGirolamo, 2017). In this study, the supervisee is the coaching student.

Research indicates that coaching supervision enhances coaches' ability to empathise with clients, apply ethical standards and develop reflective skills, ultimately leading to greater self-confidence and professional presence (Armstrong & Geddes, 2007; Bluckert, 2005; Boyatzis, 2024; Butler, 2020; Butwell, 2006; Fazel, 2013; Huffman et al., 2025; Tett & Maclachlan, 2007). Coaching ethical standards primarily include confidentiality, respect for clients and integrity, which are outlined in different professional bodies responsible for promoting good ethical practice among coaches to protect the industry and clients. These are not quantitatively measured, but coaches and supervisors sign a pledge when they become members of these organisations or upon graduation from their programmes. Clients can report coaches to their professional bodies if they feel a coach is not ethical, but because the industry is not regulated, there are no formal penalties for such except losing membership and being flagged.

In this study, master's in coaching students participated in coaching supervision to fulfil the practical requirement of their master's qualification.

This study then aims to explore their perceptions of the effectiveness of coaching supervision in enhancing their coaching confidence.

Research design

Research approach and paradigm

This study employed a qualitative approach, adopting an interpretivist worldview. Because the interpretivist paradigm is scholarship aimed at a subjective end, multiple perspectives were gathered from master's in coaching students to investigate the research problem (Van Coller-Peter & Van der Walt, 2020). The study employed an inductive approach, allowing participants to freely share their experiences without preconceived notions or predetermined outcomes.

Population and selection criteria

The study's target population consisted of coaching students who had recently completed a master's degree in business and executive coaching at a university in South Africa. The selection criteria included that the participants must have recently completed the qualification to ensure their experiences are still fresh in their memory. Completing the qualification in this case meant that the student had to undergo both practical and theoretical experiences. The practical experience includes one-on-one coaching, peer-to-peer coaching and coaching supervision, while the theoretical experience includes attending lectures and completing coursework.

Participants' profiles

The sample comprised nine female and three male participants, representing 75% and 25%, respectively. This gender distribution reflects the historical profile of the programme, which, since its inception in 2011, has enrolled relatively few male students. In terms of racial composition, eight participants (67%) identified as black people and four (33%) as white people. With respect to age, four participants were between 36 years and 45 years old, three between 46 years and 55 years old, two between 25 years and 35 years old, and two were aged 56 years and above; one participant did not disclose their age group (Mashele, 2021) (Table 4).

Sampling strategy and sample size

This was a cross-sectional study, during which data collection was conducted over 3 months. A purposive sampling method was employed, ensuring in-depth insights and targeting a sample of 12 participants. Sample size for qualitative studies can range from six to 20 participants, depending on when saturation is achieved (Creswell, 2014). Saturation was reached at 12 for this study, and the interviews were stopped.

Research instrument and data collection process

The research instrument employed in this study was an interview guide designed to facilitate open-ended questions. Semi-structured interviews were selected as they provide both consistency across participants and the flexibility to probe emerging themes in greater depth. The use of Zoom was deemed appropriate because of its accessibility, cost-effectiveness and ability to overcome geographical constraints, thereby enabling the inclusion of participants across diverse locations. This format enabled the researcher to record the interviews with ease, with the participants' permission. Participants were recruited through email, WhatsApp and LinkedIn for initial outreach and appointment scheduling. The researcher had access to the contact details, as she was a student at the same university pursuing the same master's degree.

Interview questions

In the context of this article, the interview questions were specifically selected to evaluate the effectiveness of distinct coaching approaches in fostering coaching confidence.

Although the broader study incorporated a wider range of questions, only those pertinent to this paper are reported. To ensure comparability, each question was posed three times, corresponding to each of the coaching approaches under examination:

- *How was your experience with one-on-one coaching, peer coaching and coaching supervision?*
- *What made one-on-one coaching, peer coaching and coaching supervision effective?*
- *How did one-on-one coaching, peer coaching and coaching supervision contribute to your confidence as a coach?*
- *Which one of the three coaching approaches was the most effective?*
- *Which one of the three coaching approaches contributed the most to improving your overall confidence as a coach?*

Data analysis

Thematic analysis followed the six-step approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2013). The 12 interviews were transcribed, checked for accuracy and read multiple times to familiarise with the data. Initial codes were generated line-by-line, averaging 127 per transcript. Codes were then grouped inductively to identify patterns, leading to the formation of potential themes. These were reviewed, refined and clustered, resulting in four main themes with 18 sub-themes.

Continuous engagement with the transcripts allowed for the precise definition and naming of themes. The analysis was interpreted in relation to the research questions, forming the foundation for a detailed discussion of findings in subsequent chapters. This method ensured a systematic, transparent and robust representation of participants' perspectives. A table that gives an overview of the codes and themes that emerged from the original study can be found within Online Appendix 1. Table 1 details the application of each step within this study.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the University of Witwatersrand, Graduate School of Business Administration Ethics Committee (WBS/BA2163878/268). Data collection commenced only after ethical clearance had been obtained from the university's Postgraduate Committee. Prior to participation, all individuals signed informed consent forms. To safeguard their privacy, pseudonyms were used in place of real names, and participants were informed during the interviews that their identities would remain untraceable. Both confidentiality and anonymity were explicitly assured, and participants were further informed that all data would be securely stored on a password-protected computer.

Results

The central focus of this study was to determine which of the three coaching education approaches – one-on-one coaching, peer-to-peer coaching or coaching supervision – was most

effective in enhancing the coaching confidence of master's students, given that participants had experienced all three approaches during the programme. Participants indicated that each approach contributed positively to their confidence, highlighting different aspects of learning and development within the coaching process.

The most effective coaching education approach for enhancing coaching confidence

The majority of participants (7) indicated that most of their learning occurred during coaching supervision, which they regarded as the approach that most significantly enhanced their coaching confidence. Two of these participants, however, found it challenging to rank a single approach above the others; instead, they identified coaching supervision alongside one-on-one coaching and peer-to-peer coaching as equally central to their learning. Participant 9 ranked all three approaches in order of where she perceived the most learning had occurred. Illustrative quotations for each selected coaching approach are presented in Table 2, providing direct excerpts from participants to demonstrate how they justified their choices.

Participants identified several factors that influenced their preference for one coaching approach over the others,

TABLE 1: Braun and Clarke's six-step thematic analysis process.

Steps	Braun and Clarke (2013)	Steps taken in this study
1	Familiarisation with the data	A total of 12 interviews were audio-recorded via Zoom and subsequently transcribed. To ensure reliability, each transcript was meticulously verified against the corresponding audio recording, and any discrepancies were corrected. On average, each transcript comprised approximately 12 pages. The transcripts were then read repeatedly to facilitate immersion in the data and to capture preliminary insights through detailed note-taking.
2	Generating initial codes	Once familiarisation was achieved, a systematic line-by-line reading of the transcripts was undertaken to identify and assign preliminary codes. This process generated an average of 127 codes per interview, providing the foundation for subsequent theme development.
3	Searching for themes	The initial codes were inductively clustered and organised into categories, enabling the identification of recurring patterns across the dataset. This iterative process facilitated the emergence of preliminary themes from individual transcripts and allowed connections to be established between them.
4	Reviewing potential themes	The preliminary themes were refined through a process of collapsing, merging and clustering to ensure coherence and internal consistency. This stage yielded four overarching themes, each supported by a total of 18 sub-themes.
5	Defining and naming themes	Continued engagement with the transcripts, alongside iterative analysis, informed the precise labelling and re-labelling of themes. This ensured that the names assigned accurately reflected the underlying concepts represented in the data.
6	Producing the report	The final stage involved synthesising and interpreting the themes in relation to the research questions and propositions presented in the preceding chapter. The refined themes form the basis of the findings, which are elaborated in detail in the subsequent chapters.

Source: Adapted from Mashele, A.B. (2021). *The effectiveness of alternative coaching approaches on the confidence of coaches with postgraduate qualifications*. Master's thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. Retrieved from <https://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/server/api/core/bitstreams/fe563a84-f402-448a-94ed-02c66288be55/content>

Note: Please see the full reference list of this article, Msimango-Galawe, J., & Mashele, A. (2025). The effectiveness of three teaching approaches in enhancing coaching confidence of Master's in coaching graduates in a South African university. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management/SA Tydskrif vir Menslikehulpbronbestuur*, 23(0), a3249. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v23i0.3249>, for more information.

reflecting where they perceived the greatest learning and development. The following section presents these reasons in relation to each coaching approach, providing insight into how and why each method contributed to enhancing their coaching confidence.

Table 3 captures key insights from the participants' data and some nuances that emerged from these key insights:

- *One-on-one: Empathy* – captures connection, safe space and individual attention.
- *Peer-to-peer: Engagement and collaboration* – reflects commitment, practice, learning from others and fun confidence-building.
- *Coaching supervision: Reflection and insights* – highlights reflection, self-awareness, perspective and deeper understanding.

Although most participants chose coaching supervision, they argued that all played a unique role, and the learning was valuable, bringing in different experiences that contributed significantly to their journeys as coaching graduates.

TABLE 2: Sample summary of the most effective coaching education approach.

Coaching teaching approach	Sample quotations
Coaching supervision	'What contributed most to overall confidence, I would say, was (1) supervision, (2) the peer coaching, (3) the one-on-one' (Participant 09)
One-on-one	'That's a hard question. Again, I would say the one-on-one' (Participant 01) 'I think initially one-on-one coaching because it's more grounded and you cannot jump into supervision before coming to grips with the coaching process. So I think one-on-one is much better and then the rest obviously becomes a top up' (Participant 03)
Peer-to-peer	'I think, funny enough, the peer coaching because you're actually coaching' (Participant 12)
Combination of coaching supervision with another	'The one one-on-one, in combination with the one-on-one supervision, I think had the biggest impact on me in improving my confidence, as a coach' (Participant 05)
All three	'That one is a difficult one. I think it's all of them' (Participant 10) 'So it's hard to tell or pinpoint which one contributed to my confidence, because I think all of them contributed to my confidence, to some degree, but I can't say there is one exact one that was the one that contributed to my confidence' (Participant 11)

TABLE 3: Key insights on effective coaching teaching approaches.

Coaching education approach	What made it effective	Key insight
One-on-one	Connection Safe space Individual attention	Connection and empathy
Peer-to-peer	Commitment Coaching frequently More practice Learning from each other in a safe space Learning mindset, no judgement Coaching other people Regular sessions Building confidence in a fun way	Collaboration and practice
Coaching supervision	Great for reflection Helps dig deeper and find blind spots Brings a different perspective Helping me make sense Self-awareness The coach's experience helped	Reflection

TABLE 4: Profile of Participants.

Part. #	Gender	Race	Age group (years)	Coaching before masters Yes/No	Coaching hours
1	Female	White person	36–45	No	Did not specify
2	Female	Black person	56+	Yes	130+
3	Male	Black person	36–45	No	Did not specify
4	Female	White person	36–45	No	Approximately 100
5	Female	White person	36–45	No	Approximately 250+
6	Female	Black person	46–55	No	Did not specify
7	Male	Black person	56+	Yes	150+
8	Male	Black person	46–55	Yes	Approximately 1500+
9	Female	Black person	25–35	No	Approximately 120+
10	Female	Black person	25–35	No	60
11	Female	Black person	Did not indicate	No	80
12	Female	White person	46–55	Yes	115

Part., participant.

Therefore, the fact that coaching supervision was the most popular choice among participants does not mean it is more important than the others; instead, it indicates where most learning occurred, from the participants' perspective. Each approach is discussed in detail below, accompanied by direct quotes from the data.

One-on-one coaching: Learning by observation

Participants were asked whether one-on-one coaching was effective in facilitating their learning and enhancing their coaching confidence. All participants agreed that these sessions allowed them to develop and refine their coaching practices by observing the coach in action. This aligns with Bandura's SLT, which posits that individuals acquire knowledge and skills through direct experience and observational learning (Asakura et al., 2020; Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1991). While acting as coachees, the master's students simultaneously observed and assimilated coaching techniques that they could integrate into their own practice, highlighting the dual role of learning and skill acquisition in one-on-one coaching.

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) further suggests that learning occurs within a social context, influenced by both personal and environmental factors (Asakura et al., 2020; Bandura, 1986, 1991). Although this study did not specifically focus on contextual influences, participants' experiences underscore that coaching learning is situated within the dynamics of the coach-coachee interaction. One participant reflected:

'I think you've also got to put on that different hat of, oh, look at what she does as a coach, or, ooh, I like that, or, oh, I would never say that, you know, pick up little tips or things that might be useful or methods that you might use, so you kind of keep those in the back of your mind, even though the coaching is about you at that specific time.' (Part 01)

'I think what made it so effective was that there was that basis of a trust relationship, the mere fact that I could be open and not be worried about being judged within that coaching context of the relationship, allowed me to be so comfortable with regards to expressing myself, and setting those goals for myself.' (Part 08)

Observational learning, however, has limitations. As noted by Hui and Sue-Chan (2018), observing an expert can reduce opportunities for independent exploration and problem-solving. In this study, participants' learning occurred informally through exposure to expert techniques rather than structured simulations, allowing them to observe effective coaching practices that influenced their subsequent approaches. This vicarious learning fostered a sense of achievement and a desire for continued skill development (Albizu et al., 2019).

One of the participants shared the story of her coach's weaknesses and said that even in such adverse situations, she still learned what makes a bad coach and what kind of coach she does not want to be. A coach who is not present and not a good listener and seems mechanical about the process, rather than having a keen interest in the development of the coaching student.

The findings further indicate that the coach's expertise and relational skills were crucial to the perceived effectiveness of coaching. This aligns with Albizu et al. (2019), who identified coach competence, coach-coachee relationship, coachee readiness and process characteristics as key success factors. Participants consistently attributed their learning and confidence gains to the skills and reflective questioning employed by their coaches (De Haan et al., 2011, 2013; Mbokota, 2019).

These results support SCT, which highlights the role of vicarious learning through role models, specifically expert coaches. Previous studies have demonstrated that effective one-on-one coaching improves confidence (Hall et al., 1999; Kovacs & Corrie, 2017). However, most prior research has focused on organisational executives (Gregner, 1997; Hall et al., 1999; Kovacs & Corrie, 2017; Wasylshyn, 2003), with limited attention to graduate student coaches. Studies of college students (Steinwedel, 2001) and postgraduate learners (Geber, 2010) did not address coaching-specific contexts. This research, therefore, extends the literature by confirming that effective one-on-one coaching can enhance coaching confidence among master's-level coaching students.

Peer coaching: Learning by practice

Peer coaching reflects the principles of experiential learning, where knowledge and skills are acquired through hands-on practice and reflection (Griffiths, 2005; Kolb & Kolb, 2009). Participants in this study reported that peer coaching provided a safe and non-judgemental environment, allowing them to express themselves freely, practise coaching techniques and make mistakes without fear, which in turn enhanced their skill development and *coaching confidence* (Ladyshewsky, 2010; Parker et al., 2015). One participant noted:

'I will say this, it was good, but both of us were still learning ... But I suppose what was important there is that it was also building your confidence, to coach someone who wasn't going to judge you. We knew that it was a time for learning, we weren't judging one another, and there was a high trust relationship between us.' (Part 06)

Trust and mutual respect were central to effective peer coaching. As participants engaged with peers of equal status, they were able to reflect on each other's practices, observe alternative strategies and integrate these insights into their own coaching (Asakura et al., 2020; Phillips et al., 2016). This aligns with Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model, which emphasises that learning is deepened when concrete experiences are enriched through reflection, thinking and subsequent action (Kolb & Kolb, 2009).

Participants highlighted that observing peers in action helped them identify strengths and areas for improvement, fostering self-awareness and reinforcing confidence in their coaching abilities. Similar findings were reported in studies of peer coaching among educators and healthcare professionals, where participants experienced increased confidence, motivation and readiness to apply newly acquired skills (Carlson et al., 2020; Ladyshevsky, 2010). One participant stated:

'When you're an observer, it's easy for you to pinpoint what was good or what was not up to standard. By doing that, you're also learning that, look, this is what I've observed happening, what do I need to do to be able not to do that, because it was not proper. So that's another good way, when you sit there and be part of that triad.' (Part 05)

Overall, peer coaching in this study facilitated experiential learning, translating theoretical knowledge into practice while simultaneously enhancing *coaching confidence*. Participants not only refined their practical skills but also developed the self-assurance necessary to engage effectively with clients, reinforcing the critical role of peer interactions in coach education. These findings corroborate previous research highlighting peer coaching as a valuable mechanism for boosting confidence, reflective practice and professional competence (Asakura et al., 2020; Carlson et al., 2020; Ladyshevsky, 2010; Parker et al., 2015; Phillips et al., 2016):

'I think to actually improve your confidence you've got to coach.' (Part 12)

Coaching supervision: Learning by reflection as a supervisee

Coaching supervision provided participants with opportunities to learn vicariously by observing both the supervising coach and their peers, aligning with Bandura's SCT (Bandura, 1986, 2008). Participants reported that hearing about others' experiences and receiving guidance from supervisors helped alleviate self-doubt, avoid repeating mistakes and foster confidence in their own coaching abilities. Both group and one-on-one supervision formats facilitated diverse and personally relevant learning, with group supervision broadening perspectives and creating a shared learning environment where participants could give and receive insights regarding common coaching challenges (Passmore & McGoldrick, 2009). One participant stated:

'I think what was memorable about the group supervision was that we were learning together, so you were also able to give feedback on the next person, and learn maybe from their own mistakes. So you were observing and participating at the same time. So that's what made it effective.' (Part 03)

Supervision was described as transformational rather than transactional (Hargrove, 2003), promoting deep reflection, independent thought and critical examination of personal beliefs and coaching approaches (Christie et al., 2015). Participants noted that these processes enabled them to achieve breakthroughs in understanding their own coaching styles and professional identities:

'Supervision is great for reflection.' (Part 12)

The expertise, experience and relational skills of the coach supervisor were identified as central to effective supervision. Participants valued supervisors' ability to provide constructive feedback and create a psychologically safe, confidential space conducive to reflection and learning (Carroll, 2007; De Haan, 2017; Wingrove et al., 2020). Supervision fostered trust, openness and vulnerability, which enhanced both learning and confidence:

'The coaching supervision for me gives me a platform where I could go and say to this expert or master, this is what is happening during my coaching, and now you are able to test your thinking and always get some advice when needed.' (Part 05)

Reflective practice was pivotal to learning. Participants reported that reflecting on insights gained during supervision allowed them to improve their coaching practice and integrate new strategies, consistent with Mezirow's transformative learning theory and Kolb's experiential learning model (Gray, 2006; Mbokota, 2019; Mezirow, 1990). Without reflection coupled with application, learning would not translate into enhanced competence or confidence.

These findings support previous research indicating that coaching supervision is a key mechanism for professional development, enhancing self-efficacy and coaching confidence (Armstrong & Geddes, 2009; De Haan, 2017; Hawkins & Smith, 2006; Lawrence & Whyte, 2014; Passmore & McGoldrick, 2009; Tkach & DiGirolamo, 2017). Unlike traditional one-on-one coaching, supervision offers a structured and supportive environment where postgraduate coaching students can critically examine their practices, receive expert guidance and gain the confidence necessary for effective professional practice. In this study, master's coaching students participated in coaching supervision as part of the practical requirements of their programme, and this research aimed to explore their perceptions of its effectiveness in enhancing *coaching confidence*.

Conclusion

Recommendations

This study demonstrates that observational and experiential learning through one-on-one coaching, peer coaching and coaching supervision significantly enhances *coaching confidence* among master's in coaching students. Engaging in these approaches enabled students to acquire practical skills, observe expert practice, reflect on their experiences and strengthen their self-efficacy, thereby preparing them for effective professional coaching practice.

The findings highlight the importance of integrating multiple coaching methodologies into curricula. Structured opportunities for observation, reflection and peer interaction within psychologically safe learning environments foster both competence and confidence. Coaching educators are encouraged to provide guidance on how students engage with each approach to maximise learning outcomes and ensure practical application of theoretical knowledge.

This study contributes to the literature by identifying *coaching confidence* as a distinct graduate competence, a previously underexplored area. While prior research has primarily focused on the benefits to coachees, these findings underscore the critical role of coach education in developing the confidence of coaches themselves, offering practical guidance for curriculum design and advancing both theory and practice in professional coaching.

Limitations and future research

This study was limited to 12 participants from a single institution, restricting the generalisability of the findings. Future research should examine larger, more diverse samples across multiple institutions and countries.

The study relied on self-reported perceptions of the effectiveness of three coaching education approaches in developing coaching confidence, rather than objective measures. Future studies could adopt a quantitative design with pre- and post-programme assessments of coaching confidence to control for prior experience and other external factors, isolating the effects of the teaching approaches.

Prior coaching experience and concurrent interventions were not accounted for, which may have influenced participants' reported confidence. Quantitative approaches could address these confounding variables to measure the unique contribution of each approach better.

Assessing coaching confidence before and after practical interventions is recommended to better understand the effectiveness of different coaching education approaches. Longitudinal studies could further examine how confidence developed during coach education translates into professional practice across diverse contexts.

Further research could also explore the different benefits of modelled behaviour in observational learning among peers versus an expert coach or supervisor.

Finally, a bibliometric study investigating the evolution of coach education and training, particularly graduate competencies, is recommended to inform academic curricula and professional development programmes. These findings can guide the design of coaching programmes to maximise the development of graduate coaching confidence and foreground the start of an investigation into the importance of coaching confidence by professional bodies too.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

CRedit authorship contribution

Amukelani Mashele: Conceptualisation. Jabulile Msimango-Galawe: Project administration, Supervision. All authors reviewed the article, contributed to the discussion of results, approved the final version for submission and publication, and take responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

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Data availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are available upon request from the corresponding author, Jabulile Msimango-Galawe. The data are not publicly available because they contain information that could compromise the privacy of research participants.

Disclaimer

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