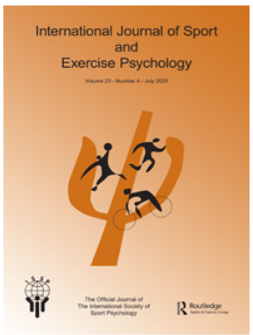

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Talk to me! Examining parent-coach communication frequency and satisfaction in youth soccer

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ABSTRACT

Regular and honest communication can enhance trust and facilitate cooperation between parents and coaches in youth sport. Given the significance of positive parent-coach interactions for athletes' development and sport-related outcomes, parents' and coaches' use of communication in day-to-day activities warrants increased scientific attention. This study sought to assess the frequency, perceived effectiveness, and perceived satisfaction of digital and non-digital communication modes between parents and coaches in youth soccer. To meet that objective, a quantitative online survey was administered to parents ($N = 1024$) and coaches ($N = 340$) in amateur and elite youth soccer to understand perceptions of mutual communication. Results showed that parents perceived communication frequency to be significantly lower across modes (i.e., regular conversations after practice/competitions, phone calls) compared to coaches. Further, WhatsApp groups were the most frequently implemented but not the most effective mode of communication for both parents and coaches on a weekly basis. In general, the majority of parents indicated to be satisfied with contemporary parent-coach communication which significantly contributed to a positive perception of overall parent-coach cooperation. Findings will be discussed within the light of potential implications for the use of communication strategies in coaching, coach education, as well as organisational decision making in youth sport.

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Youth sport; coaching; alignment; online survey; cooperation

Parents and coaches are influential social agents for children's development, psychosocial, and performance-related outcomes in youth sport (Dorsch et al., 2022). As members of a multi-directional responsive social network (see Dorsch et al., 2022), parents and coaches not only have the potential to individually impact athletes' outcomes (e.g., Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015; Holt et al., 2017) but their behaviours, experiences, and attitudes are interconnected and shaped by repeated actions and interactions with each other. Recently, a line of research has provided initial insights on the nature of the parent-coach relationship and its intricacies (Horne et al., 2022, 2023; O'Donnell et al., 2022; Preston et al., 2020; Santos et al., 2024; Wall et al., 2019). In essence, these studies attributed a key role to regular communication to facilitate an effective parent-

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coach relationship. The aim of the current study, therefore, was to assess the frequency, perceived effectiveness, and perceived satisfaction of communication between parents and coaches in youth soccer.

Extensive evidence suggests that interactions and relationships between parents and coaches can contribute to experiences of stress, frustration, and conflict (e.g., Camiré et al., 2016; Gould et al., 2008; Knight & Harwood, 2009). For example, poor communication skills and a lack of transparency by coaches reflected sources of stress for parents which can nurture feelings of frustration and anxiety and might manifest a reluctance to engage with coaches (Eckardt et al., 2022, 2023; Harwood & Knight, 2009; Harwood et al., 2010; Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005). Similarly, a display of negative behaviour and unrealistic expectations by parents may lead to coaches excluding parents instead of cooperating with them (Gould et al., 2008; Ross et al., 2015). Studies have suggested that while parents and coaches prefer a shared responsibility for youth development (Horne et al., 2023), they often appear to be misaligned in their preferences, experiences, and expectations towards the design and delivery of youth sport programmes including parent-coach communication (Horne et al., 2022, 2023). A recent review (Santos et al., 2024) identified communication as a facilitator in creating meaningful and positive coach-parent relationships. Specifically, frequent and honest communication was found to enhance trust and facilitate connections between parents and coaches (Horne et al., 2022; Lisinskiene et al., 2019; O'Donnell et al., 2022; Preston et al., 2020; Ross et al., 2015; Santos et al., 2024). Frequent communication can bolster transparency of coaching behaviours and decisions, increase parent-coach alignment regarding expectations and sport-related goals, and facilitate parent-coach cooperation (Preston et al., 2020). Findings suggested that coaches should not only initiate regular conversations but consider an adequate frequency and mode (e.g., phone calls, face to face, WhatsApp, e-mail) of interacting with parents. Further, communication modes besides in-person meetings have been perceived as an effective way to engage unavailable parents by coaches and reflect viable alternatives to enhance parental engagement and to navigate relational boundaries (O'Donnell et al., 2022). Even conversations beyond sport-related topics have been identified as a contributor to positive parent-coach cooperation (Ross et al., 2015). Building on the largely qualitative body of evidence surrounding communication as an effective practice (Santos et al., 2024), further knowledge on specific characteristics of communication such as its modes and frequency as well as its role in contributing to satisfactory parent-coach interactions is warranted.

Interviews with parents and coaches showed that they likely learned how to communicate with each other through a process of trial and error (Eckardt & Dorsch, 2024). Although evidence-based guidelines on how to communicate effectively with parents (e.g., Smoll et al., 2011; Van Mullem & Cole, 2015) or with coaches (Dorsch et al., 2017; Eckardt & Lobinger, 2024) have been introduced, criticism has been raised that a lack of skills and experience might hinder an effective implementation, particularly for coaches (O'Connor, 2011). Further, published guidelines often take a typology-oriented approach to communicating with parents (Elliott, 2021), meaning coaches are recommended to address parents based on their involvement "type" (e.g., performance-focused, sideline coach; see Van Mullem & Cole, 2015). This, however, might perpetuate the idea of merely having to adapt communication based on pre-defined categorizations while neglecting the complexity of the sport parenting experience (Elliott, 2021). For example, recent work (Eckardt & Dorsch, 2024)

suggested that children's career stages can facilitate or hinder parent-coach communication, as clubs and coaches attributed a higher importance to engaging with parents of younger children (i.e., sampling stage; Côté et al., 2007). Further, parents and coaches reported individual and contextual barriers to interacting with each other, for example, cultural specificities and language, perceived inapproachability and a lack of closeness, a lack of opportunities to engage with each other on a day-to-day basis, characteristics of the sport context (e.g., community, professional), or a club management which does not encourage parent-coach cooperation (Eckardt & Dorsch, 2024; O'Donnell et al., 2022). For example, sport and club culture, or management practices towards parents (e.g., organisational support) have been found to influence parents' beliefs, behaviours, and expectations as part of their socialisation in(to) sports (Dorsch et al., 2009; McMahon & Penney, 2015). As such, the contextualisation of parent-coach interactions should be considered, as it might impact relationships and practices (Santos et al., 2024).

Taken together, communication has been recognised as a decisive contributor to the nature of and satisfaction with parent-coach relationships. To advance knowledge on parent-coach interactions (Santos et al., 2024), the purpose of this study was to explore the extent (i.e., frequency, communication modes) of how parents and coaches communicate with each other as well as the perceived effectiveness of and satisfaction with it. We were further interested in whether communication satisfaction relates to overall satisfaction with parent-coach cooperation. Given previous evidence highlighting the importance of sport contexts and career trajectories for psychosocial experiences in sports, we explored how parent-coach communication might be influenced by context (i.e., amateur soccer and professional youth soccer academies) and children's career stage (i.e., sampling, specialising, investment; see Côté et al., 2007).

Materials and methods

Participants

Parents

A total of 1042 parents (495 mothers, 544 fathers, and three non-binary individuals) completed the online survey. Parents' age ranged from 27 to 71 years ($M = 45.4$, $SD = 6.3$). A minority of parents (18%) reported having a nationality other than German. Most parents reported being married (84%), having two children (55%), and having completed high school or higher education (63%). Half of the parents (50%) indicated to be working full-time and had a background in competitive sports, with soccer representing the most mentioned one (46%). Parents reported investing between zero and 40 hours per week ($M = 10.1$, $SD = 7.5$) in their children's soccer participation. Family annual total income was assessed in eleven categories ranging from "0 to 9999 Euro" to "100,000 Euro and above"; the majority of parents disclosed to be earning between 60,000 and 69,999 Euro per year. Children of participating parents were largely boys (89%), between four and 19 years old ($M = 12.4$, $SD = 2.9$), and mostly attended organised amateur youth soccer (59%).

Coaches

340 coaches (298 men, 41 women, and one non-binary individual) participated in the study. Coaches were between 14 and 70 years old ($M = 40.0$, $SD = 12.5$). The majority of

coaches (65%) reported having children and having completed high school or higher education (66%). Almost all coaches (92%) indicated to have played soccer in their childhood/youth. Regarding their soccer qualification, about one third of coaches (32%) stated to not hold a coaching license at the point of data collection; remaining coaches all indicated to have obtained an official coaching license by the German Football Association (Deutscher Fußball-Bund, DFB). Coaches reported to be employed part-time (44%), full-time (10%), or with an earning/time limit (46%) in either an amateur soccer club (74%), a youth soccer academy (22%), or a soccer association (4%). More than half of the coaches (65%) were coaching a boys' soccer team at the point of data collection and predominantly represented head coaches (69%) of their respective teams. Further, coaches indicated to spend between zero and 15 hours per week ($M = 1.9$, $SD = 2.4$[1]) on engaging with parents.

Procedure

To gather data from parents and coaches in German youth soccer, an online survey was launched through the platform SoSci Survey between August and December 2022. The link to the online survey was forwarded via e-mail lists, personal contacts, sports psychologists, and coaches working in German amateur youth soccer and youth soccer academies, soccer associations in Germany, teachers at secondary schools, and social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn). Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the expected duration of the online survey, their right to refuse or withdraw from participation at any time without consequences, and the anonymity and storage of their data.

The online survey consisted of three parts: (1) demographic information, (2) communication between parents and coaches, and (3) perceived organisational support. Given the intent to involve families with diverse sociocultural backgrounds, the parent questionnaire was available in seven languages: German, English, French, Spanish, Russian, Turkish, and Arabic. The surveys have been translated into the respective languages by experts in the field of sport science/sport psychology who were native to the countries. With the exception of the Spanish version, all translators also had proficient knowledge of German. The English version of the parent survey can be found in the Electronic Supplement.

Overall, 47% of total respondents initiated the survey but did not complete it. On average, participants spent 21 minutes completing the online survey. The study did not control for multiple survey submissions of one participant. Approval of the local ethics committee of the first author's university was obtained (No. 147/2022) and the study adhered to APA 7th Edition standards for ethical engagement with research participants.

Measures

Demographics

Parents and coaches were asked to provide demographic characteristics including their age, gender, marital status, education, employment, number of children, family's annual household income, country of birth, and their own experiences with sports. Parents were further asked to provide information on their respective children participating in soccer (e.g., age, gender, soccer league, soccer team, amateur or academy soccer

context, hours of weekly practice, and soccer experience). Coaches were further asked to share information about their coaching background (e.g., soccer license, soccer coaching experience, and current team characteristics, i.e., competing soccer league, age group and gender distribution of team). To consider developmental effects, children's age (i.e., parental report or coach report on what team they were coaching) was further allocated into three categories: sampling stage (6–13 years), specialising stage (13–15 years), and investment stage (above 15 years; see Côté et al., 2007).

Communication between parents and coaches

Given no questionnaires to date have assessed communication between parents and coaches in sports, this study used measures on parent-teacher cooperation from educational psychology as a related research area. As such, we understand sport and school as similar achievement contexts in which cooperative adult involvement is essential. Communication between parents and coaches was assessed using an adapted version of subscales of the questionnaire on cooperation between parents and professionals in special education (Sodogé et al., 2012). Sport-adaptation was achieved through substituting school-related terms with sport-related ones (e.g., club instead of school, coach instead of teacher). The original questionnaire by Sodogé et al. (2012) is in German and consists of a parent version and a teacher version. The questionnaire assesses (1) frequency and mode of communication (e.g., "How often do the following forms of communication between coaches and parents [i.e., parent-coach conference, feedback conversations, regular conversations, phone calls, e-mails, WhatsApp messages] occur in your child's club?"; scaling: weekly, monthly, several times per season, once per season, never), (2) perceived effectiveness of communication modes (e.g., "How helpful do you experience the following forms of communication [i.e., parent-coach conference, feedback conversations, regular conversations, phone calls, e-mails, WhatsApp messages]?"; scaling: 1 = "not at all helpful" to 5 = "very helpful"), (3) information flow (e.g., "We are informed well about", e.g., the individual development or behaviour of our child/training content/appointments for parents [parent version]; family-related changes/mental and physical health issues of the child/behavioural problems or educational issues of the child [coach version]; scaling: 1 = "absolutely not true" to 5 = "completely true"), and (4) perceived satisfaction with parent-coach communication and perceived satisfaction with overall cooperation (e.g., "Please give an overall grade for the cooperation between the coach and you as a parent.", scaling: 1 = "very unsatisfying" to 10 = "very satisfying"). Satisfaction with communication frequency between parents and coaches was assessed using a categorical format (scaling: "Yes", "More frequent communication desired.", "Less communication desired.").

Perceived organisational support

The Perceived Organisational Support (POS-s; Siebenaler & Fischer, 2020) was used to measure the extent of how parents and coaches feel supported by the respective soccer club. The original scale was adapted to meet sport-specific requirements (e.g., "My child's soccer club cares about my opinion.") A total of eight items are measured on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = "strongly disagree", 7 = "strongly agree"). Given two items of the POS-s are negatively formulated, they were recoded for subsequent data analysis. Higher values of the POS-s reflect a higher perceived organisational support.

For data analysis, only cases where at least four items had been responded to were considered (Siebenaler & Fischer, 2020). Further, a median split was performed to discriminate parents and coaches with low (i.e., $M = 1–3$) and high POS-s values ($M = 5–7$) for further analyses.

Data analysis

Before commencing the analysis, data was screened for careless responders by reviewing the time of completion for the survey (Ward & Meade, 2023) based on a completion speed index provided by the platform SoSci Survey (i.e., individuals with a value higher than 2.0 should be excluded; Leiner, 2019). Missing values were handled through a pairwise exclusion of data following recommendations for survey data (Mirzaei et al., 2022). A significant Little's MCAR test revealed a systematic pattern of missing values in the data, χ^2 (df = 928) = 1145.62, $p < .001$. This pattern appeared to be driven by parents being less responsive than coaches and thus exhibiting higher percentages of missing values across variables of interest. A complete overview on missing values per variable of interest can be found in Table 1 in the Electronic Supplement.

All statistics are reported as means (M) and standard deviations (SD). In addition, effect sizes and 95% confidence intervals (CI) are provided. Bonferroni correction to control for Type I error was applied to all analyses following recommendations of Jones et al. (2015). As such, a separate inference was used for tests investigating different propositions. A Mann–Whitney U test was conducted to identify differences in perceived frequency of communication between parents and coaches (15 comparisons, adjusted $\alpha = .0033$). Kruskal–Wallis test was used for additional exploratory post-hoc analyses to assess differences in perceived communication frequency across athletes' career stages (10 comparisons, adjusted $\alpha = .005$). Independent t-tests were conducted to examine differences in perceived effectiveness of communication (5 comparisons, adjusted $\alpha = .01$) as well as on overall satisfaction with parent-coach cooperation (3 comparisons, adjusted $\alpha = .0167$). Further, comparisons between parents and coaches with low and high perceived organisational support and their evaluation of overall parent-coach cooperation were performed (1 comparison, $\alpha = .05$).

For the Mann–Whitney U test, Rosenthal's r (1991) was manually calculated. Effect sizes of r between .1 and <.3 were interpreted as small, .3 to <.5 as moderate, and ≥.5 and higher as large. Cohen's d was applied for independent t-tests with effect sizes of $d <$ 0.3 considered as trivial, 0.3 to <0.5 as small, 0.5 to <0.8 as moderate, and 0.8 and higher as large (Ellis, 2010). All conducted tests were two-tailed. IBM SPSS Statistics Version 29.0.0.0 (241) was used for all statistical analyses. Histograms of perceived frequencies of communication modes as well as tests of normal distribution and homogeneity of variances are provided in the Electronic Supplement.

An a-priori sample size calculation using the open-source statistics software G*Power (Version 3.1.9.6; Faul et al., 2007, 2009) with an estimated moderate effect size ($d = .4$; $f^2 = .15$; see Brysbaert, 2019 for recommendations on using a default effect size if no a-priori evidence is available), an alpha level of .05, and a power of .9 yielded a total of 278 participants ($n = 139$ per group) for the Mann–Whitney U tests and a total of 266 participants ($n = 133$ per group) for the independent t-tests.[2] Given the total sample size of 1382 participants, analyses in the present study should be well-saturated.

Results

Frequency and mode of communication

Overall, findings showed that WhatsApp group messages appear to be the most frequently used mode of communication for parents and coaches on a weekly basis, whereas phone calls and e-mails were found to be chosen the least. Further, a multitude of parents and coaches indicated that parent-coach conferences (17% both) and feedback conversations (23% parents, 28% coaches) never occur throughout the season.

On a descriptive level, parents tended to indicate a lower perceived frequency across communication modes (i.e., parent-coach conference, feedback conversations, regular conversations after practice/competitions, phone calls, e-mails, WhatsApp), particularly for weekly and monthly interactions with coaches (see Figures 1 and 2 for a detailed overview on parents' perceptions and Figures 3 and 4 for coaches' perceptions). When comparing parent and coach perceptions overall, findings showed that parents reported regular conversations after practice/competitions, $U = 44{,}964.0$, $p < .001$, $r = -.417$, as well as phone calls, $U = 44{,}901.5$, $p < .001$, $r = -.433$, to be happening significantly less frequently compared to coaches. These findings are mirrored in both an amateur soccer context (regular conversations: $U = 16{,}871.0$, $p < .001$, $r = -.373$; phone calls: $U = 15{,}204.0$, $p < .001$, $r = -.431$) and professional youth soccer academies (regular conversations: $U = 5072.0$, $p < .001$, $r = -.343$; phone calls: $U = 3369.0$, $p < .001$, $r = -.447$). Similarities in perceived communication frequency were observed for the absence of parent-coach conferences as well as feedback conversations and regular conversations to be occurring several times per season.

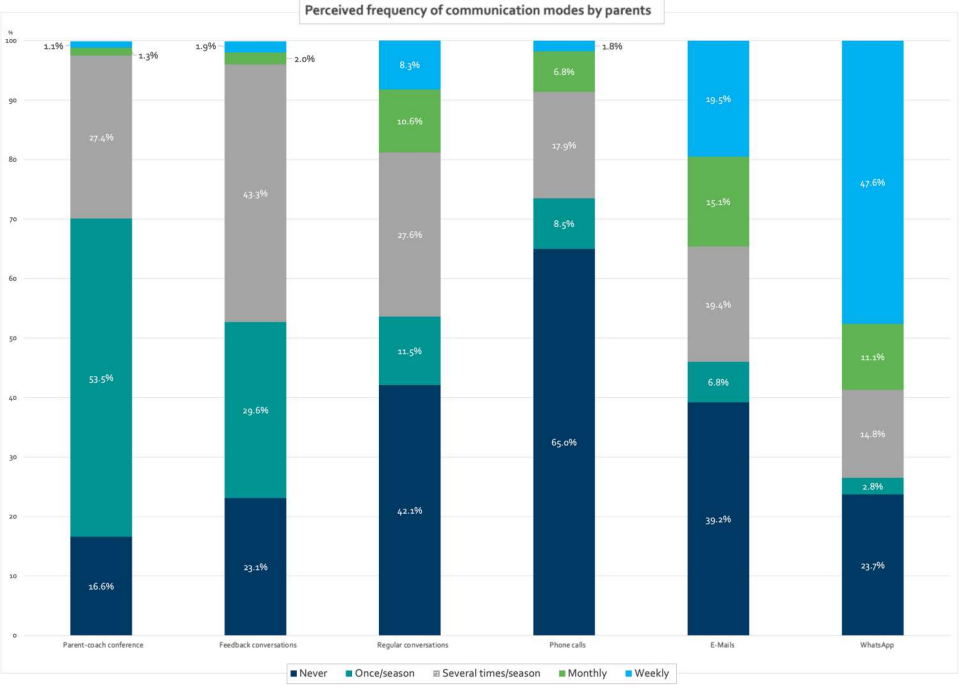
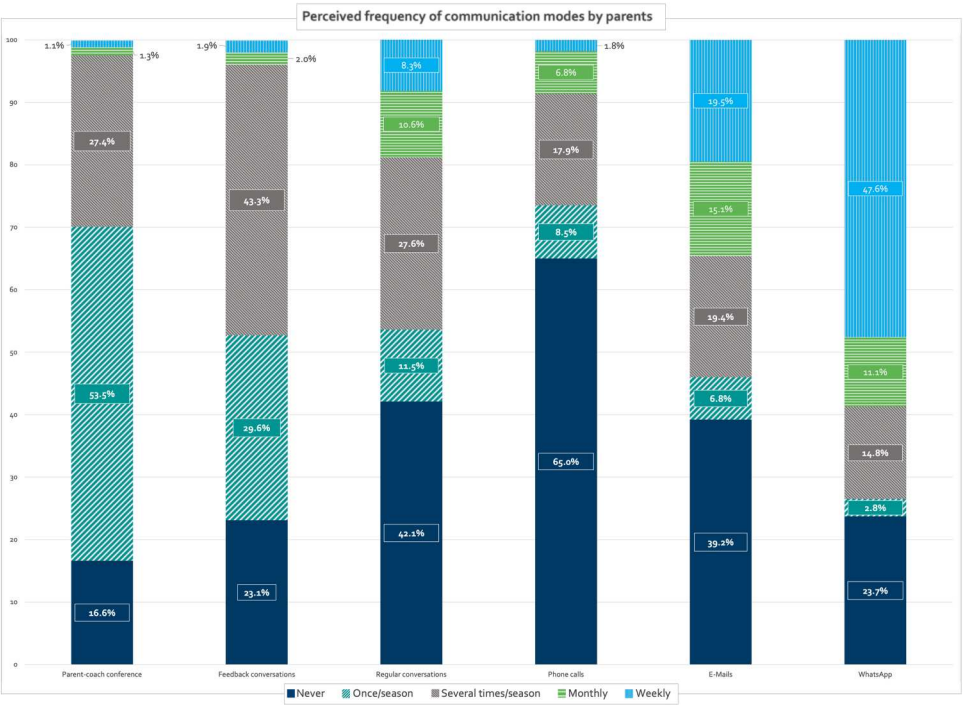


Figure 1. Perceived frequency of communication modes by parents.



Note. Columns without a pattern = "never", columns with right-to-left pattern = "once/season", columns with left-to-right pattern = "several times/season", columns with horizontal pattern = "monthly", columns with vertical pattern = "weekly".

Figure 2. Perceived frequency of communication modes by parents – Accessible design for colour-blind readers.

Further, significant differences in parents' and coaches' perceived communication frequency across athletes' career stages (i.e., sampling, specialisation, investment; Côté et al., 2007) were observed. For parents, perceived communication frequency of parent-coach conferences, $H(2, n = 727) = 17.416$, $p = <.001$, was significantly lower in the investment stage compared to a sampling and specialisation stage of their children. Further, perceived frequency of regular conversations, $H(2, n = 720) = 23.738$, $p = <.001$, and WhatsApp messages, $H(2, n = 730) = 98.908$, $p = <.001$, was highest during children's sampling stage. Coaches perceived WhatsApp messages to be occurring significantly more frequently during the sampling stage, $H(2, n = 254) = 14.718$, $p = <.001$.

Perceived effectiveness of communication

Results showed significant differences between parents and coaches in perceived effectiveness of parent-coach conferences, $t(973) = 3.68$, $p < .001$, $d = .26$ [.11, .40], feedback conversations, $t(951) = 5.48$, $p < .001$, $d = .43$ [.29, .58], and contact via e-mail, $t(921) = 7.08$, $p < .001$, $d = .54$ [.39, .69]. In particular, parents perceived feedback conversations with coaches about their children's performance as the most effective mode of communication ($M = 4.4$, $SD = 1.2$; scale: 1–5). For coaches, parent-coach conferences were perceived to be most helpful when interacting with parents ($M = 3.9$, $SD = 1.2$; scale: 1–5). Both parents and coaches reported contact via e-mail as least effective ($M_P = 3.1$, $SD_P =$

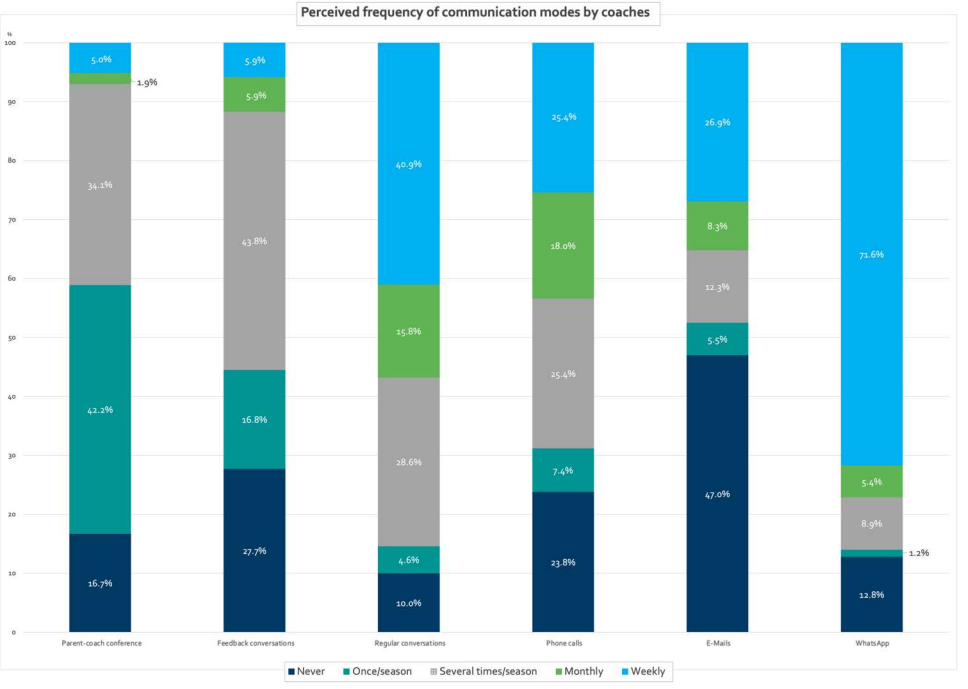


Figure 3. Perceived frequency of communication modes by coaches.

1.4; $M_C = 2.3$, $SD_C = 1.3$; scale: 1–5). Figures 5 and 6 provide a detailed overview on parents' and coaches' perceived effectiveness of all communication modes.

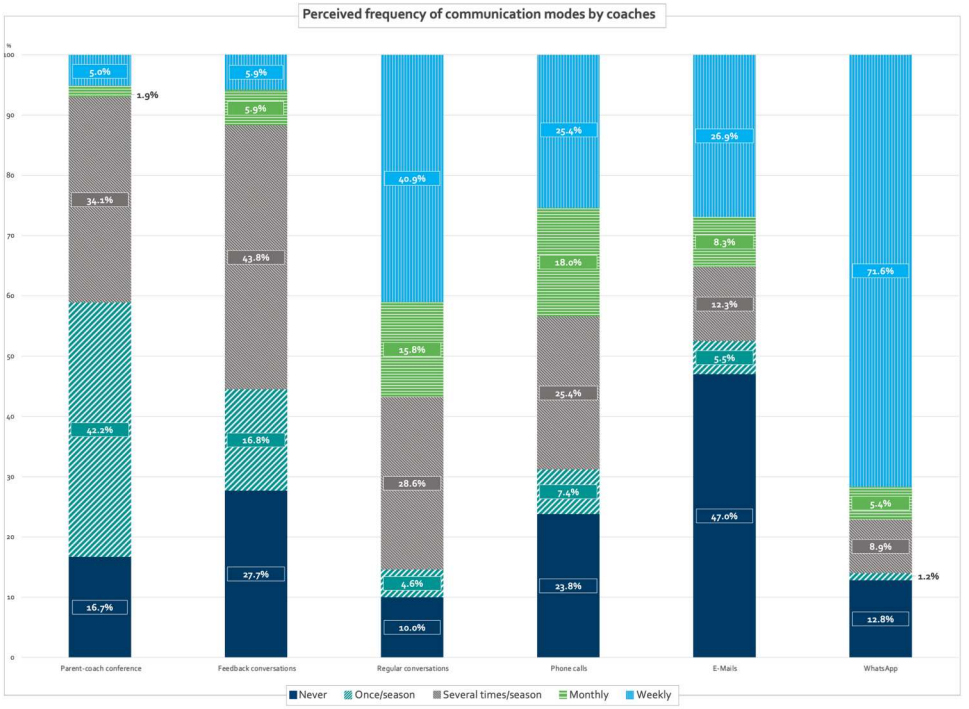
As indicated by low values on adequate information flow, parents indicated a preference to receive more information on their children's development ($M = 1.9$, $SD = 1.1$) and performance ($M = 2.0$, $SD = 1.1$), whereas coaches would have liked to know more detail on educational issues ($M = 1.3$, $SD = 0.5$), family-related changes ($M = 1.4$, $SD = 0.6$), and transfer intentions of athletes ($M = 1.6$, $SD = 0.8$; all scales: 1–5).

Perceived satisfaction with parent-coach communication and overall cooperation

About two thirds of parents reported being satisfied with the frequency of parent-coach communication, while 35% of parents expressed a desire for increased interactions. Those parents who indicated to be satisfied with communication frequency, on average, evaluated overall cooperation with coaches significantly higher ($M = 8.5$, $SD = 1.5$) than parents who were not satisfied ($M = 6.9$, $SD = 2.1$), $t(334) = 9.62$, $p < .001$, d = 0.90 [0.72, 1.07].

When comparing parents' and coaches' perceived satisfaction, parents were significantly more satisfied with parent-coach cooperation in amateur youth soccer ($M_P = 8.0$, $SD_P = 2.0$; $M_C = 7.2$, $SD_C = 1.9$); $t(379) = 3.71$, $p < .001$, d = .39 [.18, .59], whereas coaches were more satisfied in youth soccer academies ($M_P = 7.1$, $SD_P = 2.8$; $M_C = 7.7$, $SD_C = 1.1$; all scales: 1–10); $t(130) = 2.78$, $p = .003$, d = .23 [−.08, .54].

Further, results showed a significant relationship between parents' assessment of parent-coach cooperation and their general satisfaction with the amateur youth soccer



Note. Columns without a pattern = "never", columns with right-to-left pattern = "once/season", columns with left-to-right pattern = "several times/season", columns with horizontal pattern = "monthly", columns with vertical pattern = "weekly".

Figure 4. Perceived frequency of communication modes by coaches – Accessible design for colour-blind readers.

club ($r(241) = .60$, $p < .001$) and the youth soccer academy ($r(381) = .60$, $p < .001$) of their children. This might be explained through the perceived organisational support from parents. Parents with a low POS-s value gave a significantly lower rating for overall cooperation with coaches ($M = 5.79$, $SD = 2.75$) compared to parents with a high POS-s value ($M = 9.01$; $SD = 1.63$; all scales: 1–10), $t(371.43) = -14.16$, $p < .001$; $d = -1.34$ [−1.57, −1.11].

Discussion

The purpose of this article was to assess the frequency, perceived effectiveness, and perceived satisfaction of communication between parents and coaches in youth soccer. We used an online survey to collect data from both parents and coaches to offer diverse perspectives about communicating with each other.

Overall, parents perceived communication frequency across various modes to be lower compared to coaches. This might be explained by the natural ratio of parents and coaches in youth soccer: In teams with a squad size of approximately 20 players, one coach likely has to attend to a multitude of parents. As such, it appears reasonable that the proportion of perceived one-on-one conversations per parent is lower compared to a coach's assessment of communication frequency with the whole parent group. However, results suggested that parents value the opportunity for one-on-one conversations given there is an unmet desire for an increased amount of feedback conversations throughout

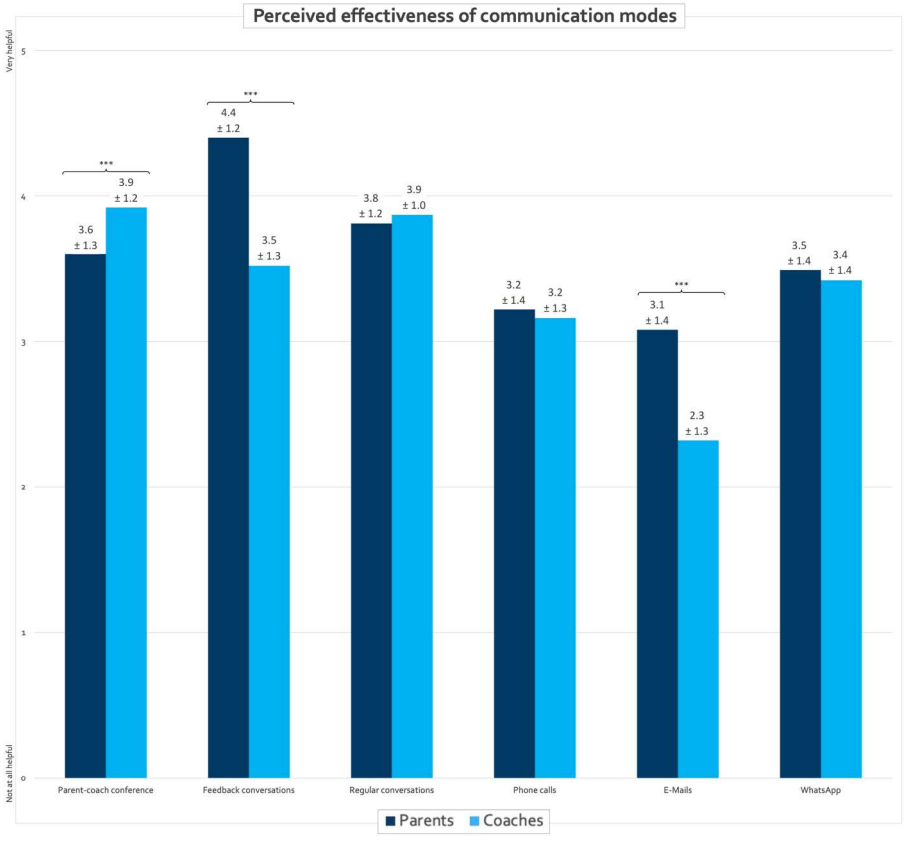
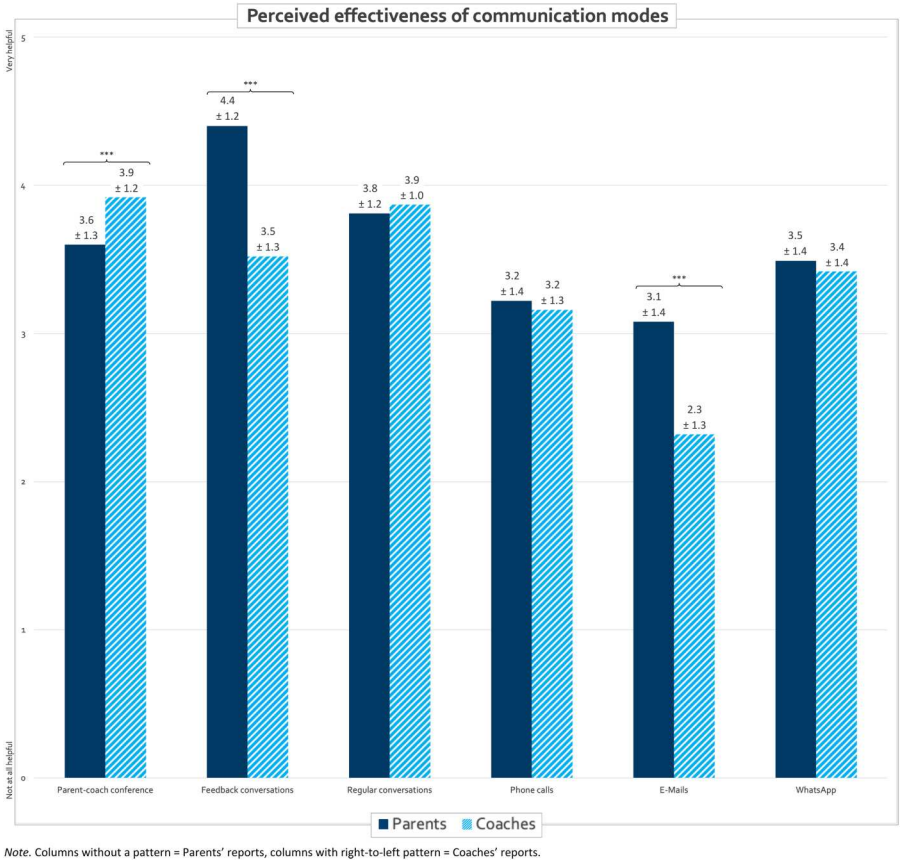


Figure 5. Perceived effectiveness of communication modes.

the season. Specifically, parents expressed a preference to receive more information about their children's performance (also see Harwood et al., 2010; Preston et al., 2020). This might be particularly relevant when considering that a multitude of parents and coaches indicated feedback conversations to not be occurring at all although both have evaluated them as helpful. Although coaches might intend to maintain communication boundaries in protecting themselves from parents' reactions and potential accusations, regular conversations about children's development and (in-)adequate sport performance can facilitate trust and reduce conflict (Preston et al., 2020).

According to the results, coaches' most frequently applied mode of communication was parent-coach conferences. In youth sport, coaches tend to invest a considerable amount of time into their job despite often being employed on a part-time basis or with limited monthly hours (Smoll et al., 2011). As such, parent-coach conferences allow coaches to address a multitude of parents and distribute relevant information in a feasible and timesaving manner (Smoll et al., 2011). Our study, however, identified a misalignment between coaches' communication behaviour and their preference for obtaining information from parents. In particular, coaches sought more information from parents on children's family- and education-related background as well as potential transfer intentions. Obtaining this information, however, might require a certain level of trust



Note. Columns without a pattern = Parents' reports, columns with right-to-left pattern = Coaches' reports.

Figure 6. Perceived effectiveness of communication modes – Accessible design for colour-blind readers.

from parents and opportunities for one-on-one informal (i.e., casual) conversations. Previous studies have found regular conversations and interactions extending beyond sports as facilitative for perceived trust and a cooperative parent-coach relationship (Preston et al., 2020; Ross et al., 2015). As evident in the results, a significant number of parents perceived these informal conversations with coaches after practice or competitions to not be taking place at all, whereas coaches predominantly indicated that they happen on a weekly basis. Focusing on informal conversations with parents and keeping track of which parents were communicated with through systems/audits or purposefully inviting parents to practice might thus reflect untapped potentials for coaches.

Our findings showed significant differences of parents' and coaches' perceived communication frequency across children's career stages (i.e., sampling, specialisation, investment; Côté et al., 2007). As such, both parents and coaches perceived regular conversations after practice/competitions and WhatsApp messages to be occurring more during the sampling stage of soccer participation. These perceptions speak to the dynamic roles of parents within children's sport careers (Côté et al., 2007; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). While parents reflect primary reference and contact persons for children

and coaches during the sampling stage, their involvement tends to decrease as children progress in age.

In an increasingly digitalised world, it might not be surprising that WhatsApp group messages were the most frequently used mode of communication between parents and coaches. Digital communication on social media platforms such as WhatsApp offers a cost-effective way to send and receive text messages as well as audios, images, or videos in real-time (Church & de Oliveira, 2013). As such, it often increases communication frequency and accessibility between its users (Thompson et al., 2015), although often at the cost of a perceived constant availability (Vahedi & Saiphoo, 2018). For example, evidence on parent-teacher communication indicated that WhatsApp usage is perceived as easily accessible, fast, and it supported an increased bidirectional exchange of information as well as involvement of parents (Aviva & Simon, 2021). Further, teachers seem to largely use WhatsApp to report school-related activities, to navigate parental involvement, and to inform parents on organisational aspects including requests for and reminders of individual contributions by parents (Erdreich, 2020). As such, it can enhance transparency on everyday school life and teaching methods for parents (Erdreich, 2020) – a practice that could suitably be adopted in youth sports to minimise tension between parents and coaches. Overall, our findings indicated that parents and coaches evaluated digital communication modes as less effective compared to face-to-face communication. Interviews with teachers revealed that traditional, face-to-face communication allowed them an opportunity for personal connection with parents, particularly in times of hardships (Erdreich, 2020; Palts & Kalmus, 2015). Complementary digital resources such as educational videos have, however, proven effective to facilitate parental support and involvement (Kwon et al., 2020; Thrower et al., 2019). Depending on the purpose, youth sport coaches could thus leverage the breadth of digital and non-digital communication given implementing a variety of communication modes can enhance cooperation with parents (Palts & Kalmus, 2015). It has to be considered, however, that time constraints and engaging with parents reflect prominent challenges for part-time and voluntary coaches which might limit their resources to fully utilise communication modes (Dawson et al., 2016; Potts et al., 2018).

An important conclusion of our data is that despite additional suggestions for future interactions the majority of parents appeared to be satisfied with contemporary parent-coach communication. Replicating previous results (Preston et al., 2020; Ross et al., 2015), findings support the notion that communication is a key catalyst of positive parent-coach cooperation. As such, group comparisons showed that parents who were satisfied with communication frequency tended to evaluate overall parent-coach cooperation significantly more positively compared to unsatisfied parents. Placing an emphasis on enhancing communication between parents and coaches, however, might not only relate to individual and relational benefits but could transfer to environmental levels as well. Findings show that a positive perception of parent-coach cooperation is related to higher levels of general satisfaction with youth soccer clubs and youth soccer academies. This suggests that positive cooperation among parents and coaches likely enhances parents' overall satisfaction with a youth sport experience. However, this result might be affected by parents' perceptions of organisational support, as those expressing to receive high support evaluated parent-coach cooperation more positively compared to lower supported parents. Considering these multidirectional

influences and the high interdependence between social subsystems in youth sport (Dorsch et al., 2022), these findings reflect an important implication for organisational stakeholders' and administrators' decision making in youth sport. Further, it emphasises the importance of educating coaches and increasing their knowledge and skills on how to cooperate with parents to fully harness the potential of frequent and honest communication.

Limitations and future directions

Despite its individual contributions, certain limitations of our study should be considered. First, we did not specify in the survey which coach parents should refer to. This might have distorted the data given parents might have used different coaches, e.g., head coach or assistant coach, as their reference point. Further, the collected data did not allow any conclusions as to whether they were matched, meaning information provided by one coach and corresponding parents of their team. As such, the assumption of independence was likely compromised given data could be nested within coaches or clubs (e.g., several parents whose children have the same coach or several parents from the same soccer club) or be dependent (both parents of the same child), and thus making them susceptible to group-based variability. Further, the significant outcome of Little's MCAR test suggested that missing data were related to the respective stakeholder responding to the survey (i.e., parent or coach), limiting generalizability and interpretability.

Methodologically, it has to be considered that the questionnaire on cooperation between parents and professionals in special education (Sodogé et al., 2012) has been adapted to a sports context for the first time in the present study. Overall, findings are situated in a male youth soccer context in Germany and should be examined across other youth sport settings as well as countries and (sport) cultures (Dorsch et al., 2019).

Drawing from our findings, future studies should assess how perceived discrepancies in communication relate to potential misalignment in expectations and goals between parents and coaches. Considering that constructive, bidirectional (digital) parent-teacher communication significantly contributed to children's academic performance (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012; See et al., 2020), it might be fruitful to examine effects of parent-coach communication modes on children's psychosocial and sport-related outcomes.

Notes

1. *Note.* Five outliers (i.e., *z*-scores ≥ 3; two cases for 18 h, one case each for 20, 25, and 45 h) were excluded from this analysis.
2. The required number of participants ($N = 450$) as indicated by additional post-hoc sample size calculations using the adjusted alpha level of .0033 was met by the study.

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