

# Opinions of Parents on Fencing Trainers Whose Children Are Fencing Athletes: Qualitative Study

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## Abstract

The aim of this research is to approach the characteristics in fencing coaches through the opinions of the parents of the athletes. The pattern of the research is phenomenon. A total of 10 parents, whose children participated in fencing competitions, participated in the study. In the study, the data were collected by using the “Personal Information Form” containing questions for parents and the semi-structured “Parental Interview Form” consisting of open-ended questions. In the study ‘Personal Characteristics Required by the Coach, Professional Skills the Coach Should Have, Communication Skills The Coach Should Have, Training Performance Expected from the Coach, Tournament Performance Expected from the Coach’ themes were reached. As a conclusion of the results obtained in the study, it is recommended that coaches take part in continuous development activities and establish a strong communication network with parents and athletes.

**Keywords:** Fencing, Parents, Fencing coaches, Fencers

## 1. Introduction

Fencing is a sport that takes place on what is called a ‘strip’ or ‘piste’, about 14 meters long and 1,5-2 meters wide where the athlete wears a protective mask, gloves and white colored clothing and a tool used a weapon which resembles a sword. It is a sport that consists of 3 branches called foil, saber and epee where the object is to score a point or touch by hitting your opponent by touching them (FIE, 2019). Fencing is a sport that is based on certain rules and techniques generally played indoors.

It is an individual sport with many playing techniques that requires very functional use of the muscles by keeping together many variable factors in which mental properties are of great

importance as well as physical properties (Kalkan & Zekioglu, 2017). In the development of all these features, there is a constant relationship between athlete, parent, and coach. The purpose of all parts is to improve athlete performance and achieve the targeted performance.

The role of the coach in the development of sports performance is an undeniable reality. Coaches have an important role in improving physical and psychological performance (Martens, 2012). These tasks include training programs, managing workouts, organizing exercises to improve athlete performance, providing tactical and technical development, role models, providing effective feedback and leading (Whitmore, 2002).

Being able to get positive psychological reactions from the athletes in the performance of these duties implies the effectiveness of the trainer (Horn, 2008). In this context, coaches are not only teachers who prepare the athletes in terms of technical, tactical, psychological or conditional but also teachers who can apply demonstrative, confirmatory and motivating elements (Rey, 2002). All these mentioned elements are considered important in training athletes and academic studies are carried out in order to be more successful in coaching (Grant et al., 2009). It can be said that the general purpose of these studies is to determine and improve the role of the coach in the athletic performance of athletes. One of the most important requirements for a successful performance in sports is to start at a young age. Many items such as the participation of individuals who started sports at a young age, the supply of sports equipment, course payments, and tournament payments are covered by families. When this is the case, it can be said that families have as much influence on performance as athletes and trainers. Considering this effect of parents on athletes, evaluating their perspective towards trainers and sports and revealing their expectations will enable to make various explanations about performance.

The aim of this research is to approach the characteristics in fencing coaches through the opinions of the parents of the athletes.

## **2. Method**

### *2.1 Research Design*

The pattern of the research is phenomenon. Phenomenology is a questioning strategy in which the researcher tries to define the essence of human experiences about a case described by participants (Cresswell, 2007). Data source in case studies; are individuals or groups that experience the subject of the research and that can express or reflect this phenomenon (Cresswell, 2014). This research was carried out as a phenomenon in order to reveal in detail and describe the views of the parents of the fencing athletes.

### *2.2 Participant (Subject) Characteristics*

A total of 10 parents, whose children participated in fencing competitions, participated in the study. Criterion sampling method which is one of the purposive sampling methods was used in the selection of the study group. In this context, while determining which participants to be sampled, parents of athletes who have been going fencing practices minimum 2 years and athletes who are participating in national competitions is set as the criterion.

### 2.3 Data Collection Tools

In the study, the data were collected by using the “Personal Information Form” containing questions for parents and the semi-structured “Parental Interview Form” consisting of open-ended questions.

### 2.4 Collection of Data

Before the data were collected, the content of the study was explained to the parents and they were asked whether they were willing to participate. Interviews lasted an average of 24 minutes. After the interviews were recorded and converted to plain text, they were analyzed by 2 experts of the field. “K1, K2, K3 ...” codes were used for the parents whose opinions were consulted.

### 2.5 Data Analysis

Data that is obtained from the interviews with the parents were interpreted using the descriptive analysis which is one of the qualitative data analysis techniques.

Descriptive analysis is the analysis, in which the data obtained are summarized and interpreted according to the previously determined themes, and that enables to reach the result by examining the cause and effect relationships (Yildirim & Simsek, 2011). In this study, themes are sub-goals that support the general purpose of the research meaning themes are formed from selected topics. The data obtained are codes that are arranged and interpreted under sub-objectives. The data obtained in this research are analyzed with Atlas.ti 7 program.

## 3. Results

In this part of the research, the findings of the parental interview forms are analyzed in order to determine the opinions of parents in the study group about fencing coaches.

### 3.1 Personal Characteristics Required by the Coach

As the data obtained from the interviews with the parents were analyzed, the parents stated their opinions as ‘Auxiliary, Reliable, Compassion, Responsible, Disciplined’ in terms of the personal characteristics that the trainer should have.

Table 1. Personal characteristics required by the coach

Theme	Code	f	Participants
Personal Characteristics Required by the Coach	Auxiliary	2	K4, K7
	Reliable	2	K1, K5
	Compassion	2	K2, K10
	Responsible	2	K3, K9
	Disciplined	2	K6, K8

### 3.1.1 Auxiliary

The opinions regarding the ‘Auxiliary’ (f = 2) result of the personal characteristics that fencing coaches should have are stated below.

**K4:** I believe that the coach should assist athletes in every way. I believe that coaches can find effective ways to overcome problems by collaborating with the athlete instead of shouting and getting angry.

**K7:** Fencing is a sport that athletes start at a young age. A 7-8-year-old child needs a supportive attitude from family members and teachers in all areas of life. It is important for coaches to show athletes effective paths both on track and in training.

### 3.1.2 Reliable

The opinions regarding the ‘reliable’ (f = 2) result of the personal characteristics that fencing coaches should have are stated below.

**K1:** The most important assets of a family are their children. Coaches generally do not allow us to watch the training. In other words, as parents we leave our most important assets 4 days a week where we cannot see and intervene for long hours. In these training sessions, we have to believe that coaches display correct behavior towards children.

**K5:** Just as I trust my child’s teachers at school, I have to trust their coaches in sports. I believe that coaches who don’t lie who are true to their word and who care about their athletes’ development are more qualified.

### 3.1.3 Compassion

The opinions about the ‘compassionate’ (f = 2) result of the personal characteristics that fencing coaches should have are stated below.

**K2:** Fencing is a long journey for an athlete. Considering this journey starts at a very young age, my observation is that, the coaches who take a compassionate approach towards their athletes are more successful in making the athletes love the sports and continue it.

**K10:** Not every parent sends their kid to this sport to become a champion. My expectation from fencing for my child is to increase his/her attention and concentration. Therefore, a compassionate and sincere approach from the trainer would increase the gain of my child from this sport.

### 3.1.4 Responsible

The opinions regarding the ‘responsible’ (f = 2) result of the personal characteristics that fencing coaches should have are stated below.

**K3:** Sports requires responsibility. Athletes should go to practices on time and always try to increase their performance to 100%. In order for the athletes behave like this, the coaches should lead by example as their athletes look up to them, success comes like this.

**K9:** I would like to work with coaches who come to work on time, take care of each and

every athlete separately and coaches who are able to follow the training program meticulously.

The opinions regarding the ‘disciplined’ ( $f = 2$ ) result of the personal characteristics that fencing coaches should have are stated below.

### 3.1.5 Disciplined

**K6:** Sports are serious business. Success cannot be achieved if the athlete does not pay attention to their diet, training and sleep patterns. The person who will provide this discipline is the trainer. If the coach is self-disciplined, his/her athlete will also be disciplined.

**K8:** I think that the most important way to be successful in sports is disciplined work. When I follow national competitions in my child’s age category, I observe that athletes of disciplined coaches are more successful.

### 3.2 Professional Skills the Coach Should Have

When the data obtained from the interviews with the parents were analyzed, the parents expressed their opinions as “Effective Private Tutoring, Tactical Domination, Technical Domination, Domination of Training Science” about the professional skills that the trainer should have.

Table 2. Professional skills the coach should have

Theme	Code	f	Participants
Professional Skills the Coach Should Have	Effective Private Tutoring	3	K2, K4, K5
	Tactical Domination	2	K1, K6
	Technical Domination	3	K3, K9, K7
	Domination of Training Science	2	K5, K10

#### 3.2.1 Effective Private Tutoring

One of the opinions about some of the professional skills the fencing coach should have is ‘Effective Private Tutoring’ ( $f = 3$ ) results are below.

**K2:** Every child is special. Every child has different characteristics. Fencing is a sport in which these individual differences arise. In my opinion, there is a way to make every child successful. This is possible with efficient practicing. I think that private lessons can make a great contribution to athletes in fencing which is an individual sport. For this reason, I believe that the trainer’s individual lesson quality should be high.

**K4:** My child had no success in the first year she/he started sports. When the schools were closed, she/he took one on one lessons almost every day. Then she started to get medals from

competitions, I think the effect of private lessons on athlete success is very high.

### 3.2.2 Tactical Domination

The opinions regarding the “Tactical Domination” (f = 2) result of the professional skills that the fencing coach should have are given below.

**K1:** As I have observed in competitions that I have attended with my child, the athletes whose coaches are giving tactics behind the ‘piste’ are more successful. Of course, these tactics should be practiced in training.

**K6:** The more detailed tactics a coach can think and apply, the more successful he/she would be. Tactics means knowing technique and teaching it.

### 3.2.3 Technical Domination

The opinions regarding the “Technical Domination” (f = 3) result of the professional skills that the fencing coach should have are given below.

**K3:** Even a person who does not know fencing can understand how technical fencing sports is while watching a competition. Trying to touch the opponent with a small point requires very fine skills. The better the coach is in this teaching process, the better the athlete performs.

**K9:** One day, our coach said to my child, “You can be an Olympic champion by making a move right or be the last one doing a little bit of every move.” When my child asked me what this meant, I said that technique in fencing was very important. Years passed, I understood thoroughly that the technique is very important in fencing and the dominance of the person who teaches this technique affects the performance of the athlete.

### 3.2.4 Domination of Training Science

The opinions regarding the result of ‘Domination in Training Science’ (f = 2), which is one of the professional skills that fencing coach should have, are given below.

**K5:** In order to fulfill the technical skills in sports, your strength and endurance must be good. In fencing mainly technical and tactical exercises are performed. In my opinion, other features need to be improved as well.

**K10:** I want my child to lead a healthy life. I think his/her weight being balanced and the musculoskeletal development is more important than skills in fencing.

## 3.3 Communication Skills the Coach Should Have

When the data obtained from the interviews with the parents were analyzed, the parents expressed their opinions as “Oratory, Effective Listening, Empathy” regarding the communication skills that the trainer should have.

Table 3. Communication skills the coach should have

Theme	Code	f	Participants
Communication Skills The Coach Should Have	Oratory	4	K2, K4, K6, K7
	Effective Listening	3	K3, K8, K10
	Empathy	3	K1, K5, K9

### 3.3.1 Oratory

The opinions regarding the result of ‘Oratory’ ( $f = 4$ ), which is one of the professional skills that fencing coach should have, are given below.

**K2:** As in all areas of life, I think it is important that coaches have an effective speaking style in communicating with athletes.

**K4:** Not all athletes can develop at the same pace. For this reason, the coach must have an effective communication style in overcoming development barriers.

### 3.3.2 Effective Listening

The opinions regarding the result of ‘Effective Listening’ ( $f = 3$ ), which is one of the professional skills that fencing coach should have, are given below.

**K8:** Me and my wife talk about the importance of listening as much as talking to our child. Listening skill of coaches is at least as important as speaking skill.

**K10:** I observe that young athletes have problems in explaining their problems. Coaches making athletes feel that coaches are good listeners would create an effective communication between them.

### 3.3.3 Empathy

The opinions regarding the result of ‘Empathy’ ( $f = 3$ ), which is one of the professional skills that fencing coach should have, are given below.

**K1:** I think coaches’ ability to share the perspective of athletes is important.

**K9:** I believe coaches who comprehend the world view of athletes can develop effective methods in terms solving difficulties that the athletes face

## 3.4 Training Performance Expected from the Coach

When the data obtained from the interviews with the parents were analyzed, the parents expressed their opinions on the performance expected from the trainer as Start and End of Training on Time, Attention, Determining the Missing Aspects, Scientific Study’.

Table 4. Training performance expected from the coach

Theme	Code	f	Participants
Training Performance Expected from the Coach	Start and End of Training on Time	2	K4, K8
	Attention	3	K1, K5, K10
	Determining missing aspects	3	K2, K6, K9
	Scientific Work	2	K3, K7

### 3.4.1 Start and End of Training Time

The opinions regarding the results of the training performance expected from the fencing coach “Start and End of Training on Time” (f = 2) are given below.

**K4:** My child wakes up at 07:00 in the morning and starts the day. She/he leaves the school at 16.00, goes to training at 18.00 and ends at 20:30, and goes home at 21.00. For a young child it is a heavy paced lifestyle. And because the practices never start on time and finish later than expected could have lowered her/his motivation. The practice should start and end at the specified time.

**K8:** Considering that the athletes go to school and train in the evening, it is important that the training starts and ends on time.

### 3.4.2 Attention

Some of the opinions regarding the results of the training performance “Attention” (f = 3) expected from the fencing coach are given below.

**K1:** Although fencing is an individual sport, trainings are done collectively. Considering the different characteristics of each individual, I think it is important that coaches pay attention to athletes.

**K10:** I think the trainers who care about their needs and seek solutions for their athletes are valuable.

### 3.4.3 Determining Missing Aspects

Some of the views regarding the results of the training performance “Determining Missing Aspects” (f = 3) expected from the fencing coach are given below.

**K2:** I’m a parent who thinks every practice is important. I expect the time spent in each training to contribute to the child. Correctly identifying my child’s deficiencies in training and sharing these deficiencies with me is an effective way to eliminate deficiencies.

**K6:** Athletes with less deficiency on the ‘piste’ succeed. So fewer errors means more success. The more effectively the trainer detects and resolves errors, the more successful the athlete will be.

### 3.4.4 Scientific Work



**K3:** I think that sport is a serious science. The more scientifically the trainer approaches fencing, the more useful it is for his/her athletes.

**K7:** I attach great importance to educational activities carried out with scientific methods. I think that science is the most important phenomenon both in education at school and in education in sports.

### *3.5 Tournament Performance Expected from the Coach*

When the data obtained from the interviews with the parents were analyzed, the parents expressed their opinions as “Providing Effective Feedback and Motivation” regarding the performance expected from the coach.

Table 5. Tournament performance expected from the coach

Theme	Code	f	Participant
Tournament Performance Expected from the Coach	Effective Feedback	6	K2, K3, K4, K6, K8, K9
	Motivation	4	K1, K5, K7, K10

#### 3.5.1 Effective Feedback

The opinions regarding the results of the training performance “Effective Feedback” (f = 6) expected from the fencing coach are given below.

**K3:** Fencing competitions result in a short time. In a few minutes, athletes can win and lose. For this reason, I think that the correct tactical notifications during the competition are crucial for the athlete’s performance.

**K7:** In addition to the tactics given by the coaches during the match, I think that the feedback about where the athlete made the right and where the wrong after the competitions ended was important in improving the performance of the athlete.

#### 3.5.2 Providing Motivation

The opinions regarding the results of the training performance “Providing Motivation” (f = 4) expected from the fencing coach are given below.

**K8:** On the day of the competition, athletes can be very stressed. I think it is important that the coach takes a confident approach in explaining the importance of the competition to the athletes and provide motivation in this direction.

**K9:** You cannot win without believing in yourself in any area of life. Athletes can lose their faith from time to time. I think the task of the coach is to provide motivation back.

## 4. Discussion

This research aims to explain the expected features by evaluating the views of parents, whose

children are fencing athletes, on fencing coaches. Parents' expectations regarding coaches were evaluated under the headings of personal characteristics, professional skills, communication skills, training performance and competition performance. Parents' behavior and styles may have positive and negative effects on children's sports experiences (Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2007; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005). Many academic studies reveal that the relationship between parents, athletes and coaches has an effect on sportive performance (Thomas & Côté, 2006; Kirby, 2015). In the studies of O'Neill et al. (2015), evaluations about the effect of athlete families on sportive performance were included, and results regarding the importance of parent, athlete and trainer relationship on performance were included. On the other hand, in another study dealing with the lives of elite athletes, the results were given to conclude that the relationship between athletes, coaches and parents has an effect on the stress experienced by the athletes and on the performance of the coach and athlete (Kremer et al., 1997). Based on all this information, the information regarding the data obtained in the study is given below.

#### *4.1 Personal Characteristics Required by the Coach*

As a result of the data obtained, the personal characteristics of the trainer are determined to be auxiliary, reliable, loving, responsible and disciplined. Quality relations between coach and athlete positively affect the development of athletes (Taylor & Wilson, 2005). In developing these relationships, the trainer's approaches towards athletes gain importance.

So much so that the relationship that coaches build with athletes can affect athlete performance. Campbell et al. (1985) suggests that coaches should take a benevolent and open approach when interacting with athletes. Başer (1986) stated that it is important to ensure that coaches display honest and reliable behaviors. Terlemez (2019) mentioned the importance of coaching responsibility. In their study, Kaya and Canbaz (2005) stated that the athletes listed 'loving' as one of the personal characteristics they expected from their coaches, while Konter (1996) expressed being disciplined as one of the coaching principles. When the literature is examined the expressions about the characteristics the coaches should have are found to be similar. In this context, it is possible to say that the personality traits of the trainers play an important role in the psychology of athletes.

#### *4.2 Professional Skills the Coach Should Have*

According to the data obtained, the results of effective private lesson, technical domination, tactical domination and training science domination as the professional skills that the trainer should have were achieved. Pavlovic (2007) stated that the most important feature of a successful trainer is the ability to provide exercise quality. It is possible to say that it will be possible to provide exercise quality with a good training science knowledge. It can be said that training programs, which are equipped with exercises that are required by the sports branch, and that contain technical and tactical elements, are an important factor in success. Dündar (1996) drew attention to the importance of the tactical knowledge of the trainer as it provides the right tactical opportunity for the athlete to respond effectively to the general motor characteristics and the weak and strong characteristics of the opponent and to adapt to any possible situation during the competition. Considering that there are special procedures

for moving the body to perform the task that needs to be completed, the technical skills become more important in the teaching of these skills (Martens, 2012). Considering that the 5-step model proposed by Pugh et al. (2000) in improving the training quality of the training draws attention to the intensity and variety of exercise, one-to-one training with athletes allows for wider programs. In summary, fencing is a branch of sports where technical and tactical skills are the priority and also a good physical condition is required like any other sports. It can be said in the light of other studies that coach responsibility is important in the development of these features.

#### *4.3 Communication Skills That a Coach Should Have*

According to the data obtained, effective speaking, effective listening and empathy results were achieved as the communication skills that the trainer should have. It is a known fact that coach-athlete relationship is a very effective factor in sports (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Evans (1995) states that it is important for successful coaches to communicate effectively with their athletes in ensuring the effectiveness of teaching and creating motivation. Ersanlı (1998) mentions that listening effectively is an important skill as the skills that make communication more efficient. Similarly, Çongur (1995) says that effective speech is an important factor such as effective listening in increasing the efficiency of communication. Baştuğ (2009) concludes that the empathic skills of coaches are important for success in sports. When the literature is studied, it can be said that the communication skill levels of the coaches are important in the relationship to be established with the athletes, and these relations have gained importance in the point of fencing athletes to continue and perform sports.

#### *4.4 Training Performance Expected from the Coach*

According to the data obtained from the research it is concluded that; starting and ending practice on time, attention, determining deficiencies and scientific study is expected from the coach (trainer). Techniques, tactics and physical work done to achieve success in sports are called training. The most important tool of an athlete on the road to success is training. Scientific methods that make up the effectiveness of these training sessions are a determining factor in the performance of the athlete (Haff & Triplett, 2015). Jowett and Ntoumanis (2004) in their modal they've put forward to explain the coach-athlete relationship, expressed the importance of the interest and intimacy between the athlete and the coach. Starting and ending the practice on time is one of the emphasized performances that is expected from the trainers by the parents. Keeping in mind the athletes start fencing sport at an early age, the continuity of the school life of the athletes and the fact that the training is organized in the evening hours make it necessary for the athletes to organize their lives according to the training hours, for this reason it can be said that it is important for the athletes and their parents that the coaches act in a scheduled manner during the practice hours. In the light of all this information, it can be said that the data we obtained are similar to the results regarding the role of the coach in training performance.

#### 4.5 Tournament Performance Expected from the Coach

According to the data obtained, the results of providing effective feedback and motivation regarding the competition performance which is expected from the coaches were achieved.

It is known that coaches are effective in reducing or increasing stress and pressure on athletes (Özdevecioglu & Yalcin, 2010). Beyond knowing how coaches will analyze athletes' strengths and weaknesses, knowing how to overcome weaknesses and building strengths by motivating players have significant effects on athlete's performance (Hansen et al., 2003). Feedback such as motivation is a tool used by athletes to evaluate their performance. Toros (2011) has stated that coach's behavior on target orientation and motivation. Based on the data obtained in the study, it is preferred to provide motivation of athletes in competitions and trainers' behaviors that provide effective feedback on the correct and wrongs of athletes after the competition. Based on these statements it can be said in the light of the data obtained in the study that the motivation of the athletes in the competitions and the trainer behaviors that are effective in the feedbacks of the athletes and their mistakes after the competition are preferred.

#### 5. Conclusion

As a conclusion of the results obtained in the study, it is recommended that coaches take part in continuous development activities and establish a strong communication network with parents and athletes. Other researchers are recommended to do similar work in other sports and team sports.

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