



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



INFLUENCE OF COACHES' ATTITUDES ON PLAYERS' BEHAVIOUR DURING FOOTBALL MATCHES: A STUDY OF CLUBS IN THE PROFESSIONAL LEAGUE ZONE D

ATCHEDO Gbènakpon Judicaël ^{1,*}, AHONNON Adolphe ² and Alihonou Blaise OUSSOU ³

¹ Department of Science and Technology of Physical and Sports Activities, National Institute of Youth, Physical Education and Sport (INJEPS), Research and Study Laboratory, Sport, Education and Social Interventions for Development (LARESEID), Social Psychology and Facilitation Research Unit (UR-PSA), University of Abomey-Calavi.

² Department of Science and Technology of Socio-Educational Activities -National Institute of Youth, Physical Education and Sport (INJEPS), Research and Study Laboratory, Sport, Education and Social Interventions for Development (LARESEID), Social Psychology and Facilitation Research Unit (UR-PSA), University of Abomey-Calavi.

³ Department of Socio-Educational Activities -National Institute of Youth, Physical Education and Sport (INJEPS), Centre for Study and Research in Education and Social Interventions for Development (CEREID), University of Abomey-Calavi.

ORCID Details

ATCHEDO Gbènakpon Judicaël: <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-4741-2363>

AHONNON Adolphe: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1582-1763>

Alihonou Blaise OUSSOU: <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-6628-5542>

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the attitudes of coaches in the zone D professional super league regarding player behaviour during football matches in Benin. It aims to investigate how coaches' attitudes influence player behaviour during matches by adopting a mixed-methods approach, both descriptive and analytical, using quantitative methods (survey of 72 players) and qualitative methods (interviews with 08 coaches), for a total of 80 participants. The study was conducted in 04 local clubs strategically selected based on one zone qualification and geographical location. Key findings show that the most frequently observed attitudes among coaches are approval (58.33%), disputing refereeing decisions, and protesting (48.61%), with a very high level of authority (45.83%). This underscores coaches' leadership in the effective management of clubs in terms of group cohesion, with a strong positive influence (65.28%) on player behaviour. Among the major behaviours observed in players, the most prominent were the pursuit of victory (84.72%) and self-maximization (80.56%).

Ultimately, the behaviours displayed by players, notably the pursuit of victory and self-maximization, reflect the observations made by coaches and are consistent with the research of Chelladurai as well as Lord and Lepper.

These results confirm our hypothesis: coaches' attitudes positively influence player behaviour during matches. This implies a strong relationship and fluid communication between coaches and players, and consequently, higher quality play in stadiums in Benin.

Keywords: Attitudes, Coach, Leadership, Behaviour, Football.

1 INTRODUCTION

Sport in general, and football in particular, is a global phenomenon involving a vast number of people. Playing football requires the development of several aspects and attitudes, both for the coach and the player. Our study surveyed coaches and players in the Benin professional league.

The Coaching Behaviour Assessment System (CBAS; Smith et al., 1977) has been used to structure coaches' general behaviours around two main categories: reactive behaviours (adopted in response to an athlete's performance) and spontaneous behaviours (initiated spontaneously by the coaches). Based on these elements, several studies suggest that athlete satisfaction is positively correlated with supportive coach behaviours and negatively correlated with sanctions (Smith & Smoll, 2007). Building on this work, the multidimensional model of leadership (Chelladurai & Carron, 1978) proposes that a coach's leadership style results from three types of behaviour: the behaviour desired by the athletes, the behaviour required by the situation, and the actual behaviour adopted by the coach.

The work of Chelladurai & Saleh (1980) made it possible to classify coach behaviours according to their decision-making style (autocratic, democratic) and their interactional style (social support, pedagogical behaviours, positive feedback). Along the same lines, Chelladurai & Carron (1978) consider that athlete performance and satisfaction depend on the degree of alignment between the desired behaviour, the required behaviour, and the coach's actual behaviour.

For Katz (1978), attitude can be expressed verbally, that is, in the form of an opinion, or non-verbally, that is, in the form of behaviour. Attitude is this hidden reality that we try to capture through opinions or other forms of empirical responses. During matches, many attitudes are observed among coaches, such as their facial expressions towards a player, approval, and many others. According to Rosenberg and Hovland (1960), attitude is defined as a positive or negative disposition whose expression results from the organization of three components: a cognitive component composed of knowledge and beliefs associated with the object, an affective component referring to the emotions aroused by the object, and finally a behavioural component relating to the orientation of action towards the object.

The model organizing this work is based on the Attitude Representation Theory (ART) of Lord and Lepper (1999). Its authors define attitude as a tendency to evaluate that generates an overall evaluation which guides judgment and behaviour. This evaluation is based on the subjective representation of the object—that is, the knowledge we have about the object—and on our immediate perception of the object—that is, its visible characteristics at the time of formulating the evaluative response. In the context of our study, this theory explains that the representation of players on the field (behaviour) and the immediate perception of coaches during matches must be identical.

Furthermore, there are several reasons or causes that lead coaches to adopt these attitudes during matches, including their desire to win, to satisfy the public, and many other legitimate reasons. Lyman (1996) defines the coach as a key figure in the sports structure. They are largely responsible for the social, psychological, emotional, and physical well-being of their athletes.

The identified consequences are changes in the coach's behaviour and modifications in the group's attitudes. The more varied the coaches' attitudes are during matches, the more confused the players become, and consequently, their behaviour no longer aligns with their initial expectations. This aspect of behaviour explains the influence of coaches' attitudes on players' expectations. It's also worth noting that players, regardless of their individual roles, will not all perceive the coach's attitudes in the same way during a match.

In light of these observations, we asked ourselves the following question: what are the effects of the attitudes of coaches in the professional league (Zone D) on player behaviour during football matches in Benin? This question led us to postulate that the effects of coaches' attitudes in the professional league (Zone D) on player behaviour during football matches in Benin include approval, contesting refereeing decisions, reprimands, facial expressions towards players, and dissatisfaction. To further answer this question, we chose to study the positive and negative effects of coaches' attitudes in the professional super league (Zone D) on player behaviour during football matches in Benin.

2 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Our study is based on the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. This study is quantitative because it aims to investigate, using a survey questionnaire administered to players, the influence of coaches' attitudes on their behaviour during matches. It is also qualitative because we interviewed coaches from clubs qualified for the professional Super League in Zone D.

2.1 Sampling

2.1.1 Sampling method and technique

The research sample was selected using a non-probability sampling method for the players. The coaches were selected using a purposive sampling technique. This purposive selection of coaches was made because they are in direct contact with the players. Based on this selection, they are able to provide relevant information related to the research topic. It should also be noted that the sampling techniques used are linked to the mixed-methods nature of our research.

2.1.2 Justification for the choice of clubs

The Beninese national football championship is played in four distinct zones based on the geographical location of each club. Each zone comprises nine clubs, for a total of 36 clubs. The first phase of the championship is played in a home-and-away format, and the top four clubs from each zone qualify directly for the professional league (16 clubs total). The remaining clubs then compete in the professional league. Since our study focuses on Zone D, covering clubs from the Ouémé and Plateau departments, the four clubs from this zone are JAK FC (Jeunesse Athlétique de Kétou), Ayéma FC of Pobè, ASVO FC (Association Sportive de la Vallée de l'Ouémé), and Dragons FC of Porto-Novo.

Table 1: Sample size distribution

Clubs	Number of players surveyed	Number of coaches interviewed	Total
Ayema FC	16	01	17
Asvo FC	17	01	18
JAK FC	20	01	21
Dragons FC	19	01	20
Total	72	04	76

2.1.3 Data collection tools and techniques

For our study, two data collection tools and techniques were used: a questionnaire survey and interviews. The questionnaire was sent to players from the targeted clubs and their respective coaches. The questionnaire focused on players' perceptions of coaches' attitudes, the nature of these attitudes, and their influence on player performance. The interview guide allowed us to understand the coaches' perceptions of how their attitudes influenced player behaviour.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Results from the player questionnaire

3.1.1 Players' identification of coaches' attitudes

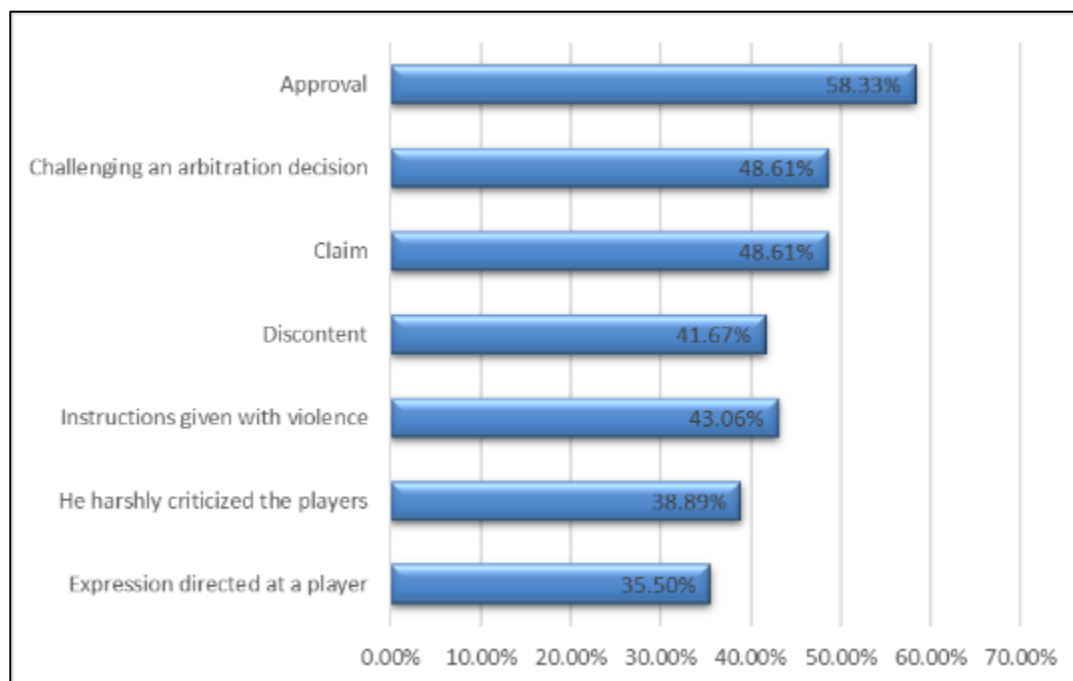


Figure 1: Distribution according to the types of attitudes identified in the coach

Among the most frequent attitudes identified in their coaches, approval (58.33%) was the most common, followed by demanding (48.61%) and contesting a referee's decision (48.61%). According to the players, these attitudes are expressed at the beginning of the match, during the match, at halftime, and at the end of the match.

The following figure shows the distribution of players according to their perception of their coach's level of authority.

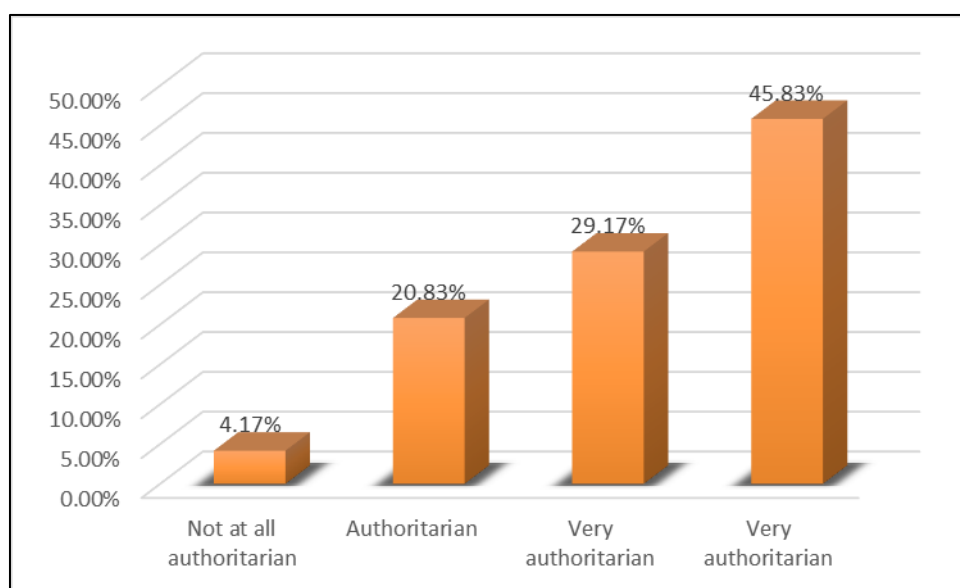


Figure 2: Distribution of players according to their perception of their coach's level of authority

According to the players surveyed, in 45.83% of cases, the coach is very authoritarian in their relationship with him: this is the mode of the distribution obtained. 4.17% believe that the coach is not at all authoritarian.

Figure 3: shows the distribution according to the perception of the coach's reaction to players' mistakes.

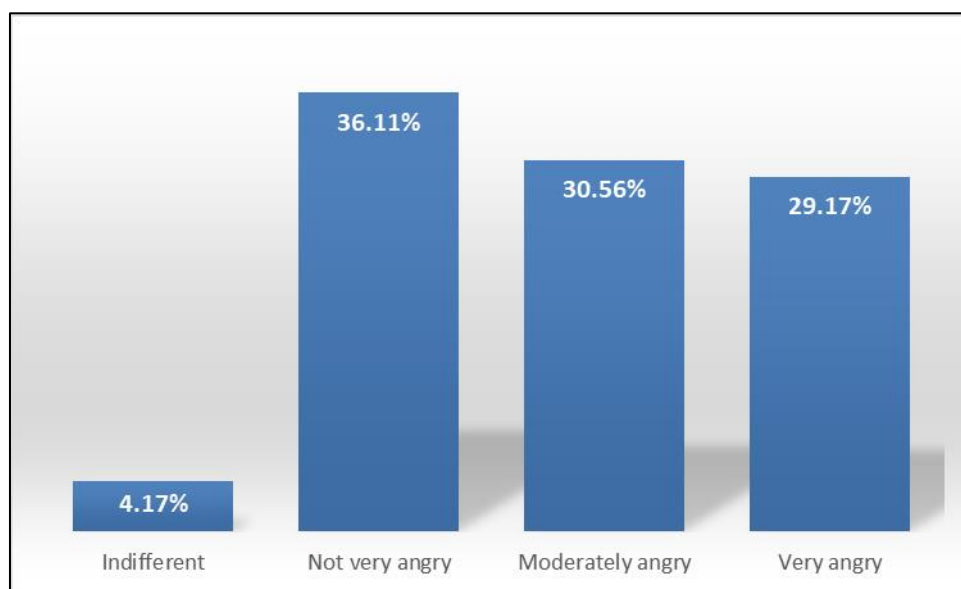


Figure 3: Distribution according to perception of the coach's reaction to player errors

In 36.11% of cases, the players interviewed felt that the coach was not very angry about player errors, while 30.56% felt the coach was moderately angry, and 29.17% reported that the coach was very angry.

The table below provides information on the coach's assessment of sanctions in cases of indiscipline.

Table 2: Distribution of players according to their assessment of sanctions in cases of indiscipline

	Number	Percentage
In cases of indiscipline, offenders are severely punished	26	36,11
In cases of indiscipline, offenders are subject to moderate punishment	42	58,33
In cases of indiscipline, offenders are rarely punished	4	5,56
Total	72	100

Players consider the sanctions for indiscipline to be moderate in 58.33% of cases, and 36.11% report that the sanctions are harsh.

3.1.2 Player behaviour

The following table presents the distribution of players according to their behaviour during a match.

Table 3: Distribution of Players According to Their Expectations During a Match

	Number	Percentage
Giving the best of oneself	58	80,56
To produce an enjoyable game	48	66,67
Win the match	61	84,72
To master my actions	4	5,56
Having more self-confidence	3	4,17

In 84.72% of cases, players' behaviour is to win the match when they are on the field. In 80.56% of cases, players' behaviour is to give their best during matches.

All players believe that the coach's attitude influences their behaviour during matches.

The following figure shows the distribution of players according to the nature of the influence exerted by the coach's attitude.

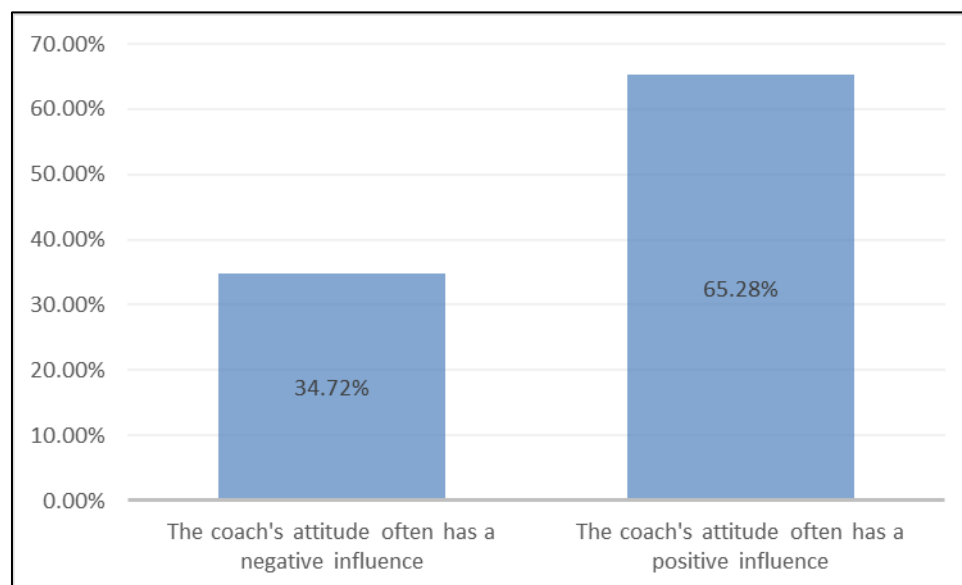


Figure 4: Distribution of players according to the nature of the influence exerted by the coach's attitude

According to 65.28% of players, the coach's attitude has a positive influence on their performance, while 34.72% report that the influence is negative. Furthermore, whether positive or negative, they consider this influence to be strong in 41.67% of cases, moderate in 55.55% of cases, and weak in 2.78%.

The following table summarizes the types of positive and negative influences caused by the coach's attitude.

Table 4: Distribution according to the types of positive and negative influences due to the coach's attitude

	Number	Percentage
Positive influences		
Focus	31	43,06
Cheer	39	54,17
Victory	65	90,28
Negative influences		
Getting lost in the game	45	62,50
Dilution	43	59,72
Discouragement	52	72,22

The most frequent positive influence is victory (90.28%) at the end of the match, and the most frequent negative influence is discouragement (72.22%).

3.2 Results from the interviews with coaches

Since we worked with four target clubs, we interviewed four coaches. The following sections present the comments gathered from the coaches of Ayéma FC, ASVO FC, JAK FC, and Dragons FC, respectively. These coaches are designated as Coaches A, B, C, and D.

The information gathered from the respective coaches relates to their attitudes towards the players during matches, the manifestation, cause, and timing of these attitudes, the positive (advantages) and negative (disadvantages) effects of these attitudes on player behaviour, the impact of these attitudes on player performance, and finally, their assessment of the team's overall performance.

3.2.1 Section 1 :

- Demands, reprimands to players, violent instructions
- These attitudes manifest as violent gestures, and it's due to a failure to respect the coach's instructions.
- This can win some matches, but it can also lead to partial losses, and these attitudes occur during matches.
- The objective is achieved.
- Some players correct themselves and improve their performance, others lose their way and are replaced.
- Average performance if half the players understand the coach's attitudes.
- Players must know their coaches inside and out. **Interview accorded by Coach A**
- Dissatisfaction, facial expressions towards the players
- Poor performances from some players
- Victory as an advantage and defeat as a disadvantage
- The objective is not always achieved, and these attitudes often arise during and after matches
- Their performance is no longer what it was at the start; others lose their way
- Respecting the coach's decisions
- Sometimes underperformance occurs because some players cannot adapt to the coach's pressure **Coach B's Comments**
- Complaining, challenging refereeing decisions
- Disrespecting the coach's decisions
- We win some matches, sometimes his attitude changes the players in many ways
- The objective is achieved, and these attitudes arise during matches and at halftime
- The team performs well if all the players on the field understand the stakes and the coach's intentions
- Adapting to the coach's attitudes **Comments from coach C**
- Anger, blaming players, approval
- Lack of anger control
- Victory and defeat
- Often, the objective is achieved, and these attitudes usually arise during matches.
- Some improve their performance; others struggle and are substituted.
- The player's expectations are often out of sync with the coach's instructions, resulting in a poor team performance.
- Managing emotions **Coach D's comments**

4 DISCUSSION

The most frequent attitudes identified among coaches were approval (58.33%), followed by advocacy (48.61%) and challenging an officiating decision (48.61%) (Figure 1). Of these results, approval is the most prevalent attitude. It is defined as a favorable judgment made about someone or something. The players stated that the coach approves of the majority of their actions on the field, to the detriment of advocacy and challenging officiating decisions. These results corroborate those of Smith & Smoll (2007), who stated that "athlete satisfaction is positively related to supportive coach behaviours and negatively related to sanctions." In other words, the coaches' attitudes, according to the players, are predominantly supportive. Further on, Chelladurai & Carron (1978) argue that athlete performance and satisfaction depend on the degree of alignment between desired behaviour, required behaviour, and the coach's actual behaviour. This does not mean that attitudes are the same as the coach's behaviour. Olson and Fazio (2009) similarly emphasize that attitudes are the central element around which behaviours are structured.

Regarding the perception of the coach's level of authority, 45.83% of the players surveyed felt that the coach was very authoritarian in their relationship with them (Figure 2). This explains why the coach's decisions and instructions must be rigorously executed. Consequently, coaches possess leadership. These results are consistent with Chelladurai & Carron's (1978) multidimensional model of leadership. This model stipulates that the coach's leadership style results from three types of behaviour: the behaviour desired by the athletes, the behaviour required by the situation, and the actual behaviour adopted by the coach. Regarding the coach's reaction to player errors, respondents rated the coach as not very angry in 36.11% of cases, while 30.56% found the coach to be moderately angry, and 29.17% reported the coach to be very angry (Figure 3). These results demonstrate that the coach-athlete relationship is independent. The player has obligations to fulfil toward their coach without offending them, and the coach, in turn, must fulfil their obligations toward their players. These results confirm the definition of the coach-athlete relationship by Jowett &

Ntoumanis (2004). They define it as "the situation in which the emotions, thoughts, and behaviours of the coach and the athlete are mutually and contextually interrelated."

Regarding the assessment of sanctions, players rated the sanctions for indiscipline as moderate in 58.33% of cases, and 36.11% reported that the sanctions were harsh (Table II). Coach sanctions are not harsh because they know they need the players to play matches, so their sanctions are brief to bring the players back into line.

Player expectations are also very important; the results of our study revealed that in 84.72% of cases, players expect to win the match when they are on the field. In 80.56% of cases, the players expect to give their best during matches (Table III). This is obvious; like any player, before each match, every team aims for victory, even though the outcome can be quite different afterward. Furthermore, they all stated that the coach's attitude influences their performance during matches.

Figure 4 shows the distribution of players according to the nature of the influence exerted by the coach's attitude. According to 65.28% of players, the coach's attitude has a positive influence on their performance, while 34.72% reported that the influence was negative. The majority of players stated that the influence of the coach's attitude was positive, indicating good communication between coach and players. The coach's interventions were not aggressive. These results corroborate those of Vealey (2005), who stated that "communication is a complex process of transforming a thought into a message and transmitting it to someone." The process continues with the reception of the message, its interpretation, and the response from the receiver. Coaches must express their thoughts through messages formulated in a way that is understood. Athletes, for their part, are receptive to messages and interpret them as intended in order to then relay a message to the coach. Furthermore, McCroskey and Wheelless (1976) identify four aspects that determine the effectiveness of communication between coach and athlete: verbal, physical, vocal, and situational. Each aspect has a specific meaning for the athlete. The coach must therefore choose their words and approach carefully so that the player can understand and execute precisely what the coach wants from them on the field.

5 CONCLUSION

Our study aimed to reveal the influence of coaches' attitudes in the professional Super League Zone D on player behaviour during football matches in Benin. These coaching attitudes generally arise during matches, and the reasons for their manifestation include players' failure to follow the coach's instructions and poor performance by certain players. The main attitudes of coaches identified during our research are: approval, contesting refereeing decisions, and making demands.

Indeed, the results obtained allow us to understand that coaches' attitudes do influence player behaviour when the coach has good leadership. And this influence is much more positive than negative. Based on these various elements, we can confirm that our predefined hypothesis is verified.

STATEMENTS ON COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

All the authors acknowledge that there is no conflict of interest. They all agree with what is written in this article. In accordance with the requirements of transparency and scientific integrity, we, the authors of this study, declare that we have no conflict of interest, whether financial, commercial or otherwise, that could influence the results or interpretations of our research on initiation rites in Benin, thus guaranteeing the independence and objectivity of our work and ensuring the credibility of our conclusions.

Declaration of competing interest

All authors have indicated they have no financial relationships relevant to this article to disclose. The authors have no conflicts of interest relevant to this article to disclose.

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