

Artículo de investigación

Title: Institutional certification for personal trainers in Angola: an alternative for professionalization favoring public health.

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Abstract

This study focuses on institutional certification for personal trainers in Angola as an alternative for professionalization in the promotion and well-being of physical and mental health. It has a mixed qualitative-quantitative and descriptive-propositional approach, using surveys, interviews, and documentary analysis. The results reveal regulatory gaps and training deficiencies in the training of professionals specializing in personal training. The sustained growth of the fitness and physical

activity sector in Angola has generated a growing demand for personal trainers in recent years, without a formal professional accreditation system to guarantee the certification, quality, safety, and effectiveness of the services offered. The absence of recognized institutional certification limits the professionalization of the sector and reduces its potential contribution to public health policies, in a context where chronic noncommunicable diseases represent a national health challenge. Likewise, it was found that there is no specific law regulating professional

certification in the field of fitness, which supports the need for a technical and institutional framework to guarantee the quality and safety of the practice. An alternative for professional advancement is proposed, comprising a comprehensive institutional certification model that combines academic training, technical evaluation, and legal recognition of personal trainers, in coordination with the Ministry of Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Health at the national level. This proposal seeks to promote ethics and professional technical competence, and to integrate fitness practice into national legal strategies for preventive public health and social welfare.

Keywords: professional certification, personal trainers, public health, professionalization, Angola, health laws and policy.

Resumen

El presente estudio está dirigido a la certificación institucional para entrenadores personales en Angola, como alternativa de profesionalización en la promoción y bienestar de la salud física y mental. El mismo posee un enfoque mixto cualitativo-cuantitativo y de tipo descriptivo-propositivo, utilizando encuestas, entrevistas y la observación. Los resultados evidencian

vacíos normativos y carencias formativas en la formación de profesionales en la especialidad de entrenador personal. El crecimiento sostenido del sector del fitness y la actividad física en Angola, ha generado una creciente demanda de entrenadores personales en los últimos años, sin que exista un sistema formal de acreditación profesional que garantice la certificación, calidad, seguridad y efectividad de los servicios ofrecidos. La ausencia de una certificación institucional reconocida limita la profesionalización del sector y reduce su potencial contribución a las políticas de salud pública, en un contexto donde las enfermedades crónicas no transmisibles representan un desafío sanitario nacional. Asimismo, se constató la inexistencia de una ley específica que regule la certificación profesional en el ámbito del fitness, lo que sustenta la necesidad de un marco técnico e institucional para garantizar la calidad y seguridad de la práctica. Se propone una alternativa de superación profesional, contentiva de un modelo integral de certificación institucional que articule la formación académica, la evaluación técnica y el reconocimiento legal de los entrenadores personales, en coordinación con el Ministerio de Juventud y Deportes y el Ministerio de Salud a nivel de país. Esta propuesta busca promover la ética y la competencia técnica profesional, e integrar la práctica del fitness

dentro de las estrategias nacionales legales en la salud pública preventiva y bienestar social.

Palabras clave: certificación profesional, entrenadores personales, salud pública, profesionalización, Angola, leyes y política sanitaria.

Introduction

In recent decades, the accelerated growth of the fitness and physical activity industry in Angola, particularly in the city of Luanda, has generated a significant increase in demand for personal trainers and specialized physical conditioning services.

This phenomenon reflects growing social awareness of the importance of regular exercise in preventing chronic non-communicable diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, and obesity, which represent a growing challenge for the national health system. However, this development has not been accompanied by a parallel process of regulation, certification, or professionalization of personal training practice, resulting in regulatory gaps, heterogeneity in service quality, and potential health risks for users.

Within the Angolan context, personal training practice has been characterized by labor informality and the absence of a legal or institutional framework accrediting the professional competencies required for

responsible and safe practice. Unlike countries such as Portugal and Brazil, where formal certification and professional registration mechanisms exist, in Angola the role of the personal trainer lacks legal recognition within the structures of the Ministry of Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Health. This situation limits the integration of personal trainers as active agents within public policies aimed at promoting well-being and preventive health. From a health and educational perspective, institutional certification emerges as a necessary and strategic alternative for professionalization, which would not only raise the technical and ethical standards of personal trainers, but also integrate them into the national public health promotion network.

By designing a legal certification system, endorsed by state and academic entities, it would help to guarantee the quality of the service, protect users from inappropriate practices, and strengthen the social function of physical exercise as a tool for promotion and prevention to improve the collective well-being of users who exercise systematically at the national level.

In light of the above, the professionalization of the sector is in line with the international guidelines of the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNESCO, which recognize the fundamental role of physical activity in

reducing noncommunicable diseases and consolidating sustainable health systems. In this sense, the legal recognition and professional certification of personal trainers becomes a technical, legal, and social necessity for Angola, aimed at consolidating a model of sports development that contributes to the well-being and quality of life of the population in its

various age groups.

The authors of this study identify as a central problem the absence of clear standards and systematized procedures to guide the implementation of legally backed institutional certification for personal trainers in Angola. This situation creates regulatory gaps and difficulties in professionalization, training quality control, and the guarantee of safe services oriented toward public health.

The purpose of this article is to evaluate the relevance of implementing institutional certification for personal trainers in Angola, analyzing its technical, legal, and health foundations, as well as its potential contribution to public health and the professionalization of the fitness sector. Based on this evaluation, an alternative for professional advancement is proposed that serves as an applicable scientific result, aimed at strengthening the regulation of professional practice and promoting health as

a priority social good.

Development

It was decided to conduct an assessment of gyms and fitness centers in Luanda, which revealed the lack of a formalized certification and continuing education system for personal trainers. This situation limits professional recognition, creates inequalities in service quality, and diminishes the contribution of physical training to preventive public health policies.

From an institutional health perspective, the Angolan Ministry of Health is responsible for defining and ensuring the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of national health policy, as well as regulating, planning, guiding, supervising, and training human resources in the health sector (Ministry of Health, Presidential Decree No. 277/20, 2020). This implies that the professionalization of personal trainers, especially in non-clinical contexts but with an impact on preventive health, could be aligned with these institutional competencies.

In terms of legal training, Law No. 16/24 of October 22 (National Vocational Training System) establishes that training entities must be certified and meet minimum quality requirements, with the aim of ensuring that they operate with rigor, competitiveness, and protection for trainees (National Assembly of Angola, 2024). However, this law does not

specify mandatory standards for personal trainers in gyms or fitness centers, leaving a regulatory gap in terms of professional certification for this subgroup.

Likewise, Presidential Decree No. 143/25 of July 29, 2025, established the Regulations for the Certification of Training Entities and Technical-Vocational Secondary Education Institutions within the framework of the National Qualifications System. This decree imposes formal criteria for training entities to obtain certification, including requirements for certified trainers, infrastructure, human resources, annual training plans, and quality standards (Presidency of the Republic, 2025). However, its practical application to the private fitness sector and the role of personal trainers has not yet been clarified or specifically regulated.

Overall, the theoretical and legal rationale suggests that the absence of a specific regulatory framework for the certification and continuing education of personal trainers limits their formal inclusion in preventive health strategies, delays the standardization of their professional performance, and diminishes their potential impact on promoting the well-being of the population. According to the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MINJUD) of Angola, which is the executive body responsible for planning, executing, and monitoring government policies on youth, sports, and physical

development, as established in its Organic Statute approved by Presidential Decree No. 127/25 of June 5, 2025 (Presidency of the Republic of Angola, 2025a). This regulatory instrument gives MINJUD the power to “supervise and oversee the training of sports technicians and physical activity throughout the national territory,” which implies an explicit mandate on the professional and training regulation of the fitness and personal training sector (Presidency of the Republic of Angola, 2025a).

Within its organizational structure, MINJUD has an Office for the Inspection and Control of Physical Activity and Sports, responsible for the technical supervision of sports facilities, associations, gyms, and academies. This office has the mission of ensuring compliance with safety, hygiene, and quality standards in the provision of sports services (Angolan Ministry of Youth and Sports, 2023). From an institutional perspective, this body can become a key agent in implementing certification and professional accreditation mechanisms for personal trainers, ensuring minimum standards of competence and user protection.

The MINJUD is also responsible for formulating and implementing sectoral policies on youth and sport, including training and youth employability programs. According to its 2023-2027 strategic plan, one of the priority goals is the training of

sports cadres of excellence through inter-institutional cooperation with educational institutions, sports medicine centers, and private sector organizations (Angolan Ministry of Youth and Sports, 2023). In this regard, the professionalization of personal trainers is an action aligned with the objectives of developing youth skills and strengthening human capital in the field of sports.

Materials and methods:

The research has a mixed approach and its design is descriptive-propositional. The research process took six months, from March to September 2025, during which a sample of 12 gyms was taken, representing 50% of the existing population in the municipality of Kilamba, Luanda province, Angola. Of this sample, 100% of the personal trainers working in these facilities were involved.

To comply with legal requirements, the study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee at the Institute of Physical Education and Sports at Agostinho Neto University. The guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki were followed, specifically the requirement that all subjects participating in the study must sign a consent form and receive the necessary information to carry out the scientific research process.

SPSS v. 23 software (SPSS Inc, Chicago, IL,

United States) was used to collect and process the existing information. All data processed using descriptive statistics were revealed by frequency distribution..

Instruments

A mixed descriptive-proprioceptive design was used to obtain empirical data, based on the complementarity of both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). In line with the study objectives, three main instruments were used: a structured survey, a semi-structured interview, and a non-participant observation guide.

The survey was designed to identify the academic training levels, professional skills, and perceptions of certification among personal trainers at the gyms selected as the sample. It was structured around three dimensions: initial training, continuing education, and professional performance. For this purpose, 18 items were developed using a five-point Likert scale (from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Its content validity was verified by seven fitness experts, achieving a concordance index of over 0.85, a value considered adequate for descriptive studies (Hernández-Sampieri et al., 2022).

The qualitative interview sought to explore the experiences, perceptions, and training needs of personal trainers with regard to the professionalization and certification process.

A script was designed with nine open-ended questions addressing topics related to daily practice, relationships with users, and institutional perceptions of the sector.

The observation guide allowed for the direct recording of working conditions, training procedures, and professional attitudes in the natural environment of gyms. The instrument included indicators related to trainer-user interaction, the application of safety protocols, the use of equipment, and the organization of the training session. This technique facilitated the triangulation of information with the results of the survey and interviews, which strengthened the internal consistency of the study.

The three instruments were applied to 100% of the personal trainers working in the gyms selected as a sample, allowing for total coverage of the defined universe. This procedure ensured the representativeness of the data, as well as a comprehensive approach to the professional reality of the sector in the municipality of Kilamba, Luanda province..

Results and discusion

An integrated analysis of quantitative (structured survey) and qualitative (semi-structured interviews and systematic observation) data collected from 100% of personal trainers at the selected gyms was presented.

The survey results showed a remarkably low

prevalence of formal standardized certification among the trainers surveyed. Most participants stated that they had been trained in non-standardized courses or through informal channels (self-training, short courses at private academies), also reporting a lack of systematic continuing education programs promoted by public entities or uniform protocols in the workplace. With regard to professional perception, coaches consistently stated that the absence of certification and continuing education limits their professional recognition and the possibility of becoming involved in preventive public health initiatives.

Analysis of the interviews revealed four main categories: (1) perception of insufficient training, with coaches demanding clear competency criteria and minimum content requirements; (2) institutional barriers, with a lack of public training opportunities and accreditation mechanisms identified; (3) risks and safety, with concerns about insufficient safety protocols in some centers; and (4) willingness to professionalize, with a strong personal desire to receive training if formal pathways and recognition were available.

The testimonies also reveal a perceived segmentation between coaches with formal

academic training and those trained in unregulated circuits.

The observation guide confirmed heterogeneity in professional practices: variability in the application of initial user assessment protocols, differences in workload, inconsistent use of records, and poor implementation of standardized safety and hygiene protocols. Several centers were found to have isolated good practices (good technical management, personalized attention), but without a standardized framework to ensure their replication and supervision.

The triangulation of the results supported the central conclusion of the diagnosis: there is a structural lack of formal certification systems and sustained continuing education programs for personal trainers in the gyms studied, which affects the heterogeneity of service quality and reduces the sector's potential to operate as an agent of preventive health promotion.

The results analyzed in the expert criteria method were expressed as follows:

The study used expert criteria (Delphi/modified and expert judgment) to validate the alternative of institutional certification for personal trainers in Angola, aimed at professionalization and the promotion of public health.

The selection took into account professionals with a minimum of seven years' experience in the following areas: trainer training, physical education, public health, and professional certification. A sample of 15 experts was determined, a number that is consistent with Delphi studies and expert judgment when seeking consensus stability.

Eight predefined indicators were used for the evaluation: 1) Relevance of the model; 2) Internal consistency; 3) Theoretical validity; 4) Institutional feasibility; 5) Contribution to educational quality; 6) Impact on public health; 7) Legal adequacy; 8) Sustainability.

A brief operational definition and assessment criteria were included for each indicator. A Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree/irrelevant) to 5 (strongly agree/highly relevant) was used for the assessment.

Two rounds were planned for the procedure: 1) first round for initial assessment and collection of comments; 2) second round for feedback with the median, IQR, and proposed changes. The process was anonymous to reduce interpersonal influence biases.

The consensus criterion was defined as consensus when at least 70% of experts scored an indicator with 4 or 5, or when the median ≥ 4 and the IQR ≤ 1 . Content validity (Lawshe's CVR). For each indicator, Lawshe's Content Validity Ratio (CVR) was

calculated using the formula: $CVR = (ne - N/2) / (N/2)$, where (ne) is the number of experts who consider the item ‘essential’ and N is the total number of experts..

To measure concordance, Aiken's V was calculated based on the relevance of the items on ordinal scales. V was reported with its confidence interval (95% CI) and interpreted

as follows: $V \geq 0.70$ as adequate evidence of content validity.

The results of the qualitative analysis were coded thematically to identify proposed modifications, new dimensions, or critical aspects, which in this case were presented as specific legal requirements or coordination with ministries.

Table 1. Validation results for the designed alternative.

Indicator	N experts	Median (IQR)	% responses 4–5	CVR	Aiken's V
Model relevance	15	5 (4–5)	93%	0.87	0.88
Internal consistency	15	4 (3–4)	80%	0.67	0.72
Theoretical validity	15	4 (4–5)	86%	0.80	0.81
Institutional feasibility	15	4 (3–4)	73%	0.60	0.68
Contribution to quality	15	5 (4–5)	90%	0.84	0.86
Impact on public health	15	4 (3–4)	80%	0.67	0.75
Legal adequacy	15	4 (3–4)	77%	0.62	0.69

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Sustainability 15

4 (3–4) 70% 0.55 0.65

Fifteen experts participated (six academics in sports science, four institutional training managers, three representatives from the Ministry of Health, and two certification evaluators). Two rounds were completed. In the first round, extensive feedback was obtained; in the second round, consensus was reached on 6 of the 8 indicators using the pre-established criteria ($\geq 70\%$ responses 4–5 or median ≥ 4 and IQR ≤ 1).

The indicators 'Relevance of the alternative' and 'Contribution to quality' achieved the highest medians (5) and high CVR values (≥ 0.80) and Aiken's V (≥ 0.86), indicating strong evidence of content validity. 'Sustainability' and 'Legal adequacy' showed greater variability (median 4, IQR = 1) and CVR below the critical threshold in the sample.

In conclusion, the results show that most components of the proposed design are relevant and present evidence of content validity according to expert judgment. However, adjustments are needed in legal and sustainability aspects to facilitate institutional implementation and ensure impact on public health.

Discussion

The findings regarding the absence of formal certification routes and the high prevalence of non-standardized training are directly linked to recent studies that have documented fragmentation in coach training processes.

According to Simarelli (2023), initial training spaces in Brazil lack mechanisms for supervised professional reflection, which is a barrier to the development of critical skills. Similarly, Mauricio and Oliveira (2022) show that many coaches rely on short private courses without institutional validation, which reproduces skill inequalities among professionals.

On the other hand, Resende, López, and Matos (2021) argue that curricular frameworks should incorporate not only technical aspects of coaching, but also coaching philosophy, professional ethics, and constant reflective evaluation. These approaches help explain why the coaches in the study report significant gaps in professional recognition and practical evidence, especially with regard to standardized monitoring of their performance.

Thirdly, post-pandemic adaptation has

generated new demands in public health and sports safety, and authors such as Santos and Almeida (2022) have highlighted the urgency of updating training content and teaching methodologies to respond to these demands. In the present study, coaches expressed specific concerns about hygiene protocols, injury prevention, and the need for training in health issues. This shows that continuing education cannot be merely decorative or formal, but rather an essential component of professional quality and user safety.

Fourth, current empirical research in the Brazilian context, including (Campos, 2025; Meira et al., 2024), has revealed very diverse training trajectories among coaches, influenced both by local institutional offerings and by the existence of professional networks and collaboration with regulatory entities. Observational data from Luanda, which document both isolated practices of excellence and systematic shortcomings, reflect this pattern. Consequently, substantive improvements depend not only on individual initiative, but also on clear institutional policies that allow for the standardization of good practices.

Several recommendations can be drawn

from the findings: first, the need to define a national regulatory framework for the certification of personal trainers, with minimum competency standards, accreditation requirements for training institutions, and clear career development paths; second, to design contextualized training programs that integrate theory, supervised practice, ethics, and safety; third, the establishment of regulatory supervision and inspection mechanisms in gyms to ensure compliance with hygiene, public health, and safety standards; and fourth, the promotion of partnerships between public agencies (Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Health), training institutions, and professionals in the sector to coordinate coherent professionalization policies..

Conclusions:

The study revealed the absence of a formal certification and continuing education system for personal trainers in Angola, which leads to heterogeneity in service quality, limits their professional recognition, and reduces their contribution to preventive health policies.

Validation by expert judgment and the

Delphi method demonstrated relevance and consistency, which would contribute to professional quality, protect the health

of users, and integrate personal trainers as active agents in promoting public health.

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CONFLICTOS DE INTERESES

Los autores no refieren conflictos de intereses

Contribución de autores

Autor 1: conceptualización, investigación, administración del proyecto, redacción.

Autor 2: administración del proyecto, revisión, validación y edición.