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UNIVERSITY SPRINT TRAINING IN CHINA AND MALAYSIA: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF COACHING PRACTICE, STUDENT ATHLETE DEVELOPMENT, AND CONTEXT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract:

This paper reviews the sprint training studies published from 2021 to 2025 and interprets the evidence from a higher education perspective, especially with regard to university training practice in China and Malaysia. A systematic literature review approach was used and the reporting logic was informed by PRISMA 2020 to enhance transparency. Relevant studies were obtained from the Web of Science Core Collection and Scopus using sprint-training-related keywords, including acceleration, maximal velocity, resisted sprinting, force-velocity profiling, neuromuscular adaptation, sprint biomechanics, speed monitoring, and sprint recovery. The first search resulted in 188 records. After removal of duplicates, subject area screening and full-text assessment 53 studies were retained for final analysis. The review highlighted three main themes: sprint technique and acceleration mechanics; strength-speed integration and development of specific abilities; and fatigue, recovery and training monitoring. The findings indicate that recent research is becoming more data informed and individualised but remains focused on quantitative designs and elite or semi professional populations. Direct evidence on university athletes, coaching pedagogy in higher education and cross cultural comparison is limited. This paper recontextualises the literature on learning, coaching practice and student-athlete development to suggest that university sprint training should be understood as both a performance issue, and an educational and contextual issue, shaped by institutional

schedules, support systems, and local training environments. This perspective offers a stronger conceptual basis for future comparative work on university sprint training in China and Malaysia.

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Keyword:

Coaching Practice; China and Malaysia; Higher Education; Sprint Training; Student-Athlete Development



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Introduction

The research on sprint training has recently undergone rapid expansion with particular emphasis on acceleration mechanics, resistance sprinting, force production, monitoring technology and recovery strategies. Much of this work has been developed by sport science and performance training. A lot of these studies have focused on biomechanical or physiological outcomes. By contrast, less attention has been paid to sprint training as a higher education practice where coaching, learning, institutional routines and student-athlete development interact in the same environment.

This is especially so when doing comparative work between China and Malaysia. The two countries are developing university sports systems but their institutional structures, coaching traditions, training resources and support environments are different. As a result, the meaning and implementation of sprint training can vary from one setting to another, and this can lead to differences in the performance of the athletes and the effectiveness of the coaching in each country. Hence a review of recent literature is therefore needed not only to summarise scientific findings but also to clarify what these findings may mean for coaching practice, student-athlete learning and training organisation in higher education.

The present review attempts to reorganise recent sprint training literature with a clearer focus on higher education, in order to make the paper suitable for an education-orientated journal. Rather than viewing sprint performance as a biomechanical or physiological outcome, the paper examines previous studies in terms of coaching pedagogy, training design, student support and contextual comparison. This framing helps to link sport science evidence to the realities of university training in China and Malaysia.

Review Aim

The aim of this review is to synthesise recent sprint training research from 2021 to 2025 and re-interpret the evidence through the lens of higher education. In particular, the review aims to elucidate how current findings on sprint technique, strength-speed integration, fatigue and

recovery can inform university coaching practice, student athlete development and future comparative research between China and Malaysia.

Review Questions

RQ1. What major themes and research trends can be identified in sprint training studies published from 2021 to 2025?

RQ2. How can these findings be interpreted in relation to higher education practice, especially university coaching and student athlete development?

RQ3. What research gaps remain, and how do they support a future comparative study of university sprint training in China and Malaysia?

Method

This review uses the systematic literature review (SLR) methodology. The process of identifying, screening, classifying, and interpreting past studies is more transparent, structured, and replicable in an SLR than in a traditional narrative review. Such an approach is appropriate to the current paper since it helps to identify the development of sprint training research over time, the most urgent issues and those that need further investigation (Tranfield et al., 2003). PRISMA 2020 was also used to guide the review's reporting logic to enhance the transparency and consistency of the review process (Page et al., 2021).

Research Objectives of the Review

This systematic review has four aims. The objective is first to identify the main research trends in sprint training between 2021 and 2025. Second, it attempts to summarise the main findings concerning sprint technique, strength-speed development and fatigue and recovery. Third, it considers how previous research can support training practice in university settings, particularly in terms of coaching design, student athlete development and training organisation. Fourth, it highlights the gaps in previous research and justifies the need for more comparative research in the context of higher education.

Search Scope and Database Selection

To ensure academic quality and representativeness, the Web of Science Core Collection and Scopus were employed as the main databases for this review. The search period was from January 2021 to December 2025. The range was selected because it is based on current progress in sprint training research, including acceleration, maximal velocity, resisted sprinting, biomechanical analysis, training monitoring and recovery strategies.

Search relevance was improved by using Boolean combinations of sprint-related keywords. The search strategy consisted of terms such as ("sprint training" OR sprint*) AND (acceleration OR "maximal velocity" OR "resisted sprinting" OR "force-velocity profiling" OR "neuromuscular adaptation" OR "sprint biomechanics" OR "speed monitoring" OR "sprint recovery"). The first search resulted in 188 records. After software screening and manual checking to remove duplicates, 181 studies remained.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies were included if they met the following criteria: (1) directly addressed sprint training or sprint performance; (2) clearly reported research design, intervention procedure, testing process, or data analysis method; (3) published in a peer-reviewed journal or another academic source; and (4) relevant to sport science, physical education, coaching, or other performance fields. Duplicate records, conference abstracts with incomplete data, editorials, brief news items, policy notes or papers whose main subject was outside sprint training were excluded. Studies were excluded if they had unclear methods or low analytical value.

Screening Procedure

The screening process was conducted in four stages. Initially, we searched the databases using the defined keywords. Second, duplicate records were removed by software and manual check. Third, we reviewed titles, abstracts and subject categories to identify whether the studies were consistent with the emphasis of sprint training. Fourth, the remaining full-text articles were assessed for relevance to the topic, clarity of methodology, and theoretical value. This stepwise process resulted in an initial 188 identified records, 181 filtered records and finally 53 studies for detailed review.

Data Extraction and Coding

Data was extracted and coded in a consistent manner for each retained study. The coding categories were publication year, journal category, research region, participant group, research design, training method type and major performance variables. The groups of participants were university students, youth athletes, elite athletes and team sport athletes. Training methods included acceleration training, maximum speed training, resisted sprinting, strength-speed integration, technical instruction, and monitoring of recovery. The main factors were stride length, contact time, ground reaction force, force-velocity profile, heart rate variability and signs of fatigue. The review identified recurring themes, compared patterns across contexts and interpreted the literature in relation to university coaching and student athlete development through this coding process.

Review Boundaries and Trustworthiness

This review is interpretive and based on available studies retrieved from the selected databases and search strategy. To strengthen trustworthiness, explicit selection criteria, transparent screening steps and a repeatable coding structure were used in the review. The review does not pretend to be exhaustive in all languages or databases. Therefore, the conclusions should be considered as a structured synthesis of the most relevant studies available and not a definitive statement about all sprint training research worldwide.

Table 1: Literature Classification Summary

Category	Summary	Example in Source Manuscript
Publication year	2022 (12), 2023 (18), 2024 (20), 2025 (3)	Derakhti et al. (2022)
Journal category	Training studies; exercise physiology; sport biomechanics; integrated sport science	Journal of Human Kinetics
Research region	Europe; North America; Australia; New Zealand; Asia	Panasci et al. (2023)
Participants	University students; youth athletes; elite athletes; team-sport athletes	Loturco et al. (2023)
Research method	Predominantly quantitative studies	Rey et al. (2024)
Training method type	Acceleration; maximal speed; resisted training; strength-speed work; technical instruction; recovery	Journal of Human Kinetics
Key variables	Stride characteristics; contact time; ground reaction force; force-velocity profile; heart-rate variability; fatigue indicators	Panasci et al. (2023)

Source: Developed by the authors based on the reviewed literature.

Findings from Prior Studies

Evolution and Distribution of Research Themes

The review of the 53 retained studies shows that sprint training research from 2021 to 2025 developed mainly around three major themes: sprint technique and acceleration mechanics; strength-speed integration and specific ability development; and fatigue, recovery, and training-load monitoring. Together, these themes show a shift from isolated performance factors toward a more integrated understanding of how technique, physical preparation, and recovery interact within training systems (Samozino et al., 2022; Hughes et al., 2023; Ward et al., 2024). For university settings, this shift is important because training effectiveness is not determined by one element alone but by the way it is organised, delivered, and adjusted within the realities of student-athlete development.

Sprint Technique and Acceleration Mechanics

Studies published between 2021 and 2022 focused heavily on the acceleration phase of sprinting, particularly the first 10 meters. In this phase, researchers studied the production of force and the movement characteristics that contribute to faster acceleration. Much evidence suggests that effective acceleration is related to the athlete's ability to direct force in a horizontal direction rather than vertical, consistent with recent force velocity work in sprint acceleration (Samozino et al., 2022). Similarly, Derakhti et al. (2022) reported that forward trunk lean, a stable hip position, and appropriate lower-limb angles help athletes generate more effective horizontal force during the start and early steps. Step rhythm was a frequent topic of

discussion in this group of studies. A short ground contact time and a high step rate were found to support early acceleration as they improve the speed of force transfer and reduce energy loss. Some studies also examined neuromuscular contributions and reported that gluteus maximus and hamstring muscle groups play an important role in maintaining forward body position and producing propulsive force. Overall, these studies indicate that acceleration performance is a combination of posture control, force direction, coordination and rhythm. From a biomechanical perspective, these findings are important for the present study, but also from a practical training perspective. In university settings athletes often train with limited time, mixed ability levels and changing academic demands. Therefore, technical instruction should be clear, efficient, and suitable for the real training conditions of student athletes. In this sense, previous studies on acceleration mechanics provide useful guidance for coaching practice in higher education settings.

Strength-Speed Integration and Specific Ability Development

A second major theme in recent sprint training research concerns the combination of strength and speed. Many recent studies have emphasised the need to combine strength training and sprint practice in a coordinated way, rather than treating them as separate components. Derakhti et al. (2022) hypothesised that athletes perform better when force development is trained more similar to the rhythm and movement requirements of sprinting. Further evidence from synthesis of sprint-specific and strength training indicates that integrated or combined methods can support sprint development when the programme is well targeted (Hughes et al., 2023; Hall et al., 2023). This means that training should increase force output and improve the ability of the athlete to express force quickly and effectively during sprint movement. One of the most widely investigated procedures in this area was resisted sprint training. Panasci et al. (2023) compared different sled loads and found that moderate loading may help to improve horizontal force production during acceleration without major disruption to sprint mechanics. Greater load may increase force demand, but it can also change running rhythm and movement pattern. Lighter loads may help preserve natural sprint mechanics but may provide less stimulus for force development and thus may limit improvements in sprint performance compared to moderate or heavier loads. These findings are largely consistent with recent review evidence and with intervention work in collegiate athletes (Hasan et al., 2021; Ward et al., 2024; Myrvang & van den Tillaar, 2024). This theme is important from the point of view of university training. Student-athletes train typically on limited weekly schedules and may not have the same support systems as professional athletes. In this regard, it may be more practical to train strength-speed integrally rather than to separate physical training and sprint practice. This also supports the educational value of structured coaching design, where the goal is not only to achieve better performance but also to provide more efficient and context-appropriate training.

Fatigue, Recovery, and Training Monitoring

The third main theme is fatigue, recovery and monitoring of training load. Recent studies have demonstrated that fatigue affects sprint mechanics significantly. Fatigue in athletes may result in diminished step rhythm, force application, and postural stability. Romero et al. (2022) demonstrated that fatigue induced by repeated sprints can change sprint biomechanics and consequently affect force production and running economy. Other studies and reviews also suggest that increased training load may lead to higher muscular and neuromuscular fatigue, which could affect performance in the subsequent sessions (Alba-Jiménez et al., 2022; Bestwick-Stevenson et al., 2022). Consequently, recovery has become a more and more

important topic in sprint training research. Recent reviews suggest that appropriate recovery strategies and monitoring can support the recovery of neuromuscular function, improve readiness for subsequent sessions, and help coaches manage training more effectively (Bestwick-Stevenson et al., 2022; Li et al., 2024; Macedo et al., 2024; Esco et al., 2025). Moreover, the use of technology-based profiling tools to support sprint monitoring and decision making in applied settings is increasing (Cormier et al., 2024). This theme is highly relevant to university sport. Unlike professional athletes, student athletes often have to juggle academic pressure, training demands and limited recovery time. This can lead to fatigue being underestimated and a reduction in training quality even if the actual volume of formal training is not too high. Therefore, the present knowledge on fatigue and recovery provides useful support to university coaches who have to manage a more careful training management in educational settings.

Discussion: A Higher Education Interpretation

Key Insights for University Sprint Training

The review suggests that sprint performance is now generally seen as a result of a variety of interacting factors, rather than a single training component. Three interrelated dimensions are highlighted within the literature: technique and acceleration control, strength-speed integration, and fatigue recovery management. Previous research has shown that these dimensions affect each other. Improvements based on strengths may help improve force production but the retention of these improvements in real sprinting depends on the quality of movement and on the recovery condition. Therefore, effective sprint training is not an accumulation of separate exercises but a coordinated system. This insight has direct educational meaning for the university sprint training. The quality of the training depends not only on what athletes do in a session, but also on how training is taught, organised, monitored and adapted to the realities of institutions. Student athletes may have limited schedules, inconsistent training histories, exam periods, and varying access to facilities. Coaches therefore need approaches that are scientifically informed but also pedagogically clear, efficient and realistic for the higher education context.

Research Gaps and Their Meaning for Higher Education

The reviewed studies provide useful findings, but there are still a number of limitations in the current literature. First of all, many studies are looking at short-term changes in performance, not long-term training development. Secondly, a great deal of literature focuses on isolated training components without complete integration of technique, strength, speed and recovery into one framework. Third, many studies concentrate on elite or semi-professional athletes and much less attention is paid to university athletes. In higher education institutions, coaching decisions are usually made in the context of whole programmes rather than in isolation of variables. A related problem is the absence of multi-level perspective. Many studies describe what happens at the individual level (e.g., contact time, stride frequency or force direction) but fewer studies describe how these changes relate to training cycles, coaching strategies, curriculum demands or broader program design. In other words, the literature generally refers to what changes in a session, but not how the sprint ability evolves over time in a university training system. Another gap involves cross-cultural and cross-context comparison. Much of the sprint training research has been carried out in countries with well-established sport science systems, for example Europe, North America and Australia. We know much less about how

sprint training works in the context of different university systems, particularly in Asian contexts. This means that existing findings may not be fully transferable to universities with different coaching traditions, resource levels, educational structures or climate conditions.

Relevance to China-Malaysia Comparative Research

These gaps directly support the value of the current research direction. A useful illustration of the way sprint training is shaped by institutional and cultural contexts can be obtained by comparing China and Malaysia. This kind of work could contribute to the literature by demonstrating that sprint development is not only influenced by the training content, but also by the training context, the coaching organisation and the educational expectations. The review provides two important lessons for research comparing China and Malaysia. First, evidence from current sprint training cannot be transferred from one context to another without consideration of institutional and cultural differences. The way that universities organise training, coach communication, involve their students and provide resources can differ and influence how training methods are implemented. Second, future research should not only measure performance outcomes, but should also explore how training is taught, managed and experienced by student athletes across different higher education systems.

Implications for University Coaching and Student Athlete Development

First, the teaching element of sprint training in universities needs to be much stronger. Technical concepts such as posture, direction of force, rhythm and recovery behaviour need to be explained in a way that student athletes can understand and apply. This means coaching should blend physical training with explicit learning support, feedback and correction. Second, training design should be consistent with realities of higher education, including short practice windows, irregular training histories, and exam periods. Integrated training models may be more useful than highly specialised plans developed for elite environments because they allow coaches to link technical teaching, physical preparation and workload control within a limited timetable. Third, coaching practice needs to incorporate recovery education, so that athletes understand how sleep, workload balance and self-monitoring impact performance and well-being. Institutional perspective. Sprint development should be seen by universities as part of student-athlete support rather than a separate performance task. Better coaches' coordination, academic schedules and sport facilities may improve training quality and reduce overload risk.

Limitations and Future Research

This review is not without limitations. It is based on studies identified in two major databases and within a defined time window which means some relevant publications may have been missed. Moreover, the literature reviewed is dominated by quantitative studies and the paper does not offer a meta-analysis or effect size comparison. The review should therefore be viewed as a structured thematic synthesis, rather than a comprehensive review of all sprint training research.

Future research should explore sprint training at the university level using mixed methods, including studentathlete experience, coaching pedagogy, and institutional conditions, as well as performance indicators. There also needs to be more comparative work across countries and across higher education systems. More specific research on China and Malaysia can help

develop a more context-sensitive understanding of sprint training and provide stronger guidance for university coaching practice and student-athlete development.

Conclusion

Sprint training research from 2021 to 2025 has become more precise, data-informed, and individualised. The most prominent themes relate to the mechanics of acceleration, strength-speed integration and fatigue and recovery management. However, the field is still focused on quantitative studies and on elite or semi-professional populations and evidence from the university and cross-cultural comparison is still limited. This paper re-frames the literature surrounding higher education practice and demonstrates how university sprint training must be seen as a process of learning, coaching and student-development and not just a performance issue. This view is particularly relevant for comparative research on China and Malaysia, where differences in institutional culture, coaching practices and support for student athletes could affect training outcomes.

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