THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COACHING BEHAVIOR AND EMOTION AMONG UPSI MALAYSIA JUARA ATHLETES

Nurul Fatin Adibah Mohd Zamri & Mon Redee Sut Txi*

Faculty of Sport Science and Coaching, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, 35900 Tanjong Malim, Perak, Malaysia

***Corresponding Author**: monredee@fsskj.upsi.edu.my

ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between coaching behavior and emotion among UPSI Malaysia Juara athletes. The objectives were to describe the athletes' backgrounds (age, gender, sports categories, level of sports participation, years of experience, and level of coach participation), analyze differences in coaching behavior and emotions based on these backgrounds, and determine the relationship between coaching behavior and emotions. Using the Coaching Behavior Scale for Sport (CBS-S) and the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) as instruments, data were collected and analyzed through Mann-Whitney U, Kruskal-Wallis, and Spearman's rho tests. Results showed no significant differences in coaching behavior across demographic variables. However, age significantly influences emotional responses, with younger athletes displaying greater emotional reactivity ($Z = -.906$, $p = 0.036$). Gender ($Z = -1.906$, $p = 0.057$) and sport categories ($Z = -1.760$, $p = 0.078$), experience ($Z = 4.031$, $p = 0.402$) and participation levels ($Z = 2.413$, $p = 0.491$) showed non-significant effects on emotions. A low but significant positive correlation was found between coaching behavior and emotion ($r = 0.257$, $p = 0.002$), suggesting that supportive coaching enhances positive emotional states. These findings highlight the importance of universal coaching principles and athlete-centered approaches in fostering emotional stability and performance. Coaches are encouraged to focus on strong interpersonal relationships and constructive feedback to promote psychological well-being and motivation, emphasizing the critical role of coach-athlete interactions over demographic factors.

Keywords: Model. Coaching behavior, Emotion, Malaysia Juara Athletes

INTRODUCTION

Sports psychology is a branch of research aimed at understanding how individuals behave, think, and feel when engaging in sports (McCormick et al., 2019). It focuses on the impact of psychological factors on athletes' performance, mental health, and overall well-being (Raglin, 2001). Sports psychology is now widely recognized as providing a significant competitive advantage and is increasingly important in maintaining consistently high levels of athletic performance across all levels of sport (McCormick et al., 2019). Furthermore, various interventions within sports psychology have proven effective in reducing the risk of psychological issues such as anxiety, depression, and burnout among athletes, thereby supporting their mental health and holistic well-being (Breslin & Leavey, 2019).

Coaching behavior has a profound influence on athletes, and the management of coach-athlete interactions plays a vital role in shaping athletes' psychological experiences (Amorose & Anderson-Butcher, 2007; Bartholomew et al., 2010; Horn, 2002). A coach's attitude, demeanor, personality, and leadership style significantly shape the athletic experience (Marcone, 2017). Coaches hold a central position within sports teams, where they are responsible for fostering an environment conducive to optimal athlete performance (Ho, 2020). Without a coaching style that commands attention and respect, and that inspires motivation, coaches may struggle to effectively guide athletes toward success (Marcone, 2017). Thus, understanding athletes' coaching preferences is essential to providing meaningful experiences that enhance performance (Pestano, 2021).

Coaching behavior encompasses a wide range of observable actions, attitudes, and communication styles that coaches exhibit when interacting with athletes (Cushion, 2010). These include the delivery of feedback, motivational strategies, leadership approaches, and the quality of interpersonal relationships between coaches and athletes (Cushion, 2010). The importance of coaching behavior lies in its direct impact on athletes' experiences, development, and performance outcomes (Pesidas & Serrano, 2023). Developing effective coaching habits is crucial for inspiring individuals to improve efficiency and achieve team goals (Pesidas & Serrano, 2023). Additionally, a coach's behavior can affect not only an athlete's performance but also their psychological well-being (Kim et al., 2020). However, coaching practices are not universally applicable, as they must account for the unique traits of athletes and the demands of specific situations (Kassim & Boardley, 2018). Effective leadership and coaching behaviors are thus shaped by the sport type, coaching style, and the individual characteristics of the athletes involved (Smoll & Smith, 1989). To enhance performance, coaches must be willing to adapt their methods to suit the specific needs of their athletes (Dunn, 2009).

Emotion in the context of sports refers to the wide range of feelings and psychological states experienced by athletes during their participation in various activities (Ruoxi et al., 2023). These emotions ranging from excitement and elation to anxiety and frustration—have a profound influence on performance, cognition, and overall well-being (Hanin, 2010). Positive emotions, such as happiness and a sense of accomplishment, can boost motivation, confidence, and resilience, which in turn enhances performance and mental well-being (Patnaik, 2021). In contrast, negative emotions like anger and fear can impair performance and jeopardize athletes' mental health if not properly managed (Chang et al., 2020). Therefore, developing emotional

awareness and learning strategies to regulate emotions are essential for optimizing performance and well-being (Bird et al., 2021). When athletes learn to harness positive emotions and mitigate negative ones, they can improve both their sporting experiences and long-term satisfaction in athletics (Lazarus, 2000).

The complex relationship between coaching behavior and athletes' emotional experiences is a critical yet underexplored area in university sports. Coaching behaviors including physical training and planning, technical skills, mental preparation, goal setting, competition strategies, personal rapport, and negative personal rapport (González-García et al., 2022) can have a significant impact on athletes' emotional states (González-García et al., 2021). Research indicates that athletes' perceptions of these behaviors play a vital role in shaping their emotional experiences (Gould & Carson, 2011). For example, coaches who emphasize physical preparation and structured planning can instill confidence and excitement in athletes. Similarly, a focus on technical development fosters a sense of competence and motivation (Martens & Vealey, 2023). Mental training strategies such as visualization and positive self-talk help athletes manage anxiety and enhance resilience (Hasbi & Asni, 2023). Goal setting also plays an emotional role meeting performance goals enhances positive affect, whereas failure may lead to negative emotions (Gollwitzer & Oettingen, 2012). Competition strategies further help athletes manage pressure and build a competitive mindset (Dunn et al., 2020).

The quality of personal rapport defined by the coach-athlete relationship is equally crucial. A positive, supportive rapport can enhance feelings of joy, satisfaction, and enthusiasm, promoting athletes' emotional well-being (Lafrenière et al., 2011). In contrast, negative rapport marked by criticism, conflict, or indifference can trigger anxiety, frustration, and anger (Guerrero & La Valley, 2006). Understanding these dynamics is essential for cultivating coaching practices that not only improve athletic performance but also support emotional and psychological health.

Despite the recognized influence of coaching behavior, there is a noticeable lack of empirical research specifically addressing how these behaviors affect the emotions of Malaysian university athletes. Coaches in the Malaysian collegiate sports system play a pivotal role in athlete development, yet limited attention has been paid to how their behaviors impact the emotional well-being of student-athletes. This is especially important given the developmental stage and performance pressures experienced by university athletes, which necessitate personalized and sensitive coaching approaches.

While existing research has identified links between coaching behaviors and emotional outcomes, significant gaps remain. One such gap involves the identification of specific coaching behaviors that elicit positive or negative emotional responses in athletes. Although studies have acknowledged that supportive communication and positive feedback are beneficial, more detailed analysis is needed to identify the most influential behaviors. Moreover, the role of individual differences such as personality traits like resilience and hardiness (Rubén et al., 2019) in moderating the effects of coaching on emotion remains underexplored. Additional research is necessary to validate these moderating factors and uncover other relevant influences on the coach-emotion relationship.

In light of the issues outlined, the purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between coaching behavior and the emotional experiences of university athletes in Malaysia. This study aims to provide insights into how various coaching behaviors influence athletes' emotions and contribute to enhanced coaching practices and athlete well-being within the Malaysian university sports context.

Specifically, this study addressed the following research objectives; i) to describe the background characteristics (age, gender, sport category, level of sport participation, years of experience, and level of coach involvement) of university athletes, ii) to examine the differences in coaching behaviors based on university athletes' background characteristics, iii) to examine the differences in emotional experiences based on university athletes' background characteristics and iv) to determine the relationship between coaching behavior and emotion among university athletes.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

Participants

The population for this study consists of Malaysia Juara athletes who took the diploma program in sports science and coaching at Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI). A total of 144 out of 228 student-athletes (n=54 female, 90 male) participated in this research based on Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table. These participants were further classified into two categories: those involved in team sports and those engaged in individual sports.

Procedure

Participants completed two online questionnaires through a Google Forms link, which was distributed via social communication platforms, including WhatsApp. The questionnaires included the Coaching Behavior Scale for Sport (CBS-S) developed by Côté et al. (1999) and the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) developed by Watson et al. (1988). Participants were first asked to provide demographic information before proceeding with the survey. Upon completion, responses were submitted by clicking the "Submit" button. Google Forms was chosen for its user-friendly interface and efficiency in data collection. All responses were collected anonymously to ensure confidentiality.

Instruments

A demographic information form was used to collect data on each participant's age, gender, level of participation in sport, years of experience in sport, and the level of coach participation. Two validated questionnaires were utilized:
   i. Coaching Behavior Scale for Sport (CBS-S): 47-items scale (Côté et al., 1999) contains seven sub-scale: Physical Training and Planning, Technical Skills, Mental Preparation, Goal Setting, Competition Strategies, Personal Rapport, and Negative Personal Rapport.

ii. Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS): 20-items scale (Watson et al., 1988) contains two sub-scale: positive affect (PA) and negative affect (NA).

Data Analysis

In this study, data collection was analyzed utilizing IBM Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 (George & MalleryPaul, 2019). Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation) were used to describe the background characteristics. Mann-Whitney test and Kruskal-Wallis test (Z-score, Chi-Square, df and asymptotic significance) were used to examine the differences. Spearman rho Correlation (correlation coefficient, significance (2-tailed)) were used to determine the relationship between coaching behavior and emotion.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistic

Table 1 presents a descriptive analysis that provides an overview of the demographic and background characteristics of university athletes, including variables such as age, gender, sports categories, level of sports participation, years of experience in sport, and the level of coach participation.

Table 1. Descriptive analysis of the athlete's background

	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Mean	SD
Age:				
17 – 21 years old	137	95.1	1.05	0.22
22 – 26 years old	7	4.9		
N	144	100.0		
Gender:				
Female	54	37.5	1.63	0.49
Male	90	62.5		
N	144	100.0		
Sport Categories:				
Individual	64	44.4	1.56	0.50
Team	80	55.6		

N	144	100.0		
Level of Sport Participation:				
International	29	20.1		
National	66	45.8		
State	41	28.5	2.19	0.82
University	8	5.6		
N	144	100.0		
Years of Experience in Sport:				
Less than 1 year	1	0.7		
1 – 3 years	8	5.6		
4 – 6 years	36	25.0	3.12	1.19
7 – 9 years	65	45.1		
More than 10 years	34	23.6		
N	144	100.0		
Level of Coach Participation:				
International	35	24.3		
National	36	25.0		
State	47	32.6	2.80	1.39
University	15	10.4		
Other	11	7.6		
N	144	100		

The descriptive analysis showed that the majority of participants (N = 144) were aged between 17–21 years (n = 137, 95.1%), while a smaller proportion were aged 22–26 years (n = 7, 4.9%), with a mean age score of M = 1.05, SD = 0.22. In terms of gender, most participants were male (n = 90, 62.5%), while the remaining were female (n = 54, 37.5%), with a mean gender score of M = 1.63, SD = 0.49. Regarding sport type, 80 athletes (55.6%) were involved in team sports, while 64 athletes (44.4%) participated in individual sports, with a mean sport type score of M = 1.56, SD = 0.50. For level of sport participation, 66 athletes (45.8%) competed at the national level, 41 athletes (28.5%) at the state level, 29 athletes (20.1%) at the international level, and 8 athletes (5.6%) at the university level. The mean participation level

score was M = 2.19, SD = 0.82. In terms of years of experience in sport, 65 athletes (45.1%) had 7–9 years of experience, 36 athletes (25.0%) had 4–6 years, 34 athletes (23.6%) had more than 10 years, 8 athletes (5.6%) had 1–3 years, and 1 athlete (0.7%) had less than 1 year of experience. The mean experience score was M = 3.12, SD = 1.19. Regarding level of coach participation, 47 athletes (32.6%) reported having coaches at the state level, 36 (25.0%) at the national level, 35 (24.3%) at the international level, 15 (10.4%) at the university level, and 11 (7.6%) at other levels. The mean coach participation level score was M = 2.80, SD = 1.39.

Table 2. Mann-Whitney U Tests for Athlete's Background on Coaching Behavior

	Z-score	Asymptotic Significance (2-tailed)
CBS-S		
Age	-.906	0.365
Gender	-.087	0.931
Sports categories	-.778	0.437

Based on table 2, the Mann-Whitney U test results indicate no statistically significant differences in coaching behavior based on athletes' backgrounds (age, gender, and sport categories). For age (Z = -.906, p = 0.365), no significant influence on coaching behavior was observed. Similarly, gender (Z = -.087, p = 0.931) shows a negligible effect. Additionally, sport categories (Z = -.778, p = 0.437), further indicate no significant differences. Overall, these findings suggest that coaching behavior remains consistent regardless of variations in these athlete demographics.

Table 3. Kruskal-Wallis Tests for Athlete's Background on Coaching Behavior

	Chi-Square value	df	Asymptotic Significance
CBS-S			
Level of sport participation	5.880	3	0.118
Years of experience in sport	4.949	4	0.293
Level of coach participation	2.712	4	0.607

Based on table 3, the Kruskal-Wallis test revealed no statistically significant differences in coaching behavior based on the level of sport participation (χ^2 = 5.880, df = 3, p = 0.118), years of experience in sport (χ^2 = 4.949, df = 4, p = 0.293), or level of coach participation (χ^2 = 2.712, df = 4, p = 0.607). These results suggest that coaching behavior is not significantly influenced by these background factors.

Table 4. Mann-Whitney U Tests for Athlete's Background on Emotion

	Z-score	Asymptotic Significance (2-tailed)
PANAS		
Age	-2.099	**0.036**
Gender	-1.906	0.057
Sports categories	-1.760	0.078

Based on table 4, the Mann-Whitney U test revealed that age had a significant effect on emotions (Z = -2.099, p = 0.036), indicating a difference in emotional responses between age groups. Gender showed a marginally non-significant effect (Z = -1.906, p = 0.057), suggesting a potential trend that warrants further investigation. Sport categories did not show a statistically significant effect on emotions (Z = -1.760, p = 0.078). These results highlight age as a key factor influencing emotional differences, while gender and sport categories showed weaker or non-significant associations.

Table 5. Kruskal-Wallis Tests for Athlete's Background on Emotion

	Chi-Square value	df	Asymptotic Significance
PANAS			
Level of sport participation	2.413	3	0.491
Years of experience in sport	4.031	4	0.402
Level of coach participation	0.921	4	0.922

Based on table 5, the Kruskal-Wallis test results indicate no statistically significant differences in emotions based on the level of sport participation (χ^2 = 2.413, df = 3, p = 0.491), years of experience in sport (χ^2 = 4.031, df = 4, p = 0.402), or level of coach participation (χ^2 = 0.921, df = 4, p = 0.922). These findings suggest that emotions are not significantly influenced by these athlete background factors.

Table 6. The Spearman's rho Test between Coaching Behavior and Emotion

		Emotion
Coaching Behavior	**Correlation Coefficient**	**0.257****
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**0.002**
	N	144

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 6 shows the Spearman's rho test results indicate a positive correlation between coaching behavior and emotion (r = 0.257, p = 0.002). This suggests a low but statistically significant relationship between the two variables (Davies, 1971), implying that coaching behavior impacts athletes' emotions.

DISCUSSION

Despite the diverse demographic and experiential profiles revealed in this analysis, findings from the Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis tests indicate that coaching behavior is not significantly influenced by athlete demographics such as age, gender, and sport categories, nor by factors like the level of sport participation, years of experience, or level of coach participation. These results align with previous studies, such as those by Reynders et al. (2019) and Cho et al. (2019), which emphasize that effective coaching behaviors tend to be consistent across diverse athlete backgrounds and contexts. This consistency suggests that coaching behaviors are more likely shaped by universal principles of coaching effectiveness, such as communication, motivation, and skill development, rather than demographic or experiential variations (Taylor et al., 2019). Similarly, research by Kassim, Abdullah, et al. (2020) highlights that athletes' perceptions of coaching are often influenced more by coach-athlete interactions and situational factors than individual differences. Therefore, the current findings reinforce the notion that demographic variables have limited impact on coaching behavior, supporting the need for coaches to focus on adaptable and athlete-centered coaching approaches applicable across diverse settings.

Next, the findings from the Mann-Whitney U test and Kruskal-Wallis test indicate that age significantly influences emotional responses, aligning with prior studies highlighting age-related emotional variability in sports settings. For instance, research by Kim and Tamminen (2023) suggests that younger athletes may experience higher emotional reactivity due to developmental and competitive pressures, whereas older athletes demonstrate greater emotional regulation. Although gender and level of participation were not significant, the trends contrast with Fernández et al. (2020), who suggest that high-level athletes exhibit better emotional regulation and lower anxiety, while males and females cope with and express emotions differently in sports. Overall, age emerges as a consistent determinant of emotional variability, while other variables require further investigation to clarify their roles.

Lastly, the findings indicate a positive correlation between coaching behavior and emotion among UPSI's Malaysia Juara athletes, suggesting that coaching behavior has a measurable, though low, impact on athletes' emotional states. Subscales such as physical training and planning, technical skills, mental preparation, and competition strategies are likely to enhance positive emotions like strength and determination by instilling a sense of preparedness and competence. Similarly, effective goal-setting and strong personal rapport foster motivation and trust. However, negative interactions, reflected in negative personal rapport, can lead to emotions like distress or nervousness. Similar findings in previous studies show that supportive and constructive coaching behaviors enhance positive emotions, while unsupportive behaviors elicit negative emotions like anxiety or frustration (Solakumur et al.,

2023). Though the relationship in this study is relatively low, it emphasizes the significant role of coaching behavior in shaping emotional dynamics, consistent with research on the impact of coaching strategies on athletes' psychological well-being. The results of this study align with past research, highlighting the significant role of coaching behavior and experience in shaping athletes' emotions, while also emphasizing that demographic factors have less influence on emotional responses.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study hold significant implications for athletes, coaches, educators, administrators, and leaders in the sports domain, particularly in understanding how coaching behaviors influence athletes' emotions. The results demonstrate that demographic variables such as age, gender, and experience do not significantly affect coaching behavior, emphasizing the universality of effective coaching principles like communication, motivation, and skill development. This underscores the importance of adopting athlete-centered approaches that focus on building trust, providing constructive feedback, and fostering environments conducive to skill growth and emotional stability. These insights are especially relevant for Malaysia Juara athletes, who often face the challenge of inconsistent coaching support within the Malaysia Juara Program.

The study also aligns with anticipated benefits highlighted in its significance. For example, the correlation between positive coaching practices and enhanced emotional regulation suggests that growth-oriented feedback and motivational strategies can help athletes better manage their emotions. This is particularly critical for Malaysia Juara athletes, as consistent emotional regulation could improve performance and reduce the risk of burnout, even in the absence of steady coaching guidance. Additionally, the findings indicate that coaching approaches emphasizing trust, mutual respect, and open communication contribute to stronger coach-athlete relationships. Such bonds are vital for Malaysia Juara athletes, as they can help counteract the instability of their coaching situation, fostering greater cohesion, motivation, and overall athletic success. Furthermore, coaching methods that promote self-awareness and introspection, such as goal setting and self-assessment, are linked to increased emotional intelligence. These practices can empower Malaysia Juara athletes to navigate their emotions more effectively, compensating for the challenges posed by inconsistent mentorship.

In conclusion, while demographic factors may not significantly impact coaching behavior, the quality of coach-athlete interactions remains crucial in shaping athletes' emotional experiences. The study reinforces the importance of supportive, adaptable coaching strategies that prioritize emotional well-being and motivation. This is particularly critical for contexts like the Malaysia Juara Program, where the lack of consistent coaching presents unique challenges. By adopting athlete-centered coaching practices, coaches can enhance the emotional and psychological resilience of athletes, ultimately fostering their growth and success both on and off the field.

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