

## **The level of relationship between athletes and coaches among sport school students in Malaysia**

Mon Redee Sut Txi

Faculty of Sport Sciences and Coaching, Sultan Idris Education University, Malaysia

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### **Abstract**

Coaches and athletes of different sport background can have a marked influence on their relationship. The objective of this study was to compare the relationship level between the athlete and coach, among sport school students. In addition, this study aimed to compare the level of athlete to coach relationship and vice versa. The *Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (CART-Q)* is used in the data collection process. In this study, the measurement is made from the contract of interpersonal relationships (closeness, commitment and complementarity). The findings are presented in the form of descriptive statistics. The comparison and relationship among variables was determined using t-tests and Pearson correlation tests. The study found that there was a significant correlation between coaches in the team sports category with the closeness of  $t = 2.098$ ,  $\text{sig} = 0041^*$  ( $p < 0.05$ ). The study also found that there was a correlation between the total time of training in a week with the commitment of athletes  $r = 0.155$ ,  $\text{sig} = 0.016^*$  ( $p < 0.05$ ). These findings indicate that the coaches have a higher level of closeness compared with athletes. Meanwhile, it appears to be no problem with athletes' commitment with the training period set by their coach. It can be concluded that, the higher the level of interpersonal qualities (closeness, commitment and complement) the higher the level of relationship between athletes and coaches.

**Key words:** coach-athlete relationship, coaches, athletes, sport school students

### **INTRODUCTION**

The success of athletes at national or international level is influenced by various factors. Among these factors is the relationship with coaches which plays an important role in shaping the career of a sports person. Every athlete requires a coach to train, educate and advice as well as to share views and experience during competitions and/or training sessions. Similarly, coaches require athletes to give their commitment and positive responses to them. Thus, the coaches and the athlete should practice mutual cooperation. According to Jowett (2007) there is interdependence between coaches and athletes in terms of thoughts and behavior.

#### **Coach-athletes Relationship**

The interpersonal factor is essential to consider one's quality as a social entity, especially to show one's relationship with another person (more so if the relationship is considered close and important) which will affect our opinion about ourselves (Hinde, 1997). In the context of the coach-athlete relationship during training, it plays an important role in the physical and psycho-social development of the athlete (Jowett & Cockerill, 2002).

In recent times, due to the findings, sport psychologists have shown interest in coach-athlete relationships (Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). According to Jowett & Nthoumanis (2004), coach-athlete relationships are defined as the situation where their emotions, thoughts and behavior are interdependent on each other.

According to Mallett (2004), coaches play an important role in producing knowledgeable and skilled athletes who are required to raise the achievement level in the sports that they are involved in. Coaches have a great influence in promoting enjoyment, satisfaction as well as continued participation of the athletes. Consequently, this study is carried out to assess the coach-athlete relationships among sport school students in Malaysia. Aspects that are given attention by the researcher includes the gender, the category of sports, total training hour in a week and years of sports experience of the athletes and coaches and the relationship between them. This is because the athlete-coach relationship is important to determine the success of a team.

A series of qualitative studies were carried out to determine the perspective of athlete-coach (Jowett & Cockerill & Meek, 2002; Jowett & Meek, 2000). Jowett and his friends had started the study by determining the uniqueness in interpersonal relationships as the condition where emotions, thoughts and behavior of the coaches and athletes are inter-related (Kelly et al, 1983). The definition of this relationship is important to determine the main components as they are inter-related in athlete-coach relationships. Thus, to build a contract of interpersonal closeness (Berscheid, Snyder & Omoto, 1983), commitment (Newcomb, 1993), complementarity (Kiesler, 1997) should be considered as these qualities were widely used to determine the emotions, thoughts and behavior of the coaches and athletes. The following discussions are aimed at giving a conclusive picture from the results that are obtained in the qualitative study conducted by Jowett and his colleagues on athlete-coach relationships.

### **Closeness, Commitment and Complementarity**

The qualitative case study results show that feelings are looked after with care, love and appreciation with the ability also to trust one another. This has a profound effect on enhancing the athlete-coach intrapersonal qualities (creativity, determination) as well as interpersonal factors such as compatibility and long lasting relationships (Jowett & Meek, 2000; Jowett & Cockerill, 2002).

The commitment of coaches and athletes and a common perspective (common goal, values, beliefs) are established as a channel for communication. Jowett and Meek (2000) also found that with sharing of knowledge comes exposure and exchange of information as well as mutual understanding on common goals.

Apart from that, social influence also enables coaches and athletes to respond according to the needs of the aspirations as well as to respective problems. Complementarity reflects the interdependence of coaches and athletes and effective interaction, in particular during practice. The role of complementarity, tasks and support is found to play an important part in the relationship as it enables both the coaches and athletes to channel all their efforts towards achieving the projected goals (Jowett & Meeks, 2000; Jowett & Cockerill, 2002).

The lack of closeness, commitment and complementarity in athlete-coach relationship is associated with interpersonal conflicts (Jowett & Meek, 2000). In general, findings of the studies brought forth not only constructive qualities but also terms and issues which give effects to more specific processes on the athletes under study.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Participants**

The sample comprised of 291 individuals, of which 240 were athletes and 51 were coaches. Samplings are categorized as athletes and coaches from individual sports and team sports among the sport school students. Samplings also consisted of various sports that are given attention by the

school. There were 17 types of individual sports and 5 types of team sports when the questionnaires were given out to the participants.

## Materials

The instrument used in this study is questionnaires. One set of questionnaire which was divided into two parts were given to the athletes. The parts were: **Part A: Background of the coaches and athletes**; the respondents were asked their age, sex (M=Male, F=Female), experience in sports, total number of training hours in a week. **Part B: Coach-athlete relationship**; the instrument used to measure coach-athlete relationships was a *Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (CART-Q)* which was devised by Jowette & Ntoumanis (2004) in United Kingdom. The questionnaire consisted of 11 items. In the 11 items were 3 sub-categories with 4 items on closeness, 3 items on measuring commitment and the rest of the items (4) on measuring complementarity. An example of the questions asked of the athletes is "Do you trust your coach?" "When the coach is training you, are you prepared to do your best?" and similar questions were given for the coaches too. Each item represented the three factors involved in coach-athlete relationships. Each item consisted of a likert scale of 7 points, that is, from greatly agree to greatly disagree. In addition to examining the reliability of the questionnaire, reliability of each sub-category was also assessed. The alpha frequency value for closeness is  $\alpha = 0.87$ , commitment is  $\alpha = 0.82$  and complementarity is 0.82.

## Procedures

There were a few procedures used in this study. The process of collecting data was done over a month period in the selected location. The questionnaires were distributed in the training fields, athletes' hostels and the National Sports Council. A briefing was held earlier by the researcher to all respondent for them to understand the aims of the study and the questions that were in the questionnaires. The respondents were requested to answer the questionnaires truthfully. The time given was 15 minutes. After the collection of the data according to the total number of respondents that was targetted, the questionnaire were divided into four categories, that is, athletes in individual sports and team sports, and coaches for individual and team sports.

## Data Analysis

In this study, the data collected would be analysed using the program *Statistical Packages for the Social Science for Window version 22'* (SPSS). Descriptive analysis was done to see the distribution of frequency and the percentage of the data. This involved general descriptions concerning the variables that were studied in the forms (frequency, percentage, average, mean and standard deviation. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the information on the background and coach-athlete relationship of the respondents to give a picture of the coefficients for the variables that were measured.

Besides that, inference analysis was also used to observe the link that existed among the variables that were studied. Independent sample t-tests statistical inference was used for the objectives of study two and three to make comparison for variables which had two means. However, Pearson Correlation tests were used for the objectives four and five to observe the existence of relation between the variables, direct relation or reverse relation and the strength of the relation. The table below illustrates the statistical test which was used by the researcher to respond to the objectives of the test.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics of all variable involved are illustrated in the form of a table and were given explanations. Presentation of the results of the study is according to the order of the study and is stated in this chapter using frequency, percentage, average, mean and standard deviation. Statistical inference like t-tests and Pearson Correlation tests were used to answer the study questions that were presented. The findings of the study discussed the athlete-coach relationship among the sport school students. The findings are illustrated and the discussions are in two parts, for the athletes and for the coaches. Discussions and explanations according to the objectives of the study are as follow:

#### *1. Comparison of athlete-coach relationship with regard to the sex of the athletes and the coach*

The results of the study show that there are no significant in relation with the gender of the respondents. The findings have links to the results of studies conducted by Salminen & Liukkonen (2009) which stated that coaches apparently assess themselves in a more positive way than the athletes. Male and female coaches have different perceptions and female coaches have more realistic views concerning themselves regarding the athletes. Besides this, coaches also regard themselves as having a good relationship with their athletes in terms of views (complementarity) and feelings (closeness). According to Jowett & Meeks (2000), closeness refers to feelings of emotion that are close to each other in the athlete-coach relationship. On the other hand, complementarity reflects the mutual connection between the coaches and the athletes in an interaction that is effective regarding the sharing of views that are similar, especially during training.

**Table 1:** Descriptive Analysis and t-Test in Athlete-Coach Relationship – Gender of the Athletes (n=240) and Coaches (n=51)

Variables	Male		Females		t	P
	M	SD	M	SD		
<b>Athletes</b>						
Closeness	23.19	4.03	23.50	3.33	-.645	.520
Commitment	17.35	3.17	17.43	2.65	-.642	.522
Complementarity	23.77	4.34	23.03	3.84	-.482	.631
<b>Coaches</b>						
Closeness	25.31	2.69	25.30	2.09	0.10	.992
Commitment	17.86	2.01	18.84	1.46	-1.605	.115
Complementarity	24.78	2.96	25.07	3.27	-.294	.770

Note: \*  $p \leq .05$

M mean

SD Standard Deviation

#### *2. Comparison of the level of athlete-coach relationship in relation to the category of sports of athletes and coaches*

The findings of the study support previous studies Lorimer & Jowett, (2009) which show that coaches in individual sports have a better relationship with the athletes compared to team sports. This study

shows that the mean score individual game is higher than the team sport. Perhaps, this is due to more one-to-one interaction on teaching and learning was given as compared with the team sport which coaches unable to specially focus to a particular player. As a result, athletes of individual sports and team sports have different thoughts and views. Hence, in giving attention to common relationship, it is important to consider the size of the group in team sports and in individual sports. The size of the sports group can more clearly define the relationship in team sports and individual sports. This idea is based on the view of Carron, Hausenblas, & Eys, (2005) that bigger groups require coaches to play a more important role so that it will have an impact on the interaction and relationship among them. Besides that, individuals in a bigger group display incompatibility in the common goals (Carron, Eys, & Burke, 2007). Thus, an increasing size of a group can change the nature of relationship and interaction among the individuals within the group. On the other hand, this also shows that coaches need to learn on how to constantly interact and have a report with their players in the team. If they able to do that, perhaps their team will be more successful.

**Table 2:** Descriptive Analysis and t-Test in Athlete-Coach Relationship - in the Categories of Sports Athlete (n = 240) and Coach (n = 51)

Variables	Individual		Team		t	P
	M	SD	M	SD		
<b>Athletes</b>						
Closeness	23.43	3.45	23.26	3.93	.365	.716
Commitment	17.34	3.16	17.45	2.63	-.296	.768
Complementarity	24.06	3.83	23.74	4.35	.608	.544
Athlete –Coach Relationship	64.83	9.70	64.46	10.20	.299	.765
<b>Coaches</b>						
Closeness	25.75	2.24	24.14	2.95	2.098	<b>.041*</b>
Commitment	18.24	2.04	17.78	1.57	.754	.454
Complementarity	25.08	3.10	24.28	2.78	.839	.406

Note: \* p ≤ .05  
SD Standard Deviation

### **3. To determine the level of athlete-coach relationship in relation to the years of sports experience of athletes and coaches**

The study results, however contradict the study by Sullivan and Kent (2003) which refer to the view that the effectiveness of the training is due to the ability of the coaches to influence the achievement of athletes. However, the result found that there are no correlation between the athlete-coach relationship and their experienced working with the student athletes. Perhaps, this is due to the fact that the coaches that were selected to teach the sport school among the best with high credibility in coaching from the Ministry of Education.

**Table 3:** Pearson Correlation Analysis in Athlete-Coach Relationship –Years of Experience in Sports Athletes (n – 240) and Coaches (n = 51)

Variables

	Value r	p
<b>Athletes</b>		
Closeness	-.040	.541
Commitment	-.013	.839
Complementarity	-.048	.446
<b>Coaches</b>		
Closeness	0.44	.761
Commitment	2.48	.79
Complementarity	0.26	.57

**4. To determine the level of athlete-coach relationship based on the duration of the training in one week**

With reference to the Table 4 below, the analysis results show no significant differences in the duration of the training in a week with, closeness ( $r = .090$ ,  $\text{sig} = .163$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) and complementarity ( $r = .099$ ,  $\text{sig} = .127$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). However, for commitment, there is a significant link between commitment ( $r = .155$ ,  $\text{sig} = 0.016^*$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and the duration of training in a week. The study results support the findings of Smoll and Smith (2009) who stated that commitment is one of the main factors for the practice of motivation. It is one of the listed behavior qualities for effective training because athletes and coaches can cooperate without disturbance. In general, the athlete-coach relationship is established while in a dynamic and complex training process where coaches and athletes need to voice and state clearly or in full their perceptions (Jowett & Cockerill, 2002). This will influence the athlete's performance, the quality of their relationship, the athletes' commitment during training and their trust and confidence in each other.

**Table 4:** Pearson Correlation Analysis in Athlete-Coach Relationship in Duration of Training Hours per Week, Athletes ( $n = 240$ ) and Coach ( $n = 51$ )

Variables	Level of Relationship	
	Value r	p
<b>Athletes</b>		
Closeness	.090	.163
Commitment	.155	<b>.016*</b>
Complementarity	.099	.127
<b>Coaches</b>		
Closeness	.068	.637
Commitment	.179	.210
Complementarity	.252	0.74

Note: \*  $p \leq .05$

## **SUMMARY**

Based on the analyses results of the study with the intended objectives in mind, it can be concluded that, there is a significant between closeness and the category of sports of the coaches. The findings show that coaches are seen to have a higher level of closeness with their individual game athlete rather than team game athlete. In short, closeness is reflected in the coaches having emotional connection with their athletes. However, according to Jowett (2007), closeness is shown in the close emotional feelings for each other in the athlete-coach relationship. Hence, the closeness relationship may help athletes to motivate and perform better in sports.

One of the most interesting studies was conducted by Wurthner (2009) as a part of the Canadian "Self Podium" program. This study was conducted after the Olympic Summer Games 2008 in Beijing, China. The aim of this study was to determine the factors that contributed to the success of some cases, performances that were not successful from the perspective of both athletes and coaches. The five critical themes were decided, and coaches who had strong relationships with athletes were seen to be the most important factor in winning Olympic medals or producing the best personal achievements. In an interview, each of the 27 athletes describes how they established a strong relationship with their coaches and how the coaches created a productive and conducive environment for them to succeed. Some verbal comments by the athletes regarding the role of the coaches and their relationship with their respective coaches were identified. One of the findings of the study showed that an effective athlete-coach relationship in terms of closeness, commitment, cooperation and interaction and many other factors are important to contribute to the achievements of the athletes.

Similarly, the total number of hours of the athletes' training in a week shows a significant link with commitment. This shows that athletes give commitment in line with the training period set by their coaches. Athlete will spend more time with their coaches during training. This also gives them an opportunity to enhance their relationship during training. More frequent training will enable more opportunities for them to maintain and to maximize their relationships. Sullivan and Kent (2003) state that the effectiveness of the training shows the ability of the coaches to influence the achievements of the athletes. Coaches are responsible to train athletes with the best method to achieve goals. They should establish a suitable and effective relationship to ease the learning process. In an indirect way, they will get commitment from their athletes. Techniques, methods and suitable actions should be emphasized to give positive impact while they are training or teaching their athletes. Thus, the experience and knowledge of a coach may influence the athlete-coach relationship. Based on the theory and social context of Bandura, effectiveness of oneself during training defines the effectiveness of the coaches in the process of learning and upgrading of the performance of their athletes. The factors involved include strategies, techniques, motivation and the personality of the coaches themselves.

In comparing the level of athlete-coach relationship in relation to the sex of the athletes and coaches, there is no significant link. Similarly, the findings of this study do not show any significant link with the years of experience in sports in athlete-coach relationships. The findings also show an absence of a link with the sports experience of the athletes and the coaches. This is in contrast with previous studies. Thus, this has to be scrutinized in order to comprehend the phenomenon in the context of local situations. This is because previous studies that were used were mostly from the West.

These findings contradict the results of the study conducted by Salminen and Liukkonen (2009) which shows that athletes and coaches assess their relationships during training in a different and obvious way. Male and female coaches have different perceptions, with female coaches having more realistic views regarding themselves. However, this studies unable to show differences between male and female coaches relationship with athletes. Perhaps, the same environment, same location and same training regime held by coaches' make the gender is no significant differences.

Thus, it is suggested that future studies should vary the variables such as on the level of relationship with team members, level of management in the team and the stress level of the athletes. Not only that, the reason of why coaches gender's is not significantly difference among athletes, categories of team and individual sport (except for closeness is not significant, and duration of the training of athletes (except for commitment) was also not significance. This is important to determine the extent to which the stated variables also affect the level of relationships and achievements in

sports among sport school students. It is also suggested that future studies are conducted within all Sport Schools in Malaysia, as that is where the new generation of sports heroes will be found. The interview method can also be applied besides using the questionnaires. The interview method can also be applied besides using the questionnaires.

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☒ Mon Redee Sut Txi

Faculty of Sport Sciences and Coaching,

Sultan Idris Education University,

Malaysia

Email: [monredee@fsskj.upsi.edu.my](mailto:monredee@fsskj.upsi.edu.my)