
Athletes' Perception of Their Coach Transformational Leadership and Coach-Athlete Relationship in Team and Individual Sports

Jamilah Ahmad Radzi, Muhammad Fitri Salimee & Ahmad Fikri Mohd Kassim

Faculty of Sports Science and Recreation, Universiti Teknologi MARA,
Perlis Branch, Arau Campus, 02600 Arau, Perlis, Malaysia

Published online: 24 May 2021

To cite this article (APA): Ahmad Radzi, J., Salimee, M. F., & Mohd Kassim, A. F. (2021). Athletes' perception of their coach transformational leadership and coach-athlete relationship in team and individual sports. *Jurnal Sains Sukan & Pendidikan Jasmani*, 10(1), 24-31. <https://doi.org/10.37134/jsspj.vol10.1.4.2021>

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.37134/jsspj.vol10.1.4.2021>

Abstract

Coach is a person who has influential figures, leads and engages in a wide range of roles. Sports coaches play important roles in sport as being responsible for numerous outcomes relevant to athlete development, learning and performance. Transformational leadership has been shown to have positive impacts on a wide range of sport outcomes. Furthermore, the coach-athlete relationship is vital to many outcomes such as satisfaction, well-being and self-concept. Therefore, the current study aimed to examine athlete's perception of coach transformational leadership and coach-athlete relationship in team and individual sports. The sample comprised of 156 university athletes which includes team (Football n = 34, Netball n = 22, Frisbee n = 30) and individual (Athletics n = 22, Badminton n = 20, Tennis n = 28). Each participant completed the Differentiated Transformational Leadership Inventory and the Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire. Results revealed that there was a significant difference in component of the coach-athlete relationship between team and individual sport, whilst there was no significant difference between components of transformational leadership with team and individual sport. Results also showed that there was no significant difference between the components of the coach-athlete relationship with gender. There was also no significant difference on components of transformational leadership with gender except component of idealized influence. The results of this study could provide insight toward an athlete's perception of their coach transformational leadership and the quality of the coach-athlete relationship in different sport categories. Therefore, to increase the positive youth development in sports through transformational leadership behavior and the quality of coach-athlete relationship more study should be examined.

Keywords: Transformational Leadership; Coach-Athlete Relationship; Team sport; Individual sport

INTRODUCTION

Transformational leader is someone who looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher level needs and engage with their followers (Burns, 1978). Later then, (Bass, & Bass, 1985) transformational leadership as leaders who stimulate followers and inspire them to achieve extraordinary results. Since its inception, Smith, Young, Figgins & Arthur, (2017) has identified much evidence to highlight the positive impacts of transformation leadership across a variety of fields, including business and military settings. Study has shown that transformational leadership enables followers to exceed expectations and leads to greater followers' satisfaction and commitment to the organization Smith, Young, Figgins & Arthur, (2017). Transformational leadership strengthens its definitions through transforming the motivation of followers toward their work, rather than focusing on self-centered and extrinsic motives, they are guided toward higher-ordered and intrinsic goals (Bormann & Rowold, 2016). Thus, transformational leadership in sport setting, put coaches as key for transformational behaviors that may be effective in helping athletes exceed and reach beyond their

preconceptions regarding their potential by transforming their beliefs and attitude (Kassim & Boardley, 2018).

Given the positive contribution that transformational leadership has given to our understanding of organizational context, more recently, researchers have used the theory to examine leadership in sport (Bormann & Rowold, 2016). Over the past decade, sport leadership scholars have increasingly turned to transformational leadership in an effort to better understand sport leadership behaviours (Mills & Boardley, 2016). Initial findings suggest that transformational behaviours of coaches are associated with increased athlete intrinsic motivation, increased athlete effort and social and task cohesion between teams (Newland, Newton, Podlog, Legg, & Tanner, 2015). Krukowska (2016), stated that transformational leaders who inspire their athletes to develop the skills they need to achieve their full potential and who motivate them to persist in pursuing their sporting dreams are also in a position to take special interest in building a close and effective relationship with their athlete.

According to Bass and Bass (1985), there are four dimensions of transformational leadership which are idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Idealized influence refers to the quality of being a role model in the eyes of followers and building confidence and respect (Krukowska, 2016). Inspirational motivation is behaviours that inspire and motivate the followers (Fogelqvist & Lestander, 2017). Newland, Newton, Podlog, Legg and Tanner (2015) stated that transformational leaders stimulate intellectual stimulation by encouraging creativity and new ways of thinking about issues and influence in decision-making processes. Individualized consideration refers to recognizing and appreciating an individual's needs, skills, goals and desires (Krukowska, 2016).

On the other hand, leadership in sports is socially built between coach and athlete. Athletes perceive their coach leadership behaviours and attribute coach abilities may affect their mutual interactions (Kao & Tsai, 2016). Therefore, coach-athlete relationship represents to all situations where the feelings, thoughts and behaviours of coach and athlete are mutually and causally linked to each other (Jowett 2017; Nicholls & Perry, 2016; Vieira et al., 2015). A strong relationship between coach and athlete affects performance, happiness and a superior concept of self (Nicholls & Perry, 2016). Based on numerous studies, quality of the coach-athlete relationship is crucial for many outcomes like satisfaction, well-being and self-concept (Krukowska, 2016). According to Kassim and Boardley, (2018) the three dimensions that are composed in coach-athlete relationship is an appropriate variable representing the athlete's connection (closeness, commitment and complementarity). Closeness refers to athletes feeling that their coach cared for, liked, valued and trusted (Kassim & Boardley, 2018). Commitment represents the interpersonal thoughts of coaches and athletes, despite ups and downs, still maintain a close relationship over time (Jowett 2017). According to Rodrigues and Ferreira, (2015) complementarity evaluates behavioral transactions between coaches and athletes involving cooperation, responsiveness and affiliation. It has been found that the coach-athlete relationship that affords a high level of 3C's has a positive connection with the sport-specific and well-being outcomes (Krukowska, 2016). It is to be believed that transformational leadership and coach-athlete relationships interact with each other in order to create an environment that also supports the reciprocal influence between transformational leadership and coach-athlete relationship (Krukowska, 2016).

However, most of the past study focused on transformational leadership in sport is limited and little study has been conducted in this area (Gorgulu, 2019). Lack of empirical study in the context of sport is a result of the bias related to the origin of the Bass and Bass (1985) theory, assuming it is applicable only in the context of work and organization (Fogelqvist & Lestander, 2017). In addition, although there are theoretical and empirical indications that imply the existence of a common ground between coach-athlete relationship concepts and transformational leadership behaviours, this integrative has not been studied extensively (Krukowska, 2016). Considering the above statement, as a team leader, a coach plays a significant role in helping his/her players obtain high levels of performance and success; therefore, this study was conducted to investigate the perceptions of coach transformational leadership and coach-athlete relationship in individual and team sport athletes.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

A total of 156 UiTM Perlis athletes from the team (football = 34; Netball= 22; Fisbee = 30) and individual (Athletics=22, Badminton=20, Tennis=28) participated in the study. The sample consisted of male (n = 80) and female (n = 76) athletes competing at university (n = 132) or regional (n = 24) levels. Length of time with their coaches ranged from 1 to 4 years (M =1.36, SD = .75). Athletes' age ranged from 18 to 25 years (M = 20.15, SD = 1.37) and their sport experience ranged from one to 18 years (M = 9.32, SD = 4.72). On average they spent two to 14 hours per week training / competing in their sport (M = 6.37, SD 1.97).

Instrumentation

Transformational Leadership measured by using the adapted version of the Differentiated Transformational Leadership Inventory (Callow, Smith, Hardy, Arthur & Hardy, 2009). For the purpose of the study, four subscales of transformational leadership in DTLI were used to assess athlete's perception on idealized influence (4 items), inspirational motivation (4 items), intellectual stimulation (4 items) and individual consideration (4 items). Athletes were asked to rate each item using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (all of the time). The stem for all items was "Our coach ..." and example items are "...recognized that different athletes had different needs" (Individual consideration). Vella, Oades, & Crowe, (2012) provided evidence for the scale's internal consistency and validity. Example items are "leads by example" (idealized influence), "expresses confidence...", (inspirational motivation), "gets me rethink the way I do things" (intellectual stimulation) and "treats each team members as an individual" (individual consideration).

Coach-athlete relationship (CART-Q) used to measure Coach Athlete Relationship (Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004). This questionnaire consists of 3 subscales i. closeness (4 items), ii. commitment (3 items) and iii. complementarity (4 items). Examples are "I like my coach" (closeness), "I feel close to my coach" (commitment), and "When I am coached by my coach, I feel at ease". Athletes' will respond using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Evidence for the construct validity of this scale has been provided (Jowett & Meek, 2002) as well for the internal consistency of its subscales (e.g., alpha coefficients ranged from .82 to .89 (Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004).

Data collection procedures

This research was approved by UiTM Perlis Research Ethical Committee. Athletes were contacted through their coaches and team members and ask about the availability to participate in the study. Athletes were informed about the nature and purpose of the study. The participants were given approximately 10-15 minutes to answer the questionnaire. The questionnaires were collected from all participants after they had completed it.

Data analysis

All data analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Science, (SPSS) version 23.0. Descriptive statistics and independent sample t-test were utilized in this present study. The significant level was set at .05 ($p < .05$).

RESULTS

The results of the Independent Sample T-test (Table 2) showed no significant difference in a component of coach-athlete relationship with gender "Commitment", $t = 0.034$, $p = 0.97$ (Male = 5.65, Female =

5.64), “Closeness”, $t = 0.76$, $p = 0.448$ (Male = 6.05, Female = 6.14) and “Complementarity”, $t = 0.322$, $p = 0.748$ (Male = 5.97, Female = 6.01).

Table 2. Independent Sample T-test for Coach-Athlete Relationship Components between genders (N=156).

	Levene’s Test for Equality of Variance		T-test for Equality of Means		
	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Commitment	0.21	0.64	.03	154	.97
Closeness	1.42	0.23	-.76	154	.448
Complementarity	0.00	0.99	-.32	154	.748

Note: $P < .05$. Sig. (2-tailed)

However, see (Table 3), as we hypothesized that there was a significant difference in a component of coach-athlete relationship with team and individual sport. Results revealed that all the components showed significant difference, “Commitment”, $t = 0.481$, $p = 0.002$ (team = 5.43, individual = 5.90), “Complementarity”, $t = 0.005$, $p = 0.002$ (team = 5.81, individual = 6.21) and “Closeness”, $t = .139$, $p = .048$ (team = 5.98, individual = 6.23).

Table 3. Independent Sample T-test for Coach-Athlete Relationship Components between team and individual sports (N=156).

	Levene’s Test for Equality of Variance		T-test for Equality of Means		
	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Commitment	0.50	0.48	-3.09	154	0.00
Closeness	2.21	0.13	-1.99	154	0.05
Complementarity	8.00	0.01	-3.16	154	0.00

Note: $P < .05$. Sig. (2-tailed)

Next, we hypothesized that there was a significant difference in a component of transformational leadership with (i) gender and (ii) team and individual sports. Results showed that there was no significant difference in component of transformational leadership with gender except Idealized Influence, $t = 2.046$, $p = .042$ (Male = 4.13, Female = 4.32). Whilst others were not, “Inspirational Motivation”, $t = .126$, $p = .900$ (Male = 4.22, Female = 4.21) and “Intellectual Stimulation”, $t = .581$, $p = .562$ (Male = 4.11, Female = 4.16). (table 4).

Table 4. Independent Sample T-test for Transformational Leadership Components with Gender (N=156).

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variance		T-test for Equality of Means		
	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Inspirational Motivation	0.02	0.89	0.12	154	.90
Intellectual Stimulation	3.75	0.05	-.58	154	.56
Idealized Influence	0.04	0.84	-2.04	154	.04

Note: P<.05. Sig. (2-tailed)

However, see (Table 5), results showed that there is no significant difference in a component of transformational leadership with team and individual sports. Results showed that “Inspirational Motivation”, $t = 5.45$, $p = .587$ (Male = 4.19, Female = 4.24), “Intellectual Stimulation”, $t = .296$, $p = .767$ (Male = 4.12, Female = 4.15) and “Idealized Influence”, $t = .820$, $p = .748$ (Male 4.19 =, Female = 4.27).

Table 5. Independent Sample T-test for Transformational Leadership Components with Team and Individual Sports (N=156).

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variance		T-test for Equality of Means		
	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Inspirational Motivation	1.17	0.28	-.54	154	0.58
Intellectual Stimulation	0.30	0.58	-.29	154	0.76
Idealized Influence	1.40	0.24	-.82	154	0.41

Note: P<.05. Sig. (2-tailed)

DISCUSSION

Due to the fact that coaches are seen as one of the most influential people in athlete careers (Krukowska, 2016), studies of coach and athlete interaction embrace a wide range of constructs that affect the lives of athletes and coaches. The present study explores the topics of transformational leadership and the relationship between coach and athlete can have a great advantage in practical applications. It is crucial that the theory, models and results produced are connected to practice, particularly in realistic environments such as sports coaching.

The result from this study showed that there is a significant difference on component of coach-athlete relationship with team and individual sport. This may be caused by the interaction between coach and athlete in both team and individual sport are different. Athletes involves in individual sport interact closer with their coach than athlete in team sport and develop deeper relationship between each other. Athlete in individual sport also receive more attention from their coach than athlete who involves in team sport as coach of team sport focusing more on the teamwork, team tactical and group

cohesiveness. This study is in line with reported from Bebetos, Filippou and Bebetos, (2017) stated that individual sports athletes are more affected by coaching behavior. It is possible athletes from individual sports receive more one-on-one coaching than those from team sports, and as a result experience more frequent behaviors such as coaching individual players on technique which contribute to perceptions of technique effectiveness (Kavussanu, Boardley, Jutkiewicz, Vincent & Ring, 2008).

In this present study, result also demonstrated that there is no significant difference on component of coach-athlete relationship with gender. The result shown that both male and female athletes have similar perception on the relationship with their coach. The result from previous study was contrasted with this study. Bebetos et al. (2017) stated that even at the level of professional athletes, women show stronger affinity to the emotional aspects of coaching behavior so that they are characterized as more sensitive and emotional. Since this study only use students-athletes, this might influence the result.

Athletes' perception in both team and individual sports may be caused by how their coach treat and communicate are both similar in either team or individual sports. In a study by Cronin, Arthur, Hardy and Callow, (2015) stated that there is significant correlation between transformational leadership with type of sports. In a study conducted by Frey et al. (2006) have shown that athletes prefer a male coach than a female coach. Further, in this present study, there is no significant difference in component of transformational leadership with gender except component idealized influence. Results of this study are partially in agreement with previous research findings. For instance, in a study by Krukowska, (2016) conducted during various parts of sporting season on various team sports athlete, there was no significant difference of transformational leadership on gender in the beginning of the season and only one significant difference on contingent rewards at the middle of the season. However, in a study by Mak and Kim, (2017) stated that there is significant difference on transformational leadership with gender of female student-athletes and male non-student athletes. In contrast, male athletes rated their coaches higher on fostering acceptance of group goals, appropriate role model, and inspirational motivation as compared to female athletes (Cronin et al. 2015). Athletes prefer a male coach than a female coach (Frey et al. 2006). Since this study only ask athletes perception without considering the gender of the coaches, the result might influence similar perception. The possible reason on idealized influence differences may related to the female athletes perceived positive personal rapport behavior to be slightly more frequent than male athletes.

Furthermore, this present study also found no significant difference in component of transformational leadership between individual and team sport athletes. This is in line with Kavussanu et al., (2008) that found team and individual-sport athletes did not significantly differ on their ratings of their coach's effectiveness. Similar athletes' perception in both team and individual sports may be caused by how their coach treat and communicate are both similar in either team or individual sports. This assumption was based on models of coaching effectiveness that propose athletes' perceptions of their coach's effectiveness are based largely on the coaching behaviors they observe (Horn, 2008). The sample used in the present study (i.e., university athletes) was relatively homogenous with regard to performance level. Given that performance level has been shown to moderate the relationship between transformational leadership behaviors (Callow, Smith, Hardy, Arthur & Hardy, 2009), this may affect the present findings.

Overall, the concept of transformational leadership in sport has earned recognition in recent years and it remains to be further explored in different contexts and using diversified approaches as a viable conceptual model. The findings of the reviewed studies further underline the significance of a coach-athlete relationship in the short-and long-term functioning of athletes and coaches. In addition, studying the relationship between coach and athlete relationship has provided valuable information about the nature and functions of the relationship between coach and athlete as regards its impact on coach transformational leadership. Nevertheless, further exploration of the interplay between the coach-athlete relationship and transformational leadership is still required, particularly from a temporal and applied perspective.

The present research was dedicated to developing understanding of the integrative between coach transformational leadership and relationship between coach and athlete. Both of those theories have received different interest in the literature on sport psychology due to their beneficial effect on the

psychological outcomes of athletes. The results of this study represent a step in developing a view of transformational leadership as a complex process that has a reciprocal impact on the relationship between coach and athlete. Lastly, findings of this study pose a potentially beneficial avenue of research, the line of inquiry discussed will evolve with information creation in particular through examining the transformation-relational coaching process in different contexts like elite sport athletes. The work presented has posed several questions that could lead to important theory and practical changes and may inspire further study by interested researchers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is suggested for further research to be conducted on a larger scale which include athletes from various levels of participation: national level, college level and district level. In addition, it is also advisable to categorize the coaches based on gender as well as for individual and team sports from contact and non-contact sports.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Special thanks to all the participants of this study. Research ethics committee Universiti Teknologi MARA; and Sport Coaching and Psychology group of Faculty Sports Science and Recreation, UiTM Perlis Branch, Malaysia.

REFERENCES

- Bebetsos, E., Filippou, F., & Bebetos, G. (2017). Athletes' criticism of coaching behavior: Differences among gender, and type of sport. *Polish Psychological Bulletin*.
- Burns, J. M., & Leadership, H. (1978). *Row*. New York, 280.
- Bass, B. M., & Bass Bernard, M. (1985). *Leadership and performance beyond expectations*.
- Bormann, K. C., & Rowold, J. (2016). Transformational leadership and followers' objective performance over time: Insights from German basketball. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 28(3), 367-373.
- Cronin, L. D., Arthur, C. A., Hardy, J., & Callow, N. (2015). Transformational leadership and task cohesion in sport: The mediating role of inside sacrifice. *Journal of sport and exercise psychology*, 37(1), 23-36.
- Callow, N., Smith, M. J., Hardy, L., Arthur, C. A., & Hardy, J. (2009). Measurement of transformational leadership and its relationship with team cohesion and performance level. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 21(4), 395-412.
- Frey, M., Czech, D. R., Kent, R. G., & Johnson, M. (2006). An exploration of female athletes' experiences and perceptions of male and female coaches. *The Sport Journal*, 9(4).
- Fogelqvist, P., & Lestander, H. (2017). Transformational leadership and motivation in sport: The moderating role of personality and self-other agreement ratings. Master Thesis, Umeå University, Sweden.
- Gliem, J. A., & Gliem, R. R. (2003). Calculating, interpreting, and reporting Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for Likert-type scales. *Midwest Research-to-Practice Conference in Adult, Continuing, and Community Education*.
- Gorgulu, R. (2019). Transformational Leadership Inspired Extra Effort: The Mediating Role of Individual Consideration of The Coach-Athlete Relationship in College Basketball Players. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 7(1), 157-163.
- Horn, T. S. (2008). Coaching effectiveness in the sport domain.
- Jowett, S. (2017). Coaching effectiveness: The coach-athlete relationship at its heart. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 16, 154-158.
- Jowett, S., & Meek, G. (2002). Closeness, Co-orientation and Complementarity in the family coach-athlete relationship: A case study. *Manuscript under review*.
- Jowett, S., & Ntoumanis, N. (2004). The coach-athlete relationship questionnaire (CART-Q): Development and initial validation. *Scandinavian Journal of Medicine & Science in Sports*, 14(4), 245-257.

- Kassim, A. F. M., & Boardley, I. D. (2018). Athlete perceptions of coaching effectiveness and athlete-level outcomes in team and individual sports: a cross-cultural investigation. *The Sport Psychologist*, 32(3), 189-198.
- Krukowska, A. (2016). The interplay between coach transformational leadership and coach-athlete relationship in supporting athletes' positive psychological outcomes (Doctoral dissertation, Loughborough University).
- Kao, S. F., & Tsai, C. Y. (2016). Transformational leadership and athlete satisfaction: The mediating role of coaching competency. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 28(4), 469-482.
- Kavussanu, M., Boardley, I. D., Jutkiewicz, N., Vincent, S., & Ring, C. (2008). Coaching efficacy and coaching effectiveness: Examining their predictors and comparing coaches' and athletes' reports. *The Sport Psychologist*, 22(4), 383-404.
- Mak, J. Y., & Kim, C. (2017). Relationship Among Gender, Athletic Involvement, Student Organization Involvement and Leadership. *Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal*, 25(2), 89-95.
- Mills, J. P., & Boardley, I. D. (2016). Expert Premier League soccer managers' use of transformational leadership behaviours and attitude towards sport integrity: An intrinsic case study. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 11(3), 382-394.
- Newland, A., Newton, M., Podlog, L., Legg, W. E., & Tanner, P. (2015). Exploring the nature of transformational leadership in sports: A phenomenological examination with female athletes. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 7(5), 663-687.
- Nicholls, A. R., & Perry, J. L. (2016). Perceptions of coach-athlete relationship are more important to coaches than athletes in predicting dyadic coping and stress appraisals: an actor-partner independence mediation model. *Frontiers in psychology*, 7, 447.
- Rodrigues, A. D. O., & Ferreira, M. C. (2015). The impact of transactional and transformational leadership style on organizational citizenship behaviors. *Psico-USF*, 20(3), 493-504.
- Smith, M. J., Young, D. J., Figgins, S. G., & Arthur, C. A. (2017). Transformational leadership in elite sport: A qualitative analysis of effective leadership behaviors in cricket. *The Sport Psychologist*, 31(1), 1-15.
- Vieira, J. L. L., Ferreira, L., Cheuczuk, F., Flores, P. P., Vissoc, J. R. N., Rocha, F. F. D., ... & Vieira, L. F. (2015). Impact of coach-athlete relationship on the collective efficacy of young volleyball players. *Revista Brasileira de Cineantropometria & Desempenho Humano*, 17(6), 650-660.
- Vella, S. A., Oades, L. G., & Crowe, T. P. (2012). Validation of the differentiated transformational leadership inventory as a measure of coach leadership in youth soccer. *The Sport Psychologist*, 26(2), 207-223.

✉ Jamilah Ahmad Radzi

Faculty of Sports Science and Recreation, Universiti Teknologi MARA,
Perlis Branch, Arau Campus, 02600 Arau,
Perlis, Malaysia

E-mail: jamilah_radzi@yahoo.com