

ORIGINAL ARTICLE



# Athletes' Relationship Toward Coaches in Malaysia

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## ABSTRACT

**Background.** In order to be successful in sports, coaches and athletes must work together. As a result, they play an important role in maintaining their relationship. Objectives. This cross-sectional study determines the athletes' relationship toward coaches in Malaysia. **Methods.** This study included 168 male athletes and 195 female athletes. Archers made up the majority of the participants (12.4%), followed by athletes in athletics (8.8%), petanque (8.8%), and pencak silat (8.5%). An online survey was used, with two measures included: (a) demographics and (b) the Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (CART-Q). **Results.** According to the findings, the athletes have a stronger bond with their coaches. Furthermore, it is revealed a significant difference in commitment between males and females and years of experience with a coach. Male athletes are more committed to their coaches than female athletes ( $t = 2.39$ ,  $p = 0.02$ ). Athletes who have trained with a coach for more than ten years are found to be more committed to their coach. ( $t = -2.52$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ). It reveals a significant difference in complementarity to training time per week (11-20 hours and 21-35 hours) between groups of athletes ( $F_{2, 360} = 3.03$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). **Conclusion.** Findings suggest that additional assessment, monitoring, and treatment plans be developed for athletes, particularly female athletes, and young athletes, to ensure that their psychosocial support is prioritized in the process of building a good social network in a relationship that involves processes to influence each other.

**KEYWORDS:** *Coach-Athlete Relationship, Interpersonal Athletes Relationship, Commitment, Complementarity, Closeness.*

## INTRODUCTION

Sports are physical activities that are done for a variety of reasons, including enjoyment, skill development, and, of course, competition (1). Sports coaching is another area of expertise. The coach and the athlete are both involved in coaching (1). These two parties will form a one-of-a-kind relationship that will enable them to achieve common objectives (2). Athletes and coaches rely on one another to achieve success in sports. As a result, coaches and athletes play an important role in maintaining their relationship. A "relationship" is a connection or social network formed by two or more individuals that involves feelings, commitment, cooperation, and mutual needs (3). In sports, for example, consider the

relationship between coaches and athletes. To achieve the goal between coaches and athletes, a relationship will involve a process to influence each other, such as sharing opinions and feelings, and will frequently involve a sports organization (1). Aside from that, intrapersonal and interpersonal factors play a role in maintaining a positive relationship between athletes and coaches. In order to achieve peak performance, athletes and coaches must incorporate psychosocial factors such as intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships (4). Many researchers have investigated these.

In sports performance, there are two factors: intrapersonal and interpersonal (5). As can be seen,

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the relationship between coach and athlete, which is an interpersonal factor, is one of the most important factors in an athlete's development process. Interpersonal communication skills are an important feature that athletes and coaches must have because they will have difficulty establishing a good relationship with each other if they do not have a good level of communication. Interpersonal skills are skills that athletes and coaches must master in order to adapt to and identify changes in expressions and emotions (6). This factor necessitates consideration of the nature of oneself as a social entity, particularly in our relationships with others (particularly those considered close and important), which will affect our view of ourselves (7). In the context of sport and its course, in the context of the relationship that exists during training between the coach and the athlete, this also plays an important role in the athlete's physical and psychosocial development (8).

Sport psychology researchers would benefit from considering "theories, concepts, and methodologies from other fields of psychology" when studying athlete-coach relationships in sports (9). This is due to their interdependence and mutual influence. Alternative conceptual model of the athlete-coach relationship based on the definition of interpersonal relationships as situations in which two individuals' behavior, emotions, and thoughts are mutually causal and interdependent (complementarity) (8, 10). This relationship concept identifies not only the basis for the formation of human relationships, but also the relationship between them. Following that, three interpersonal constructs were created: complementarity (11), closeness (12), and commitment (13); these were chosen from interpersonal behavior and behavior in an effort to implement the foundation of the athlete-coach relationship (8). He elaborated in the framework of the concept and operation of the athlete-coach relationship. The following is a rundown of the fundamentals of relationship building (8). Intimacy reflects the emotions felt by coaches and athletes, and it is used to describe the relationship in sports. Athletes and coaches describe their relationship in terms of interpersonal characteristics such as closeness, commitment, and complementarity. This situation arises as a result of their natural respect for one another. When each relationship has established a basic frame of reference, shared goals, beliefs, values, and mutual expectations, commitment exists. Coaches and athletes can share

their thoughts and experiences, beliefs, values, thoughts, and concerns through open communication channels. Then, facilitate the formation of commitment.

Complementing refers to the type of interaction that coaches and athletes have, as well as the motivation and resources necessary to foster a positive relationship between them. By definition, complementarity is a resource that aids in the formation and maintenance of such positive relationships. For example, if the coach provides an effective programme to the athlete, improving the athlete's performance is necessary, but a good relationship must exist. In other words, complementarity refers to the desire of coaches for their athletes to have a positive relationship with the coach in the pursuit of excellence. This is because cooperation is an important asset in supplementing the athlete-coach relationship. Furthermore, the complement reflects the type of interaction between the coach and the athlete. In the athlete-coach relationship, a lack of closeness, mutual commitment, and complementarity will result in conflicting aspects of closeness, commitment, and complementarity.

In recent years, more attention has been drawn to the effect of the athlete-coach relationship with an athlete's performance as a result of the findings of numerous intriguing studies (1). One of the interesting studies as part of the Canadian programme "Your Own Podium" was carried out following the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, China (14). The goal of this research is to identify factors that influence successful or unsuccessful performance from the perspectives of coaches and athletes. Five key themes have been identified. A solid connection between coaches and athletes has long been seen as the most significant ingredient in earning an Olympic gold or setting a personal best. Each of the 27 athletes recounted in interviews how they formed good ties with their coaches and how their instructors provided a fruitful atmosphere for them to flourish. Athletes' verbal statements about their roles and relationships with their individual coaches have been recognized. According to one of the study's results, the connection between athletes and coaches in terms of closeness, dedication, collaboration, effective interaction, and a variety of other characteristics is crucial in contributing to athletic success. Furthermore, the findings of a previous research demonstrate that coaches have a greater degree of closeness than players (15). As

a consequence, there seems to be no issue with players' adherence to the training schedule specified by their coach. It may be inferred that the stronger the interpersonal traits (closeness, commitment, and complementarity), the stronger the connection between athletes and coaches.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Study design.** This cross-sectional research was conducted on anonymous Malaysian athletes. The online survey was sent to the athletes and the team using a purposive random sampling procedure, with information about the study and an invitation to participate via a google form link to the survey. Before taking the survey, participants were required to electronically complete the informed consent form. After completing the survey, participants were needed to submit it to the researchers by clicking the 'submit' button.

**Participants.** The research included 363 individuals from diverse sports. There were 168 male competitors and 195 female athletes. Table 1 shows the percentages of gender, age groups, sports categories, level of competition, experience as an athlete, experience with a coach, kinds of coaching, training time per week, and types of sports (top 10) for each gender, age group, and sports category. The sample size was calculated using an estimated percentage of 30% of Malaysia's athletic population, a precision of 5%, and a z-value of 1.97. Using these numbers, a sample size of 210 athletes is necessary to get a statistic power about 95%. However, the total number of participants recruited for this research surpassed the needed minimum sample size ( $N=363$ ).

**Procedures.** The online poll URL was shared on social media networks such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook (16). A link to an online survey, the research description, and electronic informed consent were supplied to athletes who accepted to participate. They were urged to complete the questionnaire once they confirmed their willingness to participate. The online survey may be completed in 10 - 15 minutes, and participants have the option to quit at any point if they are not comfortable continuing with the research. During this investigation, (a) informed permission was acquired from each participant, and (b) the study procedure adheres to the ethical criteria of the 1975 Helsinki Declaration.

**Instruments. Demographic Information.** A brief demographic form includes of information

related to gender, age groups, sports categories, level of competition, experience as an athlete, experience with a coach, types of coach, training time per week, types of sports as an athlete was collected for the purpose of this study.

**Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (CART-Q).** The instrument used to measure coach-athlete relationships was a Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (CART-Q) which was devised in United Kingdom (17). 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 3 items 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, the 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.

**Statistical Evaluation.** The statistical analysis using SPSS (Statistical Package of the Social Science) version 24.0 software was used to analyze all data. The study data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, an independent t-test, and a one-way ANOVA. The p significance level is chosen in 0.05.

## RESULTS

Table 1 shows the frequency and percentage of the sample in terms of gender, age groups, sports categories, level of competitions, experience as an athlete, experience with a coach, kinds of coaching, training time per week, and the top ten sports. Moreover, The Mean and the Standards Table 2 shows the deviation of the measured variables. The closest mean has the highest score. Athletes' complementarity and devotion came next. Table 3 also shows a significant difference in commitment score (0.05) between males and females and years of experience with a coach. Male athletes are more committed to their coaches than female athletes ( $t = 2.39$ , sig. = 0.02 ( $p \leq 0.05$ )). Athletes who have trained with a coach for more than ten years are proven to be more committed to their instructor. [ $t = -2.52$ , sig. = 0.01 ( $p < 0.05$ )]. However, we

found no other significant variations in sports categories, coach styles, or athlete experience. Although minor, male, and female athletes' average closeness ratings were marginally higher in all variables. Furthermore, in Table 4, one-way ANOVA analysis demonstrated a significant

difference in complementarity to training time per week across groups of athletes ( $F_{(2, 360)} = 3.03$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). A post hoc study found that athletes with training schedules of 11-20 hours and 21-35 hours per week and their trainers had much greater complementarity (Table 5).

**Table 1. Percent of Gender, Age Groups, Sports Categories, Level of Competition, Experience as an Athlete, Experience with a Coach, Types of Coach, Training Time per Week, Types of Sports (Top 10)**

	Frequency	Percent
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	168	46.3
Female	195	53.7
<b>Age Groups</b>		
12 – 18	71	19.6
19 – 25	274	75.4
26 – 32	14	3.9
33 – 39	4	1.1
<b>Sports Categories</b>		
Individual	177	48.8
Team	186	51.2
<b>Level of Competitions</b>		
International	52	14.3
National	149	41.0
University, School, Club	162	44.6
<b>Experience as an athlete</b>		
1 -10 years	309	85.1
11 – 20 years	54	14.9
<b>Experience with a coach</b>		
1 – 10 years	343	94.5
11 – 20 years	20	5.5
<b>Types of coach</b>		
Fulltime	166	45.7
Parttime	197	54.3
<b>Training time per week</b>		
1 – 10 hours	260	71.6
11 – 20 hours	73	20.1
21 – 35 hours	30	8.3
<b>Types of Sports (Top 10/31)</b>		
Archery	45	12.4
Athletic	32	8.8
Petanque	32	8.8
Pencak Silat	31	8.5
Hockey	29	8.0
Taekwondo	26	7.2
Squash	24	6.6
Softball	21	5.8
Netball	20	5.5
Handball	17	4.7

**Table 2. Mean (SD) of Closeness, Commitment, and Complementarity**

	Scale	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
<b>CART - Q</b>	Closeness	25.46	3.18	-1.481	2.083
	Commitment	16.92	3.19	-0.684	0.231
	Complementarity	24.97	3.32	-1.362	1.843

CART-Q: Coach-Athletes Relationship Questionnaire.

**Table 3. Independent T-Test for Closeness, Commitment, and Complementarity to Gender, Sports Categories, and Types of Coach**

		N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
<b>Gender</b>							
Closeness	Male	168	25.50	3.29	0.22	361	0.83
	Female	195	25.43	3.09			
Commitment	Male	168	17.35	3.24	2.39	361	<b>0.02*</b>
	Female	195	16.55	3.10			
Complementarity	Male	168	25.18	3.30	1.13	361	0.26
	Female	195	24.79	3.33			
<b>Sports Categories</b>							
Closeness	Individual	177	25.62	2.98	0.91	361	0.36
	Team	186	25.31	3.36			
Commitment	Individual	177	17.15	3.04	1.34	361	0.81
	Team	186	16.70	3.31			
Complementarity	Individual	177	25.20	3.14	1.30	361	0.20
	Team	186	24.74	3.47			
<b>Types of Coach</b>							
Closeness	Fulltime	166	25.14	3.11	-1.74	361	0.08
	Parttime	197	25.73	3.23			
Commitment	Fulltime	166	17.00	2.98	0.42	361	0.68
	Parttime	197	16.85	3.35			
Complementarity	Fulltime	166	24.67	3.39	-0.16	361	0.12
	Parttime	197	25.22	3.25			
<b>Experience as an athlete</b>							
Closeness	1-10 years	309	25.39	3.24	-0.98	361	0.327
	11-20 years	54	25.85	2.84			
Commitment	1-10 years	309	16.80	3.25	-1.69	361	0.09
	11-20 years	54	17.59	2.72			
Complementarity	1-10 years	309	24.90	3.34	-0.88	361	0.38
	11-20 years	54	25.33	3.17			
<b>Experience with a coach</b>							
Closeness	1-10 years	343	25.41	3.19	-1.14	361	0.25
	11-20 years	20	26.25	2.91			
Commitment	1-10 years	343	16.81	3.17	-2.52	361	<b>0.01*</b>
	11-20 years	20	18.65	2.98			
Complementarity	1-10 years	343	24.92	3.30	-1.09	361	0.28
	11-20 years	20	25.75	3.55			

## DISCUSSION

According to the findings of this research, athletes have a greater degree of closeness with their coaches as compared to the commitment and complementarity. These facts aligned with the prior qualitative case study that presented a feeling cared for, loved, and respected, as well as the capacity to trust one another, have substantial

influence on coach and athlete intrapersonal (e.g., creativity and determination) and interpersonal aspects (e.g., compatibility and lasting relationships). A good connection will benefit both the coach and the athlete, assisting in the improvement of the athlete's performance. Trainers will be happy with the work and efforts they have put in. The importance of a healthy

connection between coach and athlete in improving the player's sporting talents (18). This is because they will, inadvertently, share more ideas and experiences and maintain successful connections with one another. Many connections are established in sports, but the importance of the interaction between players and coaches is significant (19). Furthermore, the connection

between the coach and the athlete is the foundation of the coaching process in order to assess the athlete's pleasure in achieving their performance and objectives. It is concerned with each other's well-being (20); in contrast, a coach-athlete connection that lacks closeness entails the player and coach caring, appreciating, or supporting one another less.

**Table 4. One-Way ANOVA for Closeness, Commitment, and Complementarity to training time per week between groups among athletes**

		Sum Of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Closeness	Between Groups	35.96	2	17.98	1.78	0.17
	Within Groups	3628.21	360	10.08		
	Total	3664.17	362			
Commitment	Between Groups	39.38	2	19.69	1.95	0.14
	Within Groups	3636.14	360	10.10		
	Total	3675.52	362			
Complementarity	Between Groups	65.88	2	32.94	3.03	<b>0.05*</b>
	Within Groups	3915.73	360	10.88		
	Total	3981.60	362			

**Table 5. Turkey post hoc for Complementarity to training time per week between groups among athletes**

	Training time	Mean	SE	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
	Per week	Difference		Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
Complementarity	01 – 10 hours	-0.53	0.44	0.44	-1.56	0.50
		1.23	0.64	0.13	-0.27	2.72
	11 – 20 hours	0.53	0.44	0.44	-0.50	3.44
		1.76*	0.72	0.04	0.08	3.44
	21 – 35 hours	-1.23	0.64	0.13	-2.72	0.27
		-1.76*	0.72	0.04	-3.44	-0.80

Another outcome from this research revealed that male athletes are more committed to their coaches than female athletes. Certain research on male and female athletes reveal that males are more concerned with winning and performance, whilst women are more concerned with relationships and communication (21). As a result, players will want to keep working with their instructors. Both sides will want to maximize successful results, such as winning tournaments and getting picked for various teams. One of the most important things in motivation to practice is commitment. It is one of the behaviors recommended for good training for athletes and instructors may collaborate without conflict interruption. When coaches and players have faith in one another, it highlights a positive attitude and a better manner for both sides to establish a healthy connection (22).

Furthermore, we found a substantial difference in commitment based on years of experience with a coach. Athletes who have trained with a coach for more than 10 years are proven to be more committed to their instructor. Researchers in the area of relationships and empathy accurately discovered that the length of the connection is crucial in the early phases of the relationship (23). Where it might take years for an athlete and coach to build a bond and grow to a better level of performance. A combined training time of 10 years is necessary to guarantee that an athlete is ready to compete at the top level (24), moderately proficient athletes had a two-year or less contact with their coach (25). A relationship lasting more than two years demonstrates a better degree of performance and empathic accuracy. It indicates that athletes are more inspired to see their coaches near to them in the early phases of the collaboration getting to know them (25). Thus, the

training time is also linked to the connection between the coach and the athlete. Another previous study shows a contrast result, where a simple relationship lasting 6 months to 2 years had a higher level of understanding and relationship than a relationship lasting more than 2 years (25). They discovered that the majority of coaches and athletes had relationships that lasted half to two years in their sample. They proposed that future temporal studies look at whether short- and long-term connections vary from his study's findings.

Similarly, another interesting finding from this study is that athletes who trained between 11 and 21 hours per week and between 21 and 35 hours per week have more complementarity with their coach. While a previous studies show a significant link between the total hour of training in a week with commitment (15). Athletes will spend more time with their coach (15). This will allow them to strengthen their relationship with their coach. More frequent training will provide more opportunities for them to maintain and improve their relationship. As a result of social influence, coaches and athletes can respond and communicate with one another to meet their needs, aspirations, and problems. The complementarity has mirrored the interconnectedness of coaches and athletes, allowing them to interact effectively, particularly during training. As a result, complementarity, tasks, and support were discovered to be important in the relationship because they allowed both the coach and the athlete to focus all of their efforts on achieving their goals.

## CONCLUSION

According to the data we gathered, most athletes believe their connection with their coach is stronger, and male athletes, particularly athletes who have been training with their coach for a longer period, are more committed to their coach. In terms of complementarity, athletes who spend more time training have more connections that complement one another. Athletes clearly have a great connection with their coaches. However, developing dedication and complementarity may take some time. Although performance seems to be given greater prominence in the sphere of sports, the necessity of promoting psychological well-being among players and coaches in developing a healthy connection also requires consideration. This is because, to some degree, it may aid in the development of favorable sentiments for one another throughout their

training regimen. Athletes, in fact, spend more time with their teams and coaches than they do with their families. The data is anticipated to be utilized as a guide and fundamental data for components of the connection between athletes and coaches, assisting coaches in better understanding their players and improving long-term sporting successes. However, we recognize a possible limitation in this research: the use of an online survey approach, which may restrict the study to athletes who can only access the information supplied and may not cover all sorts of sports in Malaysia. Further research using just one kind or demographic of sports is required. This is because the players in the target sport category are likely to be different from those in combat sports and other sorts of sports. As previously said, athletes with introverted and extrovert personality types must have distinct perspectives and efforts in building good interactions with others around them.

## APPLICABLE REMARKS

- Continued monitoring and research into the relationship between athletes and coaches, particularly among groups such as female and male athletes, young athletes, and long and short-term relationships with coaches, as evidenced by data.
- Furthermore, the data obtained can ensure that psychosocial support in sports is disclosed and easily accessible to relevant parties.

## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Study Concept and Design: Fatin Nurfatehah Mat Salleh. Acquisition of data: Fatin Nurfatehah Mat Salleh. Analysis and interpretation of data: Mon Redee Sut Txi. Drafting of the manuscript: Mon Redee Sut Txi. Critical revision of the manuscript for important information: Thariq Khan Azizuddin Khan. Statistical analysis: Mon Redee Sut Txi. Administrative, technical, and material support: Thariq Khan Azizuddin Khan. Study supervision: Fatin Nurfatehah Mat Salleh.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest related to the materials in the manuscript.

## FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE

The authors declare no financial interests related to the materials in the manuscript.

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