UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE COACH-ATHLETE RELATIONSHIP IN MALAYSIAN TEAM SPORTS

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By

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Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirement for the Degree of Master of Science

November 2017

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DEDICATION

This thesis is especially dedicated to God Almighty my creator, my strong pillar, my source of inspiration, wisdom, knowledge and understanding. He has been the source of my strength throughout this program and on His wings only have I soared. This thesis also dedicated to my family and loved one.

Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE COACH-ATHLETE RELATIONSHIP IN MALAYSIAN TEAM SPORTS

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YOKANANTHINI D/O MURUGEESAN

November 2017

Chairman : Nurul Ain Mohd Hassan, PhD
Faculty : Modern Language and Communication

Interpersonal communication plays a vital role in gaining success in sports. Literature concerning interpersonal communication between the coach and athlete in sports context is always mixed in its results in various countries due to the culture they live in. In Malaysia, literature concerning communication styles and culture (ethnicity) in influencing the coach and athlete relationship is sparse. This study fills the gap by exploring the factors influencing coach-athlete relationship.

The purpose of this study is to understand the factors influencing the coach and athlete in Malaysian team sports. Specifically, on two main objectives, namely, how communication styles and culture (ethnicity) influence the coach and athlete relationship.

Employing the interdependence theory by Thibaut and Kelley (1959), researcher used a qualitative approach in this study to explore the complexities and multifaceted levels of understanding among elements such as communication styles and culture which are embedded in a given social context. A semi-structured interview guide was developed based on the relevant literature and theories. Six key informants were chosen based on purposive sampling. Two athletes from synchronised swimming and two athletes from football, also coaches from these two sports that are staying in hostels at National Sports Council.

Researcher chose an interpretive (constructivist) approach of interpreting the data. Results report that key informants (athlete) are submissive and introvert at the same time. Key informants (coaches) are assertive; they do not display authoritative approach

towards athletes, they are stern in giving instructions. Throughout the study, age factor emerged as an issue that could play a role in building relationship.

Results indicate that cultural (ethnicity) may not be as critical as may be assumed an issue in building the relationship between coach and athlete in Malaysia. Cultural tolerance among the key informants revealed to be the key role in the quality of the coach-athlete relationship.

This study is significant in developing a quantitative instrument in the future based on the tentative models of this research. Also, practitioners are more likely to provide more communication opportunities for both coaches and athletes to act pro-social to achieve good relationship.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Master Sains

FAKTOR YANG MEMPENGARUHI HUBUNGAN ANTARA JURULATIH DAN ATLET DALAM ACARA BERPASUKAN MALAYSIA

Oleh

YOKANANTHINI A/P MURUGEESAN

November 2017

Pengerusi : **Nurul Ain Mohd Hassan, Phd**
Fakulti : **Bahasa Moden dan Komunikasi**

Komunikasi interpersonal memainkan peranan yang penting dalam meningkatkan kejayaan sukan. Literatur berkaitan komunikasi interpersonal antara jurulatih dan atlet dalam konteks sukan sentiasa berubah dari segi keputusannya mengikut negara, ini adalah kerana mereka menetap dalam budaya yang berbeza. Di Malaysia, literatur mengenai gaya komunikasi dan budaya (etnik) dalam mempengaruhi hubungan antara jurulatih dan atlet masih kurang. Dengan itu, kajian ini dapat mengisi jurang perkara di atas dengan meneroka faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi hubungan antara jurulatih dan atlet.

Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk memahami faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi jurulatih dan atlet dalam sukan acara berpasukan Malaysia. Khususnya terhadap dua objektif utama, iaitu bagaimana gaya komunikasi dan budaya (etnik) mempengaruhi hubungan jurulatih dan atlet.

Dengan menggunakan teori saling pergantungan oleh Thibaut dan Kelley (1959), penyelidik menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dalam kajian ini untuk meneroka kerumitan dan tahap pemahaman antara unsur-unsur seperti gaya komunikasi dan budaya yang tertanam dalam konteks sosial tertentu. Panduan temu bual separa berstruktur yang digunakan adalah berdasarkan literatur dan teori yang relevan. Enam informan dipilih berdasarkan persampelan bertujuan. Dua atlet dari sukan renang berirama dan dua atlet dari sukan bola sepak, juga jurulatih dari kedua-dua sukan ini yang menginap di asrama, Majlis Sukan Negara.

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Penyelidik memilih pendekatan penafsiran (konstruktivis) untuk menafsirkan data. Hasil laporan didapati bahawa informan (atlet) merupakan individu yang submisif dan introvert pada masa yang sama. Manakala informan (jurulatih) merupakan individu yang tegas, tetapi tidak menunjukkan sifat autoritatif terhadap atlet, mereka tegas dalam memberi arahan. Sepanjang kajian ini, faktor umur muncul sebagai isu yang boleh memainkan peranan dalam peningkatan hubungan.

Keputusan menunjukkan bahawa faktor budaya (etnik) mungkin tidak begitu kritikal seperti yang diandaikan sebagai satu isu membina hubungan antara jurulatih dan atlet di Malaysia. Seterusnya, informan mendedahkan bahawa toleransi budaya sebagai peranan utama dalam pembinaan hubungan yang berkualiti diantara jurulatih dan atlet. Kesemua penemuan kajian ini mempunyai signifikan teori dan praktikal.

Kajian ini mempunyai signifikan dalam instrumen kuantitatif di masa depan berdasarkan model tentatif dalam kajian qualitatif ini. Pelaksana juga dapat memberi lebih banyak peluang komunikasi kepada jurulatih dan atlet untuk bertindak pro-sosial bagi mencapai hubungan yang baik.

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I am extremely grateful to my parents for their love, caring and blessings for educating me for my future. Next, I express my thanks to my siblings for their support and valuable prayers. My special thanks go to my loved one, Emmanuel Leong Theng Kuang. You have been with me through the entire process, put up with my stressful days and helped me maintain my enthusiasm for this thesis. I could not have done it without you. I love you! Also, a huge thanks to Aunt Mary Leong, for her willingness to help me in grammatical editing. Her careful editing contributed hugely to the final process of this thesis.

My sincere appreciation also goes to my fellow research 'fighters', Elizabeth Wong Zu Ying, Rahmawati Nurdin, Chan Tak Jie, and Kalaivani for their constant encouragement. Finally, my thanks go to all the people who have supported me to complete this thesis directly or indirectly. I pray that I shall be a good steward of this honour. Once again, all glory belongs to Him alone.

I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on (10 November 2017) to conduct the final examination of Yokananthini D/O Murugeesan on her thesis entitled "Factors Influencing the Coach-athlete Relationship in Malaysian Team Sports" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the University Putra Malaysia [P.U. (A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the degree of Master of Science.

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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of University Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science (Human Communication). The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A01-A04	Athlete 1, 2, 3, 4
C01-C02	Coach 1, 2
CART-Q	Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire
NSC	National Sport Council
OCM	Olympic Council Malaysia
SEA Games	South East Asia Games

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction

Fans' roaring cheers from every corner, coaches and athletes' tears of joy, proud moments of family and friends, these were some of the excitements celebrated by Malaysians in the recent outstanding SEA Games Kuala Lumpur 2017 achievements. This time extravagant media hype was focused much on Malaysian athletes and this took it to another level than the usual image in the context of sports in Malaysia. Behind this success, there are many untold sacrifices and hard work both coach and athletes endured together as a team. Nationwide coaches and athletes headed to the same direction, relying on one another and willing to give it all out for the good of the entire team and nation. In order to achieve this standard, both coach and athlete should strike a good relationship. Looking back at the recent victory, research such as this gives a great impact in sports research, especially in Malaysia.

1.2   Research Background

A good performance by its nature highly depends on building a good relationship, to build a good relationship; a successful interpersonal communication is needed. This happens during the transmission and interpretation of messages between the senders and the receivers. Also, it is often defined as the communication that takes place between people who are interdependent and binding of the same knowledge together. For example, manager-subordinate relationship, teacher-student relationship, parents-children relationship, as well as, the coach-athlete relationship. Walsh (2011) defined that communication is a two-way process which involves encoding by the coach and decoding by the athlete and vice versa and this particular process involves coach-athlete relationship (Montgomery, 1988).

Literature within sports management and communication field has indicated various factors motivating coach-athlete relationships. Past research has highlighted a need to explore the communication styles that coaches use with their athletes are in the relationship building process. For instance, Becker (2009) found that athletes were more pleased about how their coaches interact with them effectively through clear and positive communication styles. He also highlighted that it does not matter what coaches did but how they did it. Erickson (2013) detailed the manner in how volleyball coaches interact with their athletes, and the tone they used on them, which impacted athlete outcomes significantly. The study signifies that coaches' direct communication influence how players perform and behave.

Past research also indicated that ethnic background plays an important role in a coach-athlete relationship. For example, Solomon, Wietgardt, Yusuf, Kosmitzki, William, Stevens and Wayda (1996) cited in Jowett and Frost (2007) highlighted that coaches have different expectations of athletes from various backgrounds and treat athletes of particular ethnic group differently. For example, African-American athletes receive more instruction while European-American athletes receive more praise (Solomon, Wietgardt, Yusuf, Kosmitzki, William, Stevens & Wayda, 1996, as cited in Jowett & Frost, 2007). They concluded that culture (race/ ethnicity) consists of expectation which may influence the coach-athlete relationship. However, limited similar research has been done on how to maintain the coach-athlete relationship in Malaysia.

1.3   Problem Statement

The Star online (May, 2011) reported national rhythmic gymnast, Elaine Koon made shocking allegations about her coach Elena Kholodova. Elaine Koon entered the team with hopes of bringing glory to the country, but ended up leaving with frustration, bitterness and disappointment by the authoritarian leadership style of her coach with the usage of verbal aggression. The news also reported that athletes were never treated with respect and were often called negative names or shouted at them repeatedly.

To date, several studies have cited a lack of communication as an underlying factor of perceived struggles or conflicts between the coach–athlete/ athlete–athlete dyads or within coaching teams and sports organisations (Culver & Trudel, 2000; Jowett & Frost, 2007; Kerwin, Doherty, & Harman, 2011). Unfortunately, these studies have so far unlikely to provide specific information on effective communication in the coach-athlete relationship.

In Malaysia, only a few studies tackled on effective communication that can enhance the coach-athlete relationship. For an example, Latif, Hassan, and Fauzee (2009) explored the effectiveness of communication of coaches from athlete's perspective. Researchers concluded that through an effective communication style, coach and athlete can build a good interpersonal relationship. However, that study only focused on athlete's perception. Therefore, the urge to study communication styles as a factor in the coach-athlete relationship is timely in Malaysia.

Recently, The Star online (December, 2016) reported Olympic Council of Malaysia (OCM) chaired a forum entitled "Athlete's Voice Matters". This forum showcased the existing norms and culture in Malaysia, in which athletes are likely to be afraid to speak up. With that, this research gives a platform for athletes to express their thoughts and a hope for improvement in the coach and athlete relationship. Often, athletes prefer to withdraw from the program or remain silent from all the unbearable scolding and harsh instruction by the coach. In line with this, Smith, Ntoumanis and Duda (2010); Wang, Koh and Chatzisarantis (2009) stated that the nature of coach-athlete interaction can

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highly influence the athlete's psychological process. For example, lack of motivation and a brittle bond between coach and athlete. These coach and athlete's relationship can be critical to athlete's career and success. To what extend are athletes able to tolerate this type of suffering? This is a question to ponder about.

In the coach-athlete relationship, athletes who receive aggressive communication from their coach towards athletes will be less satisfied with their coach, exhibit less sportsmanship and likely to be less successful in terms of win- lose percentage (Kassing & Infante, 1999). Besides that, by coach constantly portraying verbal aggressiveness towards athletes, athletes are likely to consider their coach as less credible, competent, trustworthy and caring person compared to a coach who is assertive. All these probably make athletes feel less motivated to be back for training (Mazer, Barnes, Grevious, & Boger, 2013). Coaches may believe that aggressive communication is important to enhance performance, but eventually, not all athletes can be dealt with such aggressiveness.

Based on the problem stated above, researcher therefore agrees with the arguments made by classic theorist whereby individuals who use aggressive and abusive communication towards athletes will fail to achieve their goals (Ridgeway, 1987; Ridgeway & Diekema, 1989; Van Vugt, 2006). Aggression in communication or verbal assault has always intended to cause mental distress to an athlete.

Study on communication styles is timely in Malaysia as it has the ability to reason out problems that need to be addressed between dyads based on the issue mentioned above and this may help in the important upcoming Championships. Next, previous research pointed out that coach often demonstrates threaten punishments when faced with athlete who display a less desirable performance (Miles & Greenberg, 1993). The indication is that aggressive communication style may be designed to correct unsatisfying performance, this may also relate to the coach-athlete relationship. Serpa (1999) found that interaction processes between coach and athlete have often been one of the strongest factors for sports performance.

According to scholars, the interpersonal relationship is fundamental in the process of coaching as its nature is likely to determine the athlete's satisfaction, self-esteem and performance accomplishment (Jowett & Meek, 2000; Lyle, 1999; Tubbs & Moss, 2000; Vealey, Armstrong, Comar & Greenleaf, 1998). In order to build an effective interpersonal relationship, interpersonal communication plays an essential role.

Coe (1996) explained that both athlete and coach have to be in perfect harmony in order to achieve a great thing. In a general view, skilled communicator has a wide range of communication behaviour and knows the necessity of using it when interacting with others. Communications from coach to athlete display a foundation for appropriate actions. This, however, requires the athlete to receive the information from the coach but

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also to understand and accept it. A coach achieved nothing if the athletes do not accept what they are being told. Therefore, they should also skilled in communicating with people who have a different understanding (Adler & Towne, 1999). Also, research has generally shown that effective communication requires the development of trust and respect between coach and athlete (Yukelson, 1984).

An article entitled 'Relationship in sport' by Jowett and Poczwardowski (2012), highlighted that the call for more research in the coach-athlete relationships is motivated by the need for a systematic and comprehensive guide for the policy makers, and also to serve as knowledge for coaches and athletes in the next decades. This is in line with Kenny's (1995) statement, as cited in Jowett and Poczwardowski (2012), stating that "society has an interest in preventing destructive relationships, and we 'social scientists' are the people who are best equipped to assist society in this endeavour" (P.598).

Next, Malaysia is a combination of many races and ethnicity, it is to be said that cultural also affect the coach-athlete dynamic. Hofstede (1984) defined that culture is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another. Meanwhile in Asia, much study focuses on China (Li, Dittmore, & Park, 2015; Yang & Jowett, 2010, 2011), and middle-east (Ahmad, 2014), the research interests are widely about cross-cultural psychology. According to Yang (2011), emphasized that, to date, there are still quite a few areas of nationality, religion, race, and ethnicity which remain unexplored in terms of the content and the nature of their coach-athlete relationships. The majority of empirical research has been carried out in Western societies (Yang, 2011). Clearly, there is considerable scope for further investigation of the coach and athlete that might influence acceptance and the relationship due to the differences in culture. This study becomes imperative because most academic research in this area is done outside Malaysia framework.

A Malaysian study entitled 'Influence of Coaches' Behaviour on Athletes' Motivation: Malaysian Sport Archery Experience' by Samah, Hanie, and Olotokunbo (2013) stated that communication remains one of the key factors to motivate the coach-athlete relationship. Though there was a Malaysian study done on behaviour on athletes' motivation, and much on leadership behaviour. This shows that there was a lack of studies on communication styles, and role of culture between coach-athlete relationships. Therefore, this study is to understand the factors influencing coach-athlete relationship in Malaysia team sports.

1.4   Research Questions

1. How different communication styles influence the coach-athlete relationship?

2. How does the role of culture (Ethnicity) influence the coach-athlete relationship?

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1.5   Research Objectives

General objective

The general objective of this study is to understand factors influencing the coach-athlete (elite) relationship in Malaysian team sports in the National Sports Council (NSC).

Specific objective

The specific objectives of the study are developed as follow:

1. To understand different communication styles may influence the coach-athlete relationship.

2. To explore the role of culture may influence the coach-athlete relationship.

1.6   Significant of the study

This study aims to explain the communication styles that may influence the coach-athlete relationship at the National Sports Council (NSC). This study also contributes to the understanding of multiculturalism due to how Malaysia is formed which typified by three major ethnic groups, namely Malays, Chinese and Indians. Therefore, the coach-athlete relationship may benefit from this cultural view. Athletes at the National Sports Council (NSC) regularly interact with their coaches and it is very important for athletes and coaches at National Sports Council (NSC) to have mutual understanding in order to improve the effectiveness of communication and best performance.

This study is important due to the choice of key informants which include both coach and athlete. McGee (2016) stated that coach- athlete relationship is a dyadic relationship. However, much of the research and intervention focused on increasing the effectiveness of the relationships that are directed on the athlete only. For example, in Philippe and Seiler's study (2006), the researchers only restricted to investigate one member of the coach-athlete dyad, which is the athlete. Another research done by Jowett and Chaundy (2004), highlighted that 'a coach cannot do it alone'. They suggested future research to examine both coach and athlete to reveal the mutual perception of their relationship. It means that focus on one particular person in this coach-athlete relationship may not accurately reflect what goes on between coach and the athletes. Hence, to maintain the relationship is not solely coach's responsibility or vice versa. Two people are responsible for the upkeep of such relationship. This study focuses on both the coach and athlete.

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On the other hand, many studies have been done in a quantitative approach to measuring quantitatively the quality of the coach-athlete relationship by using Coach-athlete Relationship Questionnaire (CART-Q). For example, Jowett and Ntoumanis (2004); Nicholls, Earle, Earle, and Madigan (2017); Vieira, Nascimento Junior, Pujals, Jowett, Codonhato, and Vissoci (2015); Yang (2011); Yang and Jowett (2013). However, in this study, researcher mainly focuses on factors influencing the coach-athlete relationship by using a qualitative approach. This approach is important as researcher will be able to explore the grey area of the key informants' experiences and perspectives in this study.

This study aims to contribute to the knowledge by providing the National Sports Council and the Ministry of Youth and Sports a communication training kit for both coaches and athletes in achieving desired performance in line with the mission of the National Sports Council of Malaysia in many championships, this therefore adds on to the significance of the study.

1.7   Limitations of the study

The limitations of the study are those characteristics of design or methodology that impacted or influenced the application or interpretation of the results of the study.

The key informants involved are the coaches and athletes from National Sports Council (NSC). This scope is a focus on two types of team sports: female synchronised swimming and men football team. In the process of conducting this study, several limitations of the study occurred. Although there are more than six team sports under the supervision of National Sports Council (NSC), only four team sports athletes and coaches are staying at hostel provided by National Sports Council (NSC) located at Bukit Jalil. It will be challenging for the researcher to be able to gather other team sports from a different location to commit in this study. The result of this study is limited to these 2 sports. However, this limitation helped researcher to have an in-depth analysis in the finding.

Furthermore, only two sports are chosen, this is because few other team sports will be away to overseas most of the time for friendly matches and competitions for 2016 Olympic qualifying. Key Informants in certain team sports faced unavoidable management problems, hence, they were put in the interim period, and therefore, research on factors influencing understanding coach-athlete relationship would not be suitable to be carried out with the key informants.

Besides that, Lorimer and Jowett (2009) stated that research has specified that it is problematic to achieve a successful coach-athlete relationship within team sports, such as football, therefore choosing football key informants for this study help in enhancing the benefits of the research study. Next, there may be a need to choose key informants who would interact openly in interviews as many of the athletes in Malaysia are

uncomfortable to being questioned. Finally, since the study also focuses on cultural factors, it is important to choose sports that consist of different races which certain sports do not meet the requirement of the research.

1.8 Definition of Keywords

This section presents the important keywords of this study. Namely, coach-athlete relationship, relationship, and team sports.

1.8.1 Coach-athlete relationship

The relationship between a coach and athlete is a partnership through instructions, guidance and much support from a coach to athlete, which contribute to performance success. These two individuals who share a similar nature in sports are often known as dyads in the world of sports. Both the coach and athlete relationship are salient as success cannot be seen with only one party ruling the relationship. Coach-athlete relationship is a relationship between coach and athlete that stresses on interpersonal communication or another word dyadic communication.

The effective coach-athlete relationship has been associated with top-level sports performance. Besides that, the coach-athlete relationship is one of the main fundamentals of top class performance. If there is no interchange in a relationship, negative relationship between coach and athlete will be easily formed. According to Ryan (1996), arrogant, ignorant and ultimately betray the trust that is implicit or indirect within the coach-athlete relationship refers to a negative coaching approach. These negative coaching approaches will lead to an unhealthy relationship between the dyads. Classic researchers, Kelley, Berscheid, Christensen, Harvey, Huston and Levinger (1983) defined that dyad relationship as one that has mutually interconnected behaviors, emotions and thoughts. When both coach and athlete have mutually interdependent in these three aspects, the success of the relationship can be secured and maintained unlimitedly.

1.8.2 Relationship

This research does not aim to study the causal relationship between coach and athlete because the main idea of this study is to explore both coach's and athlete's perspective on factors that influence the relationship. This shows that the researcher did not aim to study on the interrelationship or the correlation between coach and athlete but to understand their view on how both coach and athlete influence one another towards achieving relationship goal which leads to performance satisfaction.

1.8.3 Team sports

Team sports are a presence of many individuals to combine to form an efficient and effective team (Cotterill, 2011). Team sports are defined "as a collection of two or more people who share the common identity, common goals and objectives, share a common fate, exhibit structured patterns of interaction and modes of communication, hold common perceptions about group structure, are personally and instrumentally interdependent, reciprocate interpersonal attraction and consider themselves to be a team" (Carron, Hausenblas, & Eys, 2005, p.13).

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