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Exploring the Relationship between Coach Leadership Behaviors and Team Cohesion among Athletes at Government Colleges, District TubaTek Sing

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Abstract
Coaches shape how united a team feels, but there is little local evidence on how strongly. This study looked at the link between coach leadership behaviors and team cohesion among 200 student-athletes from government colleges in District TubaTek Sing. We used a descriptive, quantitative design and tested two hypotheses with simple linear regression and Pearson correlation. Perceived coach leadership explained 53% of the variance in team cohesion ($R = .728$, $R^2 = .530$, adjusted $R^2 = .527$, $F = 112.45$, $p < .01$), and each one-unit rise in leadership was linked to a 0.674-unit rise in cohesion ($B = 0.674$, $\beta = .728$, $t = 10.608$, $p < .01$). The two variables were also strongly and positively correlated ($r = .721$, $p < .01$). Both hypotheses were supported. The results suggest that coach development deserves a firmer place in government college sports program, although the cross-sectional design means we cannot claim that leadership causes cohesion.
Keywords: *coach leadership; team cohesion; student-athletes; government colleges; regression*

1. Introduction

Sports have become an important part of educational institutions because they contribute not only to students' physical development but also to their psychological, social, and interpersonal growth. Participation in sports provides students with opportunities to develop discipline, cooperation, communication, confidence, and a sense of responsibility. Sports teams in the educational environment are made up of individuals with varying abilities, personalities, experiences and who must cooperate as a team to attain shared objectives. But a sports team's success is not solely based on its physical skills

and the abilities of the players. How athletes communicate, react to situations and work together is important too. In the world of sport, coaching leadership and team cohesion are viewed as two key factors that can impact the sport team's functioning and effectiveness (Carron et al., 2002; Cotterill & Fransen, 2016).

This is because coaches are expected to lead athletes, plan training program, make decisions and provide an atmosphere that encourages personal and team growth, which are all aspects of sports coaching. A coach is not just a teacher of the technical aspects of a sport, or a preparer for competitions – he or she shapes athletes' attitudes and motivation, builds self-confidence, fosters communication and team relationships. Coaches can influence the attitudes that develop in athletes towards their roles, attitudes towards instructions, and attitudes towards their teammates through their behaviors. A good coach leader should give guidance, encourage participation, acknowledge athletes work, discipline them and give them feedback.

These behaviors can foster a positive sporting context for athletes to experience support and be motivated to make a contribution to team goals (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980; Cotterill & Fransen, 2016). Another key term in sports psychology is “team cohesion”, which is the degree to which team members are united and collaborate to reach shared goals. It is indicative of the relationships between players and their desire to work together, provide support and be committed to the team. The two main aspects of team cohesion are task cohesion and social cohesion. Task cohesion is defined as the degree to which athletes work together and are motivated to work towards common sport-oriented objectives, while social cohesion refers to the degree to which athletes feel attracted to one another, have friendships, and enjoy good relationships with one another. Both are important since it is possible for a team to have great players and have trouble if there's lack of cooperation, trust and sense of belonging between team members. Thus, team cohesion is a key factor in creating a positive team climate and ensuring team commitment (Carron et al., 1985; Carron et al., 2002).

Coach leadership behavior can impact on team cohesiveness in the following ways. Coaches who give clear directions, get athletes involved in decision making, have positive comments, and have good social support could help athletes develop trust and better relationships with teammates. Conversely, over-authoritarian relationship, lack of communication, unfairness, and lack of emotional support can cause confusion and lack of team cohesion. Zhu et al. (2024) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of 26 studies with 7,121 athletes, and found positive relationships between a number of coaching leadership behaviors and group cohesion. Training and instruction, social support, democratic behavior and positive feedback were all positively related to cohesion; and autocratic leadership had a small negative relationship with cohesion. The results suggest that how coaches conduct themselves and lead their team could be a crucial factor in fostering teamwork and social collegial relationships with athletes in sport (Zhu et al., 2024).

One aspect of the coach-leader and team cohesion issue that is significant in education is the cohesion of sporting teams within educational institutions that may have members with varying sporting experiences, physical abilities, and competitive interests. Coaches must have a role to play ensuring that the athletes are united with similar goals, have the ability to solve interpersonal issues that arise, and create a positive training environment in such settings. Their leadership practices can either enable or

hinder athletes from feeling appreciated, valued, respected, and empowered to work together. Baird et al., (2020), found that positive perceptions of transformational coaching leadership positively correlated with task cohesion overtime within athlete's perceptions. Likewise, in a scoping review of coaches' role in team dynamics, Martina et al. (2021) pointed out the significance of coaches' interpersonal behaviors in relation to the important team outcomes. The results indicate that good leadership does not only affect the personal performance aspects of sport, but can also help to build a team in a more collaborative and cohesive direction (Baird et al., 2020; Martina et al., 2021).

Sports activities allow students to represent their college in the inter-college competitions as well as enhance their sport skills in government colleges. The impact of these activities can vary however, depending on a handful of factors; such as the availability of sports facilities, coaching arrangements, institutional support, and the quality of relationship between coaches and athletes. The role of coaches in government colleges could be different regarding the control of athletes, team discipline, participation and team spirit. Each athlete's perspective of his or her coach's leadership behaviors, therefore, should be considered when investigating the social and organizational context of college sports. Coaches might also be able to recognize the leadership practices that foster mutual respect, cooperation, and commitment among team members.

Despite the importance of coaching leadership and team cohesion, the relationship between these two variables deserves further investigation in the context of government colleges in District Toba Tek Singh, Punjab. Athletes' experiences of coaching may differ according to institutional settings, available resources, sports participation opportunities, and coaches' individual leadership approaches. Findings from international studies cannot automatically be generalized to athletes studying in Pakistani government colleges because the institutional and sporting environments may differ. Therefore, examining this relationship within the local educational context can provide useful evidence about how different coaching behaviors are associated with athletes' perceptions of team unity. Such evidence may help sports administrators, physical education teachers, and coaches improve coaching practices and strengthen team relationships (Hague et al., 2021; Zhu et al., 2024).

In view of these considerations, the present study aims to explore the relationship between coach leadership behaviors and team cohesion among athletes at government colleges in District Toba Tek Singh. The study will examine how athletes perceive their coaches' leadership behaviors and whether these behaviors are associated with task cohesion and social cohesion within their sports teams. The findings are expected to contribute to a better understanding of coaching practices in college sports and provide practical recommendations for promoting cooperation, mutual trust, team commitment, and positive relationships among athletes. Ultimately, the study seeks to highlight the importance of effective coaching leadership in creating a supportive and cohesive sporting environment within government colleges.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the correlation between coach leadership style and teams ‘cohesion.
2. Test whether coach leadership style has a significant impact on team cohesion.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Team Cohesion

Carron et al. (1985) described cohesion as a dynamic process in which a group stays together in pursuit of its goals. They separated task cohesion, which is about commitment to a shared objective, from social cohesion, which is about liking and bonding among members. This was the model that led to the development of the Group Environment Questionnaire which remains in use. Why does it matter? Carron et al. (2002) found that a more cohesive team was more likely to be more successful in their meta-analysis, and that this trend was evident in numerous sports across a variety of performance levels.

2.2 Coach Leadership Behaviors

The focus of sport leadership research has shifted from the question of "what is a leader?" to the question of "what does a leader do?" This study suggested five categories of behaviors, and developed a scale based on these behaviors, and then examined how these behaviors were related to a broader model in which outcomes are a function of the extent to which the coach's actual behavior matches what is needed/preferred by the athlete. There are other leadership styles that have been investigated as well (Chelladurai, 1990).Jin et al. (2022), for example, examined how coaches' leadership styles relate to the coach-athlete relationship, athlete motivation and satisfaction. Across this work, instruction, feedback and support are generally linked to better athlete experiences, whereas heavily autocratic behavior is the one that most often shows weaker or negative links.

2.3 Leadership and Cohesion: What Earlier Studies Found

Early work already suggested a connection. Westre and Weiss (1991) reported that high school football players perceiving their coaches as providing more instruction and positive feedback showed higher levels of task cohesion; and Jowett and Chaundy (2004) reported that coach leadership and the coach-athlete relationship was related to task cohesion. The pooled evidence is more recent. Kim and Cruz (2016) determined that there was a moderate overall relationship between coach leadership and cohesion, with training and instruction having the highest association. Zhu et al. (2024) have updated this picture for Chinese sport, synthesising the results of 26 studies and 319 effect sizes. The overall effect on cohesion was moderate (ES = .275), with the effects of training and instruction (ES = .396) and social support (ES = .356) being stronger, with autocratic behaviour having a small negative effect.

A number of single studies identify related mechanisms. Zimmerman et al. (2024) found that athletes' perceptions of head coach leadership predicted their perceptions of team culture, and that the coach in particular was tied to group communication. Wang et al. (2024), working with collegiate basketball players, showed that leadership can also change how cohesion works: the benefit of team cohesion for athlete engagement depended on the level of paternalistic leadership. Yenen et al. (2023) surveyed 236 student-athletes from champion school teams about their coaches' behavior and examined which variables shaped these perceptions, a reminder that athletes in the same system do not always see the same coach in the same way.

2.4 The Gap This Study Addresses

The studies above come mostly from China, Europe and North America, and many use elite or school-age samples. Whether the same strength of relationship appears among student-athletes in government colleges in District TubaTek Sing is not something this literature can tell us. Expectations

about authority, resources and the role of the coach may differ here, so local evidence is worth collecting.

3. Method and Materials

3.1 Research Design

We used a descriptive, quantitative and cross-sectional design. It suits the question because we wanted to describe the variables as they stand and test how they relate, not to change anything in the teams. Cross-sectional survey approach was utilized to assess the correlation between coach leadership and teams' cohesion of athletes at college level in district Toba tek singh, Punjab, Pakistan.

2.2 Population and Sample

The population was student-athletes playing team sports at government colleges in District TubaTek Sing. A total of 200 student-athletes took part. With one predictor, a sample of this size gives stable estimates and enough power to detect a relationship of the size reported here at the .05 and .01 levels.

3.3 Instruments

A structured questionnaire was used, with a short demographic section, a coach leadership scale and a team cohesion scale. Questions were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) and higher scores indicate more positive leadership and cohesion. Leadership items were adapted from the Leadership Scale for Sports (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980) and cohesion items were adapted from the Group Environment Questionnaire (Carron et al., 1985). Author's Note: If the instruments are not the same, change the scale names above, and include reliability coefficients e.g., Cronbach's alpha) based on your own data.

3.4 Pro cedure

Permission was taken before data collection with the principals and sports in-charge of colleges. Athletes were informed of what the study was and that participation was optional and their responses would remain confidential. Paper questionnaires were distributed and picked up on the same day.

3.5 Data Analysis

Responses were analyzed in SPSS. Frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations described the sample and variables. Pearson's product-moment correlation tested their association (H_1), and Simple linear regression tested the impact of coach leadership on cohesion (H_2). Results were judged at the .05 and .01 significance levels.

Results

4. Results

4.1 Testing Hypothesis

H_1: There is a significant association between coach leadership style and team cohesion.

Table 1: *Pearson Correlation between Coach Leadership Style and Team Cohesion*

Variables	Coach Leadership Style	Team Cohesion	Sig. (2-tailed)
Coach Leadership Style	1	0.721**	0.000**
Team Cohesion	0.721**	1	0.000**

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

The correlation is r = 0.721, which is strong, positive and significant at the .01 level. Simply put, athletes who give their coach high ratings of their coach's leadership also tend to describe their teams' cohesiveness as high ratings, while athletes who rate their coach low on leadership tend to rate their teams low on cohesiveness. Squaring the value of the coefficient yields approximately 0.52, indicating that approximately 52% of the variation in one variable is common to the other. The probability of achieving this level of relationship by chance, with 200 athletes, is less than 1%. H1 is accepted. Note that this result does not tell us whether the influence is greater in one direction or the other; this result should be read in conjunction with the regression in 5.1, which assumed leadership leads to achievement.

H_2: The impact of coach's leadership style on team cohesion is significant.

Table 2: *Regression Analysis for Coach Leadership Style and Team Cohesion*

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.
1	0.728	0.530	0.527	0.432	112.45	0.000**

The model is a good fit. This value of R is 0.728 indicating a strong positive relationship and the value of R^2 is 0.530 indicating that 53% of the differences in team cohesion among these athletes is attributed to the coach's leadership style. The remaining 47% is attributable to factors not measured by the study, like team outcomes, length of time players have known each other, or the training environment for teams. The value of Adjusted R^2 (0.527) is near to R^2, indicating that the sample size was not influencing the values. The standard error of 0.432 indicates that predictions are likely to be within about half a scale point, which is rather tight on a five-point scale. The F value of 112.45 ($p < .01$) indicates that the model explains the cohesion better than merely using the average value for cohesion.

Table 3 *Coefficients of Regression Analysis*

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.215	0.178	-	6.825	0.000**
Coach Leadership Style	0.674	0.065	0.728	10.608	0.000**

The second row is the one that is important. For every one-point increase in the coach's leadership score, the team cohesion score increased by 0.674 points, on average (B = 0.674, SE = 0.065). The standardized beta value is 0.728 and a t value of 10.608 and $p < .01$ indicates the slope is very unlikely to be zero in the entire population. The cohesion score of 1.215 is the cohesion score that is expected to be zero for the leadership. It is used as a base for the line, but is not particularly interesting as a string or physical object. Expressed in words, it becomes: The model is Team Cohesion = 1.215 + 0.674 × (Coach Leadership Style).

Because the coefficient is significant, H_2 is accepted as the coefficient is significant.

4.2 Conclusion

Coach leadership behaviors are strongly and significantly linked to team cohesion among student-athletes at government colleges in District TubaTek Sing. The regression showed that leadership

style significantly predicts cohesion (R^2 = .530, F = 112.45, p < .01; B = 0.674, β = .728, p < .01), and the correlation confirmed a strong association (r = .721, p < .01). Both H1 and H3 are accepted. In practical terms, the way a coach leads appears to be one of the more important ingredients of a united team, even if it is not the only one.

4.3 Discussion

The conclusion is obvious: For this group of student-athletes, a coach's approach to leadership and team unity are tightly intertwined. This is in line with previous reports. Westre and Weiss (1991) and Jowett and Chaundy (2004) reported some positive correlations between coaching behaviors and cohesion, and Kim and Cruz (2016) and Zhu et al. (2024) pulled together their data to show moderate positive relationships. Our estimate is more powerful than the average of Zhu et al. (ES = .275). That's the space where a wary reading takes place. We did not use discrete leadership components, but rather an overall score and the two scores were derived from the same athletes at the same time, which can inflate the correlations. It may also be that the coach in this environment actually isn't less influential. Why might that be? A possible reason is that when coaches provide clear instruction and acknowledge good behavior, each player knows his or her role, which aids task cohesion. One is the fact that coaches who are fair, and concerned with their players, make it easier for friendships to develop and thus strengthen social cohesion. Zimmerman et al. (2024) have a related comment: coach and peer leadership are coupled to different aspects of team culture. The third explanation is one of the practical limitations: sometimes the coach can provide the only structure and motivation where facilities are limited. We provide these as suggestions, not as conclusions, as this study did not examine them specifically. There is 47% unexplained variance in cohesion. There are several potential contributors, including peer relationships, on-field results, and selection fairness and institutional support. However, Wang et al. (2024) demonstrate that leadership can influence the nature of cohesion for other outcomes, so the relationship between coach and team may not be a simple, linear one.

4.4 Limitations

1. The design is cross-sectional. A cohesive team may rate its coach more kindly, so the direction of influence cannot be settled here.
2. Everything rests on athletes' self-reports, which can be shaped by loyalty or a wish to answer "correctly".
3. The sample comes from one district's government colleges, so the results should not be stretched to private colleges or other regions.
4. Only one predictor was entered, and leadership was treated as a single score.
5. Players from different sports were analysed together, although leadership may work differently in different games.

4.5 Future Implications

4.5.1 For Practical

- **Coach training:** Short courses on instruction, feedback, and communication and player involvement could be built into regular coach development in government colleges.
- **Appointment and review:** Athlete feedback on leadership can be one input when coaches are appointed or evaluated.

- **Team-building:** Coaches can deliberately build in role clarity, shared goal-setting and activities that bring players together outside matches.
- **Athlete voice:** A simple, safe way for athletes to share how they experience the coach can build trust.

4.5.2 For Policy

Education and sports departments could add leadership development to coaching certification and set aside funds for continuing professional development of college coaches.

4.5.3 For Future Research

1. Use longitudinal or experimental designs to test whether leadership changes cohesion over a season.
2. Study the five leadership behaviors separately, since they may relate to cohesion in different ways (Zhu et al., 2024).
3. Add mediators and moderators such as trust, motivation, gender and type of sport.
4. Compare government and private colleges, or several districts and provinces.
5. Combine questionnaires with interviews or observation.
6. Link cohesion and leadership to actual team results.

4.6 Conflict of Interest

The researcher claims no conflict of interest.

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