

# Accessing the Coach Leadership Style among Athletes in the Malaysian Secondary School

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## Abstract

According to the Association for Applied Sport Psychology (2010), the term "sport" encompasses any form of physical activity that, through consistent or leisurely engagement, seeks to enhance both physical and mental wellbeing, foster social connections, or achieve competitive outcomes across all levels. One of the important factors for achieving success in sports is the feeling of winning something competitive (Duda, 1989). According to the Multidimensional Theory by Chelladurai and Saleh (1980), team success is the result of the compatibility between the actual behaviour and the behaviours favoured by athletes. The descriptive method was used in this research. The instrument used in this study is the Leadership Scale for Sports questionnaire Chelladurai & Salleh (1980) which consists of 40 questions on a Likert scale to test 5 dimensions of the coach's leadership style. Furthermore, this research aims to investigate what is the most preferred and the actual leadership style of secondary school athletes in Malaysia, specifically in Subis District. The study indicates that the most favourable leadership style is training and instruction with mean score 4.29 and std. deviation .61. Followed by democratic leadership behaviour with mean score 4.06 and std. deviation .64. The third and the fourth places go to positive feedback behaviour with mean score 3.82 and std. deviation .70, and social support behaviour with mean 3.67 and std. deviation .61. The most unfavourable style of leadership is autocratic types of behaviour with mean 1.85, std deviation .82. The researchers also found no significant difference between the preferred and actual leadership styles of Malaysian secondary school athletes.

**Keyword:** Coach Leadership Style, Athletes, Malaysian Secondary School

## Introduction

Based on The Malaysian Bar (2020), sports have been an important part of human life since ancient times. From traditional games to global sporting events watched by millions, sports have connected us universally. However, sport is not just entertainment, it has a deeper role in the development of individuals and society. According to the Association for Applied Sport Psychology (2010), the term "sport" encompasses any form of physical activity that, through consistent or leisurely engagement, seeks to enhance both physical and mental wellbeing, foster social connections, or achieve competitive outcomes across all levels. Meanwhile, according to Eime et al. (2020), sport means a human activity capable of reaching decisions that require a physical effort or physical skill which, according to its nature and organisation,

is competitive. Apart from physical sports, along with current technological developments, e-sports or electronic sports are also categorised as sports.

In Malaysia, there are many types of sports. Sports began to develop in Malay lands since the Malay Sultanate of Melaka, perhaps even earlier than that. The Malaysian Bar (2020) said that sports found in Malaysia today are the result of sports spread during the colonial era, from ancient times, and sports after Malaysia became independent. Boat racing, Top games, and Silat are known as forms of sport or games closely related to local culture and popularised by the Malay community. However, in earlier days, these sports were for fun and to fill free time. The Malaysian Ministry of Youth and Sports (2021) also noted that Western influence greatly influenced sports in Malaysia, especially during British colonial rule in the 19th century. Among the sports brought by Western influence are tennis, soccer, and so on. Moreover, the influence of Chinese immigrants to Malaysia has also influenced sports in Malaysia by introducing such as volleyball and ping pong.

The Ministry of Youth and National Sports (2003) quoted the National Sports Policy as adopted in 1988 to demonstrate the government's commitment to ensuring that the quality of national sports can be improved. Sports must be part of the country's development strategy, which is why this policy is made. For example, sports programmes like education and health development should get recognition. Moreover, the goal of this policy is to create a healthy, obedient, and united Malaysian community. The other purpose of this policy is also to provide opportunities and facilities to meet the real needs of a human being both physically and mentally. The slogans "Sport for All" and "High Performance Sports" are also part of this policy. These slogans are designed to attract the attention of people from all walks of life to join. Everyone involved in sports strives to maintain a healthy and energetic lifestyle through sports and recreational activities. Meanwhile, high-performance sports provide an opportunity for talented athletes to succeed at the national and international levels.

Referring to the Malaysian Ministry of Education (2017), the government has established sports schools as one of their efforts to realise the slogan of high-performance sports in Malaysia. Among the earliest sports schools established in Malaysia are the Bukit Jalil Sports School and the City of Penawar Sports School, established around 1966 and 1998, respectively. In addition, the Malaysian Ministry of Education (2017) has also stated that Malaysia Sports Schools (SSM), such as Bukit Jalil Sports School, were established with the aim of bringing together students with potential to improve their sports and academic talents with the help of professional and experienced coaches in the field of sport. Referring to the Malaysian Ministry of Education (2017), it is recorded that there are five SSMs across the country located in Bukit Jalil, Johor, Pahang, Perlis and Sabah.

A coach's responsibility is to help athletes achieve their best performance in competition. As such, a coach's job is to cover basic skills training, planning, and implementation of long- and short-term training programmes, pre-competition preparation, and technical and tactical advice throughout the competition to improve their performance. A good coach not only trains but also becomes a good advisor to the athletes. A coach who gains an athlete's confidence and has a quality training behaviour will always be appreciated by athletes (Bompa, 1993; Martens, 1987).

A coach's leadership style has a major influence on the athlete's performance or the achievement of a team. Leadership behaviour is often associated with the way a leader uses power to serve those who follow them (Cox, 2011). The impact of leadership is contingent upon the leader's style and conduct, and it has an influence on the followers' performance, satisfaction with the leader, and dedication to achieving goals.

A coach plays an important role in the development of a sport. They play the role of training athletes and teams that will join some competition. Wildman (2006) asserts that the demonstration of effective leadership is crucial in enhancing team performance. This highlights the significance of teamwork and collaboration among individuals, not just relying on the skill and talent of athletes, but also in achieving team success and triumph in tournaments or competitions. They also need to make sure the athletes and the team can show the best achievement in the competition (Bompa, 1993; Martens, 1987). Knowledge of coach leadership in sports, like planning, training techniques and game strategy setup, is necessary to ensure the constant involvement of athletes in sport activities.

One of the important factors for achieving success in sports is the feeling of winning something competitive (Duda, 1989). The athlete will remain in the sport he plays if he wins the competition he is in. According to Chelladurai (1990), a leader who can communicate under any circumstances is someone who knows what is required of his skill when they work to a goal. Thus, Chelladurai and Saleh (1980) have categorised coach leadership into five categories: training and guidance, autocratic, democratic, positive feedback, and social support. According to the Multidimensional Model by Chelladurai and Saleh (1980), team success is the result of the compatibility between the required behaviour, the actual behaviour and the athlete's favourite behaviours. Furthermore, this research needs to be carried out to ensure that the athletes not only achieve the objectives of training but that the training is also acceptable to athletes. In this connection, the study has focused on the coach leadership style favoured by secondary school athletes in Subis District.

### **Problem Statement**

Malaysia's government has allocated millions of ringgits for the development of sports in our country; this includes the development of sports facilities and Malaysia's sports ecosystem. With no exception to the highly focused aspects of training leadership, these courses are designed specifically for the excellence of our athletes at the root level. Citing the Metro daily newspaper dated 24 February, 2023, the government has allocated a total of 394 million in the 2023 budget for sports development. Ahmad (2023) also said that an amount of RM324 million was allocated to enhance training programmes and sports facilities across the country for the benefit of all athletes, including para-athletes. This will create a sporting environment that covers all aspects, from talent quests to podium events, as well as the maintenance and improvement of sports facilities across the country. Nevertheless, last year our country still failed to reach the golden goal in the theme of the recent sea sports. As a result of the four-year exchange of ministers, the Youth and Sports Minister said the country's sports policy had become unstable, causing appropriations that were supposed to be used for the needs of the nation's athletes to be affected (Fadhli, 2023). This is also closely linked to the coach leadership style that the athletes demand. Because of the frequent exchanges of ministers, the coaches were also replaced along with the ministers' replacement; not all of them, but the problem remained.

Athletes' performance, motivation, morality and intellectual development are influenced by the coach's leadership style. A string of coaches who do not have an appropriate leadership style leads to elements that undermine the performance and excellence of the athlete under the guidance of the coach. Coaches at all levels must have a clear leadership style that meets the needs of athletes under his guidance to the best level of their performance. Often, we read in the press or hear on the television that when there is a failure in the national sports team then the coaches who have leadership problems will be replaced with a new coach;

our national football team is no exception when the head coach was replaced with a new head coach. The compatibility of the relationship between the coach and the athlete is an important component in the success of an athlete (Beam et al., 2004). According to the Sarawak Voice report (2022), the coach who showed poor performance at the Malaysia Games (SUKMA) xx MSN Kuala Lumpur 2022 may be replaced. The phenomenon of changing coaches has become commonplace in Malaysia. According to a multidimensional leadership model, with a combination of three coach behaviours, namely meeting the requirements of the body, the actual coach style, and the style desired by the athlete, the sport can succeed, (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980). In this regard, the success of a team is still not guaranteed, even if the coach is a high-performing coach, if the trainer's attitude and style are not liked by the athletes and the organisation.

The rationale behind the selection of athletes at the secondary school in Subis District, Sarawak, in this study is because to date there is too little research to generalise secondary school athletes, especially in the style of coach leadership in Malaysia, particularly in Sarawak. The purpose of this study is to give information to all teachers who are appointed as a coach at school, district, state, or national level about the leadership style that is in demand by high school athletes in Subis district, Sarawak, Malaysia. Besides, the coach or teachers can also find out the ranking of the dimension of leadership style in the selection of athletes at the school level as it can affect the achievement in athletic performance under the guidance of the coach. Besides, variable aspects such as favoured dimensions of leadership style and actual of leadership behaviour according to secondary school athletes will be answered throughout this study.

Therefore, the research aims to

- Identify the favoured leadership style of the athlete in secondary schools for Subis District.
- Identify the actual leadership style practised by the coach in school according to athletes' perception.
- Identify the differences between favoured leadership style and actual leadership style in secondary schools in Subis District.

The research question

1. What dimension in leadership would be the choice of the athletes in secondary schools in Subis District?
2. What is the actual leadership style practised by the coach in secondary schools in Subis District?
3. Is there any difference between gender in leadership style at secondary schools in Subis District.

The null hypothesis

H<sub>0</sub>: There are no significant differences between favoured leadership style of coaches and actual leadership style of coaches according to athletes' perception.

### **Literature Review**

Studies related to the leadership style of coaches have been conducted extensively on international level and in Malaysia and found factors that the most notable reason why athletes are dissatisfied is that coaches don't have a certain style of leadership while

managing some training programme (Cakioglu, 2003; Al Tahayneh, 2003.) This situation, if allowed to continue, will not lead to achievement and accomplishment. Individuals or teams are deteriorating. Past studies have proven that the decline in player performance is closely linked to the style of training in the democratic dimension and positive feedback or reward dimension (Carthen, 2005). According to Chelladurai (2007), there are five dimensions of leadership, training and instruction, democratic, autocratic, social support and rewarding. Previous research conducted by Schliesman (1987); Chelladurai and Riemer (1998) indicates that athletes consistently prefer positive feedback, effective training and instructions, and democratic leadership behaviours regardless of the circumstances they encounter in their athletic endeavours. Chelladurai and Riemer (1998) support these findings and argue that team sports necessitate strong communication and interaction among players, as well as a well-structured and organised training regime facilitated by the coach. Terry and Howe (1984), who examined coach leadership behaviour at the group level, found that athletes expressed higher satisfaction when their coach exhibited autocratic rather than democratic behaviour. More recent research by Calvo and Topa (2019) revealed that soccer players, including both adolescents and adults, consistently favoured coach leadership behaviours characterised by effective training and instructions, as well as positive feedback, across all categories.

In Malaysia, among the researchers who have researched this matter is Nasiruddin et al (2023), according to whom the motivation of 4th grade students in Kuala Muda Yan district has a positive relationship with the coach's leadership style. To increase the motivation of sports students, coaches should use training and instruction leadership style and democratic leadership style.

In addition, a study conducted by Rengasamy (2013) found that the leadership style most preferred by Segamat high school athletes is one that gives positive feedback by leaders regardless of their gender or race. But high school athletes don't like autocratic leadership styles. Next, high school coaches must understand the needs and wants of athletes. They need to take gender and race differences into account when training and guiding athletes. Coaches should not use autocratic leadership and should consider the element of positive feedback.

A study by Govindan et al (2019) found that training and instructional leadership styles were the most liked by athletes, followed by democratic leadership style and social support. Alor Gajah Melaka athletes least like autocratic leadership style. Asiah and Rosli (2009) showed that MASUM hockey athletes of Melaka Technical University preferred the way of training leadership and instruction during training. In addition to that, a study conducted by Yasim et al (2022) showed that Terengganu Sports School athletes prefer positive feedback leadership followed by the leadership style of training and instruction, social support, autocratic behaviour, and supportive behaviour.

Autocratic style of leadership seems to be less favoured by athletes. El-Saleh and Althawabeyeh (2020) showed that autocratic style of leadership ranked last. Chelladurai (1990) stated that the autocratic nature of leadership gives the impression that all decisions lie with the individual; coaches who practice this leadership style do not listen to the opinions of the athletes under their care and only make decisions based on their own thoughts. Similarly, Jin et al (2022) found autocratic style of leadership was less favoured by the respondents. Furthermore, autocratic leadership refers to a leader who tends to use power as a tool to force subordinates to take certain actions. Autocratic leadership is characterised by the fact that absolute power is in the hands of the autocratic leader, who determines the policies of the group. His purpose, which imposes on the members what he does, also

determines the relationship that exists between them, in which he which alone is the ruler and the rule, and where the source of remorse and punishment depends entirely on him. Karim et al (2018) revealed that teachers in the Hulu Langat district exhibit a predominantly autocratic coaching leadership style, wherein the coach assumes full authority in decision-making. It is imperative for a coach to possess the ability to guide, instruct, respond, and provide directions as needed in certain circumstances. Failure to receive clear instructions can lead to confusion and potential conflicts. Particularly in times of crisis, the autocratic leadership style becomes crucial as it allows the organisation's followers to rely entirely on the decision-makers (Muczyk & Holt, 2008).

Gender differences are a factor that needs to be studied in identifying how athletes interpret and make perceptions of coach leadership styles (Horn, 2002). Although the results of a study by Terry and Howe (1984) showed no differences in the preferred coach leadership style between male and female athletes, most studies in the field of sport found that men and women have different views on coach behaviour (Beam et al., 2004; Chelladurai & Arnott, 1985; Chelladurai & Saleh, 1978; Hastie, 1995; Martin et al., 1999; Sherman et al., 2000).

Past studies have also shown that gender factors give a different degree of preference to the coach's leadership dimension where male athletes are more autocratic while female athletes are more likely to prefer a democratic leadership style (Chelladurai, 1980; Chelladurai & Arnott, 1985; Rui et. al., 2011). However, to date, researchers have been unable to identify which coaching leadership styles are of interest to athletes based on gender and which contribute to athlete success due to inconsistent study findings.

### **Theoretical Framework and Conceptual Framework**

According to Chelladurai (1980), leadership is an interactive process and depends on the characteristics of the situation and the team. Thus, the effectiveness of a coach as a leader in the field of sports is dependent on the characteristics of the athlete and the urgency of the situation. If coaches adapt their leadership behaviour to the behaviour preferred by the athlete, then the athlete is more prepared and strives to perfect the coach's expectations and improve their performance.

Chelladurai (1980, 1984) proposed a multidimensional leadership model to examine leadership in sport more closely. This model was formed as a result of several studies of the ideal coach leadership style (Chelladurai & Saleh 1978). The Multidimensional Leadership Model combines ideas put forth by the leadership theories of Trait Leadership Theory, Behaviour Theory and Situation Theory to show the interaction of coaches and athletes in a sports environment. According to Chelladurai (1980), the focus of this Multidimensional Leadership Model is three aspects of leadership style:

- i. Necessary behaviour.
- ii. The real behaviour of the leader.
- iii. Favoured behaviour.

The variables that will influence the behaviour of a leader are the characteristics of the situation, the characteristic of the leader and his skill. Achievement and satisfaction are the main objectives to be achieved is the interaction between the three behaviours of the leader. The Multidimensional Leadership Model can be clearly described in Figure 1.

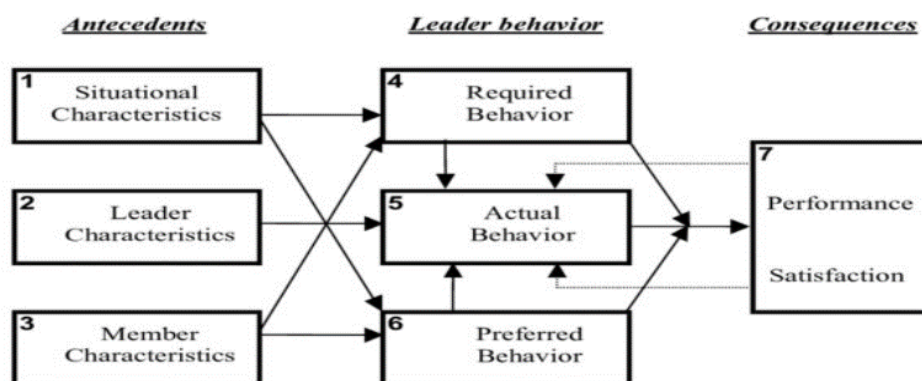


Figure 1: The Multidimensional Model of Leadership. Adapted from: Chelladurai, P. (1999). Human resource management in sport and recreation (p. 163).

Based on this Multidimensional Leadership Model, Chelladurai assumes that if the three coaching leadership patterns are compatible, i.e. the coach behaves in accordance with the required and desired behaviour, then the leader is the ideal leader. For example, the behaviour required by the athlete is a leader who often motivates during training and the coach acts in such a way as the player admires the behaviours, then athletes' performance and satisfaction will be achieved.

For the evaluation of the new search results, a conceptual framework was developed for each of the study's processes and the underlying variables. The researchers' understanding of the literature served as the basis for the study concept. Figure 2 illustrates this conceptual framework.

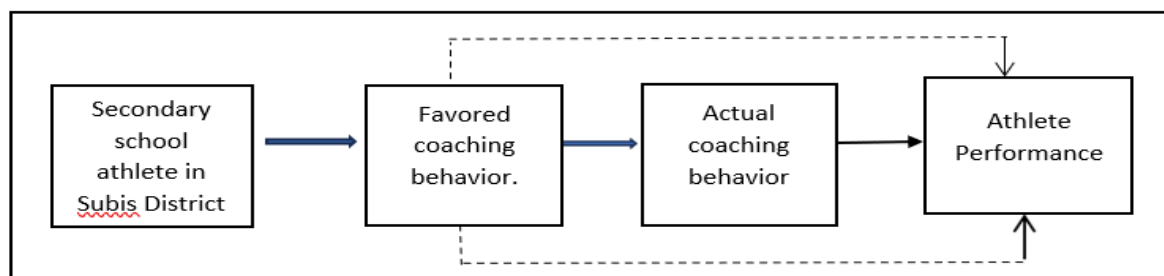


Figure 2: The conceptual framework for the research

This research was conducted to find out coaches' leadership style favoured by secondary school athletes in Malaysia, specifically in Subis District, Sarawak. The descriptive method was used in this research. According to Baumgartner and Hensley (2006), the descriptive study aims to describe the current situation. Based on the objectives of this study, survey methods and questionnaire instruments are the appropriate type of descriptive study to obtain data on school athletes. Rohana (2003) stated that the survey method is a common descriptive method in educational and social science studies. She also stated that the purpose of the survey was to obtain information about variables related to phenomena without questioning the existence of those variables. In addition, the survey method is an ideal choice to identify the attitude and orientation of a person in a large population (Babbie, 2002). Furthermore, researchers chose this survey method because it is a suitable method for studying information

obtained from a variety of survey questions instruments and using data collection methods that depend on the answers to the questions asked. This study will apply the Leadership Scale for Sport (LSS) to identify the leadership preferred by athletes. The researcher uses probability random sampling techniques, or deliberately selects samples, based on the objectives of the study. This technique is used to obtain the most relevant and informative samples to answer research questions or its objectives. To describe populations more accurately, larger samples are needed, as stated by Fraenkel et al (2011, p. 704). According to Gay (1996), if the population is small, the sample must be large and close to the population to be representative, homogeneous and generalisable. Roscoe (1975) stated that samples between 30 and 500 people were appropriate, supporting the selection of these samples. The study targets were secondary school athletes in the Subis District area. Athletes from three schools in SMK Subis, SMK Suai and SMK Luar Bandar were selected as subjects. Subjects selected aged from 15 and below and 18 and below. Before answering the questions, participants were provided with a consent form that outlined the purpose of the study and guaranteed the protection of their information through confidential data collection, storage and reporting procedures. According to Mohd Majid Konting (1990), statistical data analysis using this software can produce accurate calculations. Descriptive statistical analysis such as mean and standard deviation was used to see and determine the position in the dimension of coach's leadership style that athletes are interested in at the secondary school level in Subis District, Sarawak, Malaysia. While inferential analysis, which is an independent t-test, was used to see the differences in the favoured leadership style and actual leadership style of the coaches according to athlete perception.

### Data Collection Instrument

The instrument used in this study is the Leadership Scale for Sports questionnaire (Chelladurai & Salleh, 1980) which consists of 40 questions on a Likert scale to test five dimensions of the coach's leadership style, namely the dimension of training and instruction (13 questions); democratic dimension (9 questions); autocratic dimension (5 questions); social support dimension (8 questions); and positive feedback dimension (5 questions). The reliability value of this questionnaire is between .75 and .90 (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980; Chelladurai et al., 1988). The type of question used in this study is in the form of matrix questions. Questions in the form of selected answers contain several questions or statements as stimuli and suggested answers as responses from respondents. Respondents are required to read and understand the statement and choose the most appropriate answer based on the suggested answer for the statement presented. According to Babbie (2002), questions in the form of selected answers contain some questions may have the same set of answers as a Likert scale. The use of a Likert scale will make it easier and save time for respondents to answer. Table 3 shows the five-point Likert-type scale, Table 4 shows the three sections of the research instrument, Table 5 shows the dimension of leadership in sport.

Table 3

#### *5-point Likert -Type Style*

Never	Rarely (75 %)	Sometimes (50%)	Frequently (25%)	Every time
1	2	3	4	5



Table 4

*Three sections of the research instrument*

Section		Item	Category of data
Section A	Demographic	Gender	Nominal
		Level of involvement	
Section B	Favoured leadership type of coach	1. Training and Instruction 2. Democratic 3. Autocratic 4. Social Support 5. Positive Feedback	Ordinal (Likert Scale)
Section C	The real leadership style of the coach	1. Training and Instruction 2. Democratic 3. Autocratic 4. Social Support 5. Positive feedback	Ordinal (Likert Scale)

**Dimensions of leader behaviour in sport**

Table 4

*Dimensions of leader behaviour in sport: (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980). Development of a leadership scale. Journal of Sport Psychology, 2, 34-45.*

Dimension	Description	Number of items in the questionnaire
Training and Instruction	A coach's approach is focused on improving athlete performance by emphasising and facilitating training through showcasing skills, techniques, and tactics in sports. Create a harmonious relationship between team members and coordinate their activities.	1, 5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 23, 26, 29, 32, 35, 38
Democratic	Coach approach that allows athlete involvement in decision-making to achieve group objectives, and to form training and game strategy.	2, 9, 15, 18, 21, 24, 30, 33, 39
Autocratic	Coach typically makes choices based on their ideas and judgements and rarely accepts advice from the team members. The coach has control over all decisions	6, 12, 27, 34, 40

	and there is little input from the team.	
Social Support	Coach behaviours that emphasise individual wellbeing, a positive group atmosphere and friendly interpersonal relationships.	3, 7, 13, 19, 22, 25, 31, 36
Positive Feedback	Coach leadership behaviours that enrich athletes with recognition and rewards for their good achievements.	4, 10, 16, 28, 37

A pilot test is a small study done before the actual test to be conducted (Chua, 2011). Creswell (2008) suggested conducting a pilot test to see to what extent respondents understood and answered the questionnaire after the questionnaire was completed. The pilot test aims to gather feedback from participants on the clarity of items, instructions, relevance, feasibility and estimated time required to answer the questionnaire. The input from the pilot test is used to enhance survey questions and to identify problems that may arise during actual study. Ten students from different sports backgrounds have been selected as respondents. Respondents also represented at least a school level in the competition. The pilot test was conducted in SMK Bekenu's computer lab for a day, on July 3, 2023. The time taken by the subjects was 30 minutes.

### Findings

Table 5 below shows the most favoured coach leadership styles according to the athlete's perception in Subis District, Sarawak. It can be concluded that the most favoured coach leadership style is training and instruction with mean score 4.29 and std. deviation .61. The findings clearly show that athletes prefer this style because they come from different backgrounds and cultures and prefer to progress gradually based on their abilities rather than being suddenly pushed to a higher level. Using this approach, coaches try to create a positive relationship between the athletes. Human beings normally like to be loved and taken care of. The coach is highly approachable using this kind of leadership behaviour. The second type of leadership style favoured by the athlete is democratic leadership behaviour with mean score 4.06 and std. deviation .64. Behaviours that increase an athlete's chances of participation are what athletes expect from their coaches. Athletes prefer to make decisions together with their respective coach regarding team goals, training methods, tactics and game strategies. With a mean score of 1.85 and a std. deviation of 0.82, authoritarian behaviour was the least preferred behavioural dimension among the athletes. The results of this study clearly show that athletes do not adhere to this style because they expect to be well-served by their coaches. Additionally, athletes dislike coaches who are intolerant and making their own decisions without discussing with the team members. Moreover, during this phase, secondary school athletes exhibit a level of maturity where they are capable of independent thinking and making choices that are suitable for the competition. They are also adept at making informed decisions and assuming responsibility.

Table 5

*The most favoured leadership behaviour according to athletes' perception*

No	Dimension	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	Training and Instruction behaviour	4.29	.61
2.	Democratic behaviour	4.06	.64
3.	Positive Feedback behaviour	3.82	.70
4.	Social Support behaviour	3.67	.61
5.	Autocratic behaviour	1.85	.82

For the leadership style practised by the coaches in the Subis District, training and instruction would be the actual leadership style practised by the coaches according to athletes' perception with mean score 4.24, std. deviation .64. The results of this study clearly indicate that the real behavioural dimension of trainers is training and instruction. Therefore, the coach pays more attention to the training and instruction dimensions when implementing training programmes. This allows athletes to fully concentrate during training and enjoy the coach's training programme. This is followed by democratic behaviour with a mean score of 4.03 and a std. deviation of 0.69. Research shows that athletes prefer coaches to seek their input on important training topics and encourage them to provide suggestions on how to approach training. In position 3 and 4 comes positive feedback leadership behaviour with mean score of 3.91 and std. deviation .82, social support with mean score of 3.67 and std deviation .65. The most unpopular leadership behaviour in this research is autocratic behaviour with the mean score of 2.00 and std. deviation .88. Using this approach, the coach typically makes choices based on their ideas and judgements and rarely accepts advice from the team members. The coach has control over all decisions and there is little input from the team.

Table 6

*Actual leadership behaviour according to athletes' perception*

No	Dimension	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	Training and Instruction behaviour	4.24	.64
2.	Democratic behaviour	4.03	.69
3.	Positive Feedback behaviour	3.91	.82
4.	Social Support behaviour	3.65	.65
5.	Autocratic behaviour	2.00	.88

When comparing the most favoured leadership behaviour and actual leadership style according to athletes' perception, the findings showed there were no significant differences between most favoured leadership behaviour and actual leadership behaviour with a significance value  $\alpha=0.05$ . Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. Table 7 below shows the comparison between favoured leadership behaviours and actual leadership behaviours.

Table 7

*The comparison between favoured leadership behaviour and actual leadership behaviour according to athletes' perception*

Dimension	Comparison	Mean	Std. deviation	t	p
Training and Instruction	Favoured	4.29	.61	1.208	.230
	Actual	4.24	.64		
Democratic	Favoured	4.06	.64	.771	.443
	Actual	4.03	.69		
Positive Feedback	Favoured	3.82	.70	-4.89	.140
	Actual	3.91	.82		
Social Support	Favoured	3.67	.61	.364	.717
	Actual	3.65	.65		
Autocratic	Favoured	1.85	.61	-.869	.065
	Actual	2.00	.88		

Significance value  $\alpha = 0.05$

### Discussion

The research findings show the most favoured leadership styles by athletes are training and instruction, followed by democratic, positive feedback and social support. The autocratic behaviour is the athletes least favoured leadership style. Subis secondary school athletes in Sarawak favoured training and instruction style of leadership likely due to school students prefer to follow training methods and instructions from their respectful coach. Socio-cultural factors of the local community also encourage athletes to choose and be comfortable with those dimensions. This study found that athletes at secondary school want to master skills as well as developing knowledge of the technique in sports causes them to follow their training method and coach's instructions. Factors of age, maturity level and the respondent's experience may contribute to this selection.

The research result also supports the study conducted by Ling (2017) in Sarawak, which aimed to study the perception of athletes towards the behaviour of coaches that are preferred by athletes as well as the actual behaviour of the coaches in track and field. The study respondents consisted of 252 secondary school athletes (male,  $n = 126$ ; female,  $n = 126$ ) aged 13 to 18 years, based on Sarawak's track and field athletes' perception of coaching behaviour. It was found that the most preferred behaviour by athletes is training and instruction ( $M = 3.89$ ,  $SP = 0.75$ ). The findings of the athletes' perception of the coach's actual behaviour is also training and instruction behaviour ( $M = 4.13$ ,  $SP = 0.68$ ) Thus, the conclusion shows the same results also reported in this study.

Similarly, the research conducted by Govindan et al (2019) found that the most favoured coach leadership style is training, and instruction (mean=3.29) followed by democratic behaviour (mean=3.20). On the other hand, autocratic behaviour (mean 2.97) is the least favoured style of leadership. In contrast, the actual leadership behaviours of coaches reveal that training and instruction (mean 4.49) is the dominant behaviour, followed by democratic behaviour (mean=4.40), social support (mean=4.35), and the least preferred behaviour is autocratic behaviour (mean 4.20).

In contrast, a study conducted by Rengasamy (2013) found that the leadership style most preferred by Segamat secondary school athletes was positive feedback. The secondary school athletes seem to less favour autocratic leadership styles. Next, high school coaches must understand the needs and wants of athletes. They need to take gender and race differences into account when training and guiding athletes. Coaches should not use autocratic leadership and should consider the element of positive feedback. Yasim et al. (2022) showed that Terengganu Sports School athletes prefer positive feedback leadership followed by the leadership style of training and instruction, social support, autocratic behaviour, and social support behaviour.

In this research, researchers found that autocratic is the most unfavoured leadership style. Similarly, most of the studies found that autocratic style of leadership was less favoured by the athletes. El-Saleh and Althawabeyeh (2020) showed that autocratic style of leadership ranked last in their study. Chelladurai (1990) stated that the autocratic nature of leadership gives the impression that all decisions lie with the individual. Coaches who practise this leadership style do not listen to the opinions of the athletes under their care and only make decisions based on their own thoughts. Similarly, Jin et al (2022) found that autocratic style of leadership was less favoured by the respondents.

It can be concluded that the most dominant dimension and the most preferred behaviour by athletes are training and instruction, democratic behaviour, social support, and positive feedback followed by autocratic behaviour. The training and instruction approach is suitable for young athletes as they are less experienced and need proper feedback and guidance from their coaches. According to the researchers, young athletes display a predilection for a coaching approach that highlights affirmative reinforcement. The reason behind this preference is that it aids in maintaining their concentration throughout training sessions and garners attention from their coach. As a result, athletes can fully engage in their training and diligently adhere to their coach's guidance. Consequently, this amplifies their motivation and dedication levels when participating in training exercises.

From the actual behaviour of the trainers, it can be concluded that positive feedback is the dominant dimension, followed by democratic behaviour and social support. The results of this study indicate that coaches and athletes share the same favourite dimensions. This situation allows coaches and athletes to build a good relationship and focus perfectly during training. Through the fit between the athletes' will and the coaches' leadership style, athletes will be more motivated to follow the training and achieve brilliant success.

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