




Perception of interpersonal relationships between students and sports coaches in Piura, Peru

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ABSTRACT

Background: In Peru, current laws require universities to integrate complementary sports services in order to obtain institutional licensing. However, the scarcity of information makes it difficult to understand behaviour among athletes and coaches. The objective of the study is to analyse the interpersonal behaviour between athletes and coaches at the Universidad Nacional de Frontera, Sullana, Peru, 2023. The study was a non-experimental, descriptive study based on a quantitative approach. A total of 85 athletes involved in one of the sports disciplines offered by the university participated. The valid and reliable Interpersonal Behaviour Perceptions (IBQ) scale (Cronbach's alpha = 0.913) was applied. The results reveal that football (31.8%), volleyball (30.6%) and basketball (18.8%) are the most practiced disciplines and are related to the gender of the participants ($p < .016$), whose ages range from 18 to 23 years. In addition, athletes value the support of coaches in decision-making but show neutrality in perceived empowerment. There is resistance towards pressure and discrepancies in emotional support and comfort from the coach. In conclusion, positive interpersonal behaviour is observed between athletes and coaches at the Universidad Nacional de Frontera, Sullana, Peru.

Keywords: Physical education, Interpersonal relations, Technician sporty, College athletes, Behaviour, Sports competition, IBQ.

Cite this article as:

Coronel-Chugden, J-W., Moreno-Quispe, L. A., & Villegas Aguilar, G. F. (2025). Perception of interpersonal relationships between students and sports coaches in Piura, Peru. *Journal of Human Sport and Exercise*, 20(1), 12-21. <https://doi.org/10.55860/rx0kiv71>



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Submitted for publication June 12, 2024.

Accepted for publication July 22, 2024.

Published August 06, 2024.

[Journal of Human Sport and Exercise](#). ISSN 1988-5202.

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doi: <https://doi.org/10.55860/rx0kiv71>

INTRODUCTION

Interpersonal relationships refer to the social and emotional interactions between individuals in a given environment and are guided by rules of social exchange that dictate how individuals are expected to treat each other (Rosso et al., 2010). Therefore, social relationships are fundamental; however, despite a growing interest in sport psychology on interpersonal coping, a lack of conceptual clarity and divergence in terminology hinder its progress (Eckardt & Tamminen, 2023).

On the other hand, Laios (2005) in his study highlights that ineffective communication is one of the main causes of conflict in professional and institutional sports. Since it affects the coach-athlete relationship (Pitney et al., 2023). Choi et al., (2020), likewise, inappropriate treatment by a coach could impede the development of athletes' athletic performance and psychological well-being.

However, this situation is aggravated by the lack of respect, which manifests itself between the coach-athlete pair through contempt, unfair criticism and unequal treatment (Cerrada & Gime, 2021). In terms of (House, 2022) conflicts of interest, such as the prioritization of outcomes over athletes' well-being, can generate tensions, as well as differences in vision and approach. Likewise, a lack of emotional support from the coach, especially during difficult times, can lead to a strained relationship (Aguinaga et al., 2023).

According to the National Survey of Social Relations (ENARES) published by the Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática- INEI (2020) in Peru both males and females between 12 and 17 years of age were victims of physical and psychological violence in 78.0%. These events took place at home and at school. Therefore, young people in these conditions who qualify as athletes in universities will have a suboptimal performance because they carry psychological problems from an early age. In terms of Rosalie & Vilca (2023) it is essential to generate plans and policies aligned with encouraging good efficient interpersonal relationships.

In that context, further research is required to better understand the problem of interpersonal relationships (Trolio et al., 2021). Simons & Bird, (2023), examined the theory of "*Inversion*" and concluded that it has the potential to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding interpersonal relationships in sport. According to Putranto (2023) good communication is fundamental to the quality of interactions between coach and athlete. However, there is still a lack of information, which makes it difficult to understand the behaviour between athletes and coaches.

Therefore, we consider that the present study is relevant because localized data can have a significant impact on decision-making based on localized gaps between interpersonal relationships between athletes and sports coaches. In terms of Pulido et al. (2022) these types of studies predict the style of support in the face of the needs of coaches and athletes. On the other hand, Cronin et al. (2022) asserts that the results of this type of analysis promote the development of vital skills in sport. Bissett et al. (2020) based on the results, coaches and athletes can be trained to optimize sports performance.

In short, the assessment of interpersonal relationships can help detect potential problems or conflicts before they escalate, and coaches have a key influence on the transmission of values and ethics to students. A positive relationship with the coach can increase students' sense of safety and security, which is especially crucial in youth sport, where the safety and well-being of participants are of utmost importance.

It is important to assess interpersonal relationships between coaches and athletes to detect problems or conflicts before they escalate, because coaches have a key influence in transmitting values and ethics to athletes. A positive relationship with the coach can increase the athletes' sense of security, which is crucial in youth sports to deal with stress, competitive pressure and other emotional challenges.

Therefore, the objective of this study was to identify the sports preferences of athletes according to age and gender, as well as to describe and relate the interpersonal behaviour of coaches and athletes at the Universidad Nacional de Frontera, Sullana, Peru.

METHODS

The study was descriptive and of non-experimental design.

Participants: The population consisted of 85 qualified student athletes belonging to various sports disciplines at the University. All of them resided in the Piura region and came from different academic cycles and professional careers of the 3 faculties of the University (Business Sciences and Tourism, Economic and Environmental Sciences, and Engineering in Food Industries and Biotechnology).

Measures: The Interpersonal Behaviour Questionnaire (IBQ) reported in a previous study Rocchi et al. (2017), was adapted to Spanish for use in this population. The questionnaire was valid and reliable (Cronbach's alpha = 0.913). The questionnaire scale was Likert, with the lowest score being 1 "Strongly Disagree" and the highest score being 5 "Strongly Agree". The questionnaire was adapted from a study.

Procedures: The study was conducted at the Universidad Nacional de Frontera, Peru for 9 months (March to November 2023). The investigators gave the athletes the questionnaire to voluntarily complete and to evaluate the informed consent of the study. Once the questionnaires were completed, the data were processed for analysis (Myers et al., 2022).

Analysis: A descriptive analysis of the variable was carried out and Spearman's correlation test was performed to analyse the relationship of the variable, for which Microsoft Excel 2019 spreadsheets and SPSS v27 software were used.

RESULTS

Out of a population of 85 athletes qualified in different sports disciplines of the National University of Frontera, the results indicate that the disciplines that practice the most are soccer (31.8%), volleyball (30.6%) and basketball (18.8%).

Table 1. Athletes by type of sport they practice.

	Sport	N	%
Sporting activity	Football	27	31.8
	Volleyball	26	30.6
	Karate	13	15.3
	Basketball	16	18.8
	Athletics	3	3.5
Total		85	100%

Table 2 shows that women show a more significant participation in volleyball (22.4%), football (16.5%) and football (12.9%). On the other hand, the male gender exhibits higher percentages in football (15.3%), basketball (12.9%) and volleyball (8.2%). In summary, it is observed that a higher proportion of women prefer volleyball and men prefer soccer, indicating a significant association between the gender of the participants ($p < .04$).

Table 2. Athletes by gender according to the type of sport they practice.

Gender	Type of sport you play in college						p-value
	Athletics	Basketball	Football	Karate	Volleyball	Total	
Female	1 (1.2%)	5 (5.9%)	14 (16.5%)	11 (12.9%)	19 (22.4%)	50 (58.8%)	.016
Male	2 (2.4%)	11(12.9%)	13(15.3%)	2(2.4%)	7(8.2%)	35 (41.2%)	
Total	3 (3.5%)	16 (18.8%)	27 (31.8%)	13 (15.3%)	26 (30.6%)	85 (100.0%)	

Table 3 provides information on sports preferences according to the age of the athletes. It should be noted that, between 18 and 19 years of age, the most practiced sport is soccer (17.6%), followed by volleyball (14.1%). In the 20-21 age group, soccer leads with 9.4%, followed by karate and volleyball, both with 5.9%. In the 22-23 age group, volleyball leads with 3.5%, followed by karate with 2.4%. From 23 years of age onwards, volleyball is the most practiced sport with 4.7%, followed by basketball. This shows that there is a constant tendency at all ages towards soccer as the most practiced sport, followed by volleyball compared to other sports disciplines.

Table 3. Sports preferences practiced by qualified university students.

Age	Athletics	Basketball	Football	Karate	Volleyball	Total	p-value
18-19 years	2 (2.4%)	6 (7.1%)	15 (17.6%)	3 (3.5%)	12 (14.1%)	38 (44.7%)	.603
20-21 years	1 (1.2%)	6 (7.1%)	8 (9.4%)	5 (5.9%)	5(5.9%)	25 (29.4%)	
22-23 years	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1(1.2%)	2 (2.4%)	3 (3.5%)	6 (7.1%)	
23 years and over	0 (0.0%)	4 (4.7%)	3 (3.5%)	3 (3.5%)	6 (7.1%)	16(18.8%)	
Total	3 (3.5%)	16 (18.8%)	27 (31.8%)	13(15.3%)	26(30.6%)	85(100.0%)	

Regarding the interpersonal behaviour of the coaches from the perspective of the athletes, the following was evidenced:

A mean of 4.00 of athletes, agree with the statement "*coaches support the decisions I make by myself*" this means that coaches trust in the athletes' ability to make decisions and take responsibility for their own performance, tactics and competition strategies. A mean of 3.27 of the athletes consider that the coach encourages them to make their own decisions, i.e., they have a neutral position regarding the empowerment they receive to make their own decisions. Likewise, they have a neutral position regarding the support of the coach towards the decisions made by the athletes (mean of 3.06) and the freedom given by the coach to make their own decisions (3.00), respectively.

Likewise, the majority of athletes consider that they do not agree to receive pressure from the coach to do things their way (mean 1.87), the coach imposes his/her opinions (mean 1.81), pressures them to adopt certain behaviours (mean 1.76) or limits the athletes' choices (mean 1.54).

Regarding coaches' support of athletes' competencies, respondents showed a neutral position regarding their coaches' motivation to improve their skills (mean 3.09), providing valuable feedback to athletes (mean

3.15), recognizing athletes' ability to achieve their goals (mean 3.10), telling athletes that they can achieve things (mean 3.15).

Regarding reinforcement of athletes' competence, respondents strongly disagreed with the statement that the coach tells them they will probably fail (mean 1.19), sends them messages saying they are incompetent (mean 1.12), doubts athletes' ability to improve (mean 1.25) and doubts athletes' ability to overcome challenges (mean 1.45).

Regarding the relationship and support of coaches, athletes have a neutral position to the interest their coach has in what they do (mean 3.12), disagree with the statement "*the coach takes the time to get to know me*" (mean 2.88), "*the coach sincerely enjoys spending time with me*" (mean 2.72) and "*relates to me*" (mean 2.85).

In relation to frustration, they strongly disagree with the statement "*the coach does not comfort me when I feel bad*" (mean 1.52) among other aspects evidenced in Table 4.

Table 4. Application of the Interpersonal Behavioural Questionnaire (IBQ) in sport.

"My coach..."	Medium	SD
Autonomy-supportive (AS)		
Gives me the freedom to make my own choices.	3.00	0.83
Supports my decisions	3.06	0.69
Supports the choices that I make for myself	4.00	0.83
Encourages me to make my own decisions	3.27	0.71
Autonomy-thwarting (AT)		
Pressures me to do things their way.	1.87	1.24
Imposes their opinions on me.	1.81	1.21
Pressures me to adopt certain behaviours.	1.76	1.28
Limits my choices.	1.54	1.22
Competence-supportive (CS)		
Encourages me to improve my skills	3.09	0.78
Provides valuable feedback	3.15	0.84
Acknowledges my ability to achieve my goals	3.11	0.74
Tells me that I can accomplish things.	3.15	0.81
Competence-thwarting (CT)		
Points out that I will likely fail	1.19	1.26
Sends me the message that I am incompetent.	1.13	1.29
Doubts my capacity to improve.	1.26	1.29
Questions my ability to overcome challenges.	1.46	1.38
Relatedness-supportive (RS)		
Is interested in what I do.	3.13	0.75
Takes the time to get to know me	2.88	0.89
Honestly enjoy spending time with me	2.72	0.91
Relates to me.	2.86	0.80
Relatedness-thwarting (RT)		
Does not comfort me when I am feeling low.	1.53	1.28
Is distant when we spend time together.	1.54	1.27
Does not connect with me	1.59	1.28
Does not care about me.	1.42	1.2

Regarding the 6 dimensions of interpersonal behaviour of coaches in sport there is a positive and significant relationship ($Rho = 0.747^{**}$) between autonomy-thwarting and autonomy support, i.e., the greater the autonomy-thwarting the greater the autonomy support, this allows taking concrete actions to strengthen the autonomy of athletes, coaches are providing a type of support that helps athletes feel empowered and responsible for their own sport development. In addition, there is evidence of a positive and significant relationship between competence-supportive and autonomy support ($Rho = 0.729^{**}$), which are fundamental to cultivate an environment that fosters growth, excellence and well-being of athletes. It was also evidenced that the greater the competence-supportive, the greater the autonomy-thwarting ($Rho = 0.673^{**}$), this contributes to the development of more resilient athletes, capable of facing challenges and difficulties with determination and self-direction. Both aspects are fundamental for growth and long-term success in sport.

It was observed that the less autonomy support there is less competence-thwarting ($Rho = -0.088^{**}$), this is explained when athletes experience less autonomy support, that is, when they have less freedom to make decisions and less control over their own sport development, they may become more dependent on external direction, such as that of coaches or team expectations. In addition, if athletes feel they have no control over their training, tactics or personal goals, they are less likely to experience the satisfaction and commitment associated with intrinsic motivation. Furthermore, the results show that lower autonomy-thwarting results in lower competence-thwarting ($Rho = -0.095$), which can lead to a lack of alignment between coaches' training methods and athletes' individual needs, which in turn can negatively affect their development and competence in their sport discipline. When autonomy is reduced, opportunities for athletes to experiment, make mistakes and learn from their errors are also reduced. The relationship of the other dimensions is evident in Table 5.

Table 5. Correlation of the dimensions of interpersonal behaviour of coaches in sport.

	AS	AT	CS	CT	RS	RT
Autonomy Support (AS)	1					
Autonomy-thwarting (AT)	.747**	1				
Competence-supportive (CS)	.729**	.673**	1			
Competence-thwarting (CT)	-.088	-.095	.114	1		
Relatedness-supportive (RS)	-.305**	-.411**	-.080	.757**	1	
Relatedness-thwarting (RT)	-.336**	-.352**	-.182	.716**	.867**	1

Note: ** indicates a highly significant correlation at 1%.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study indicate a positive dynamic between athletes and coaches at the Universidad Nacional de Frontera, Sullana, Peru, as well as a high degree of interest on the part of the coaches in sports activities. This finding coincides with previous research that highlights the importance of the coach-athlete relationship for the development and performance in sport. Specifically, it supports the significant influence of the coach's leadership behaviours on the emotional experience of athletes during competition, as pointed out by González-García et al. (2021), Furthermore, it agrees with the relevance of effective coach-athlete communication, highlighted by (Davis et al., 2019), where the interest shown by coaches towards athletes' activities can be interpreted as an indicator of open and responsive communication. Finally, the results agree with the findings of Kim and Park (2020), who emphasize the importance of trust, friendship and constructive communication in the coach-athlete relationship, suggesting that the high level of interest shown by coaches can foster a positive work environment and facilitate both individual and collective development.

The data also reveal that the sports disciplines most commonly practiced by qualified college athletes are soccer (31.8%), volleyball (30.6%) and basketball (18.8%). However, the results of Paul et al. (2023), show a lower preference for soccer (6.9%), women's volleyball (3.5%) and baseball (3.5%), among other activities. On the other hand, Moreno-Quispe et al. (2020), found that 30% of the participants showed a preference for mountaineering, followed by 18.5% who preferred volleyball and 16.5% who opted for soccer. In an additional study, it was observed that during COVID-19 confinement, athletes presented a high level of physical activity, especially women from rural areas compared to urban areas Moreno-Quispe et al. (2021), results that differ slightly from ours. According to Tan et al. (2023), these discrepancies could be attributed mainly to individual differences in tastes and preferences.

When evaluating athletes' preferences according to gender in various sports activities, the data show that in greater proportion 27 (31.8%) of males prefer soccer and 26 (30.6%) of females prefer volleyball. These results compare with those of Paul et al. (2023), whose findings favour male athletes in most sports, including mixed sports. Possible reasons for this inequality in evaluation may be due to financial and promotional incentives, sex biases, and others. On the other hand Nuzzo (2023), points out that these differences occur because men are more motivated by challenge, competition and social recognition. Women have fewer competitive events and are more motivated by greater attractiveness, muscle "toning". Dakic et al. (2023), for women face unique challenges to participate.

Finally, it was found that in the ages evaluated (18-19 years, 20-21 years, 22-23 years and 23 and over), soccer is the most practiced sport, followed by volleyball in terms of proportion. These data compare with the results found by Hernández-Beltrán et al. (2024), who point out that in addition to tastes and preferences, the levels of physical condition of university athletes also play a role. On the other hand Lourenço et al. (2022), autonomous and psychological motivation also play an important role.

Despite these findings, our study has limitations because it focused exclusively on athletes from one university and residents of a single region. In addition, the information did not include details on the socioeconomic conditions of the participants, nor did it inquire about emotional aspects and health status.

CONCLUSIONS

The data show that interpersonal behaviour is positive between athletes and coaches of the Universidad Nacional de Frontera, Sullana, Peru, 2023. Soccer, volleyball and basketball are the most practiced sports among athletes at the Universidad Nacional de Frontera. There is a differentiated preference for sports between genders. Women show a stronger inclination towards volleyball, while men have a stronger affinity for soccer.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

JWCC and LAMQ participated in project conceptualization, methodology, data curation and analysis, research, visualization, and writing of the manuscript. GFVA participated in data analysis, research, visualization, and writing of the manuscript. All authors approved the final version of the manuscript for publication.

SUPPORTING AGENCIES

This research was approved by Dean's Resolution No. 207-2023-UNF-FCEA and was carried out with the financial support of the Universidad Nacional de Frontera, Peru.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We appreciate the participation of the athletes in the study and the support of the authorities in the various sports disciplines.

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