

Assessing the Impact of Coaching Styles on the Mental and Physical Wellness of Student Athletes at Federal University Oye Ekiti

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Abstract: Coaching style significantly influences the mental and physical wellness of student-athletes. This study examined the impact of authoritarian, democratic, and laissez-faire coaching styles on student-athletes at Federal University Oye-Ekiti (FUOYE). Using a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 100 student-athletes through structured questionnaires. Results indicated that the democratic coaching style was the most commonly experienced (52%), followed by authoritarian (38%) and laissez-faire (10%). A one-way ANOVA revealed significant effects of coaching styles on mental wellness variables such as anxiety ($F(2, 97) = 4.72, p = .011$), stress ($F(2, 97) = 3.89, p = .024$), and self-esteem ($F(2, 97) = 6.58, p = .002$), highlighting the psychological influence of coaching methods. Furthermore, MANOVA results showed a significant multivariate effect of coaching styles on physical wellness variables: injury rates, physical fitness, and nutrition ($p < .05$). Follow-up ANOVAs showed that coaching styles significantly influenced injury rates ($F(2, 100) = 4.78, p = .011, \eta^2 = .09$), physical fitness ($F(2, 100) = 5.65, p = .005, \eta^2 = .105$), and nutrition ($F(2, 100) = 3.92, p = .023, \eta^2 = .075$). Student-athletes also perceived their coaches positively in terms of fairness ($M = 4.05, SD = 0.79$) and communication ($M = 3.95, SD = 0.86$), though lower ratings were given for involvement in decision-making. The findings suggest that democratic coaching promotes better wellness outcomes. The study recommends adopting democratic coaching approaches, integrating mental health support into training, and providing professional development for coaches to improve athlete well-being.

Keywords: Coaching Style, Student-Athletes, Mental Wellness, and Physical Wellness

Introduction

Coaching is widely acknowledged as a fundamental component in the development of athletes, influencing not only their athletic performance but also their mental and physical well-being. Coaches

serve multifaceted roles as instructors, motivators, mentors, and psychological support systems, especially within the demanding environment of student-athletics (Horn, 2008). In university settings, where student-athletes must balance rigorous academic responsibilities with competitive sports participation, the influence of coaching style becomes even more pronounced.

Coaching style, broadly defined as the manner in which a coach leads, communicates, and interacts with athletes, significantly shapes athletes' psychological environments and physical experiences. Chelladurai and Saleh (1980) identified major coaching styles; autocratic, democratic, laissez-faire, and transformational, each varying in degrees of control, communication, athlete autonomy, and motivational strategies. Autocratic styles prioritize discipline and centralized decision-making, often yielding short-term performance benefits at the expense of increased psychological stress and reduced autonomy (Bartholomew et al., 2010). Democratic coaching promotes athlete participation in decision-making, supports autonomy, and fosters positive psychological outcomes such as motivation and self-confidence (Amorose & Horn, 2000). Transformational coaching extends these democratic features, incorporating inspiration, individualized support, and a developmental focus that nurtures both mental resilience and physical growth (Vella, Oades, & Crowe, 2013). Conversely, laissez-faire coaching, characterized by minimal guidance or feedback, may lead to ambiguity, lack of cohesion, and reduced psychological safety among athletes.

The mental wellness of student-athletes encompasses factors such as motivation, emotional regulation, self-esteem, and resilience in the face of academic and athletic stressors. Numerous studies have linked positive coach-athlete interactions with improved mental health outcomes, including lower levels of anxiety, stress, and burnout (Ojo, 2020). On the other hand, coaching environments perceived as overly critical or unsupportive have been associated with elevated psychological distress and performance anxiety, particularly among student-athletes who face compounded pressures from academics and competitive sports.

In addition to mental health, coaching style also influences physical wellness. Training intensity, rest periods, injury prevention, and athlete recovery are often shaped by the coach's philosophy. Authoritarian coaches may neglect adequate recovery time, emphasizing high-volume or high-intensity training, thereby increasing susceptibility to overuse injuries and fatigue (Gustafsson et al., 2017). In contrast, coaches who emphasize holistic development and individualized training approaches are more likely to foster sustainable athletic participation and promote long-term physical health (Weinberg & Gould, 2019).

Within the Nigerian university context, participation in organized sports serves not only as a platform for physical development but also as a pathway to scholarships, national representation, and social mobility (Ogunjimi, Onifade, & Ipinmoroti, 2012). At Federal University Oye-Ekiti (FUOYE), student-athletes engage in various competitive sports programs while simultaneously navigating academic commitments. Anecdotal evidence suggests diversity in coaching approaches across different teams, ranging from strict authoritarianism to more collaborative methods. However, there remains a dearth of empirical studies examining how these coaching styles influence student-athletes' mental and physical health in Nigerian universities. Most existing research on the psychological and physiological effects of coaching style has been conducted in Western contexts, where institutional support systems, cultural norms, and coaching education differ significantly from those in Nigeria

(Adegbesan & Ekpo, 2020). This limits the generalizability of existing findings to African settings, where coaches often operate within resource-constrained environments and face unique socio-cultural expectations. As a result, there is an urgent need for localized studies that explore how coaching styles are experienced and interpreted by Nigerian student-athletes. This study, therefore, seeks to evaluate the influence of coaching styles on the mental and physical wellness of student-athletes at Federal University Oye-Ekiti.

Literature Review

Concept of Coaching Styles

Coaching style refers to the characteristic manner in which a coach interacts with athletes during instruction, training, and competition. It encompasses a set of behaviours, communication patterns, decision-making strategies, and motivational techniques employed by the coach to influence athlete development. Chelladurai (2007) emphasized that coaching style is a vital determinant of athlete experience, particularly in structured settings such as schools and universities, where coaching often extends beyond skill development to include mentorship and emotional support.

Three primary coaching styles are commonly identified in the literature: democratic, authoritarian, and laissez-faire. The democratic coaching style is characterized by shared decision-making, open communication, and mutual respect between the coach and athletes. It promotes autonomy and athlete engagement, which have been shown to enhance motivation, confidence, and overall well-being (Horn, 2008). In academic institutions, this approach can foster a supportive environment that addresses both the performance and psychosocial needs of student-athletes.

Conversely, the authoritarian or autocratic coaching style involves centralized decision-making, strict discipline, and limited athlete input. Coaches adopting this style maintain control over all aspects of training and competition, often prioritizing obedience and performance outcomes over athlete well-being. While such a style may yield short-term performance gains, it has been associated with elevated stress, anxiety, and reduced intrinsic motivation among athletes (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003). This is particularly concerning in university settings, where student-athletes navigate multiple academic and personal demands.

The laissez-faire coaching style, in contrast, reflects minimal direct involvement from the coach. Athletes under this style are given significant autonomy to make their own decisions. While potentially effective for highly experienced and self-regulated athletes, the laissez-faire approach has been criticized for its lack of structure and guidance, which may result in decreased motivation, poor discipline, and limited developmental progress among less experienced individuals (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003).

The effectiveness of each coaching style is context-dependent and influenced by factors such as athlete age, skill level, personality, and the overall goals of the sport program. Contemporary coaching literature advocates for an adaptive, athlete-centered approach, which emphasizes the need for coaches to tailor their styles to the unique needs of their athletes. In the context of university sports, where athletes face dual demands of academic performance and athletic commitment, the

choice of coaching style plays a critical role in supporting both their mental and physical wellness (Pelletier et al., 2001).

Mental Wellness in Athletes

Mental wellness in athletes refers to a state of psychological well-being in which individuals are able to cope with the demands of sport, maintain positive relationships, and function effectively both on and off the field. It encompasses emotional stability, stress resilience, cognitive functioning, and a sense of purpose or satisfaction in life (Keyes, 2002). For student-athletes, mental wellness is particularly critical, as they are expected to manage academic workloads alongside athletic responsibilities, often under pressure to perform in both domains (Rashed et al., 2025).

Mental wellness includes various dimensions such as emotional regulation, self-esteem, motivation, and psychological resilience. Athletes with high levels of mental wellness tend to exhibit strong coping strategies, reduced anxiety, and a greater ability to maintain focus and discipline during training and competition (Rice et al., 2016). In contrast, poor mental wellness can manifest as performance anxiety, burnout, depression, or a lack of motivation, which may hinder both academic and athletic outcomes. As such, mental wellness is increasingly recognized as a core component of athlete development programs.

The demands of competitive sports, especially at the university level, can contribute to mental health challenges. Factors such as excessive training loads, fear of failure, injury, and coach-athlete conflict can increase psychological stress (Gustafsson et al., 2011). Without proper support, these stressors may lead to conditions such as chronic anxiety or depression. In this context, the role of the coach becomes central, not only in technical instruction but also in shaping an emotionally supportive environment that promotes athlete mental wellness.

Coaching styles have been shown to significantly impact the mental wellness of athletes. Democratic and autonomy-supportive coaching approaches have been positively associated with athlete confidence, emotional well-being, and intrinsic motivation (Amorose & Horn, 2000). Conversely, authoritarian coaching styles can result in elevated stress levels, decreased athlete satisfaction, and emotional exhaustion (Isoard-Gauthier et al., 2013). These findings underscore the need for university coaches to adopt athlete-centered strategies that foster psychological safety and well-being (Alam et al., 2025).

Ultimately, fostering mental wellness in athletes requires a holistic approach that integrates psychological support, positive coaching, and institutional policies promoting balance between academics and athletics. Institutions that prioritize mental health not only improve the overall well-being of student-athletes but also enhance performance outcomes and long-term personal development. As awareness of mental wellness grows within sports science, more emphasis is being placed on early identification, open dialogue, and proactive interventions to sustain healthy psychological functioning in athletes (Mohd Pauzi & Shahadat Hossen, 2025).

Physical Wellness in Athletes

Physical wellness in athletes refers to the ability to maintain a healthy body through regular physical activity, proper nutrition, sufficient rest, and avoidance of harmful habits. It involves not just the absence of illness or injury, but the optimization of body systems for peak performance and overall

well-being (WHO, 2021). For athletes, physical wellness is foundational to their ability to train effectively, compete successfully, and recover efficiently, making it a critical component of long-term athletic development (Hossen et al., 2023).

Key indicators of physical wellness in athletes include muscular strength and flexibility, body composition, nutrition, and injury prevention. A physically well athlete is capable of meeting the physical demands of their sport without excessive fatigue or risk of breakdown (Corbin et al., 2014). In student-athletes, physical wellness also affects academic performance, as physically fit individuals tend to experience better concentration, energy levels, and mental alertness (Keating et al., 2009). As such, maintaining high standards of physical wellness is essential not only for sports success but also for holistic educational outcomes.

Several factors influence the physical wellness of athletes. These include training intensity, rest and recovery practices, access to fitness resources, and the quality of coaching. Inadequate recovery, poor dietary habits, and overtraining can lead to physical exhaustion, decreased performance, and a higher risk of injury (Koutedakis & Sharp, 2004). Therefore, structured and scientifically-informed training regimens, alongside supportive coaching practices, are necessary to maintain physical wellness throughout an athlete's competitive season.

Coaching style significantly contributes to physical wellness by influencing how athletes train, recover, and maintain their bodies. Coaches who employ a democratic or athlete-centered approach are more likely to adjust training loads based on athlete feedback, promote injury prevention, and encourage healthy lifestyle habits (Pelletier et al., 2001). In contrast, authoritarian coaching styles may neglect athlete input, leading to overtraining or disregard for signs of fatigue and injury, which can compromise physical well-being (Reinboth & Duda, 2006). Hence, the coach's ability to align training with athletes' physical limits is critical in sustaining wellness.

Physical wellness not only enhances athletic performance but also supports psychological resilience and academic productivity. Institutions must prioritize comprehensive athlete support systems that incorporate individualized fitness programs, nutrition education, and health monitoring. With the coach at the center of athlete development, an understanding and implementation of appropriate coaching strategies are essential to fostering physical wellness in student-athletes (Alam et al., 2025).

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- i. What are the dominant coaching styles employed by coaches at Federal University Oye Ekiti?
- ii. What is the impact of coaching styles on the physical wellness (injury rates, physical fitness, nutrition) of student-athletes at Federal University Oye Ekiti?
- iii. What are the perceptions of student athletes regarding the different coaching styles they have experienced?

Materials and Methods

This study employed a descriptive survey design, which is appropriate for investigating the current status, opinions, and relationships among variables without manipulating any of them. The

target population for this study comprised all registered student-athletes at the Federal University Oye-Ekiti (FUOYE) who actively participate in university-organized sports. These include students involved in football, athletics, basketball, volleyball, table tennis, and other competitive sports under the supervision of university coaches. At the time of the study, the estimated population of active student-athletes was approximately 231 for the 2023/2024 academic session (Source; Office of the FUOYESU Sport Director)

A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure fair representation of student-athletes across different sports teams. From the total population of 250, a sample size of 100 student-athletes was selected using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table. Stratification was based on the sports type to capture diversity in coaching styles and athlete experiences. Participants were randomly selected from each sport category to reduce selection bias and increase the reliability of the results.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire that consisted of three major sections. Section A focused on demographic data, gathering information such as age, gender, sport type, and the number of years each respondent had participated in university sports. Section B assessed coaching styles using a modified version of the Leadership Scale for Sports developed by Chelladurai and Saleh (1980). This section was designed to capture athletes' perceptions of their coaches' dominant styles, specifically autocratic, democratic, laissez-faire, and transformational approaches. Section C measured the wellness of student-athletes in two dimensions. Mental wellness was evaluated using selected items from the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS), which assessed emotional stability, motivation, and psychological resilience. Physical wellness was determined through a self-reported scale that explored indicators such as frequency of fatigue, injury recovery rate, sleep quality, and overall physical health. All items in the instrument were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5), allowing for quantifiable analysis of responses (Rahman, Hossain, et al., 2025).

To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by three experts in Sports Psychology and Human Kinetics from Nigerian universities. Their suggestions were incorporated into the final version of the instrument. The reliability of the instrument was established through a pilot test conducted on 20 student-athletes at Ekiti State University, which is demographically similar to FUOYE. The instrument yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.83, indicating high internal consistency and reliability.

Procedure for Data Collection

Permission was obtained from the Sports Directorate of FUOYE, and ethical approval was granted by the university's research ethics committee. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants, and informed consent was obtained. Questionnaires were distributed to student-athletes during team meetings and training sessions. Participation was voluntary, and anonymity was assured. Data collection was carried out over a period of two weeks, with researchers available to clarify any misunderstandings or ambiguities in the questionnaire.

The data collected were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. Descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage, were employed to summarize the demographic characteristics of the respondents and to

describe the distribution of coaching styles and levels of wellness among the student-athletes. Also, ANOVA and MANOVA were used, and the significance level for all statistical tests was set at $p < 0.05$.

Results

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Student-Athletes

Characteristics	Descriptions	Frequency
Gender	Males	43
	Females	57
Age Range	15-20 years	43
	21-26 years	35
	27-32 years	22
Type of Sport	Football	20
	Basketball	14
	Volleyball	16
	Athletics	27
	Board Games	23
How long have you been a student-athlete?	Less than 1 year	27
	1-2 years	27
	3-4 years	25
	More than 4 years	21
How often do you train per week?	1-2 times	26
	3-4 times	24
	5-6 times	28
	Daily	22
Have you participated in any university-level competitions?	Yes	60
	No	40

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 100 student-athletes who participated in the study. The majority were females (57%), aged between 15–20 years (43%), and most commonly participated in athletics (27%) and board games (23%). The data further show that most student-athletes had between 1 to 4 years of experience, with 54% falling within that range, while 27% had less than 1 year of experience. Additionally, the majority trained between 3 to 6 times per week, and 60% had participated in university-level competitions, indicating a high level of athletic engagement.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of the Dominant Coaching Styles Employed by Coaches

Coaching Style	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Authoritarian	38	38.00%
Democratic	52	52.00%
Laissez-faire	10	10.00%
Total	100	100.00%

Table 2 shows that the democratic coaching style was the most commonly reported by student-athletes (52%), followed by the authoritarian style (38%) and the laissez-faire style (10%).

Table 3: One-Way ANOVA Results of Influence of Coaching Styles on Mental Wellness Variables

Mental Wellness Variable	Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Anxiety	Between Groups	128.65	2	64.33	4.72	0.011*
	Within Groups	1313.5	97	13.54		
	Total	1442.15	99			
Stress	Between Groups	105.28	2	52.64	3.89	0.024*
	Within Groups	1312.8	97	13.53		
	Total	1418.08	99			
Self-esteem	Between Groups	182.41	2	91.21	6.58	0.002**
	Within Groups	1343.22	97	13.85		
	Total	1525.63	99			

As shown in Table 3, a one-way ANOVA revealed that coaching styles had a statistically significant effect on Anxiety, $F(2, 97) = 4.72$, $p = .011$, Stress, $F(2, 97) = 3.89$, $p = .024$, and Self-Esteem, $F(2, 97) = 6.58$, $p = .002$, among student-athletes. These results suggest that different coaching styles significantly influence key aspects of mental wellness.

Table 4: Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) for the Effect of Coaching Styles on Physical Wellness

Effect	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Group	Pillai's Trace	0.866	29.301	6	0.00	0.433
	Wilks' Lambda	0.259	36.667 ^b	6	0.00	0.491
	Hotelling's Trace	2.377	44.758	6	0.00	0.543
	Roy's Largest Root	2.151	82.469 ^c	3	0.00	0.683

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects of Impact of Coaching Style on Physical Wellness

Dependent Variable	Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Injury Rates	Coaching Style	21.38	2	10.69	4.78	0.011*	0.09
	Error	224.55	100	2.25			
Physical Fitness	Coaching Style	35.76	2	17.88	5.65	0.005**	0.105
	Error	316.8	100	3.17			
Nutrition	Coaching Style	27.49	2	13.75	3.92	0.023*	0.075
	Error	350.10	100	3.50			

The MANOVA results in Table 4 indicate that coaching styles had a statistically significant multivariate effect on the combined physical wellness variables, injury rates, physical fitness, and nutrition. with p-values less than .05. Follow-up univariate ANOVAs revealed that coaching style significantly influenced injury rates, $F(2, 100) = 4.78$, $p = .011$, $\eta^2 = .09$; physical fitness, $F(2, 100) = 5.65$, $p = .005$, $\eta^2 = .105$; and nutrition, $F(2, 100) = 3.92$, $p = .023$, $\eta^2 = .075$, indicating moderate effect sizes across the three physical wellness indicators.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics of Student-Athletes' Perceptions of Coaching Styles

Item	Response Option	N	(%)	\bar{X}	Std. Dev.
My coach communicates effectively with athletes.	Strongly Agree	40	40.00%	3.95	0.86
	Agree	38	38.00%		
	Neutral	12	12.00%		
	Disagree	6	6.00%		
	Strongly Disagree	4	4.00%		
My coach supports my mental and emotional well-being.	Strongly Agree	35	35.00%	3.78	0.94
	Agree	40	40.00%		
	Neutral	15	15.00%		
	Disagree	7	7.00%		
	Strongly Disagree	3	3.00%		
My coach involves athletes in decision-making.	Strongly Agree	25	25.00%	3.60	1.01
	Agree	38	38.00%		
	Neutral	20	20.00%		
	Disagree	12	12.00%		
	Strongly Disagree	5	5.00%		
My coach is too controlling during training. (reverse-coded)	Strongly Agree	22	22.00%	2.88	1.07
	Agree	30	30.00%		
	Neutral	25	25.00%		
	Disagree	15	15.00%		
	Strongly Disagree	8	8.00%		
My coach treats athletes with fairness and respect.	Strongly Agree	45	45.00%	4.05	0.79
	Agree	35	35.00%		
	Neutral	10	10.00%		
	Disagree	7	7.00%		
	Strongly Disagree	3	3.00%		

Table 5 presents student-athletes' perceptions of coaching styles, showing generally positive responses. The highest agreement was recorded for fairness and respect ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 0.79$) and effective communication ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 0.86$), while perceptions were lower for involvement in decision-making and control during training, suggesting room for improvement in participatory and autonomy-supportive coaching behaviours.

Discussion

It was observed from this study that a majority of coaches adopt a leadership approach characterized by open communication, shared decision-making, and respect for athlete input. Such a trend aligns with global best practices in athlete-centered coaching, where the democratic style has been associated with higher levels of motivation, self-determination, and psychological well-being among athletes (Hodge, Henry, & Smith, 2014; Amorose & Horn, 2000). These coaches are likely to create supportive environments that fulfill athletes' psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, core tenets of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The substantial presence of authoritarian coaching styles indicates that a significant proportion of coaches still employ strict, command-based methods with limited athlete involvement. While this style may promote discipline and short-term performance gains (Bartholomew et al., 2010), it has also been linked to increased stress, reduced self-esteem, and psychological burnout, particularly among student-athletes who are balancing academic and athletic pressures (Isoard-Gauthier et al., 2015; Gustafsson et al., 2018). The relatively low prevalence of the laissez-faire style further reflects a preference for more structured coaching for the sports with such coaches at FUOYE. Although laissez-faire coaching can encourage independence, it often lacks the guidance necessary for skill development and psychological support, potentially leading to confusion, underperformance, and weak team cohesion.

Also, the findings revealed that coaching styles have a significant impact on student-athletes' mental wellness, specifically on their levels of anxiety, stress, and self-esteem. The results demonstrate that the type of coaching style employed contributes to meaningful differences in these psychological outcomes. Research by Smith and Smoll (2016) supports these findings, showing that supportive coaching behaviors are associated with lower levels of anxiety and stress, while controlling or negative behaviors tend to elevate psychological distress. Horn (2018) also argues that democratic coaching, characterized by empathy, autonomy support, and positive reinforcement, can buffer athletes from performance-related stress and promote healthy self-esteem. Conversely, authoritarian styles, which often involve excessive criticism and limited athlete input, have been linked to increased anxiety and feelings of inadequacy (Isoard-Gauthier et al., 2015).

Furthermore, the findings revealed that coaching styles significantly affect the physical wellness of student-athletes. These results suggest that the manner in which coaches train, guide, and support athletes extends beyond psychological effects to influence tangible aspects of athletes' physical health. This aligns with literature that underscores the role of coaching in shaping training intensity, recovery practices, and health-related behaviors. According to Weinberg and Gould (2019), coaches who adopt democratic or transformational styles often emphasize holistic development, balancing performance demands with adequate rest, proper nutrition, and injury prevention strategies. In contrast, authoritarian coaches may focus heavily on discipline and performance outcomes, sometimes at the expense of athlete health, increasing the risk of overtraining and injury (Gustafsson et al., 2017). More so, studies by Smith, Smoll, and Cumming (2007) show that when athletes feel supported and involved in decision-making processes, key features of democratic coaching, they are more likely to adhere to best practices related to physical conditioning and self-care, such as proper hydration, warm-up routines, and nutritional habits. This likely explains the observed influence of coaching style on nutrition and physical fitness among student-athletes at FUOYE. Injury prevention is also closely tied to coaching behavior. As noted by Jowett and Cockerill (2003), a positive coach-athlete relationship can lead to better communication about pain, fatigue,

and injury symptoms, enabling timely interventions. This contrasts with authoritarian environments where athletes may feel pressured to push through discomfort, thereby increasing injury risk.

The findings further showed that student-athletes at FUYOYE generally perceive their coaches positively, particularly in terms of fairness and respect and effective communication. These high ratings suggest that many coaches demonstrate ethical leadership and maintain open communication channels, which are essential components of a healthy coach–athlete relationship. Such perceptions are consistent with the principles of transformational and democratic coaching styles, which emphasize empathy, fairness, and interpersonal connection (Vella, Oades, & Crowe, 2013). A lack of athlete input and excessive control may undermine these needs, potentially leading to decreased engagement, motivation, or even burnout (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Furthermore, Amorose and Horn (2000) found that athletes are more likely to exhibit higher motivation, self-esteem, and satisfaction when they perceive their coaches as autonomy-supportive and fair. Similarly, Fransen et al. (2015) emphasized that effective communication and respectful treatment are central to building trust and team cohesion, both of which positively affect athletes' performance and wellness.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that the democratic coaching style is the most prevalent among student-athletes at Federal University Oye-Ekiti, followed by the authoritarian and laissez-faire styles. This aligns with global trends favoring more participatory and athlete-centered approaches, suggesting that many coaches are already adopting methods that prioritize collaboration, fairness, and respect. The significant effects of coaching styles on mental wellness indicators, anxiety, stress, and self-esteem emphasize the critical role that coaches play in shaping athletes' psychological well-being. The results reveal that different coaching approaches can either buffer or exacerbate mental health challenges among student-athletes, highlighting the importance of supportive and autonomy-promoting coaching behaviors.

Similarly, the multivariate and univariate analyses of physical wellness demonstrate that coaching styles influence injury rates, physical fitness, and nutrition practices with moderate effect sizes. Coaches who foster balanced training loads, communicate effectively, and engage athletes in health-related decisions contribute positively to the physical well-being and performance readiness of their athletes. Student-athletes' perceptions of their coaches further reinforce these findings. High ratings for fairness, respect, and communication suggest that many coaches are effective in building trust and positive relationships. However, lower ratings for decision-making involvement and training control indicate that there is room to strengthen democratic and autonomy-supportive coaching elements, which have been shown to enhance both mental and physical wellness outcomes.

In summary, these findings emphasize that coaching style is not merely a leadership preference but a determinant of holistic athlete development. By adopting more participatory approaches, university coaches can simultaneously improve the psychological resilience, physical preparedness, and overall well-being of student-athletes, thereby supporting their academic and athletic success.

Recommendations

Coaches at Federal University Oye-Ekiti should be encouraged to adopt democratic and autonomy-supportive coaching strategies that emphasize fairness, respect, collaboration, and shared decision-

making. To support this, structured workshops and certification programs should be organized to train coaches on evidence-based leadership styles, mental health awareness, injury prevention, and balanced training practices. In addition, the university should incorporate mental health resources, including access to sports psychologists, peer-support systems, and stress management workshops, to complement positive coaching practices and address issues such as anxiety, stress, and low self-esteem among student-athletes. Furthermore, formal systems for collecting regular feedback from student-athletes regarding coaching behaviors, training loads, and overall well-being should be established, as this will help identify areas for improvement and ensure that athletes have a voice in shaping their training environments.

Future Research Directions

Future studies should track athletes over multiple seasons to assess how consistent exposure to specific coaching styles affects their mental wellness, physical development, and performance outcomes over time. Research should also investigate whether the impact of coaching styles varies across different sports and between male and female athletes. In addition, further research is needed to explore how cultural norms, institutional policies, and resource availability influence coaching practices and their impact on athlete well-being. Finally, future studies should examine variables such as motivation, social support, or academic stress as potential mediators or moderators in the relationship between coaching style and athlete wellness.

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