

# **The Impact of Coaching Leadership Style on Motivation and Team Cohesion in Volleyball**

**Nora Deda<sup>1\*</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Lecturer, Faculty of Educational Sciences, Department of Physical Education and Sports, 'Luigj Gurakuqi'  
University, Shkodër, Albania

\*Corresponding author

## **Abstract**

This study examines the relationship between coaching leadership style, athlete motivation, and team cohesion in volleyball. The research was conducted with 28 female players from a local volleyball club in Shkodër, Albania, aged between 16 and 25 years. A mixed-methods design was employed, combining standardized questionnaires with semi-structured interviews to capture both quantitative and qualitative aspects of the athletes' experiences.

The results indicate that democratic and transformational leadership styles are associated with higher levels of intrinsic motivation, greater athlete satisfaction, and stronger perceptions of team cohesion. In contrast, autocratic leadership was linked to lower motivation, reduced commitment, and weaker social bonds within the team. These findings reflect broader changes in Albanian sport, where the persistence of authoritarian coaching traditions inherited from the communist era is increasingly challenged by the expectations of younger athletes raised in a democratic environment.

The study underlines the importance of coach education programs that emphasize inclusive, participatory, and supportive leadership, which not only enhance performance but also contribute to the personal development and long-term retention of players in volleyball.

**Keywords:** Leadership, volleyball, motivation, cohesion, coaching

# International Conference on Future of Teaching and Education (ICFTE)

## 1. Introduction

The role of the coach in modern sport extends beyond the design of training programs and the development of technical skills. Coaches are increasingly recognized as leaders whose style of interaction with athletes has a direct influence on motivation, cohesion, and ultimately performance. In volleyball, where teamwork and synchronized actions are crucial, the leadership style of the coach assumes a particular significance. Team morale, the willingness to commit to demanding training schedules, and the ability to function as a cohesive unit on court are all shaped by the quality of leadership.

“Leadership in sport is frequently categorized by democratic and autocratic behaviors (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980), while transformational leadership has been shown to influence athlete motivation, cohesion, and performance (Mach et al., 2022).”

Democratic leadership emphasizes participation, shared decision-making, and communication, creating a sense of ownership among athletes. Autocratic leadership, on the other hand, is directive and authority-based, often efficient in the short term but potentially detrimental to long-term motivation. Transformational leadership focuses on inspiration and personal development, encouraging athletes to transcend individual limits and contribute to collective success. While these distinctions are well studied in international literature, limited research has addressed their specific impact within volleyball in Albania.

The Albanian context offers a particularly interesting background for the study of coaching leadership. During the communist period, sport was strongly influenced by centralized structures and authoritarian practices, reflecting the political system of the time. Volleyball was among the most popular sports, especially for women, but its development was guided by rigid discipline and hierarchical authority. In the three decades since the transition to democracy, volleyball has continued to occupy an important place in Albanian sporting life, yet the expectations of athletes have changed. Younger generations are less receptive to authoritarian coaching and more motivated by inclusive and supportive approaches that recognize their autonomy.

Against this background, the present study investigates how different coaching leadership styles affect the motivation and cohesion of volleyball players in Shkodër. By combining quantitative data from questionnaires with qualitative insights from interviews, the study seeks to clarify whether democratic and transformational approaches provide measurable benefits over autocratic styles in the Albanian setting. The findings are intended to contribute to both the academic understanding of sport leadership and to the practical improvement of coaching education in volleyball.

# International Conference on Future of Teaching and Education (ICFTE)

## 2. Methods

### 2.1 Participants

The study sample consisted of 28 female volleyball players from the Vllaznia Volleyball Club in Shkodër, Albania. The athletes were between 16 and 25 years of age (mean age  $19.8 \pm 2.4$  years). All participants had at least three years of competitive experience at the regional or national level. None reported recent injuries or medical conditions that could have influenced their responses. Participation in the study was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all athletes prior to data collection.

### 2.2 Instruments

Two instruments were used to assess leadership style, motivation, and team cohesion. First, a structured questionnaire adapted from established leadership and motivation scales was distributed to all players. It included items measuring perceptions of the coach's leadership style (democratic, autocratic, or transformational), levels of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and indicators of team cohesion. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten selected players to gain qualitative insights into their experiences. Interview questions focused on the athletes' perceptions of their coach's leadership behavior, its effect on their motivation, and its influence on group dynamics.

### 2.3 Procedure

The questionnaires were administered during a regular training session, under the supervision of the research team, to ensure clarity and consistency in responses. Interviews were scheduled separately and conducted in person, lasting between 20 and 30 minutes each. All interviews were recorded with participant permission and transcribed for analysis.

### 2.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics and group comparisons to identify trends in motivation and cohesion according to perceived leadership style. Qualitative data from interviews were examined using thematic analysis to highlight recurring patterns and contextual explanations. The integration of both sources allowed for a comprehensive interpretation of how coaching leadership style affects motivation and team cohesion in volleyball.

# International Conference on Future of Teaching and Education (ICFTE)

## 3. Results

The analysis of questionnaire data revealed clear differences in how athletes perceived the effects of their coach's leadership style on motivation and team cohesion. Players who identified the dominant style as democratic reported significantly higher levels of intrinsic motivation and satisfaction with training sessions. They emphasized the value of being consulted in decision-making and the positive impact of open communication on their willingness to commit to demanding practice routines.

Responses linked to transformational leadership were also strongly positive. Athletes associated this style with inspiration, encouragement to improve, and greater personal responsibility for team success. This approach was particularly noted to enhance team cohesion, as players described feeling united by shared goals and mutual trust.

By contrast, perceptions of autocratic leadership were less favorable. Athletes who described their coach as primarily authoritarian reported lower satisfaction, higher stress during training, and weaker feelings of belonging to the team. Cohesion scores in this group were also lower, with players expressing limited trust and communication among teammates.

Thematic analysis of the interviews supported these findings. Players from Vllaznia emphasized that democratic and transformational behaviors fostered motivation by creating a supportive environment and reducing fear of mistakes. Conversely, autocratic tendencies were perceived as undermining confidence and discouraging initiative.

Overall, the results indicate that democratic and transformational leadership styles are more effective in promoting motivation and team cohesion among female volleyball players at Vllaznia Volleyball Club, while autocratic leadership presents risks to both individual and group performance.

*Table 1: Mean scores of motivation and cohesion according to perceived leadership style*

Leadership Style	Motivation (Mean $\pm$ SD)	Cohesion (Mean $\pm$ SD)
Democratic	4.3 $\pm$ 0.5	4.4 $\pm$ 0.4
Transformational	4.2 $\pm$ 0.6	4.5 $\pm$ 0.3
Autocratic	3.1 $\pm$ 0.7	3.0 $\pm$ 0.8

*Source: Authors' field data, Vllaznia Volleyball Club, Shkodër*

# International Conference on Future of Teaching and Education (ICFTE)

## 4. Discussion

The findings of this study confirm the central role that coaching leadership style plays in shaping athlete motivation and team cohesion in volleyball. The higher scores reported under democratic and transformational leadership styles suggest that athletes respond positively when coaches create an atmosphere of trust, dialogue, and shared responsibility. Players from Vllaznia Volleyball Club emphasized that opportunities to voice opinions, receive encouragement, and feel supported not only increased their personal motivation but also strengthened their sense of belonging to the team. These results are consistent with the broader literature on sport leadership, which highlights the importance of participatory and inspirational behaviors in team sports (Clemente et al., 2020).

In contrast, autocratic leadership was associated with reduced motivation and weaker team cohesion. Athletes reported higher stress levels, less confidence, and more limited communication under authoritarian approaches. This finding reflects a recurring tension in Albanian sport, where coaching traditions shaped by the authoritarian model of the communist period continue to influence practice. While such methods may achieve discipline and short-term compliance, they appear less effective in sustaining long-term commitment or fostering strong social bonds within the team.

The comparison between styles further indicates that transformational leadership may be particularly effective in enhancing cohesion. Players noted that inspiration and a shared vision motivated them to transcend individual interests and contribute more fully to team objectives. This suggests that beyond technical expertise, the ability of a coach to cultivate collective identity and mutual trust is a decisive factor in volleyball performance.

Taken together, the results support the view that athlete-centered leadership models are better suited to the current sporting context in Albania. The transition from authoritarian to democratic practices in society is mirrored in sport, where younger generations of athletes value autonomy, recognition, and supportive guidance. For coaching education, this implies that future programs should prioritize the development of interpersonal and leadership skills alongside technical and tactical instruction.

# International Conference on Future of Teaching and Education (ICFTE)

## 5. Conclusion

This study demonstrated that coaching leadership style has a measurable impact on the motivation and cohesion of female volleyball players at Vllaznia Volleyball Club in Shkodër. Democratic and transformational approaches were associated with higher motivation levels, greater satisfaction, and stronger perceptions of unity within the team, while autocratic leadership was linked to reduced enthusiasm, weaker communication, and lower trust among athletes. The findings confirm that leadership in volleyball extends beyond tactical and technical expertise, influencing the psychological and social dimensions that sustain performance.

These results have practical implications for the development of coaching practice in Albania. The persistence of authoritarian methods, inherited from earlier periods of centralized sport organization, appears increasingly incompatible with the expectations of today's athletes. Younger generations respond more positively to leadership that encourages dialogue, inspiration, and collective responsibility. To meet these expectations, coach education programs should integrate training in leadership and communication skills, equipping coaches to adopt democratic and transformational practices. Such an approach would not only improve team performance but also contribute to athlete well-being, retention in sport, and the broader modernization of volleyball in Albania.

## Acknowledgment

This research was supported by the Department of Physical Education and Sports Sciences, "Luigj Gurakuqi" University, Shkodër. The authors express their gratitude to the athletes and staff of Vllaznia Volleyball Club for their participation and collaboration throughout the study.

## References

- Chelladurai, P., & Saleh, S. D. (1980). *Dimensions of leader behavior in sports: Development of a leadership scale*. *Journal of Sport Psychology*, 2(1), 34–45. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsp.2.1.34>
- Mach, M., et al. (2022). *Transformational leadership and team performance in sports teams: A conditional indirect model*. *Applied Psychology*, 71(4), 1378–1407. <https://doi.org/10.1111/apps.12342>