



Exploring Soccer Coaching Methods: Design and Validation of a Measurement Instrument

Alen Ćirić^{a,*}, Šemso Ormanović^a, Nedim Čović^a, Denis Čaušević^a

^a Faculty of Sport and Physical Education, University of Sarajevo, Patriotske lige 41, 71000 Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

* Corresponding Author e-mail: alen.ciric@fasto.unsa.ba

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Abstract: Soccer coaches, although not prominently featured in the foreground, are essential to the outcomes of the sport. They are key figures between athletes and organizational goals. Choosing, retaining, and developing the greatest athletes is the cornerstone to a successful coaching career. The aim of this study was to develop and validate a questionnaire that was determine the characteristic soccer coaching styles. A experimental study involved the participation of 207 soccer coaches (B, A and PRO UEFA coaching license). The questionnaire comprises 14 themes and consists of 65 items designed to evaluate soccer coaching styles, developed from the updated Leadership Scale for Sport. The validation of the developed instrument in this empirical study was conducted using two procedures: (1) factor analysis (PCA with oblique rotation) and (2) an internal consistency assessment (Scale Reliability Analysis – Cronbach's Alpha). Nineteen significant factors were extracted, and they are as follows: Player contribution to the game system; Cooperation/ Opinions; Implementation of coach's requirements; Teaching; Motivation; Conflict resolution; Informations; Sanction; Expressing an opinion; Error correction at own discretion; Highlighting the good and bad sides of players; Instructions; Team goal setting; Highlighting positivism/ negativism; The coach's personal expectations; Team solutions; Strategy creation; Social support; The influence of the team on coaching decision-making. By analyzing the data, it was determined that "B" football coaches are characterized by the coaching style "positive feedback", "A" soccer coaches by the "training and instructor" and "positive feedback" styles, while "PRO" coaches are characterized by the "positive feedback" style and a slightly lower frequency by the "training and instructor" style. Using only one coaching/leadership style is certainly a limiting factor, as different situations require different coaching approaches.

Keywords: Soccer, Competencies, Style, Coaching, Leadership, UEFA

1. Introduction

People who are not highlighted in the foreground in soccer, but are of crucial importance for sports results, are soccer coaches. They represent central figures positioned between athletes and organizational goals (Louis, & Fatien Diochon, 2014). The goal of a successful and effective coaching career is, without a doubt, the ability to select, retain and develop the best athletes, which is ultimately the key to survival in the role. The coach-athlete relationship is the heart of coaching, where the interaction between the coach and the athlete generates the learning and development of the athlete, leading to better results (Moen, & Federici, 2013; Silva *et al.*, 2016).

Coaches are nothing but leaders and each coach is characterized by a certain work style,

decision-making style, or more precisely, coaching style. A coaching style can be defined as a relatively consistent pattern of behavior that characterizes a leader (Nanjundeswaraswamy & Swamy, 2014). Coaching style is a recognizable and relatively stable behaviour of a manager that affects subordinates (Żuchowski, 2020). The five coaching styles of soccer coaches analyzed in this research are training and instruction, autocratic, democratic, social support and positive feedback styles (Chelladurai, 1980). According to the author Chelladurai (1980), each of the mentioned coaching styles are defined as follows:

Training and instruction: coaching behaviour aimed at improving the performance of athletes. Teaching athletes sports skills, techniques and tactics, clarifying relationships between team members, structuring and coordinating the activities of team

members. A coach trains and instructs athletes to help them reach their maximum potential. Every coaching approach significantly influences athletes' responses, adaptations, and performances in diverse settings. Training and instruction-oriented coaches assist athletes in cultivating technical skill and tactical awareness, which are essential for success in competitive sports (Smith *et al.*, 2007). *Democratic*: coaching behaviour that allows greater participation of athletes in making decisions related to group goals, training methods, tactics and game strategies. More precisely, democratic behaviour is defined as the degree to which the coach allows the participation of athletes in decision-making. A democratic coaching approach that encourages player participation in decision-making has been demonstrated to enhance athlete autonomy and intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). *Autocratic*: coaching behaviour that includes independent decision-making and emphasizing personal authority. The autocratic style can facilitate rapid decision-making in high-pressure scenarios; nevertheless, over reliance on it may adversely affect athlete happiness (Amorose & Anderson-Butcher, 2007). *Social support*: coaching behaviour characterized by concern for athletes individual well-being, a positive group atmosphere and warm interpersonal relationships with team members. This style represents the degree to which the coach is involved in meeting the athlete's interpersonal needs. A very important element of this style is stress reduction for athletes. Moreover, the provision of social support and affirmative feedback in coaching substantially enhances athletes' mental health and self-confidence, underscoring the necessity of cultivating positive interpersonal relationships and establishing a supportive environment for peak performance (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). *Positive feedback*: coach's behaviour that strengthens the athlete through recognizing and rewarding good performance, that is, recognizing the contribution of athletes that may go unnoticed or unrecognized. Basically, a positive feedback style is any expression or behaviour that shows the athlete that you, as a coach, appreciate what they are doing on a daily basis. Giving positive feedback is seen as support that can increase an athlete's self-confidence.

Understanding the dynamics of coaching styles is essential for the advancement and performance of players, particularly in team sports such as soccer, where the coach's impact transcends technical skills to encompass team culture, motivation, and mental resilience (Potrac *et al.*, 2007).

Studies indicate that a coach's conduct and communication style can profoundly influence an athlete's involvement, pleasure, and overall performance (Horn, 2002).

The objective of this study was to construct and validate a questionnaire designed to ascertain the characteristics of UEFA soccer coaching styles.

2. Methods

2.1 Subjects

This study included 207 soccer coaches with a B, A and PRO UEFA coaching license obtained in Bosnia and Herzegovina male and female (n=207; male=196; female=11; UEFA B (n=86; 41%), UEFA A (n=97; 47%), UEFA PRO (n=24; 12%)).

2.2 Questionnaire

A specifically designed questionnaire was used to collect data for the research. The questionnaire consisted of 14 topics (themes) and consist of 65 items aimed at assessing the soccer coaching styles and were created based on the revised questionnaire Leadership Scale for Sport (Chiu *et al.*, 2016). Each topic consists of five particles/offered answers, where the first answer to the given topic (a) characterizes the coaching style "Training and instruction", the second (b) "Autocratic style", the third (c) "Democratic style", the fourth style (d) "Social support style" and the fifth (e) answer represents "Positive feedback style" (Table 1). The selected questions were reformulated and adapted for each of the five coaching styles. According to a five-point Likert scale (1. Strongly disagree, 2. Disagree, 3. Neither agree nor disagree, 4. Agree, 5. Strongly agree) the respondents had to determine the degree of agreement with "each" statement, assigning them a value from 1 to 5. It is important to point out that the respondents did not know which answer represents a certain coaching style.

2.3 Statistical analysis

Statistical analyses were carried out using the SPSS 23. program for Windows (SPSS, Inc., IBM Corp).

Table 1. Principal component analysis – component matrix coefficient values, names and corresponding coaching

Component	Factor name	Corresponding coaching style	Particle number	Theme	Particle name	Component matrix coefficient value
1	Player contribution to the game system	Positive feedback	8	System and method of playing in the match	a. I present the system and game mode that will be used in the match in detail to the players	0.520
			8	System and method of playing in the match	e. I always present the system and the way of playing that will be used in the match to the players with enthusiasm and conviction in a positive outcome	0.462
			10	Player contribution	c. Players have the right to be creative and thus contribute to the team	0.651
			10	Player contribution	d. I ask the players to cooperate in order to contribute to the team	0.681
			10	Player contribution	e. I encourage the players to contribute to the team	0.643
2	Cooperation/ Opinions	Social support & democratic	7	The method of implementing the training	c. Players are allowed to give suggestions on how to implement the training	0.758
			7	The method of implementing the training	d. I'm looking for the opinions of the whole team about the way to implement training	0.698
			8	System and method of playing in the match	c. I allow players to make suggestions for the game mode and system to be used in the match	0.759
			8	System and method of playing in the match	d. I am asking the entire team to cooperate in deciding on the system and mode of play that will be used in the match	0.613
3	Implementation of coach's requirements	Autocratic	5	Expectations	b. Players must fulfill my expectations	0.640
			7	The method of implementing the training	b. The players must implement the training exclusively as I tell them	0.744
			8	System and method of playing in the match	b. The system and gameplay that I have clearly defined, I impose on my players without the possibility of changes	0.508
			10	Player contribution	b. The players must do as I tell them, because that's the only way they can contribute to the team	0.579
4	Teaching	Positive feedback	1	Training of soccer skills	a. I train players in soccer skills with constant monitoring and making corrections with clear instructions	0.849

			1	Training of soccer skills	b. While training players in soccer skills, I specifically require them to do what I tell them to do	0.409
			1	Training of soccer skills	c. While training the players in football skills, I allow them to be creative and come up with solutions themselves	0.723
			1	Training of soccer skills	d. As I train the players in soccer skills, I ask them to help each other	0.792
			1	Training of soccer skills	e. While training players in soccer skills, I try to praise their good performances and progress	0.884
			2	Error correction	a. I pay special attention and give clear instructions to players on how to correct mistakes	0.428
5	Motivation	Social support	3	Motivation of players for work	a. I instruct the players how to work according to their abilities	0.643
			3	Motivation of players for work	c. I let the players do according to their abilities	0.718
			3	Motivation of players for work	d. I ask all players to help each other to perform to the best of their ability	0.825
			3	Motivation of players for work	e. I praise and encourage the players to work to the best of their ability	0.669
6	Conflict resolution	Social support	12	Conflict resolution	c. In conflict situations, I will let the players come to a compromise on their own	0.631
			12	Conflict resolution	d. I resolve conflicting situations and finding compromises as a team	0.740
			12	Conflict resolution	e. In conflict situations, I encourage players to reach a compromise	0.692
7	Informations	Training and instructions	6	Creating strategies for development	a. Strategies for development are based on detailed and clearly defined steps and instructions	-0.486
			9	Highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of players	a. I go into detail as I highlight each player's strengths and weaknesses	-0.660
			10	Player contribution	a. I clearly define what the player should do in order to contribute to the team	-0.308
			11	Goals	a. I explain in detail to the players and define the goals	-0.540
			13	How do i transfer the information?	a. I present the information going into detail	-0.725
			14	Decision making	a. I make decisions by taking the smallest details into consideration	-0.673
8	Sanction	Autocratic	2	Error correction	b. Sanctioning players when they make mistakes (verbal reprimand or ignoring)	0.779
			3	Motivation of players for work	b. I ask the players to do as they are told regardless of their capabilities	0.594
			4	Solutions in the given situation	b. I ask players to do only what I ask them to do in certain situations	0.466

9	Expressing an opinion	Democratic	9	Highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of players	c. I let the players discuss while I point out their pros and cons	0.600
			11	Goals	c. As I list and explain the objectives, players are allowed to make suggestions	0.408
			13	How do i transfer the information?	c. Players have the right to express their opinion when I present information	0.685
			13	How do i transfer the information?	d. When presenting information, I ask the entire team for input	0.733
10	Error correction at own discretion	Democratic	2	Error correction	c. I allow players to fix bugs at their own discretion	-0.625
			2	Error correction	d. I prefer teamwork in debugging	-0.309
11	Highlighting the good and bad sides of players	Autocratic	9	Highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of players	b. I believe that players should know their strengths and weaknesses, needless to say about it	0.713
			12	Conflict resolution	b. In conflict situations, I bring solutions	0.380
			13	How do i transfer the information?	b. I keep the information to myself. I'm talking in a way so I don't get questioned by the players	0.323
12	Instructions Training and instructions		5	Expectations	a. I state in detail what I expect from each player	0.629
			7	The method of implementing the training	a. I explain in detail the way I will implement the training	0.307
13	Team goal setting Social support		11	Goals	b. I explain the goals in such a way that the players know they "must" follow them	-0.305
			11	Goals	d. I set goals in cooperation with the whole team	-0.665
			11	Goals	e. I define goals based on positive team and individual values	-0.351

Table 2. Kaiser Mayer-Olkin and Bartlett test – PCA Factor analysis with Oblimin rotation (coaching styles scale)

Description		Value
KMO sample adequacy indicator		0.866
Bartlett's test of sphericity	<u>Approx. Chi-Square</u>	<u>8080.254</u>
	<u>Df</u>	<u>2415</u>
	<u>Sig.</u>	0.000

The validation of the developed instrument in this empirical study was conducted through two methods: (1) factor analysis (PCA with oblique rotation) and (2) an internal consistency assessment (Scale Reliability Analysis – Cronbach's Alpha).

Following the extraction of the factors, an oblique rotation with Kaiser normalization was conducted. Normality of distribution was checked by Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test.

Table 3. Factor structure matrix, eigenvalues and explained variance - results of extracted factors - Oblimin rotation

Component	Initial eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Eigenvalues
1.	17.074	24.392	24.392	17.074	24.392	24.392	7.517
2.	4.908	7.011	31.403	4.908	7.011	31.403	4.107
3.	3.921	5.602	37.005	3.921	5.602	37.005	4.450
4.	2.430	3.471	40.476	2.430	3.471	40.476	8.440
5.	2.171	3.101	43.578	2.171	3.101	43.578	6.882
6.	1.967	2.810	46.387	1.967	2.810	46.387	3.706
7.	1.721	2.458	48.845	1.721	2.458	48.845	7.958
8.	1.564	2.234	51.080	1.564	2.234	51.080	3.346
9	1.523	2.176	53.256	1.523	2.176	53.256	3.966
10	1.484	2.12	55.376	1.484	2.12	55.376	1.843
11	1.372	1.96	57.336	1.372	1.96	57.336	3.197
12	1.294	1.848	59.184	1.294	1.848	59.184	1.94
13	1.223	1.747	60.931	1.223	1.747	60.931	2.526
14	1.157	1.653	62.584	1.157	1.653	62.584	5.021
15	1.115	1.593	64.177	1.115	1.593	64.177	3.349
16	1.106	1.579	65.756	1.106	1.579	65.756	1.375
17	1.037	1.481	67.237	1.037	1.481	67.237	4.096
18	1.022	1.46	68.697	1.022	1.46	68.697	4.587
19	1.01	1.443	70.139	1.01	1.443	70.139	2.566

3. Results

The results of the principal components factor analysis with oblique (Oblimin) rotation demonstrate a comprehensive justification for the application of factor analysis in the context of football coaching styles. Specifically, the correlation matrix is suitable for factorization, as evidenced by the clear correlation structure (correlation coefficient values exceeding 0.3) (Table 2). The validity of rejecting the null hypothesis and the persistence of a significant correlation between the original variables are indicated by the result of the Chi-Square test (8080.254), which serves as the foundation for the Bartlett test and the significance of the test (Sig. < 0.001) (Table 2). The created questionnaire has excellent internal consistency, as the recommended theoretical value of 0.7 was significantly exceeded (Srdić *et al.*, 2019). This was determined by the Cronbach Alpha (CA) test,

which yielded a value of 0.94-0.95 for all variables. After examining all of the tests that were conducted to validate the coaching styles scale, it can be inferred that this scale possesses favorable metric characteristics. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test was used to verify the normality of the distribution. The results indicated that there was no significant statistical deviation from the normal distribution for all variables at the $p < 0.00$ level. The range of these values was 0.174 to 0.407. The 19 significant factors were extracted (Table 3), and each factor was allocated a name based on the particles that have the greatest influence on it (Table 3).

4. Discussion

The primary significant factor is termed "Player contribution to the game system." Coaches assert that the most significant impact on players' contributions

and their efficacy within the game system will occur if players are thoroughly informed about the game system to be utilized and when the coach acknowledges their efforts. Similar findings were achieved in the study conducted by Mills & Clements, (2021). In a study performed by Becker, (2009), athletes said that this coaching methodology enhances their motivation to attain greater achievements. The second factor is termed "Cooperation/Opinions". The findings of this research were corroborated by Turman, (2001), who posited that coaches must prioritize effective collaboration with players and respect their perspectives, both during training and matches, to foster a positive team environment, which is crucial for the team's optimal performance. The third factor, termed "Implementation of Coach's Requirements," comprises four components. The coaches assert that players will maximize their contributions to the team by adhering strictly to the coach's directives and executing his instructions. Research by Kellett, (2002) depicts coaches as police generals and players as troops. The correlation between a coach's methodology and an athlete's success is intricate, encompassing not just immediate tactical or technical results but also long-term athlete development, which includes psychological well-being and social cohesion (Vella *et al.*, 2013).

Six particles constitute the fourth element, designated as "Training". The coaches believe that the most beneficial impact on the athletes is achieved through providing helpful and thorough instructions throughout training. Furthermore, it is imperative to rectify identified problems with comprehensive and practical guidance while consistently motivating and encouraging participants throughout their tasks. The findings of this study align partially with the research conducted by Partington & Cushion, (2013), which indicates that coaches tend to favor prescriptive instructions above the role of knowledge facilitators. The fifth factor, termed "Motivation," comprises four components. Comparable findings were noted in the study conducted by Rhind & Jowett (2010). The coaches conclude that a collaborative team approach, player support, and positive feedback will enhance motivation and ultimately improve overall performance. Factor 6 comprises three particles. It is referred to as "Conflict Resolution". Yukelson, (1997) asserts that the optimal method for resolving team conflicts is through the involvement of all members, aligning with this research's findings that coaches advocate for a collective approach to conflict resolution

and compromise, engaging all players in addressing these challenging situations.

Factor 7 comprises six particles and pertains to the transmission of the coach's information, referred to as "Information". The coaches assert that optimal outcomes for the players will be achieved by providing comprehensive information. Comparable findings were seen in the study by Partington & Cushion, (2013), in which coaches emphasized the necessity of delivering a greater volume of information to players. The eighth ingredient, termed "Sanction," comprises four particles. The prevailing stance among coaches is that an autocratic method of administering and enforcing sanctions is the sole effective approach that yields optimal results. This coaching methodology aligns partially with the findings of Hagiwara & Wolfson (2013). The study by Ramzaninezhad & Keshtan, (2009) indicated that professional football coaches exhibit a greater propensity for an autocratic leadership style compared to a democratic one. The ninth factor is termed "Expressing Opinions". It is composed of four components. The findings of this research indicate that coaches concur that players ought to be permitted to articulate their viewpoints, which coaches should consider. Comparable findings were observed in the study conducted by Lemyre *et al.*, (2007).

Factor 10 consists of two particles and is referred to as "Error correction at one's discretion". The prevailing stance among coaches is that players ought to operate within their competencies and get support in making autonomous decisions when rectifying errors. A comparable outcome was observed in Smith & Cushion, (2006). Three particles constitute the eleventh element, termed "Highlighting the Positive and Negative Aspects of Players." The research findings indicate that coaches assert players ought to be aware of their strengths and weaknesses, and they should refrain from highlighting aspects that players should already recognize, which contradicts the study's conclusions. Wang & Straub, (2012). Factor 12 is designated as "Instructions" and comprises two particles. For the players to fulfill the coach's expectations, it is essential to elucidate the training methodology and the specific requirements placed upon them. This outcome aligns partially with the findings of O'Connor *et al.*, (2018), which indicate that coaches are more predisposed to provide comprehensive explanations regarding the content and execution of training prior to its commencement,

whereas the instructions given during the training are of lesser intensity.

The thirteenth aspect, termed "Team Goal Setting," comprises five components. Coaches assert that they ought to establish individual and team objectives collaboratively with the entire squad. In the study by [Senécal *et al.* \(2008\)](#), the authors examined the disparities between the experimental group, which had team goals established, and the control group, highlighting the beneficial impacts of team goal setting, as the athletes in the experimental group exhibited a greater degree of team cohesion. The fourteenth aspect, termed "Emphasis of Positivism/Negativism," comprises three components, leading coaches to prioritize the positive attributes of players above the negative ones. Comparable findings were observed in the study conducted by [Gillham & Weiler, \(2013\)](#). Factor 15 comprises two components and is referred to as "Personal Expectations of the Coach." This research indicates that both individuals and the team as a whole are permitted to articulate their views, perhaps impacting the coach's expectations. Permitting players to impact the coach's decisions is a very stressful and demanding strategy that necessitates advanced skills, a democratic methodology, and is emotionally taxing ([Price & Weiss, 2000](#)). Establishing attainable expectations by coaches and players is crucial, as failure to meet these goals may adversely impact the psychological dynamics of the group ([Leo *et al.*, 2022](#)).

Factor 16 is designated as "Team Solutions". It comprises four particles and pertains to formulating answers or decisions in specific circumstances. This research is corroborated by the findings of [Allen & Hodge \(2006\)](#), which underscore that coaches formulate solutions and decisions by considering the perspectives of all players, thereby acknowledging the views of the entire team. Factor 17 is referred to as "Formulating a Strategy". It comprises three particles. The research findings indicate that coaches generally believe they should permit team involvement in strategic planning for both team development and gameplay, while retaining the authority to make certain strategic decisions independently. This finding is somewhat corroborated by the research conducted by [Freitas *et al.*, \(2013\)](#).

The eighteenth component comprises two particles and is termed "Positive feedback". [Larsen *et al.*, \(2015\)](#) assert that coaches deem it essential to cultivate an environment that fosters positive experiences of conquering challenges through frequent

positive feedback. These findings align with the study's conclusions, indicating that coaches believe players should receive frequent positive feedback, allowing them to formulate their assessments and strategies based on the strengths of their players rather than the contrary. Factor 19, the final factor, is termed "Team Influence on Coaching Decisions" and comprises three components. [Machida-Kosuga & Kohno, \(2022\)](#) asserted that coaches ought to cultivate an environment centered on individual development, wherein athletes assume a leadership role to some degree. This aligns with the findings of this study, which indicate that coaches generally believe decisions should be made with consideration for players' opinions, permitting them to voice their perspectives, while also maintaining a degree of autonomy to make independent decisions.

The recommendation for future research is to conduct research on a larger sample that comes from different countries.

5. Conclusions

The aim of the study was to establish the characteristic leadership styles for all UEFA soccer coaches from five different coaching styles (training and instructor, autocratic, democratic, social support and positive feedback). By analyzing the data, it was determined that "B" football coaches are characterized by the coaching style "positive feedback", "A" soccer coaches by the "training and instructor" and "positive feedback" styles, while "PRO" coaches are characterized by the "positive feedback" style and a slightly lower frequency by the "training and instructor" style. Using only one coaching/leadership style is certainly a limiting factor, as different situations require different coaching approaches. Coaches need to know and understand the different approaches and leadership styles available to them and choose the most appropriate style at a given time.

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Participants consent

Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous. Participants were provided informed consent.

Author Contribution Statement

Alen Ćirić: Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Validation, Data curation, Writing original draft and writing, review & editing. **Šemso Ormanović:** Methodology, Writing original draft. **Nedim Čović:** Methodology, Writing original draft. **Denis Čaušević:** Methodology, Writing original draft. All the authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there was no conflict of interest.

Does this article pass screening for similarity?

Yes

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