

Coaching Style Preferences and Attitude of Student Athletes

Edward Louie Salcedo¹, Fausto C. Romero²

¹Sports Coordinator, Mariners Polytechnic Colleges Foundation, Baras, Canaman, Camarines Sur, Philippines

²Dean, College of Arts and Sciences, Naga College Foundation, Inc., Naga City, Camarines Sur, Philippines

ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of coaching style preferences on the attitudes of student athletes officially recognized under the Local Government Unit (LGU) of Naga City for the school year 2025–2026. Specifically, it identified the coaching style preferences along autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire dimensions; measure athlete attitudes in terms of value for purpose and meaning, feedback-driven orientation, tech-savviness and visual learning, mental health awareness, and desire for autonomy and inclusion; assess the significant relationship between coaching styles and athlete attitudes; determine the extent of influence of coaching styles on athlete attitudes; and develop an LGU-sponsored training program to enhance coaching practices. The 185 respondents were selected through purposive sampling, and a descriptive-correlational research design was employed. Data analysis utilized Weighted Mean, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r), and Coefficient of Determination (r^2). Athletes prefer democratic coaching, moderately accept autocratic coaching, and reject laissez-faire coaching; they prioritize purpose and feedback, moderately value autonomy and mental health awareness, and place less emphasis on tech-savvy learning. Democratic coaching strongly aligns with athletes' needs; autocratic coaching fosters autonomy and adaptability; and laissez-faire coaching supports feedback responsiveness and psychological well-being. An LGU-sponsored program was developed to enhance coaching effectiveness and athlete development.

Keywords: democratic coaching, student-athlete attitudes, descriptive-correlational design, LGU training program.

INTRODUCTION

Coaching styles and athlete attitudes are central to shaping student-athletes' motivation, resilience, and long-term engagement. Authoritarian methods often emphasize discipline but risk creating stress, disengagement, and dropout, while supportive and democratic approaches foster autonomy, emotional growth, and teamwork (Labadan, 2021; Barredo, 2022). Athlete attitudes also play a decisive role, as positive attitudes emerge when athletes feel respected and supported, while negative ones develop under pressure and poor guidance (Micua et al., 2024). The interaction between coaching style and athlete attitude ultimately determines performance, morale, and sustained participation in sports.

Globally, autonomy-supportive and transformational leadership have been shown to enhance resilience, optimism, and self-regulated learning (Zhang et al., 2025; Li & Xing, 2025; Hirose et al., 2025; Nakayama

& Izawa, 2025; Ikudome et al., 2025). These findings align with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), particularly Target 4.7, which emphasizes inclusive education fostering peace, respect, and cultural diversity (United Nations, 2023). Supportive coaching contributes to psychosocial development, emotional intelligence, and resilience, reinforcing education as a tool for empowerment and lifelong growth (UNESCO, 2024; UNICEF, 2025). In the Philippines, the Department of Education's Strengthened Senior High School Curriculum: Sports Coaching (DepEd, 2025) integrates coaching styles with ethical and psychosocial practices, consistent with Republic Act 10588 or the Palarong Pambansa Act of 2013. Local studies and pilot programs, such as Coach Connect: Gen Z Edition in Naga City Science High School, highlight the positive impacts of adaptive coaching, while regional research in Baguio, Ilocos, and Angeles City further emphasizes psychosocial support and athlete-centered approaches (Dela Cruz & Ramos, 2023; Villanueva & Santos, 2024; Garcia & Bautista, 2025; Lopez, 2023).

Despite these contributions, gaps remain in addressing the cultural and generational contexts of Filipino centennial athletes. International research underscores the benefits of autonomy-supportive coaching but often overlooks localized needs (Zhang et al., 2025; Li & Xing, 2025). In Sorsogon, studies revealed challenges in coaching management and sports development programs in technical vocational schools (Balaoro, 2024; Delgado & Digo, 2023; Ebio & Digo, 2024), yet limited research has focused on Naga City athletes who value autonomy, collaboration, and psychosocial support. This study is significant as it provides evidence-based guidance for coaches, schools, and policymakers to adopt adaptive strategies that foster resilience, teamwork, and motivation. It will benefit student-athletes through stronger psychosocial support and positive sports experiences, while parents and communities gain healthier approaches to sports participation that reinforce discipline, respect, and collaboration. Conducting this research in Naga City is compelling, as it directly addresses the evolving needs of centennial athletes and contributes to building a sustainable sports culture that empowers youth academically, socially, and athletically.

Research Objectives

This study determined the influence of coaching style preferences on the attitude of student athletes in the local government unit of Naga City, school year 2025-2026. It identified the coaching style preferences of student athletes along autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire. It measured the attitude of student athletes in terms of value for purpose and meaning, feedback-driven, tech-savvy, and visual learners, mental health awareness, and desire for autonomy and inclusion. It assessed the significant relationship between the coaching styles preferences and the attitude of student athletes, and the extent of influence of the coaching styles' preferences on the attitude of the student athletes. It developed an LGU-sponsored training program to enhance the coaching styles, preferences, and attitude of student athletes.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive–correlational research design to describe coaching style preferences and attitudes of student-athletes and to examine the relationships between these variables without manipulating conditions. Descriptive–correlational approaches are widely recognized in sports and education research for identifying associations and patterns (Saunders et al., 2023; Williams & Moser, 2022). The descriptive design systematically presented and summarized characteristics of student-athletes' coaching style preferences and attitudes, providing baseline data for future interventions and policy decisions (Saunders et al., 2023; Garcia & Torres, 2022). The correlational design explored the link between coaching style preferences and athlete attitudes, consistent with recent applications in sports

psychology that examined coaching styles and athlete satisfaction (Martinez et al., 2022) and leadership approaches with performance outcomes (Anderson & Smith, 2020). The respondents were 185 student-athletes from Naga City, selected through purposive sampling to ensure representation across sports disciplines, a method supported in sports psychology research for capturing diverse athlete experiences (Kim & Lee, 2021; Hernandez & Cruz, 2023). Data were gathered using a structured survey questionnaire consisting of items on coaching style preferences (autocratic, democratic, laissez-faire) and athlete attitudes (purpose, feedback, tech-savvy learning, mental health, autonomy/inclusion). The instrument was adapted from Pascual and Espeso (2025) and validated scales in sports leadership and athlete motivation studies (Brown & Johnson, 2021; Nguyen & Alvarez, 2022). Previous studies support the relevance of structured instruments, showing that democratic and supportive coaching behaviors enhance athlete satisfaction, emotional regulation, and motivation (Wan Ahmad Munsif & Mohd Azrul, 2024; Nurul Fatin Adibah & Mon Redee Sut Txi, 2025; Mohamad Nizam et al., 2023). These validations ensured cultural relevance and reliability of the adapted scales in examining coaching styles and athlete attitudes. This study adhered to ethical standards in conducting research involving human participants, ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw at any stage, and it also acknowledged the responsible use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools in data organization and manuscript preparation, with final interpretations and conclusions remaining under the accountability of the researchers.

In this study, descriptive statistics and correlational analysis were employed to summarize coaching style preferences and athlete attitudes, and to examine their relationships. The weighted mean was used as the primary descriptive tool to capture dominant trends in Likert-scale responses, ensuring accurate reflection of collective attitudes (Nguyen & Alvarez, 2022; Hernandez & Cruz, 2023). The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) measured the strength and direction of associations between coaching styles and athlete attitudes, confirming meaningful links in sports psychology research (Anderson & Smith, 2020; Silva & Moreno, 2023). The coefficient of determination (r^2) assessed the extent to which coaching style preferences explained variations in athlete attitudes, providing reliable measures of explanatory strength (Anderson & Smith, 2020; Silva & Moreno, 2023). The modified ADDIE model (ADD) was applied to design the LGU-sponsored training program, focusing on analysis, design, and develop phases to ensure evidence-based, context-sensitive, and strategically aligned interventions for enhancing coaching practices and athlete development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results highlight the role of coaching style preferences in shaping student-athletes' attitudes, showing how the interaction between coaching methods and athlete expectations contributes to both positive and negative outcomes, with the discussion emphasizing practical implications for coaching practice and athlete development.

Coaching Style Preferences of Student Athletes

Table 1 presents a consolidated overview of the coaching styles, autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire, as perceived and preferred by student-athletes. The highest rated coaching style was "Democratic," with an average weighted mean of 2.86, interpreted as "Highly Preferred." This was followed by "Autocratic," which obtained an average weighted mean of 2.53, also interpreted as "Highly Preferred." The lowest rated coaching style was "Laissez-Faire," with an average weighted mean of 2.49, interpreted as "Moderately Preferred." The overall average weighted mean was 2.63, which falls under the interpretation of "Highly Preferred."

Table 1
Coaching Style Preferences of Student-Athletes

| Coaching Styles | AWM | Interpretation |
|-----------------------|------|------------------|
| Democratic | 2.86 | HP |
| Autocratic | 2.53 | HP |
| Laissez-Faire | 2.49 | MP |
| Overall Weighted Mean | 2.63 | Highly Preferred |

Note: 1.00-1.75=Fairly Preferred (FP); 1.76-2.50=Moderately Preferred (MP); 2.51-3.25 = Highly Preferred (HP); 3.26-4.00=Very Highly Preferred (VHP).

Student-athletes demonstrate a clear preference for democratic coaching, which emphasizes collaboration, communication, and shared decision-making, while moderately accepting autocratic styles for their structure but rejecting laissez-faire approaches that minimize guidance and oversight. This balance reflects athletes’ desire for autonomy alongside structured support, highlighting that effective coaching must integrate democratic principles to meet psychological needs for autonomy and relatedness (Llanos-Muñoz et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2022; Zhang & Wang, 2021; García-Mas et al., 2023; López-Gajardo et al., 2025). Contemporary studies consistently show that supportive and participatory coaching enhances resilience, motivation, and satisfaction, whereas authoritarian or laissez-faire tendencies weaken cohesion and increase dropout risks. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) provides a strong framework for these findings, explaining that athletes favor coaching styles that fulfill their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Democratic and autonomy-supportive coaching practices not only foster engagement and trust but also sustain long-term performance and well-being.

Attitude of Student Athletes

Table 2 established the overall trends and common themes that shape their perspectives. This serves as a comprehensive reflection of student-athletes’ evolving attitudes, showing how they balance personal growth, performance, and well-being within diverse and demanding environments. The highest-rated attitude was “Value for Purpose and Meaning” and “Feedback-Driven,” both with an average weighted mean of 3.34, interpreted as “Very Highly Preferred.” The lowest-rated attitude was “Tech-Savvy and Visual Learners” with 3.18, interpreted as “Highly Preferred.” The overall average weighted mean was 3.27, which falls under the interpretation of “Very Highly Preferred.”

Table 2
Attitude of Student-Athletes

| Attitudes | AWM | Interpretation |
|-----------------------------------|------|-----------------------|
| Value for Purpose and Meaning | 3.34 | VHP |
| Feedback-Driven | 3.34 | VHP |
| Mental Health Awareness | 3.25 | HP |
| Desire for Autonomy and Inclusion | 3.25 | HP |
| Tech-Savvy and Visual Learners | 3.18 | HP |
| Overall Average Weighted Mean | 3.27 | Very Highly Preferred |

Note: 1.00-1.75=Fairly Preferred (FP); 1.76-2.50=Moderately Preferred (MP); 2.51-3.25 = Highly Preferred (HP); 3.26-4.00=Very Highly Preferred (VHP).

Student-athletes place the greatest importance on purpose and constructive feedback, which drive motivation, resilience, and performance, while technology and visual learning are seen as supportive but secondary. This hierarchy of values reflects their intrinsic orientation toward meaning, growth, and holistic well-being, with mental health, autonomy, and inclusion serving as complementary supports. Recent studies reinforce these findings: Kang and Alaeddini (2025) highlight the role of meaning in balancing dual roles; Mao (2025) emphasizes feedback and coping strategies for resilience; Ellis et al. (2025) show that open conversations improve mental health outcomes; Stride et al. (2025) underscore inclusion and belonging as essential for motivation; and Thakar and Wafgaonkar (2025) demonstrate that technology enhances training but is not central. These attitudes align with Self-Determination Theory, which explains how autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fulfilled through inclusion and feedback, and with Transformational Leadership Theory, which emphasizes vision, individualized consideration, and motivational support to foster resilience, identity, and shared success. These clarify that student-athletes’ purpose-driven attitudes are shaped by supportive and transformational coaching, ensuring engagement, well-being, and long-term development.

Relationship between the Coaching Styles Preferences and the Attitudes of Student Athletes

Table 3 presents the relationship between student-athletes’ preferred coaching styles and their attitudes toward training and performance. The data reveals strong correlations between coaching styles and learner attitudes, with all r-values above 0.90 and p-values below 0.05, indicating highly significant relationships. Autocratic coaching shows strong alignment with tech-savvy and visual learners ($r = 0.95, p = 0.012$) and those desiring autonomy and inclusion ($r = 0.97, p = 0.007$). Democratic coaching demonstrates the strongest correlations overall, particularly with autonomy and inclusion ($r = 0.98, p = 0.003$), as well as purpose and meaning ($r = 0.97, p = 0.006$) and tech-savviness ($r = 0.97, p = 0.005$). Laissez-faire coaching also shows significant relationships, especially with feedback-driven learners ($r = 0.94, p = 0.018$) and those with mental health awareness ($r = 0.96, p = 0.009$). The overall relationship proved to be significant ($r = 0.91, p = 0.000$).

Table 3

Relationship between the Coaching Styles Preferences and the Attitudes of Student Athletes

| Preferred Coaching Style | Attitudes | r-value | p-value | Int. |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------|---------|-------------|
| Autocratic | Tech Savvy and Visual Learners | 0.95 | 0.012 | S |
| | Desire for Autonomy and Inclusion | 0.97 | 0.007 | S |
| Democratic | Value for purpose and meaning | 0.97 | 0.006 | S |
| | Tech Savvy and Visual Learners | 0.97 | 0.005 | S |
| | Desire for Autonomy and Inclusion | 0.98 | 0.003 | S |
| Laizze-Faire | Feedback Driven | 0.94 | 0.018 | S |
| | Mental Health Awareness | 0.96 | 0.009 | S |
| Overall Relationship | | 0.91 | 0.000 | Significant |

Note: The r-values = 0.49 to 0.98, indicating moderate to very strong correlations. The corresponding r^2 values are 0.24-0.96, or between 24% and 96%, S-significant correlation at $p < .05$, while NS not significant correlation.

The findings demonstrate that coaching styles strongly influence learner and athlete attitudes, with democratic coaching emerging as the most universally effective by fostering autonomy, inclusion, and purpose, while autocratic and laissez-faire styles show targeted strengths for specific learner needs. Statistical evidence revealed consistently high correlations, confirming that coaching approaches must be carefully matched to learner profiles to optimize engagement and performance. This interpretation is reinforced by recent scholarship: Labadan (2021) and Li & Xing (2025) highlight democratic coaching’s role in enhancing motivation and engagement, Marcone (2023) emphasizes the impact of coaching behaviors on psychological needs, García & Torres (2022) link laissez-faire coaching to feedback receptiveness, and Kim & Park (2024) show autocratic coaching’s effectiveness in structured, tech-integrated environments. Theoretical frameworks such as Self-Determination Theory explain these outcomes through the fulfillment of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, while Social Learning Theory underscores the role of modeling in shaping motivation and identity. The evidence and theory confirm that adaptive coaching strategies, prioritizing democratic methods while strategically applying autocratic or laissez-faire approaches, are essential for maximizing motivation, retention, and developmental success.

Influence of the Coaching Style Preferences on the Attitudes of the Student Athletes

The data in Table 4 presents the influence of preferred coaching styles on the attitudes of student-athletes. Autocratic coaching shows very strong correlations with tech-savvy and visual learners ($r = 0.95$, $r^2 = 0.91$) and with the desire for autonomy and inclusion ($r = 0.96$, $r^2 = 0.93$). Democratic coaching demonstrates very strong influence with value for purpose and meaning ($r = 0.97$, $r^2 = 0.94$), tech-savvy and visual learners ($r = 0.97$, $r^2 = 0.95$), and desire for autonomy and inclusion ($r = 0.98$, $r^2 = 0.96$). Laissez-faire coaching also shows very strong influence with feedback-driven learners ($r = 0.94$, $r^2 = 0.88$) and mental health awareness ($r = 0.96$, $r^2 = 0.92$). The overall influence of coaching styles on student-athlete attitudes was very strong ($r = 0.91$, $r^2 = 0.83$).

Table 4
Influence of Preferred Coaching Styles on the Attitudes of Student-Athletes

| Preferred Coaching Styles | Attitudes | r-value | r ² -value | Int. |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------|-----------------------|-------------|
| Autocratic | Tech-Savvy and Visual Learners | 0.95 | 0.91 | VS |
| | Desire for Autonomy and Inclusion | 0.96 | 0.93 | VS |
| Democratic | Value for Purpose and Meaning | 0.97 | 0.94 | VS |
| | Tech-Savvy and Visual Learners | 0.97 | 0.95 | VS |
| | Desire for Autonomy and Inclusion | 0.98 | 0.96 | VS |
| Laissez-Faire | Feedback-Driven | 0.94 | 0.88 | VS |
| | Mental Health Awareness | 0.96 | 0.92 | VS |
| Overall Influence | | 0.91 | 0.83 | Very Strong |

Note: 0=No Influence; 0.01-0.20=Very Weak; 0.21-0.40=Weak, 0.41-0.60 Moderate, 0.61-0.80=Strong, 0.81-1.00=Very Strong

The results confirm that coaching styles exert a powerful and consistent influence on student-athlete attitudes, with democratic coaching emerging as the most impactful by fostering autonomy, inclusion, and purpose, while autocratic and laissez-faire styles demonstrate targeted strengths for tech-savvy learners and those prioritizing feedback or mental health. Recent studies reinforce these findings: Li and Xing (2025) and Pascual & Espeso (2025) highlight democratic coaching's role in enhancing engagement and performance, Manvi (2025) emphasizes the importance of feedback and relational coaching, Labadan (2021) confirms democratic coaching's motivational benefits, and Kim & Park (2024) show autocratic coaching's effectiveness in structured, tech-integrated environments. Theoretical frameworks such as Transformational Leadership Theory and Social Learning Theory explain these outcomes, illustrating how coaches inspire athletes through vision, individualized support, and observable behaviors that shape resilience, inclusion, and identity. The data, scholarship, and theory converge to affirm that adaptive coaching strategies, prioritizing democratic methods while strategically applying autocratic or laissez-faire approaches, are essential for maximizing motivation, retention, and developmental success among student-athletes. Social learning, where adaptive coaching fosters resilience, autonomy, and collective success.

LGU-Sponsored Training Program

The Local Government Unit (LGU) of Naga plays a vital role in advancing the holistic development of student-athletes by ensuring training programs are responsive to evolving needs. Findings on coaching styles confirm that democratic coaching exerts the strongest influence, fostering purpose, inclusion, and adaptability, while autocratic coaching shows unexpected strength in promoting autonomy and tech-savvy learning, and laissez-faire coaching contributes to feedback receptiveness and mental health awareness. Guided by these results, the LGU-sponsored program applies a modified ADDIE model, focusing on Analyze, Design, and Develop phases, to systematically prepare, design, and create adaptive training modules. The program emphasizes democratic coaching as the foundation, integrates autocratic elements for independence and adaptability, and selectively applies laissez-faire strategies for feedback and mental health support. Structured as Adaptive Coaching for Athlete Development, it includes workshops, simulations, role-playing, and blended learning modules covering purpose-driven coaching, autonomy and inclusion, tech-savvy instruction, and feedback with mental health awareness. Supported by recent scholarship, democratic coaching is shown to foster intrinsic motivation and retention (Adolfo, 2025; Pascual & Espeso, 2025), supportive coaching mitigates stress and promotes resilience (Bates, Mack, & Nothnagle, 2024; Kass & Morrison, 2023), and inclusive practices address mental health concerns (McGuine et al., 2021; Shepherd et al., 2021). Autocratic coaching, though rigid, can strengthen discipline and structured learning (Bullard, 2021; Kim & Park, 2024). These affirm that adaptive coaching, integrating democratic, autocratic, and laissez-faire elements, best supports athlete motivation, resilience, and well-being, aligning with the LGU's initiative to cultivate resilient and motivated athletes prepared for competition and personal growth.

CONCLUSIONS

Student-athletes prefer democratic coaching, moderately accept autocratic coaching, and reject laissez-faire coaching, reflecting their prioritization of purpose and feedback while moderately valuing autonomy and mental health awareness and placing less emphasis on tech-savvy learning. Democratic coaching consistently resonates with athletes' values and attitudes, autocratic coaching reinforces independence and

adaptability, and laissez-faire coaching plays a supportive role in enhancing feedback responsiveness and mental health awareness. Athletes benefit most from democratic coaching as it strongly aligns with their developmental needs, while autocratic coaching contributes to fostering autonomy and modern adaptability, and laissez-faire coaching provides added strength in areas of feedback and psychological well-being. Democratic coaching emerges as the most impactful approach, autocratic coaching complements athlete growth by promoting autonomy and technological adaptability, and laissez-faire coaching remains relevant in cultivating receptiveness to feedback and awareness of mental health.

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