

## Original Article

## Key Characteristics of Successful Sports Coaches: A Word Cloud Analysis of Essential Traits

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### Abstract

In the world of sports, coaches are the main pillars of athlete development and, with their diverse characteristics and skills, play an important role in the growth, performance, and success of athletes. This research focuses on identifying the essential and important characteristics that define a successful and good coach from the perspective of physical education students. This study used word cloud analysis to visually display and classify the frequency of these features, gaining insights into students' evaluations. The five most prominent features mentioned by the students included discipline, experience, success, justice and knowledge. The findings show that these characteristics significantly affect the learning environment by creating a structured, supportive and motivating atmosphere that is conducive to the growth of athletes. Coaches with these qualities not only motivate and guide athletes but also build trust, respect, and strong communication for better results.

### 1. Introduction

In the world of sports, coaches are one of the important and main pillars of athletes' development, and they with their diverse characteristics and competencies can play a key role in the growth, performance and success of athletes. A coach's responsibilities go beyond the transfer of technical and tactical knowledge related to sports and include fostering the mental and physical development of athletes. Due to the changes that occur in society and as a result in sports, coaches should prepare themselves to face new challenges. Understanding the qualities that make a coach truly stand out is essential to improving athlete performance and ensuring long-term success in competitive environments.

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Coaching is defined as a process in which a coach helps a player or athlete to learn and improve certain skill (Zamani, Aroufzadeh, Nazari, & Movahesi, 2020), and it plays a fundamental role in achieving success in sports at all levels (Lyle & Cushion, 2016). In the sports environment, the coach is known as the main and central character and has the responsibility to provide opportunities to improve the abilities and skills of the athletes in various technical, physical and ethical fields (Gilbert & Trudel, 2004).

Considering the changes that occur in society and consequently in sports, only having technical and tactical information cannot guarantee the success of advanced coaches (Kouhian, Elahi, & Akbari, 2021). Sports coaching takes place in a complex, dynamic, and multidimensional environment that depends on specific social and cultural contexts (Gano-Overway et al., 2020). Coaching behaviors, formed under the influence of personal and environmental factors have a significant impact on the performance and mental health of athletes, and emphasize the importance of adaptability and reflective training (Partington & Walton, 2019).

The quality of the relationship between the coach and the athlete depends on the participation of both parties, and this relationship will be effective when both parties are satisfied with it (Kajtna & Barić, 2009). Coach competencies, including motivational abilities, game strategy, technique, and character development, have a positive effect on athlete motivation (Mu'ammal, Muzakki, Fakhri, & Setiawan, 2022). However, the coach plays a crucial role in making sports an educational experience for participating youth (Resnick, 2018). Sports coaches play essential roles in sports organizations and, as key figures for athletes, are responsible for maintaining their motivation, which affects their performance in competitions. In order to motivate athletes, coaches should have appropriate competencies that show their quality as coaches (Mu'ammal et al., 2022).

A wide range of coaching behaviors affect athletes' behavior (Fazilah, Radzi., Abu Bakar, & Mohd, 2023). Coaches with a high level of innovation exhibit more creativity and are known to be more effective coaches in helping athletes prepare for different competitive situations and maintain focus during competitions (Mohd Kassim, 2018). The coach's responsibility includes developing coaching programs for athletes and improving their performance (Gould, Collins, Lauer & Chung, 2007). A good and responsible coach is a coach who supports the mental, physical, tactical and technical development of athletes to achieve their ultimate goals (Manzoor, 2018).

A good coach can be defined as a competent coach, and some scientific sources show that coaches play an important role in motivating athletes (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Successful athletes' coaches are more focused on their own emotions and needs and tend to involve others in the management process. In contrast, less successful athletes' coaches focus less on relationships and are less inclined to involve others in decision-making (Kajtna & Barić, 2009).

Sports coaches are among the key human resources in sports organizations that serve sports at different levels and levels and play a decisive role in this field (Khosravizadeh, Elahi, Bahrami, Nastohi, & Haghdadadi, 2013).

Poczwardowski et al. (2002) consider the coach-athlete relationship to be critical to the overall sports experience, training quality, and competition performance. Coaching success at the elite level requires several key factors including a competitive attitude, commitment and confidence (Partington, 1988). As research on elite coaches becomes more common in sports literature, the complex processes defining their profession will be more thoroughly understood (Gauthier, Schinke & Pickard, 2005). For instance, Salmela (1994) asserts that behind every successful elite athlete stands an effective coach. Coaches are increasingly working with a diverse range of people and are faced with high demands from athletes, parents, managers and supporters, who are expected to play a variety of roles such as coaching, mentoring, sports psychology and even business management (Shokriamlashi, Elahi, Akbariyazdi, 2021). Many studies have shown that coaches face a variety of personal and professional challenges, suggesting that the demanding nature of coaching combines with numerous work-related issues that organizations are trying to address and mitigate (Khosravizadeh et al., 2013).

In the field of sports coaching, understanding the characteristics of a successful coach is important and vital for improving the development and performance of athletes. Despite the importance of these characteristics, most existing researches mainly focus on technical and tactical aspects and have not had a comprehensive and detailed analysis of the key characteristics of successful coaches. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to examine the views of physical education students regarding the characteristics that a good coach can have and make them stand out. This research uses keyword analysis to identify and examine the fundamental characteristics that define an outstanding coach. By analyzing the results, we aim to provide valuable insights into the essential competencies and characteristics of coaching. This approach not only improves the processes of selecting an outstanding coach for athletes, but also provides a systematic framework for sports organizations to improve their coaching standards.

## **2. Material and methods**

The current research uses mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative) to obtain a detailed and comprehensive analysis of students' answers to the research question of this research in the form of word cloud.

A word cloud is a visual representation of text that is mainly used in text analysis to summarize and display the frequency of words in a text, and it provides a quick picture of the prominence of words without dealing with their linguistic meaning or relationships (Kabir, Ahmed & Karim, 2020), and the size of a word in the word cloud indicates its frequency in the document and provides immediate visual appeal from the context of the document (Chandrapaul, Soni, Sharma, Fagna & Mittal, 2019).

Overall, a word cloud is a visual summary of a document that displays the most important words and their frequency in the document (Heimerl, Lohmann, Lange & Ertl, 2014).

In this research, data was collected from 143 undergraduate students of Physical Education and Sports Sciences of Sivas Cumhuriyet University, including all academic orientations, in April 2024 through convenience sampling method. First, the purpose of the research was fully explained to the students and pre-prepared questionnaires were presented to them. After completing demographic information, students were asked to list up to three characteristics that they believed would represent an outstanding and successful coach. The research question of physical education students was as follows: "In your opinion, what are the most important characteristics that a good and outstanding coach should have?" At the end of this stage, 419 words were collected and these words were carefully examined and categorized so that words with similar meanings were placed under common headings to obtain a more detailed analysis of the results. Finally, 31 words with different frequencies were identified, the most frequent being the word "disciplined" with 45 repetitions and the least frequent being the words "peaceful" and "humorous" with 2 repetitions.

The selection of undergraduate physical education students for this study was very important for several reasons. First, because of their field of study, these students have constant and close contact with coaches of different sports (both on campus and off campus), which experience gives them a more nuanced view of what makes a good coach. Secondly, the presence of seasoned and champion athletes among these students makes them have valuable experiences of interacting with successful coaches in competitive environments. Finally, due to the courses offered during their studies, these students are involved in a variety of sports, which allows them to provide more comprehensive opinions about the characteristics of effective coaches. Together, these factors justify the selection of physical education students as the statistical population of this research.

The wordclouds.com website was used to display keywords and create word clouds. In this display, the size of each word is determined according to the number of repetitions in the text; So that the most frequent words are displayed larger and the words with less repetitions are displayed smaller. Finally, EndNoteTM20 software was used to manage references and citations so that the required references in the text can be identified in the best possible way and researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the research topic.

### **3. Results and Discussions**

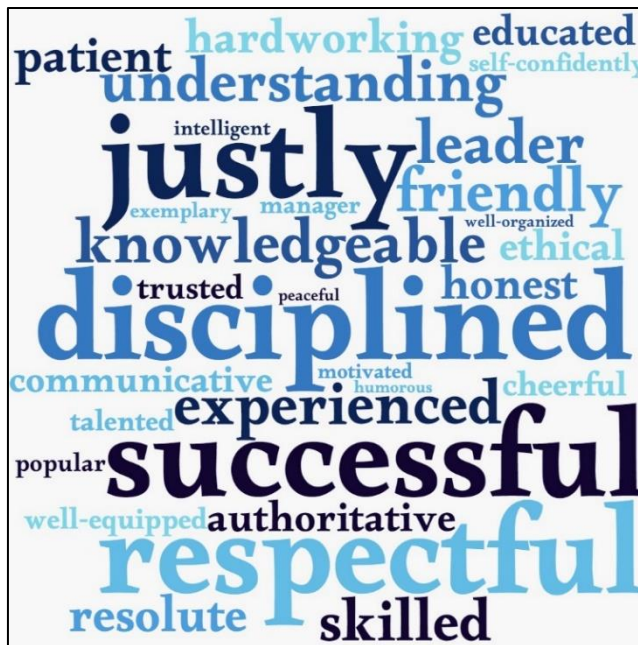
This research was conducted with the participation of 143 physical education students who had a diverse distribution in terms of gender and age. Among the participants, 92 were men (64.34%) and 51 were women (35.66%). In terms of age, 37 people in the age group of 18-19 years (25.87%), 53 people in the age group of 20-21 years (37.06%), 38 people in the age group of 22-23 years (26.57%), and 15 people were in the age group of 24 years and older (10.49%).

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This distribution reflects the demographic diversity of the participants and provides a perspective of the different groups that participated in the research.

In order to present the results in an attractive and fast way, the research findings are depicted in the form of a word cloud (figure1). This visual representation allows the readers of this article to see directly and at a glance the key characteristics expected of a good coach. Word clouds are a useful tool for summarizing information because they condense text into important words with high frequency and provide a clear overview of the content at a glance (Padmanandam et al., 2021).

The size of the words in these keywords indicates the importance and frequency of each attribute based on the weight of the data, which clearly shows the emphasis on attributes such as discipline, experience, and success. This visual tool helps the audience to easily and more attractively gain a deeper understanding of the students' expectations regarding the desirable characteristics of an instructor.



**Figure1.** Word Cloud of key characteristics of a good and successful coach

During the process of data collection and analysis, 31 key words with different repetitions were extracted as characteristics that represent the characteristics of a good instructor from the students' point of view.

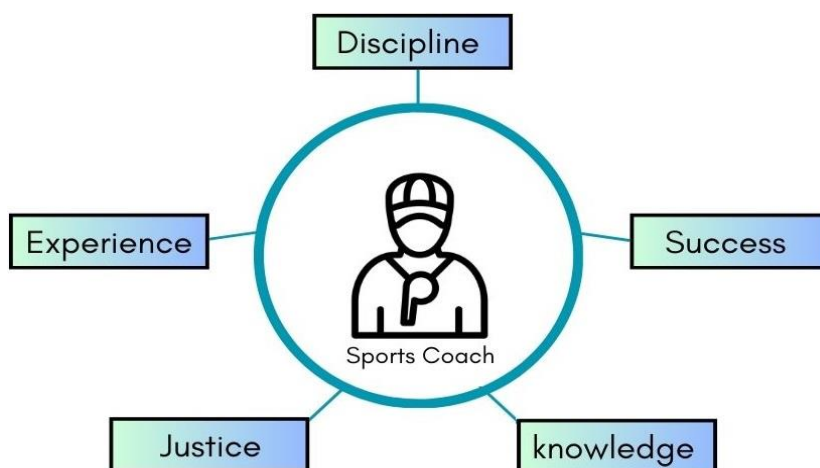
These words and their number of repetitions are given in the order of repetition in the following table:

**Table 1.** Key Characteristics of a good and successful coach

No	Word	WF*	No	word	WF
1	disciplined	45	17	trusted	8
2	experienced	39	18	well-equipped	7
3	successful	35	19	talented	7
4	justly	33	20	patient	6
5	knowledgeable	29	21	manager	6
6	leader	25	22	intelligent	5
7	respectful	24	23	exemplary	5
8	friendly	22	24	ethical	5
9	understanding	18	25	educated	5
10	skilled	14	26	well-organized	4
11	resolute	12	27	cheerful	4
12	honest	11	28	self-confidently	3
13	hardworking	11	29	popular	3
14	motivated	10	30	peaceful	2
15	authoritative	10	31	humorous	2
16	communicative	9			

\*word frequency

The analysis of the collected data showed that students expect certain characteristics from a good sports coach. The first and most important of these features, **Discipline** with the highest number of repetitions shows its importance in creating a structured educational environment. **Experience**, as the second feature, emphasizes the trainer's ability to transfer knowledge and practical skills. **Success** in the professional and educational career of a coach is considered an inspiration and a role model for athletes. **Justice** in evaluating and treating athletes helps to create a sense of trust, and further, the deep **knowledge** of the coach makes him answer the questions and educational needs of the athletes correctly (see figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Five characteristics of a good and successful coach

Other qualities such as leadership, respect, friendliness, skill and honesty are all influential in creating a positive and efficient learning environment for effective learning. All of these features help create a productive and inspiring learning environment for students.

### ***Discussions***

Based on the results obtained from the word cloud analysis, in this section we discuss the characteristics that were repeated more than 10 times in the students' answers as key indicators in evaluating a good sports coach. A word cloud is typically created by text summarization, where monotonous data is transformed into a visually appealing format to highlight important textual content and convey important information quickly (Padmanandam, Bheri, Vegesna & Sruthi, 2021). In the following, we will examine and analyze these characteristics in order to gain a better understanding of the factors that have a major impact on students' evaluation of instructors.

Discipline is very important and essential for every coach and athlete, especially during training and practice, because it ensures focus and effort to achieve goals. According to the findings of this research "Disciplined" with the highest number of repetitions (45 repetitions) has been identified as the most important characteristic of a good coach. Sports students expect a disciplined coach to provide a structured and stable environment for learning.

Discipline plays an important role in class management, lesson planning and accurate and timely assessment of athletes' performance. Human life is always accompanied by rules that guide her in the path of order and discipline, and therefore people must follow these rules and be disciplined according to the values and norms of their lives. Athletes and people in all professions have disciplined attitudes and everyone, especially coaches who are good role models, should be disciplined (Sahabuddin, Hakim, Syahrudin & Sofyan, 2023). Due to Masurska & Vladova (2022), effective discipline is reinforced by the strictness and positive attitude of the teacher towards the students; Friendly approach, understanding and support of the teacher to the students helps to maintain better order in the classroom. Therefore, the coaching approach focuses on the importance of creating a sports environment that promotes positive behaviors and teaches athletes a sense of responsibility and self-regulation (Fazilah et al., 2023).

The next most repeated word in this study was the word "Experienced" with 39 repetitions. Experience allows the coaches to transfer the necessary knowledge and skills to the athletes in a practical way. Experienced coaches are able to anticipate various educational challenges and can provide effective solutions for them. The concept of experience plays an important role in the training of coaches and allows them to effectively transfer knowledge and skills to athletes.

The findings of the Stone et colab. (2021) show that integrating practitioners' experiential and experimental knowledge can increase the acceptance of modern educational methods and make it easier to adopt new learning approaches. By evaluating coaches' experiences in their work contexts, a better understanding can

be gain on the pragmatic constraints of coaching in different performance contexts (Cooper & Allen, 2018).

"Successful" with 35 repetitions is recognized as the third most important characteristic of a good coach. The success in the career and educational record of the coach shows his/her ability to achieve the goals and improve the students' learning level. Successful coaches are an inspiration, and a good role model for athletes. Any successful sports coach knows that good teaching methods and social interaction are just as important as sports skills and tactics (Cassidy, Potrac & Rynne 2023). The study by Choi et al. (2005), suggests that a successful coach is not only very motivated but also fosters the same enthusiasm in their players.

Justice ("justly") with the number of repetitions of 33 was recognized as the fourth most prominent characteristic of a good coach from the perspective of physical education students. Student athletes expect their coaches to be fair in evaluating and dealing with athlete issues. Justice in the educational environment helps to create a sense of trust and mutual respect between the coach and the athletes.

The coach, as a major player in the sports environment, has responsibilities that go beyond mere technical and tactical aspects and include moral aspects as well (Hardman, Jones & Jones 2010). According to Yuosefi et colab. (2014), coaches should focus on teaching all aspects of sports ethics, especially fair behavior and avoiding a win-at-all-costs mentality that can lead to unethical actions. They should aim to enhance ethical behavior while also pursuing victory, prioritizing the development of ethics first and the athlete's performance second.

In terms of ranking the characteristics of a good coach from the point of view of sports students, knowledge (knowledgeable) is considered the fifth most important characteristic for a good coach. In-depth and up-to-date knowledge in the coach's field of expertise allows him/her to correctly answer the questions and educational needs of sports students and athletes and present the course content in an attractive and conceptual way. One of the venue where coaches acquire the knowledge necessary to perform their duties proficiently is through formal coach education (Young, Jemczyk, Brophy & Côté, 2009). According to Van der Merwe (2015), teacher-coaches also seek quality mentorship interactions and up-to-date and high quality coaching information to effectively develop as coaches. Lifelong learning (LLL) refers to the ongoing, voluntary pursuit of knowledge for personal or professional reasons, continuing throughout a person's life (Coşkun & Demirel, 2010).

Further, based on the results, one of the main characteristics that have been highlighted as the characteristics of a good coach is the ability to lead or be a leader with the most frequency. Coaches who are able to direct the educational path with strong leadership are considered valuable by students and athletes. A good coach creates a positive and constructive environment for learning by being respectful to the athletes and helps them feel valuable and self-confident.

A good coach with a friendly attitude can establish a warm and intimate relationship with athletes and make the learning environment more pleasant and motivating for them.



A good coach with high understanding responds to the needs and problems of athletes and accompanies them on the learning path by providing appropriate support and guidance. In addition, with the skills and necessary abilities in their specialized field, they can effectively convey the concepts to the athletes and provide deeper learning. A coach who is resolute in making decisions and implementing training programs can encourage athletes to pursue goals and commit to learning. With honesty and transparency in their communication, good sports coaches win the trust of athletes and create a safe and reliable environment for learning. A good coach with hardworking and continuous efforts in teaching and guiding shows a model of commitment and perseverance to athletes and helps to improve the quality of education. Motivated coaches, with their passion for learning and teaching, can encourage athletes to try harder and achieve educational goals. A good coach with an effective approach (authoritative) and self-confidence in managing lesson times, can maintain discipline and implement educational decisions effectively.

Coaches who strengthen these qualities in themselves can identify the environment and use it for the growth and development of athletes and motivate them and put them on the path to reach their goals. By creating a positive and supportive atmosphere, these trainers can improve interpersonal skills and provide better opportunities for athletes to progress.

#### *Implications and Future Prospects*

According to the research findings, some implications and research and practical suggestions can be presented. It seems necessary to develop training programs for coaches in order to strengthen characteristics such as discipline, experience, success and justice in the form of training workshops on behalf of training centers such as universities or relevant sports federations. Also, emphasis on soft skills such as leadership, effective communication and time management should be included in training programs.

Further research on the effect of these characteristics on athletes' performance can better clarify the exact relationship between them. In the practical field, paying special attention to these characteristics in the process of evaluating and selecting coaches can lead to the selection of coaches with higher abilities to increase the success rate of sports teams and athletes. Holding workshops and training courses to strengthen the desired skills and create supportive and regular learning environments are among the measures that can help increase the effectiveness of trainers. Also, establishing regular feedback systems that allow athletes to provide feedback on coaches' performance can improve the quality of training and professional development of coaches.

These suggestions not only help to improve the quality of education, but also create positive and effective learning environments for athletes.

This research was conducted on physical education students who are active in academic environments, and therefore its results may not be generalizable to other communities, including athletes who are not physical education students. These groups may have different opinions and experiences about the characteristics of coaches. Evaluating instructors' characteristics based on athletes' opinions can be

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influenced by their personal experiences and feelings, and this may lead to bias in the results. In addition, some key characteristics of educators may not have been identified in this research; Therefore, the use of diverse data collection methods can help identify these characteristics more fully and accurately.

#### 4. Conclusions

As a result, this study identifies the key characteristics of effective sports coaches from the perspective of physical education students and emphasizes the critical roles of discipline, experience, success, justice, and knowledge. The findings show that these characteristics significantly affect the learning environment by creating a structured, supportive and motivating atmosphere that is conducive to the growth of athletes.

Coaches who embody these qualities not only inspire and guide athletes, but also foster the trust, respect, and effective communication that is essential to enhancing training outcomes. It also highlights the importance of soft skills, such as leadership and interpersonal communication, alongside technical expertise, the need for comprehensive training programs aimed at equipping coaches with these competencies.

By integrating these insights into evaluation and development processes for coaches, Educational institutions and related sports organizations can increase the quality of coaching levels and ultimately this will greatly help the success and growth of athletes.

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