

Building Confidence through Participative Coaching: Narratives of Collegiate Student-Athletes

Jennifer Anne G. Cabato¹, Cris Lei C. De Guzman², Eunice Dela Cruz³, Maechelle R. Liquiran⁴, Romy L. Padin⁵, Kobe Santos⁶, Karyl Jane Tagata⁷

Central Luzon State University

ABSTRACT: This study explored the lived experiences of collegiate student-athletes regarding participative coaching and its perceived contribution to confidence development. Using a qualitative phenomenological design, fifteen Physical Education student-athletes from Central Luzon State University participated in semi-structured, one-on-one interviews. Data were analyzed using Giorgi et al.'s (2017) descriptive phenomenological method. The findings revealed that participative coaching was experienced through open communication, athlete participation, shared decision-making, consideration of academic and personal responsibilities, trust, encouragement, constructive feedback, discipline, and structured skill development. These experiences helped participants feel valued, supported, and more confident in their athletic abilities. The findings further indicated that participative coaching does not require athletes to make all decisions; rather, it involves meaningful consultation while allowing coaches to retain appropriate leadership responsibilities. The findings support previous research linking participative coaching with student-athletes' self-confidence and self-efficacy (Pestaño et al., 2025). They also complement research emphasizing motivation, perceived competence, and physical activity participation among Filipino college students (Martin et al., 2016; Martin et al., 2017). Overall, participative coaching emerged as an important relational and developmental practice that supports confidence and holistic athlete development.

Keywords: participative coaching, self-confidence, student-athletes, athlete participation, coach-athlete relationship

1. INTRODUCTION

Confidence is an important psychological attribute that supports student-athletes in training and competition. It may help athletes approach challenges, remain motivated, and recover from setbacks, and has been associated with perceived success and sports confidence (Ibrahim et al., 2016; Mwangi et al., 2018). In the collegiate setting, confidence is particularly relevant as student-athletes balance academic responsibilities with training and competition. Research among Filipino college students also highlights the roles of motivation and perceived barriers in physical activity participation (Martin et al., 2016; Martin et al., 2017; Martin & Santos, 2015).

Coaches contribute to student-athletes' development by providing instruction, guidance, feedback, and psychological support. While high-performance sport often emphasizes competitive excellence (Banwell & Kerr, 2016), participative coaching promotes communication, collaboration, athlete involvement, and shared

decision-making. Van Meervelt et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of athletes' expectations in how participative coaching behaviors are perceived. Moreover, Pestaño et al. (2025) found that participative coaching is associated with student-athletes' self-confidence and self-efficacy.

Although previous research provides valuable evidence, quantitative studies may not fully capture athletes' personal experiences of participative coaching. Therefore, this study explored the lived experiences of collegiate student-athletes, focusing on how communication, participation, shared decision-making, support, encouragement, and feedback contribute to their confidence and development.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study therefore sought to understand how collegiate student-athletes experience participative coaching and how they perceive its influence on their confidence and development.

Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do collegiate student-athletes describe their experiences with participative coaching?
2. How do student-athletes experience communication and involvement in coaching decisions?
3. How do student-athletes perceive the influence of participative coaching on their confidence?
4. What coaching practices do student-athletes perceive as helpful in developing their abilities and confidence?
5. How does participative coaching address athletes' academic, personal, emotional, and athletic needs?

2. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of collegiate student-athletes in relation to participative coaching. Phenomenology seeks to understand how individuals experience and give meaning to a particular phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

The phenomenological approach was appropriate because the study focused on participants' personal experiences and perceptions rather than numerical measurements. The researchers sought to understand how student-athletes experienced being consulted, listened to, supported, encouraged, and involved in coaching processes.

Participants

The participants consisted of fifteen (15) college student-athletes currently enrolled in the Physical Education program at Central Luzon State University. The participants included eight (8) female and seven (7) male student-athletes representing different varsity sports.

Participants were selected because they had direct experience with collegiate athletic training and coaching. Their experiences provided relevant information regarding communication, athlete involvement, decision-making, confidence development, and coach-athlete relationships.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured, one-on-one interviews. An interview guide was developed to explore participants' experiences of participative coaching, confidence, decision-making, communication, support, and personal development.

The semi-structured format allowed the researchers to maintain consistency while giving participants opportunities to elaborate on their experiences. Probing questions were used to clarify responses and obtain more detailed narratives.

With participants' permission, interviews were audio-recorded to facilitate accurate transcription. The recordings were transcribed and reviewed by the researchers before analysis.

Data Analysis

The interview data were analyzed using Giorgi et al.'s (2017) descriptive phenomenological method. The method involved five major steps.

First, the researchers read each transcript repeatedly to develop an overall understanding of the participants' experiences. Second, a phenomenological attitude was adopted to remain focused on the participants' descriptions. Third, meaningful statements were identified and organized into meaning units. Fourth, the meaning units were transformed into psychologically relevant meanings. Finally, the transformed meanings were synthesized to identify the general structure of the participants' experiences. The transcripts and meaning units were organized using an Excel file to facilitate data management and analysis.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers observed ethical principles throughout the study. Participants were informed of the purpose, procedures, and objectives of the research before the interviews. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed that they could decline to answer questions or withdraw without penalty.

Participant codes were used instead of names to protect identities. Interview information was treated as confidential and used only for research purposes. The researchers also ensured that participants' experiences and opinions were treated respectfully and without judgment or discrimination.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of the participants' narratives produced thirteen themes that were organized into four broader areas: (1) communication and athlete participation, (2) shared decision-making and holistic support, (3) confidence and motivational support, and (4) feedback, discipline, and skill development.

Communication and Athlete Participation

Theme 1: Open Communication and Athlete Participation

Participants generally described positive experiences when coaches allowed them to express opinions, suggestions, and concerns.

"In my experience, we are always open to everyone's suggestions. When a problem comes up, we address it directly, so things don't turn into a mess." - P2

P8 stated:

"Our coach is kind and approachable, though she can be strict during training. She values our opinions, listens to our concerns, and always gives us an opportunity to speak up."

Similarly, P11 shared:

"Coach is open to suggestions from us players, especially when we say things like, 'Coach, I think this strategy might work better.'"

These responses indicate that athletes valued coaches who were approachable and receptive to their opinions. Being given an opportunity to speak appeared to make participants feel involved and recognized. This supports research on participative coaching, which emphasizes athlete involvement and communication as important aspects of the coaching experience (Pestaño et al., 2025).

Theme 2: Consideration of Athletes' Needs and Limitations

Participants also described participative coaching in terms of recognizing individual needs, weaknesses, schedules, and physical limitations.

P4 stated:

"They ask us about our weak spots, which helps them tailor our training sessions accordingly."

However, P6 described an experience in which consultation decreased over time:

"At first, she used to ask for our input. But over time, things shifted and everything had to be done her way. She stopped asking if we already had plans on a certain day or time."

These responses demonstrate that participative coaching was not always experienced consistently. While some athletes experienced individualized consideration, others noticed changes in the level of consultation. Van Meervelt et al. (2022) noted the importance of athletes' expectations in how participative coaching behaviors are perceived.

Shared Decision-Making and Holistic Support

Theme 3: Shared Decision-Making and Athlete Voice

Participants described several situations in which coaches involved them in decisions regarding training and team activities.

P8 stated:

"Major decisions require a majority vote or full team consensus first. So, it's not just between the coach and me, it involves the coach and the entire team."

P9 explained:

"She usually asks how we're doing and whether we're finding the training difficult. Sometimes, she even asks for our suggestions or opinions regarding our activities."

P6 added:

"She always checks with us first to see if we're up for it or if our bodies can handle the training load."

These narratives indicate that participation occurred through consultation, discussion, and collective decision-making. Athletes were not necessarily given complete authority, but they were provided opportunities to contribute.

The findings suggest that participative coaching involves a balance between athlete voice and coach leadership. This is consistent with research linking participative coaching with self-confidence and self-efficacy (Pestaño et al., 2025).

Theme 4: Consideration of Academic Responsibilities

Participants also described coaching practices that considered their responsibilities as students.

One participant stated:

"She asks us things like, 'What time do you prefer to train?', 'Which days are you free?', 'What time works for you?', or 'Can you handle a session today?' She really takes into account our schedules both as students and as athletes."

Another participant recognized the coach's leadership role:

"It's only right that our coach makes the final calls, since it's ultimately for the good of our performance."

These responses indicate that athletes valued being consulted regarding schedules and physical readiness while recognizing that coaches retain responsibility for final decisions. This is particularly relevant in collegiate sport because student-athletes must balance academic and athletic demands. Research involving Filipino college students has similarly emphasized the importance of motivational and contextual factors in physical activity participation (Martin et al., 2016; Martin et al., 2017).

Theme 5: Emotional and Personal Support

For some participants, coaching extended beyond athletic instruction to include academic and personal support.

P3 shared:

"Whenever we struggle with our school subjects, our coaching staff helps us out so we can focus and train properly."

P4 stated:

"Whether we're dealing with issues in school, our personal lives, or anything else, she takes the time to talk to us. The staff helps us work through it so we can get back on track with our game."

These narratives suggest that athletes viewed their coaches as sources of support during difficulties outside sport. Such support may help athletes manage concerns that could interfere with their athletic participation.

This finding reinforces the importance of viewing student-athlete development holistically. Martin et al. (2023) likewise examined multiple factors associated with competition success rather than focusing exclusively on athletic skills.

CONFIDENCE AND MOTIVATIONAL SUPPORT

Theme 6: Confidence through Trust, Support, and Encouragement

Participants frequently connected participative coaching with increased confidence.

P7 stated:

"When you feel that your coach is approachable, it really boosts your confidence. You know you can go to them anytime you make a mistake and ask for guidance without hesitation."

P9 explained:

"It really helped boost my confidence because I feel like our coach trusts us and believes in our abilities. That gives me the confidence to pick myself up and try again."

P8 added:

"It really strengthened our bond and built trust among us. It made us feel like we were truly valued and included."

These experiences indicate that trust, inclusion, and encouragement were important elements in participants' confidence development. The findings support Pestaño et al. (2025), who examined participative coaching in relation to student-athletes' self-confidence and self-efficacy. They are also consistent with research identifying self-confidence as an important psychological factor in student-athletes (Ibrahim et al., 2016).

Theme 7: Encouragement during Difficulties Builds Self-Belief

Participants described situations in which coaches helped them overcome self-doubt through encouragement and additional opportunities to practice.

P1 recalled:

"There was a time when I was struggling with a specific skill and started doubting whether I could pull it off. Our coach sat down with me, asked what was holding me back, gave me some advice, and gave me another shot to practice it."

P3 stated:

"I told him, 'Coach, I don't think I can play that position,' but he told me, 'You've got this, just trust yourself.' That was the turning point where I started to believe in my own abilities."

These narratives suggest that confidence was developed not only through verbal encouragement but also through opportunities to practice and try again. Such experiences are relevant to self-efficacy because successful attempts and supportive feedback may strengthen athletes' perceptions of their capabilities.

Theme 8: Motivation during Competition and Opportunities to Participate

Participants also described encouragement during competitions as important.

P5 stated:

"By doing that, she gives us the courage to step up and participate in the game. At the same time, it makes us as players feel much more involved."

P10 recalled:

"He gave us a pat on the back and said, 'You've definitely got this, push through this match so we can lock in a spot in the semifinals.'"

These accounts indicate that encouragement during challenging competitive situations may help athletes maintain motivation and confidence. Opportunities to participate also allowed athletes to demonstrate their abilities under actual competitive conditions.

FEEDBACK, DISCIPLINE, AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Theme 9: Constructive Feedback and Positive Reinforcement

Participants identified feedback as an important coaching practice.

P1 explained:

"What helps us most is her balance of feedback and encouragement. She directly points out what we need to work on, so we know where we're falling short, while constantly encouraging us to keep pushing."

P3 stated:

"She sets up games or mini games so she can spot where we're falling short and when we still need to work on. Through that process, both our skills and our confidence keep improving."

These responses indicate that participants valued feedback that was specific and focused on improvement. Athletes appeared to appreciate correction when it was accompanied by encouragement and opportunities to improve.

Theme 10: Discipline and Consistent Training

Participants also emphasized discipline and consistent training.

P6 identified:

"Discipline, punctuality, stretching/workouts, identifying weaknesses, repeated practice, and team chemistry."

P7 stated:

"She constantly reminds us to stay self-disciplined. Experiencing that kind of guidance has really worked for me, helping me bring out my best performance during games."

P9 added:

"The way she disciplines us helps curb our bad habits, making sure the quality of our play doesn't slip."

These narratives demonstrate that participants did not view participative coaching as the absence of discipline. Instead, they recognized that athlete involvement can coexist with clear expectations regarding punctuality, preparation, behavior, and training.

Theme 11: Communication and Coach-Athlete Relationship

Communication also emerged as important in developing team chemistry.

One participant stated:

"It's really about the way she communicates. Effective communication helps us build and strengthen our overall team chemistry."

P3 explained:

"During training serious/no favoritism, after training talks casually/friendly, strengthens bond and motivates training."

These experiences suggest that athletes valued coaches who maintained appropriate professional expectations while developing positive relationships with athletes. Communication therefore served both instructional and relational purposes.

Theme 12: Skill Development through Structured Drills

Participants continued to value structured training and technical development.

P6 stated:

"What proved to be most effective were the structured drills, things like working with cones and hurdles. Those really made the difference."

The participant explained that these activities helped improve agility and competitiveness while allowing the coach to observe the athletes' abilities.

This finding demonstrates that participative coaching is not limited to shared decision-making. Athletes also value structured drills, repetition, technical instruction, and opportunities to develop their skills.

Theme 13: Supportive and Pressure-Free Coaching Environment

Some participants emphasized the importance of reducing unnecessary pressure while maintaining performance expectations.

P9 stated:

"We don't need to play under pressure just to win. Even if we lose, what matters most is that we execute our game plan and play to our true potential."

P8 added:

"Addressing my bad habits and mistakes is crucial. If you don't call attention to something, it will never change or improve."

These responses indicate that participants valued an environment focused on execution, learning, and improvement rather than excessive pressure to win. At the same time, they recognized that constructive correction and accountability remained necessary.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings show that participative coaching is a multidimensional process involving communication, consultation, athlete involvement, encouragement, feedback, and consideration of individual needs. Participants particularly valued coaches who were approachable and receptive to their opinions,

which appeared to strengthen their sense of involvement and confidence. This supports previous research linking participative coaching with student-athletes' self-confidence and self-efficacy (Pestaño et al., 2025).

The findings also indicate that athlete participation can coexist with coach leadership. Participants appreciated being consulted but recognized that coaches still need to make final decisions when necessary. Confidence was associated with trust, encouragement, constructive feedback, practice opportunities, and participation in competition, consistent with research on self-confidence and perceived success among student-athletes (Ibrahim et al., 2016; Mwangi et al., 2018).

The findings further highlight the importance of motivation and supportive relationships in maintaining engagement in training and competition, complementing research on physical activity participation among Filipino college students (Martin et al., 2016; Martin et al., 2017). Participants also emphasized academic, personal, and emotional concerns, supporting a holistic view of student-athlete development (Martin et al., 2023). Finally, participative coaching was seen as compatible with discipline, structured training, feedback, and accountability.

5. CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that participative coaching is a supportive and collaborative approach that can contribute to student-athletes' confidence and development. Participants valued communication, athlete involvement, trust, encouragement, constructive feedback, consideration of individual needs, and opportunities for skill development. Feeling heard, supported, and included appeared to strengthen confidence and involvement.

However, participative coaching does not require athletes to make every decision. Rather, it involves meaningful athlete participation while allowing coaches to maintain appropriate leadership responsibilities. Overall, a communicative, inclusive, supportive, and structured coaching environment may contribute to athletes' athletic, academic, emotional, and personal development.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, coaches should promote open communication by giving athletes regular opportunities to express their opinions, concerns, and suggestions. They should also involve athletes in appropriate decisions regarding training, schedules, and strategies while maintaining their leadership responsibilities. Coaches are encouraged to consider athletes' academic responsibilities, individual abilities, physical limitations, and personal circumstances when planning training activities. Constructive feedback, encouragement, structured drills, practice games, and opportunities to demonstrate skills should be provided to help athletes improve and develop confidence. At the same time, appropriate discipline should be maintained through clear expectations regarding punctuality, preparation, training behavior, and team responsibilities. Universities and athletic organizations should provide coach-development programs focusing on communication, participative leadership, positive coach-athlete relationships, and holistic athlete development. Coaches should also recognize academic, emotional, and personal concerns that may affect athletes and refer them to appropriate support services when necessary. Finally, future researchers are encouraged to include student-athletes from different universities, sports, regions, and competitive levels and consider mixed-method or quantitative approaches to further examine the relationships among participative coaching, confidence, motivation, self-efficacy, performance, and well-being.

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Corresponding Author: **Cris Lei C. De Guzman**, Central Luzon State University.

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