



Effective Communication Between The Coach And Tunas Muda Bengkulu Team In Building Good Relationships

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Abstract. Effective communication is the process of delivering messages precisely so that they can be clearly understood by the message recipient. In various contexts, both personal and professional, effective communication plays a significant role because it can influence the outcomes of interactions and relationships between individuals. The purpose of this research is to understand effective communication between coaches and Tunas Muda Bengkulu Team in building good relationships. This research is of qualitative type. The theory used is the theory of effective communication according to Devito. The results of this study indicate that, first, openness: the coach of Tunas Muda Bengkulu Team prioritizes open, clear, and supportive communication, which helps build trust and create a collaborative atmosphere within the team. Second, empathy: the coach builds effective communication through an open and honest approach, listening to the players' problems and hopes. Third, supportive attitude: the coach supports the team's morale, especially in difficult situations, by providing clear directions and motivational words, helping the team stay focused and enthusiastic. Additionally, support from teammates, who strengthen each other, enhances a positive atmosphere and builds the team's mental strength to face challenges on the field. Fourth, a positive attitude: the coach gives constructive criticism in a supportive manner, beginning with appreciation for the players' efforts to maintain their spirit. Fifth, equality: in the relationship between coach and players, fair treatment does not always mean the same treatment for everyone. The coach may give more attention to players who have important roles in the team's strategy, but this is done for the overall interest of the team, not favoritism. Thus, effective communication between the coach and Tunas Muda Bengkulu Team in building good relationships can serve as a reference for the application of effective communication theory according to Devito.

Keywords: *Effective Communication, Good Relationships, Coaches and Teams*

INTRODUCTION

Football is widely regarded as one of the most popular and influential sports in Indonesia. As a national passion, football has transcended its function as a mere recreational activity; it has become a cultural phenomenon that unites individuals across generational, gender, and socioeconomic divides (Heryanto, 2015). In the Indonesian context, football is more than a sport—it is a powerful social force that fosters unity, pride, and identity among its followers. It serves not only as a medium for physical well-being and entertainment but also as an arena for achieving national and international recognition. However, the accomplishments of a football team are not determined solely by the physical and technical abilities of its players. The leadership and communication competence of the coach play an equally, if not more, critical role in shaping team performance (Smith & Smoll, 2007). The coach assumes a multifaceted position within a football team, functioning not only as a strategist and technician but also as a communicator, mentor, and motivator. A successful coach must possess the ability to convey instructions clearly, foster emotional connections, and nurture a sense of trust and cooperation within the team. According to Jowett and Cockerill (2003), the coach-athlete relationship is

central to athletic development, and effective communication is the cornerstone of this relationship. A coach's role extends beyond providing tactical guidance; it includes building a training environment that is psychologically safe and emotionally supportive, which in turn affects players' motivation, discipline, and commitment to team goals.

Effective communication in this context is not a one-dimensional process. It involves both verbal and non-verbal cues, active listening, mutual feedback, and emotional resonance. Devito (2011) emphasizes five core principles of effective interpersonal communication—openness, empathy, supportiveness, positivity, and equality—all of which are indispensable in the dynamic interaction between a coach and their players. Openness allows for honest dialogue, fostering an environment where players feel safe expressing their needs and concerns. Empathy helps the coach to understand and validate players' perspectives, while supportiveness and positivity help build confidence and morale. Finally, equality ensures that every player, regardless of skill level or status, is treated with respect and consideration, thereby promoting a cohesive team culture.

Nevertheless, implementing these principles is often fraught with challenges. Miscommunications can arise due to unclear instructions, inappropriate tone, lack of emotional sensitivity, or misinterpretation of intentions. These barriers are not trivial—they can disrupt team harmony and hinder performance (Weinberg & Gould, 2014). Based on preliminary observations conducted with the Tunas Muda Bengkulu Football Team, it was found that communication between the coach and players was often suboptimal.

Instances of confusion during training sessions, visible emotional detachment among some players, and inconsistent feedback from the coach point toward deeper interpersonal challenges that, if unresolved, could affect both individual and team outcomes. Given these observations, this research seeks to explore and analyze the patterns of communication employed by the coach of Tunas Muda Bengkulu in managing his players.

Employing a qualitative approach, the study investigates the extent to which the principles of effective interpersonal communication are integrated into daily training routines and competitive interactions. More specifically, it focuses on the interpersonal strategies used by the coach to foster trust, convey expectations, resolve conflicts, and enhance motivation among team members.

This research is significant both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it contributes to the growing literature on interpersonal communication in sports psychology and organizational behavior. Although considerable research has explored communication in corporate and educational contexts, studies focusing on athletic environments—especially in developing countries such as Indonesia—remain limited (Jowett, 2017).

Practically, the findings may serve as a guide for coaches, sports educators, and team managers to develop more effective communication strategies that can improve team dynamics and player satisfaction. The implications extend beyond football; they can be adapted to other team-based sports and even organizational settings where leadership and communication intersect.

In conclusion, football is not just a game of physical prowess but a communication-rich environment that demands emotional intelligence, interpersonal skill, and leadership acuity. The relationship between coach and player, built on effective communication, serves as the bedrock of any successful team. By understanding and applying the principles of openness, empathy, supportiveness, positivity, and equality, coaches can foster a team culture that is not only performance-oriented but also emotionally resilient and psychologically safe. This research aspires to offer insights that can enhance the practice of coaching in Indonesia and inspire future investigations into the human dynamics of sport.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Devito's Theory of Effective Interpersonal Communication

Joseph A. Devito (2011) outlines five key principles of effective interpersonal communication: openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality. These principles serve as critical guidelines for building and maintaining constructive interpersonal relationships, particularly in emotionally intensive and goal-oriented environments such as competitive sports teams.

1. Openness encourages honest, transparent dialogue between communicators, enabling both coaches and players to express concerns, goals, and feedback without fear of judgment.
2. Empathy involves the ability to understand and share another person's feelings or perspectives, which is crucial for coaches seeking to connect with players on a deeper emotional level.
3. Supportiveness refers to behaviors that convey affirmation and encouragement, helping to create a psychologically safe environment for learning and growth.
4. Positiveness includes optimistic language and feedback strategies that inspire confidence and reinforce effort.
5. Equality ensures that all team members are treated fairly, regardless of their role or status, thereby fostering mutual respect and a sense of belonging.

According to Devito, these principles form the foundation of successful interpersonal interactions in any context and are particularly valuable in structured group settings where teamwork and trust are essential (Devito, 2011).

Interpersonal Communication in Sports Psychology

The second theoretical basis derives from the domain of sports psychology, where communication is recognized not merely as an exchange of information but as a critical psychological tool. Interpersonal communication in sports involves verbal and non-verbal exchanges that shape emotional states, clarify goals, and influence performance (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003). This theory emphasizes the relational dynamics between coaches and athletes, particularly focusing on how trust, closeness, commitment, and complementarity are fostered through consistent and meaningful communication. Jowett (2017) argues that the coach-athlete relationship is central to athletic success and must be built on a strong communication foundation. Miscommunication, lack of clarity, or emotionally distant interactions can lead to confusion, reduced motivation, and even conflict within the team. Conversely, a communicative environment characterized by clarity, empathy, and responsiveness can significantly enhance individual and collective performance. Moreover, feedback mechanisms—a core element in this theory—allow athletes to adjust their behavior, improve their skills, and feel acknowledged by their coaches. This reciprocal loop is essential in developing mutual understanding and fostering a growth mindset within the team (Weinberg & Gould, 2014).

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach to explore the dynamics of effective communication between the coach and players in fostering strong interpersonal relationships within the Tunas Muda Bengkulu Football Team. The qualitative method is chosen because it allows the researcher to gain a deep understanding of the participants' experiences, perspectives, and interactions. Specifically, this research adopts a descriptive qualitative design aimed at providing a detailed portrayal of the phenomenon under investigation—namely, the principles of effective communication as outlined by Devito (2011), including openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality. Participants were selected using

purposive sampling, where informants were deliberately chosen based on their relevance to the study's objectives. The informants consisted of one coach, serving as the primary communicator within the team; two players with distinct roles and experiences—one senior player and one newcomer; and one support staff member involved in the team's operational activities. This selection strategy was intended to capture a diverse range of perspectives regarding communication practices within the team.

Data collection was conducted using three primary techniques: observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observations were carried out by directly monitoring interactions between the coach and players during training sessions and matches to identify patterns in both verbal and non-verbal communication. Semi-structured interviews were held with the coach, players, and support staff to gain deeper insights into their experiences, perceptions, and challenges in team communication. Additionally, documentation such as training notes, team rosters, and photographs of team activities served as supplementary data to enrich and validate findings from observations and interviews. The data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which involves three key stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. In the data reduction phase, relevant information related to effective communication was selected and simplified. The data display stage involved organizing the findings into narratives, matrices, or visual diagrams to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions were drawn and verified to ensure the validity and accuracy of the results. To ensure data credibility, this study applied triangulation techniques. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing data obtained from the coach, players, and support staff, while methodological triangulation was achieved by integrating observation, interview, and documentation techniques. The research was conducted on-site at Tunas Muda Bengkulu, a local football team actively participating in Liga 3 competitions. This team was selected due to its unique communication dynamics and strong commitment to youth player development.

RESULTS

The findings of this study indicate that effective communication between the coach and players of the Tunas Muda Bengkulu Football Team plays a critical role in building harmonious relationships and supporting overall team performance. Through the analysis of interview transcripts, direct observation, and supporting documents, five core components of effective communication—as identified by Devito (2011)—were found to be consistently implemented in the coach–player interactions. These components include openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality. Each of these aspects contributes uniquely to the internal dynamics of the team.

Openness

One of the most evident characteristics in the communication process is the coach's openness in both conveying instructions and receiving input from the players. During interviews, players expressed appreciation for the coach's willingness to listen to their suggestions regarding match strategies and training adjustments. Notably, openness was not limited to tactical discussions; it extended to personal matters that may influence the players' mental or emotional readiness. The inclusive communication style created a psychologically safe environment in which players felt respected and heard. This aligns with Devito's (2011) notion that openness facilitates mutual understanding and promotes transparency in interpersonal relationships.

Empathy

The coach demonstrated a high level of empathy, especially when players faced emotional or physical challenges. This was reflected in personal coaching approaches where the coach acknowledged the players' feelings and provided moral support. For instance, during periods of personal difficulty, such as academic stress or family issues, the coach offered flexible responses and motivational guidance. This emotional sensitivity helped foster a deeper level of trust and connection between the coach and his players. Such empathy enhances not only psychological well-being but also commitment and performance, as supported by Jowett (2017) in the context of athlete-coach relationships.

Supportiveness

Supportiveness was expressed through both verbal encouragement and constructive criticism. Observations revealed that the coach often praised player efforts, regardless of the outcome, which reinforced a growth-oriented mindset. In challenging match situations, the coach provided not only technical instructions but also emotional encouragement to maintain player morale. Furthermore, the coach actively facilitated teamwork by recognizing collaborative efforts, thereby reinforcing a culture of mutual support among teammates. This reflects Devito's (2011) argument that supportive communication fosters motivation and emotional security in team settings.

Positiveness

A positive communication tone was consistently observed throughout training and team meetings. The coach strategically began feedback sessions with expressions of appreciation, followed by areas for improvement. This approach avoided discouragement and instead promoted reflection and self-improvement. Moreover, the coach deliberately avoided using negative or harsh tones, which could potentially lower team spirit. This aligns with the findings of Robbins and Judge (2013), who suggest that constructive feedback delivered positively can enhance employee—or in this case, athlete—engagement and performance.

Equality

Although each player has a different role on the field, the coach maintained fairness in treatment and decision-making. Players were given equal opportunities to participate in training drills and were rotated regularly to develop broader skill sets. Even when star players received tactical emphasis, the coach ensured that others did not feel marginalized. Equality was also visible in how playing time, responsibilities, and recognition were distributed across the team. This helped establish a sense of justice and collective belonging, which Devito (2011) identifies as fundamental to relational equity in interpersonal communication.

Communication Barriers Identified

Despite the overall positive implementation of effective communication principles, some barriers were noted during observations. At times, the coach's vocal intonation, especially when giving urgent instructions, was perceived as aggressive by certain players. While the intent may have been to assert authority or urgency, it occasionally led to misinterpretation and emotional discomfort. Additionally, discrepancies between verbal commands and accompanying body language sometimes caused confusion, particularly among newer players less accustomed to the coach's communication style. These barriers are consistent with previous studies (e.g., Widodo et al., 2021) that emphasize the importance of congruence between verbal and non-verbal cues in minimizing misunderstandings within team communication.

DISCUSSION

In conclusion, this study confirms that effective communication—anchored in the principles of openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality—plays a pivotal role in fostering interpersonal harmony and enhancing team performance within the Tunas Muda Bengkulu Football Team. The coach's ability to apply these principles has positively influenced the team's internal dynamics, creating a collaborative, inclusive, and motivating environment. These findings are consistent with the theoretical perspectives of Devito (2011), Robbins and Judge (2013), and prior empirical studies by Agustian and Yahya (2018), all of which emphasize the transformative impact of effective coach–athlete communication on performance and psychological well-being.

However, the study also reveals that despite the overall effectiveness of the coach's communication style, certain barriers—such as misinterpretation of tone and limited feedback mechanisms—still pose challenges to fully optimized interaction. These issues underline the importance of continuous reflection and adaptation in communication practices, particularly in emotionally charged environments like competitive sports.

Moving forward, enhancing clarity in verbal delivery and increasing the use of feedback loops can further strengthen communication and reduce misunderstanding. Ultimately, the integration of communication theory into everyday coaching practice proves essential in shaping not only athletic performance but also emotional resilience and team cohesion. By consistently embodying the principles of effective communication, coaches can build more engaged, confident, and cohesive teams—an imperative for both current performance and long-term player development.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, effective communication between the coach and players of the Tunas Muda Bengkulu Football Team plays a significant role in fostering positive relationships that support overall team performance. The study reveals that the coach's communication practices reflect the five key principles of effective interpersonal communication as outlined by Devito (2011): openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality. The coach demonstrates openness by encouraging players to express their opinions and by being receptive to feedback, thereby creating an inclusive communication environment.

Additionally, the coach's empathetic approach—acknowledging the emotional conditions and needs of players—helps build trust and emotional closeness. Supportive behavior is evident through motivational efforts and clear guidance, which foster a positive team atmosphere and strengthen collaboration. Constructive criticism and recognition of players' efforts boost their morale and self-confidence, while the emphasis on fairness reinforces a sense of justice within the team, even when strategic focus must be placed on certain key players.

LIMITATION

In light of the study's results, it is recommended that the coach further develop communication skills, particularly in managing vocal tone and delivering messages more clearly to reduce potential misunderstandings. A more personalized communication approach is also encouraged, allowing the coach to better understand each player's individual needs and tailor communication strategies accordingly.

Furthermore, the coach is advised to employ feedback mechanisms more consistently to ensure that messages are accurately received and interpreted. Players, on the other hand, are encouraged to take a more active role in providing feedback to the coach in order to establish a more effective two-way communication process. Additionally, developing interpersonal

communication skills among players will help strengthen team cooperation and overall performance.

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