

# PEDAGOGICAL COMPETENCIES OF COACHES

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## Abstract

The pedagogical competencies of coaches have recently become the focal topic of sports pedagogy which aims to maximise the role of coaches in the process of education of children and youth. A pedagogically competent coach is expected to possess and apply knowledge and skills, but also personal characteristics in order to be a positive role model with whom children and youth can identify, i.e., a role model who is gladly admired and respected by children. The aim of this paper, based on previous research, is to analyse the risk factors which directly and indirectly affect the educational outcomes of children if their coaches do not possess adequate pedagogical competencies. In addition, the authors state and explain the pedagogical competencies that coaches should possess and continuously improve. The authors also indicate the harmful effects of the coaches' application of inadequate pedagogical procedures on the psychophysical development and sports achievements of children. A pedagogically incompetent coach can negatively affect the formation of the child's personality, moral and social development. Poor relationships between coaches and children often result in children's emotional, psychosomatic, and social problems, which may even lead to their giving up on sport altogether. In the conclusion of the paper, the authors propose the development of strategies and the provision of multiple support to coaches throughout the education system, as well as continuous insight, monitoring and counselling by external experts. This is the only way to create the preconditions for the optimal psychophysical development of children and their athletic and personal achievements.

Keywords: athletes, coaches, education, pedagogical competencies, sport.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Training practice should be conducted in adequate conditions, under the expert supervision and integrated engagement of highly educated experts of various profiles such as kinesiologists, sports psychologists, pedagogues, nutritionists, doctors, and others. Only if these conditions are met, we can ensure a stimulating environment for the proper development of the psychophysical characteristics of young people and other athletes. This is the only way to create a platform for a favourable transformation of all their anthropological characteristics and athletic achievements.

Sports success depends on a number of endogenous and exogenous factors. The specification equation in sport introduced us with the mathematical additive model which determines the exact factors that influence sports success. It is assumed that each anthropological feature participates in a particular sport to a certain proportion. According to Orlick (1999), crucial endogenous success factors in sport include commitment, self-control, and anticipation. The reason why commitment is nominated as the first endogenous factor lies in the fact that commitment is not a guarantee that someone will succeed, but they will certainly not succeed in achieving top sports results if they are not committed to their goal. Furthermore, in the conditions of a game or a match, if there is no balance in the control of the emotional and mental state, the athlete will not achieve the results that they are potentially capable of achieving. Having self-control means overcoming fear and/or avoiding euphoria. Hence, the first two factors that are assumed to be crucial in shaping a top athlete stem from personality traits. The third success factor is anticipation or prediction of situations in the game, which belongs to the cognitive abilities of athletes. Therefore, it can be concluded that psychosocial factors play a crucial role in shaping athletes. In order for athletes to completely utilise the potentials they have in the cognitive-conative sphere, they need to have access to external factors which are primary in shaping top and other athletes. Wylleman et al. (2002) and Karković (1998) state that parental support, communication skills and empathy are the most important exogenous factors. A coach must possess highly developed communication skills and empathy as part of pedagogical competencies because, in such circumstances, the athlete will transform his/her potential into quality traits and achievements more efficiently. All athletes should be provided with the opportunity to be surrounded by coaches with adequate pedagogical competencies. That is the only way to create a society in which young people will have the desired psychosomatic development, with the primary purpose of preserving and improving their overall health.

There is also an educational component in sport. Negativities that occur in the sports arena can be manifested onto the societal arena. That is a two-way process. In the school system, it is impossible for a teacher to work without formal pedagogical, psychological, and didactic qualifications. In addition, there are professionals in education that collaborate with teachers and parents, provide continuous review and monitoring of the educational process and provide adequate training on the structure and design of the educational process. In sport, coaches often work without formal pedagogical-psychological qualifications, and there is no established system of review, monitoring and counselling regarding their pedagogical activities. For example, according to the Split Sports Association, about 50% of coaches have no formal pedagogical or psychological qualification.<sup>1</sup> This raises the question of why in the system of sports which is subsidised by the state there is no formal review or monitoring of pedagogical standards during training practice or pedagogical counselling and professional training which would involve young athletes and their parents, in addition to coaches.

A study conducted at the George Washington University (Visek et al., 2015) indicates that the second most important reason out of 81 reasons to engage in sports in children was the coach's respectful attitude towards all participants of the sports environment. Interestingly, winning was listed as far as the 48th reason.

## 2 THE ROLE OF THE COACH

Sport is an extremely important activity for a child as it contributes to their motor and mental development (Barić and Horga, 2006). It should be noted that sport can influence the formation of the child's personality (cooperation, assertiveness, responsibility, perseverance), the development of moral (respect for the principles of fair play, indicating how certain behaviours may harm others) and social characteristics (helping others, sharing, cooperation, respecting the rules of the game without deceiving, cheating, or hurting the opponent) (Barić and Horga, 2006).

It has been found that athletes with whom coaches maintain good relationships are less prone to antisocial behaviour, and that they are at a high level of sociomoral reasoning that encourages prosocial behaviour (Rutten et al., 2007).

It has also been found that a positive social climate and quality relationships between coaches and children are associated with a higher level of enjoyment in sport and their intention to continue practicing sport, as well as creating better friendships with peers (Gardner, Magee and Vella, 2016). Said authors state that positive relationships between coaches and athletes are a key component of the social climate, and associate it with a number of motivational outcomes, including greater persistence of young people in sport. According to Albert Bandura's theory of aggression as a learned behaviour, the models of behaviour a child observes in adults and experiences from them are often applied in interaction with their peers (Alajbeg and Kovačević, 2019). For this reason, it is extremely important how the coach treats children, because it serves as a model (role model) for them to treat both adults and peers. Rottensteiner, Konttinen, & Laakso (2015) highlight the factors that contribute to poor coach-athlete relationships, as well as youth's withdrawal from sports, namely: coach-athlete conflict, control and autocratic coaching style, lack of encouragement, and excessive emphasis on winning.

### 2.1 The coach's relationship with children and parents

In order to shape a child's personality through sport and to encourage their quality moral and social development, a good relationship between coaches and children is crucial. The coach should enable children to experience positive experiences through sport, because this ensures quality educational outcomes (Barić and Horga, 2006). The process of training is also a process of education, as this relationship is not linear, but it represents a mutual relationship between the coach and the child that must be based on respect (Miljković, 2009). In the research conducted by Milojević et al. (2016), it is noted that the coach's leadership style is an important factor in shaping the socio-emotional climate in training. Coach's leadership style, their way of defining the goals of the athlete, and the values and attitudes they promote, greatly influence the child's active interest in sport (Barić and Horga, 2006). Miljković (2009) states that according to the traditional classification, there are three dominant styles of coaching. Firstly, the **autocratic style**, where the coach decides and defines what needs to be done and how it will be executed, and what goals should be achieved. The athlete is not involved in the decision-making process, but they may ask if something is not clear to them, for example, the purpose of a certain exercise. In the **democratic (authoritative) style**, the coach determines the abilities and

<sup>1</sup> Data officially requested and received by e-mail from the Split Sports Association.

needs of the athlete, encourages suggestions, makes decisions based on these suggestions, determines the training regime, and decides what to do and how to do it in cooperation with the athlete.

In the **laissez-faire style** (or lenient style), the coach has no requirements from athletes, or these requirements are random, they do not work according to a specific plan and programme, and they lack work structure or clearly set goals (which is why this should not be referred to as coaching).

Along with the coaching styles, another important factor is a mutually respectful relationship between the coach and the parents. In addition to said mutual respect, the coach should clarify at the beginning which topics they can and will discuss with the parents, and which not. According to Brown (2003), acceptable topics are: psychological and physical treatment of the child, helping the child and stimulating their progress, and the child's behaviour. Some of the issues that should not be discussed with parents include training schedule, coaching methods, and the work and behaviour of other children and other coaches.

### 3 PEDAGOGICAL COMPETENCIES

Coaches are frequently not even aware of how their behaviour affects children and parents, and what impression they leave. In order for a coach to have a positive effect on the development and athletic achievement of children and young people, they must develop and improve their own pedagogical competencies through continuous pedagogical training (Grk, 2010). Bezinović (1988) explains competence (Lat. *competere* – to benefit, to aspire to something) as an area in which a person has knowledge and experience, i.e., in which a person is qualified or trained to evaluate something or work. Since the previous research in the context of pedagogical competencies has mainly focused on teachers, there is scarce research on the pedagogical competencies of coaches. However, the pedagogical competencies that a teacher possesses are certainly desirable for the coaches as well because coaching is a teaching process with all the characteristics of educational work. Therefore, the coach, as well as a pedagogically competent teacher, is expected to put their professional (pedagogical) knowledge, skills, and competences in the service of their pedagogical endeavour, and to serve as a role model, specifically a positive role model with whom their students (Ljubetić and Kostović Vranješ, 2008) or the children they train may identify.

Adequate professional qualifications of coaches are the basic precondition for quality work in sport (Čokorilo, Grk and Kuljić, 2011). Said authors state that only a coach who possesses pedagogical competencies, who thinks critically about themselves and the training practice, who changes and improves their behaviour and creates a stimulating environment can expect sports success of children and youth. The management of a sports organisation plays an important role in the development of pedagogical competencies of coaches and their continuous professional improvement.

Grk (2010) states that in the context of pedagogical competencies of a coach, there is a distinction between: a) unconsciously pedagogically incompetent, b) consciously pedagogically incompetent, c) consciously pedagogically competent, and d) unconsciously pedagogically competent coach.

An unconsciously pedagogically incompetent coach does not acknowledge that they would be more successful in their work with better pedagogical education. A consciously pedagogically incompetent coach realises that they would be more successful in their work with better pedagogical education but chooses not to (not yet, at least) expand their competences. A consciously pedagogically competent coach opts for pedagogical education as part of the job, whenever they feel the need for it in their work. Unconsciously pedagogically competent coach is a coach to whom pedagogical education and training are implied. Recently, the awareness of the need to develop pedagogical competencies of coaches has become the central focus of sports pedagogy, as it tries to maximise its role in the education of children and youth. According to Jurčić (2014), pedagogical competencies can be classified into eight dimensions: a) personal, b) communication, c) analytical (reflective), d) social, e) emotional, f) intercultural, d) developmental, and e) problem-solving skills. There is another competence that should be added to these pedagogical competencies – creating a pleasant socio-emotional climate in training. Each of these dimensions is explained in more detail below.

#### 3.1 Personal competence

Educating a student means guiding and regulating their development, respecting their individual characteristics. In order for a coach to guide and regulate the educational development of children, they must possess certain personal competences such as: empathy, respect, understanding, flexibility, approachability, caring, enthusiasm, professional ethos (willingness to take responsibility for success),

good disposition, calmness, patience, fairness, objectivity, consistency and the ability to exhibit appropriate behaviour in a particular situation (Jurčić, 2014). The coach should avoid punishing, ridiculing, insulting and any other form of negative reactions while working with young athletes, as this has an extremely adverse effect on the development of their self-esteem, their self-confidence and sense of competence (Barić and Horga, 2006).

### **3.2 Communication competence**

This competence includes a set of social skills of initiating, establishing, and maintaining a dialogue with athletes, where information, opinions, views and ideas are shared by exchanging verbal and non-verbal symbols (Jurčić, 2014). It is recommended to nurture direct, authentic, and open communication with a lot of positive examples and suggestions for changing undesirable forms of behaviour and encouraging the desirable ones. It is also important to respect children's feelings, acknowledge their individual differences and avoid labelling (e.g., referring to someone as inept) which can have significant negative and long-term consequences on children's development and self-image (Barić and Horga, 2006).

### **3.3 Social competence**

This competence involves the art of establishing relationships with children, parents, colleagues and the management. Social competence is based on one's own ability to cooperate and work in a team, courtesy and kindness, ability to overcome conflict, tolerance, authority, approachability, popularity, solving common problems and similar items (Jurčić, 2014). The coach can significantly help children and young people by giving them advice on how to behave in a team, by indicating inappropriate behaviours or statements, and by supporting and praising prosocial behaviours in children (Barić and Horga, 2006).

### **3.4 Analytical competence**

Jurčić (2014) states that this competence is manifested in the coach's evaluation of their own work, i.e., the extent to which the children understand their tasks, whether they are motivated, whether the realisation and achievement of set goals is going well and whether they are directed towards a quality educational process. Therefore, analytical competence is a practical view of our own work and checking whether the work is evolving as initially planned (Kovačević and Mušanović, 2013).

### **3.5 Emotional competence**

Arnold (2008) indicates that emotional competence is an individual's ability to become aware of their own and others' emotions, i.e., an individual's ability to cope with their own issues (self-awareness, self-control and motivation) and the ability to master relationships with other people (empathy and social skills).

Children in sport experience a variety of emotions, varying in intensity, quality and duration. Of all emotions, the most common are fear, anger, rage, sadness and, of course, joy (Ivanišević, 2012). It is, therefore, important that the coach stresses the importance of self-regulation of emotions to children and how to deal with successes and failures.

### **3.6 Intercultural competence**

This competence is manifested in mutual understanding, respect, acknowledgement and equal cooperation. It is based on the acknowledgement of different lifestyles, different beliefs, traditions, customs, and similar items (Jurčić, 2014). Being interculturally educated means understanding each other, acknowledging each other, helping each other, being open and sensitive to differences, and being able to communicate tolerably (Previšić, 2009).

### **3.7 Developmental competence**

A pedagogically competent coach should critically evaluate their own pedagogical and educational work, which means that they should not remain at the same level of acquired knowledge, competences, values and motivation, but strive to upgrade them with new knowledge, competences, values and new motivation through continuous learning and professional improvement (Jurčić, 2014). In this respect, entities in charge of continuous training of coaches including the management of clubs, state and local

authorities, and experts and scientists in higher education institutions play an extremely important role as organisers and coordinators of various forms of professional training of coaches.

### 3.8 Problem-solving skills

Organisation and management of a quality training process requires problem-solving skills. For a variety of reasons, communication difficulties can arise between coaches and athletes. Miljković (2009) lists some causes of communication difficulties: the perception of a trained person may differ from the perception of the coach; the coach may have problems accurately expressing their intentions, and it often happens that emotions interfere with the communication process in sport, or the athlete and the coach are at different stages of communication and understanding. It is for these reasons that the coach should develop verbal and non-verbal communication skills, give positively toned feedback, pay equal attention to all athletes, make sure that athletes actively listen while the coach speaks. In order for a coach to acquire good communication skills and conflict resolution skills, expert training is definitely required in order to adapt their communication style to different styles and age groups of athletes.

### 3.9 Creating the socio-emotional climate

The standard practices of the institution and the climate surrounding it are two aspects of the work of the institution that strongly influence the daily life and work within each institution (Ljubetić and Bubić, 2015). A positive atmosphere allows each individual to develop their own sense of value and dignity, while simultaneously creating a sense of belonging to social communities (Freiberg and Stein, 1999 according to Ljubetić and Bubić, 2015). Research to date has found that a more favourable atmosphere contributes to better achievements, better socio-emotional health, higher level of self-esteem, and less antisocial behaviour (Tubbs and Garner, 2008; Gregory et al., 2010). Motivating and encouraging children, giving optimistic expectations, accepting diversity, showing calmness and patience, creating opportunities for progress also contribute to a favourable atmosphere (Jurčić, 2014).

## 4 CONCLUSION

Upon reviewing previous research, it can be concluded that there are various anomalies in terms of insufficient pedagogical competencies of coaches. Some studies have identified and explained that in the environment of pedagogically competent coaches there are a number of positive outcomes, both educational and athletic. It has been found that a large number of coaches do not have formal pedagogical qualifications, which is highly concerning from the point of view of the profession.

It is necessary to further investigate the status of pedagogical competencies of coaches, and to define the needs for optimising pedagogical work in sports clubs. Many coaches by default behave according to the model of transgenerational educational methods, which in no way contributes to a quality training process.

Therefore, competent entities should create and monitor pedagogical conditions in sports clubs, as this is a guarantee that young athletes will gladly attend training practice. It is necessary to ensure that coaches have access to and attend additional pedagogical training, continuous participation in seminars, workshops and scientific-professional conferences. This requirement is essential, in addition to the system of continuous review, monitoring and counselling within pedagogical activities, because this is the only way to create the preconditions for optimal psychophysical development of athletes.

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