

# Effect of Coaching Behaviors on Team Cohesion and Performance in Iraqi Premier League

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## **Abstract**

*The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of coaching behaviors on team cohesion and performance in Iraqi Premier League in 2017-2018 season. It is descriptive research of correlation type, and field survey was used for data collection. The population includes 440 players in the form of 20 teams that 205 players choose as a sample based on Morgan's table. In order to collect data, Coaching Behavior Questionnaire (CBQ; Martin & Barnes, 1999) and Team Cohesion Questionnaire (GEQ; Carron, Widmeyer, & Brawley, 1985) were used. For measuring performance of Iraqi football teams, their rank in the table was used as criterion. Instruments reliability was obtained using Cronbach's alpha (coaching behavior: 0.75, cohesion: 0.83). Research tool validity was confirmed using expert ideas and confirmatory factor analysis in AMOS software. Descriptive statistics (Central tendency, dispersion) and inferential statistics (Structural Equation Modeling-AMOS software) were used for data analysis. Results showed that positive reactive coaching behaviors had significant impact on team cohesion and performance. However, normal coaching behavior had no significant impact, and negative reactive coaching behavior had no significant impact on the team performance.*

**Keywords:** Team cohesion, coaching behaviors, team performance, premier league

## **Introduction**

The athlete is the main human resource in the sport and she/he is its real producer and consumer. Coaches have the highest influence on the athletes, and the key relationship in the sport is relationship between coaches and athletes, which plays significant role in social and sport progress of athletes (Philippe et al., 2011). The relationship between the coach and athlete is defined as the situation in which feelings, thoughts, and behavior of coaches and athletes are mutually and greatly connected (Rhind et al., 2012). Coaching is a face-to-face leadership, which approaches individuals with different experiences, talents, and interests to each other and encourages them to take step for accepting the responsibility, and continue their progress. Coaching does not mean assigning techniques and thinking of the best program, rather it is paying real attention to the players (Martens, 1985). As mentioned, the coach has significant influence on their team, and their leadership style and behavioral pattern considerably affect the performance and efficiency of the players. Even if leadership term is not used by the coaches, their tasks, such as advanced and organized activities, require applying leadership. Because coaches are engaged in such tasks as planning, organization, control, coordination, and influence on players for achievement of the team goals. In fact, they perform the same tasks of the leader by formulating these policies in the group processes (Case, 1984). Range of coaching behaviors in the research, covers normal and reactive behaviors of coaches. Natural or normal behaviors are those that are represented by the coaches in reaction to a specific activity, and are not pre-specified. Either these reactions are related to the game or they are irrelevant. Reactive behaviors of coaches are responses that emerge immediately after the behavior of the player or team. These reactions are provided toward both the

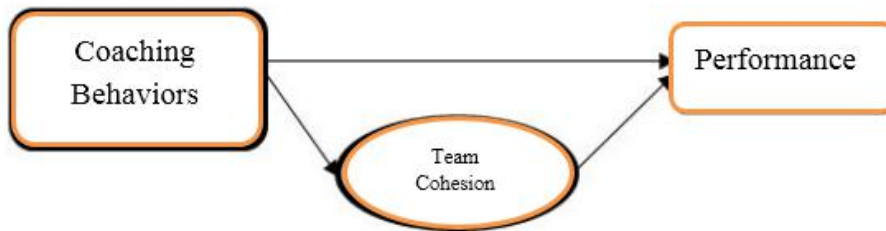
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positive and poor performance of the player and performance of part of the team (Mills et al., 2007). Meanwhile, coaching and leadership of team fields is interrelated to such concepts as cohesion and unity of the members, which enforces the leader or coach to identify the factors that enhance such cohesion and unity. The athletes of the team fields can transform the collective will to success or failure, so the abilities and weaknesses of the group are also effective in the performance of an athlete (Azad Fada, 2012). In group sports, people interact with each other, and success comes when team members work in an efficient and coordinated manner, and it is here that the role of coach as a leader and coordinator is further enhanced, and his coaching style plays a key role in cohesion and coordination (Moradi, 2006). Nowadays, with the increase in investment in professional sports, improvement in athletic performance has been increasingly taken into consideration. Sports psychologists believe that the psychological variables of athletes play a key role in individual and team performance. However, team variables cannot be ignored in the team's performance and success, as in team fields, the level of team performance is influenced by the status of interactions and player relationships. Studies show that team cohesion is one of the important predictors of the sports teams' success (Ramzaninezhad et al., 2009). Cohesion is the term that is used for describing inter-personal attraction feeling and feeling attachment to the group by the members as well as tendency to stay in the group. Group cohesion is defined as follows: "A dynamic process that is manifested in the team tendency to consistency and unity together to pursue their goals and intentions." It is evident that the coach should consider the athlete's behavior in both physical and mental aspects, and never shows excessive attention to one and neglect the other aspect (Carron, 1985). In this research, team cohesion is considered as a dynamic process in tendency of the group for staying loyal to each other, unity in achievement of effective goals, and meeting emotional needs of the members in group cohesion and task cohesion. Group cohesion contains social cohesion and task cohesion. Social cohesion means inter-personal attraction among the group teams, so that the group allows achievement of personal goals, and task cohesion means objective evaluation of athletes about the coordinated attempt with their team work, or it shows the extent by which the team and individuals achieve their goals (Carron, 1985). Reviewing the models and previous studies shows that factors affecting team performance and success can be summarized into three variables as players' characteristics, coaches' characteristics, and team factors. Players' characteristics such as age, experience, motivation, anxiety, and self-confidence; coaches' characteristics such as coaching level, age, experience, leadership style, and coaching behavior; and team factors such as past successes of the team or group, cohesion, and team self-confidence (Ronayne, 2004). Exploring performance of the first two groups for identifying their behavioral and functional characteristics in interpersonal and inter-group interactions and their awareness of their role in gaining desirable or undesirable outcomes, group unity and cohesion, and team dynamism and vitality lead to determination of optimal and effective performance criteria in the proper management of the sport clubs and the development of functional feedback to athletes and coaches, on the one hand, and creating positive social mobility and change, on the other hand (Nazarian Madavani, 2009). As evident from the definition of team term, a team is composed of a small set of individuals with complementary skills, which gather to realize shared goals, and all individuals are accountable toward the performance outcome of the team's members. Outcome of a team or athletes' attempts is specified by their performance. Each athlete considerably influences the team cohesion and ultimate performance by his personal characteristics. So that Chelladurai (1980) maintains that objective evaluation of the performance, which is calculated by calculation of win and loss percentage of the teams, reflects the team performance and it is influenced by other variables involved in the team outcomes such as ability of the competitor team, environmental conditions, and even the chance. Motivation for winning, the wish of success, and representing such performance beyond the limits and conditions are a prominent feature of professional sport. Professional athletes must constantly strive to reach their peak performance and stay at the peak. To reach the peak of success, clubs, coaches, and players are committed to taking advantage of the time and facilities available. In team sports, the success of the team is result of efforts of all the members gathered together to achieve a common goal and the success is not only determined by the individual. In order to achieve high team performance, we need to be aware of the factors that influence the team's success (Chelladurai, 1980). Findings of previous studies indicate that the coach's behavior and experiences influence the team cohesion and performance (Chelladurai, 1980). Roach (2016) in his work studied impact of the head coach's experience on the team performance in USA National Football League, and found that the team performance is dramatically bad in the initial coaching short term of a coach (Roach, 2016). Paul et al. (2016) studied role of trust and team cohesion in relationship between effective coordination and virtual team performance. Their findings showed that personal trust and team cohesion mutually interact, and effective coordination improves the whole project performance through cohesion and trust (Paul et al., 2016). Tekleab et al. (2016) examined the functional task diversity impact on the team performance considering the roles of behavioral integration, team cohesion, and team

learning. Their findings showed that behavioral integration variable has modifying role in the relationship between functional task diversity and team cohesion, and team learning plays intermediating role in the relationship between team cohesion and team performance (Tekleab et al., 2016). Benson et al. (2016) investigated relationship between team cohesion and team performance in elite European youth athletes. They should when team cohesion, performance is controlled in the half-season, task, and social cohesion of the team at the end-season is effectively established (Benson et al., 2016). Chiniara et al. (2017) investigated that how servant leadership develops mental differentiation in the leader-member relationship quality, which can promotes team cohesion, and positively influences team task performance and organizational citizenship behavior (Chiniara et al., 2017). Hoseini Keshtan (2007) in Iranian Premier Soccer League showed that leadership style in exercise and education, democracy, social support and positive feedback are positively related to the cohesion, while autocratic style is negatively correlated with group cohesion. Considering the conceptual model of Smith and Smoll (2001) regarding effect of factors of correlation, team unity, coaching behaviors, and coaches' reaction to the perceived team player's responsibility towards team performance, the present study aimed to study the influence of coaching behaviors on the team performance with the mediator role of team cohesion.



**Figure 1. Research conceptual model**

## **Methodology**

Current research aims at investigating impact of coaching behaviors on team cohesion and performance in Iraqi football League. This descriptive research is correlation type research. Research statistical population included all players in the Iraqi Premier League in the form of 20 clubs (each club include 22 players) in 2017 - 2018. Statistical sample was considered 205 player according to Morgan's table. Research instruments included Coaching Behavior Questionnaire (CBQ; Martin & Barnes, 1999), which included 48 items of closed type, and was designed based on Likert five-point scale. This questionnaire was designed in order to evaluate perception of athletes about their coaches' behavior. Reliability of this tool was obtained as 0.75 by Cronbach's alpha. In order to measure cohesion, Group Environment Questionnaire (GEQ; Carron, Widmeyer, & Brawley, 1985) was used, which contained 18 items for social cohesion (2 subscales) and task cohesion (2 subscales) components. It is measured based on Likert five-point scale. Reliability of this tool was obtained as 0.83 by Cronbach's alpha coefficient. For verifying validity of the questionnaire, expert ideas, and confirmatory factor analysis was used. In order to evaluate variable of performance, the rank gained by the teams at the end of the season in table was used. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, tables, and diagrams) and inferential statistics (structural equation modeling (SEM)) were used for testing the proposed model and hypotheses. AMOS and SPSS 16 software were used in this research.

## **Procedure**

In this research, firstly authorities in Iraqi Football Federation were coordinated to obtain a permit to conduct the research. Given the research objectives, the time taken to collect data was considered in the return round of the 2017-2018 league games; hence, the players will have enough time to know their coaches. The researcher came to the site after obtaining a permit and coordinating with the coaches for agreement on the time and place of collecting the data. Following explaining

significance of the research subject, the way of completing the questionnaires, and insuring the players regarding confidentiality of the information, the questionnaires were distributed and then collected.

### Findings

Research findings showed that minimum and maximum age of players was 16 and 31 years old, respectively. 96 percent of the research population members had sport background fewer than 14 years. Highest and lowest history of presence in the league was 10 and 1 years. 70 percent of the research population had experience of attending in the league for fewer than 5 years. Mean age of research subjects was 21.72 years, mean sports experience was 7.23 years, and mean history of presence in the league was 3.58 years. Following data analysis, research descriptive statistics are summarized in the following tables.

**Table 1. Descriptive indexes related to the teams in the research**

	Sample	Mean	Estimate Standard Error	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Age	205	21.72	0.277	3.675	16	31
Sport background	205	7.23	0.281	3.729	2	20
Background in league	205	3.58	0.159	2.105	1	9

**Table 2. Description of statistical indexes related to coaching behavior components**

Factors	Sample	Mean	Estimate Standard Error	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Positive reactive coaching behavior	205	3.77	0.044	0.0583	1.94	3.31
Negative reactive coaching behavior	205	3.33	0.061	0.821	1.50	3.69
Normal coaching behavior	205	3.67	0.036	0.478	1.81	3.75
Team performance	205	12.94	0.453	6.011	4	23

Among triple coaching behaviors, highest mean was related to positive reactive behavior with mean of 3.77, and lowest mean was related to negative reactive behavior with mean of 3.33. Mean of normal behavior component was 3.67. Total mean of coaching behavior variable is 3.59, which is higher than theoretical mean with 3.

### Structural Equation Model

Structural Equation Model was used in AMOS software for investigating effect of coaching behaviors on research variables.

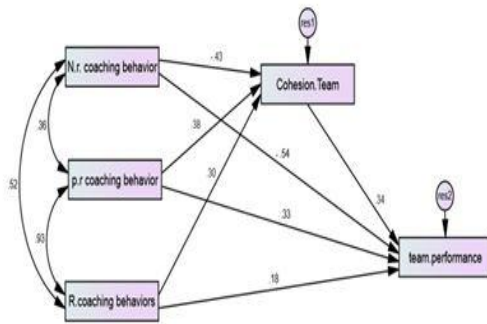


Figure 2. Impact of coaching behaviors on team cohesion and performance

Table 3. Structural model fit indexes

Index	Obtained value	Acceptable value
CMIN/DF	2.67	Below 3
RMSEA	0.073	Below 0.1
PNFI	0.812	Above 0.5
GFI	0.818	Above 0.8
AGFI	0.822	Above 0.8
NFI	0.902	Above 0.9
RFI	0.906	Above 0.9
CFI	0.925	Above 0.9
IFI	0.941	Above 0.9

Results in Table 3 indicate that Goodness Fit Index (GFI) is 0.818, which suggests acceptability of this value for optimal model fit. Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) is 0.822, which is above 0.8, thus the model enjoys acceptable fit. Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation (RMSEA) is 0.073, which is smaller than 0.1, and thus suggests confirmation of the research model. In addition, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) is 0.906, and Parsimonious Normed Fit Index (PNFI) is 0.812, which denote optimal fit and confirmation of research model.

Table 4. Testing research hypotheses

Negative reactive coaching behavior has significant impact on the team cohesion.	-0.430	-5.723	0.001	Supported
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Positive reactive coaching behavior has significant impact on the team cohesion.	0.382	3.204	0.001	Supported
Normal coaching behavior has significant impact on team cohesion.	301/0	7.103	0.002	Supported
Team cohesion has significant impact on team performance.	0.343	5.654	0.032	Supported
Negative reactive coaching behavior has significant impact on the team performance.	7.547	5.863	0.001	Supported
Positive reactive coaching behavior has significant impact on the team performance.	0.338	3.212	0.001	Supported
Natural coaching behavior has significant impact on the team performance.	0.185	1.319	0.061	Rejected

Research findings showed that negative reactive coaching behavior has negative significant impact on team cohesion with path coefficient (-0.430) and statistical value (-5.723). Therefore, since the coefficient's statistical value is larger than -1.96, then the hypothesis of negative reactive coaching behavior impact on team cohesion is supported. According to the research findings, positive reactive coaching behavior has positive significant impact on team cohesion with path coefficient (0.38) and statistical value (3.204). Therefore, since the coefficient's statistical value is larger than +1.96, then the hypothesis of positive reactive coaching behavior influence team cohesion is supported. As observed, given the proposed standard model, normal reactive coaching behavior has significant impact on team cohesion with path coefficient (0.30) and statistical value (7.103). Therefore, since the coefficient's statistical value is larger than +1.96, then the hypothesis of normal coaching behavior influence team cohesion is supported. Given the proposed standard model, team cohesion with path coefficient (0.34) and statistical value (5.654) has significant impact on team performance, and it means that with one unit increase in the team cohesion, there would be 0.34 increases in the team performance. Therefore, since the coefficient's statistical value is larger than +1.96, then the hypothesis of team cohesion impact on team performance is supported. Negative reactive coaching behavior has significant impact on team performance with path coefficient (0.54) and statistical value (5.863). Therefore, since the coefficient's statistical value is larger than +1.96, then the hypothesis of negative reactive coaching behavior influence team performance is supported. Positive reactive coaching behavior has significant impact on team performance with path coefficient (0.33) and statistical value (3.212). Therefore, since the coefficient's statistical value is larger than +1.96, then the hypothesis of positive reactive coaching behavior influence team performance is supported. Normal coaching behavior has no significant impact on team performance with path coefficient (0.18) and statistical value (1.319). Therefore, since the coefficient's statistical value is smaller than +1.96, then the hypothesis of normal coaching behavior influence team performance is not supported.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Current research aimed at investigating impact of coaching behaviors on team cohesion and performance in Iraqi Premier Football League. Descriptive statistics showed that means of normal coaching behavior (3.67), positive reactive coaching behavior (3.77), and negative reactive coaching behavior (3.33) are at high levels given the determined norm. Hence, considering the fact that the players played in the premier league, results of this results seem logical. High means of coaching behaviors suggest that Iraqi Premier Football League strengthen their performance based on the coaches' behaviors. Of course, it should be noted that caching is one of the influential issues in sport. Evident role of coaches is crucial for improvement of the team conditions. Coaches play a key role in the formation of national and international teams by training elite athletes. Coaching as a process implies that there should be a two-way interactive relationship between the leader and the followers (Mack and Gammage, 1998). The findings of this study showed that normal coaching behavior and positive reactive coaching behavior have positive significant impact on team cohesion. However, the noticeable point in this research was the findings that normal coaching behavior (Sig. Level as 0.002) has more impact on team cohesion compared to positive reactive coaching behavior (Sig. Level as 0.001), which was an unexpected result.

Natural or normal behaviors are those that are represented by the coaches in reaction to a specific activity, and are not pre-specified. It can be expected that these behaviors are contingent, that is, the coach's respond considering the status governing the players and the team and the performance they provide. The player is expecting appropriate feedback for his performance. Since various variables affect team cohesion, it can be stated that impact of normal behaviors by coaches on team cohesion can be justified when other variables affecting the team cohesion are controlled (Northouse, 2010). This finding is consistent with findings by Hoseini Keshtan (2010) in Iranian Premier League, Benson et al. (2016), Tekleab et al. (2016), Paul et al. (2016), and Chiniara et al. (2017). Other findings of this research showed that negative reactive coaching behavior has negative significant impact on team cohesion. It is consistent with findings by Hoseini Keshtan (2010) and Roach et al. (2016). Other research findings suggest significant impact of team cohesion variable on team performance. These findings are consistent with findings by Benson et al. (2016), Tekleab et al. (2016), and Paul et al. (2016). Positive reactive coaching behaviors have positive significant impact on performance of players. Positive reactive coaching behavior with significance level of 0.035 influences performance of the players, and normal coaching behavior had no significant impact on team performance. Leadership and cohesion are key elements for growth of team and group, and the style applied by the leaders for promoting team cohesion significantly affects the group performance. The coaches are the main pillar of the sports teams and among the three main factors of athlete, coach, and spectators, the coach is a strong organizer and foundation of any sport or team development, hence effective coaching involves various roles and styles. It seems that most sports psychologists have come to this general agreement to consider team cohesion as the main characteristic of teamwork in their research. Perhaps this is why most sports studies focus on team coherence as the most important variable in relation to team players' performance (Gil, 2006). Leadership plays a critical role in the success or failure of the programs and the leadership behavior of coach can have an important impact on team performance outcomes. Despite significant numbers of studies on leadership styles of coaches, the question is that which leadership style is more effective for team performance of the athletes. In other words, the main challenge of coaches is using a leadership style that leads to the team success. Therefore, considering influence of coaching behaviors on team cohesion of players and team performance, it is recommended that authorities of the clubs and teams as well as the coaches optimally use communicative model of coaching behavior for team cohesion and performance.

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