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Investigation of The Perception Styles of Coach Leadership Behavior in Physically Disabled Athletes

Fiziksel Engelli Sporcularda Antrenör Liderlik Davranışı Algılama Biçimlerinin İncelenmesi

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Abstract

This study investigates how athletes with physical disabilities perceive their coaches' leadership behaviors in relation to sport branch and years of participation. A quantitative survey design was employed, and data were collected from 127 licensed athletes engaged in wheelchair basketball, amputee football, and individual sports. The Leadership Scale for Sports was used as the main data collection instrument, and analyses were conducted using SPSS 22.0. Independent samples t-tests, one-way ANOVA, and Pearson correlation analyses were applied following normality testing. The results revealed no statistically significant differences in leadership perceptions according to sport branch or duration of sports participation ($p > 0.05$). In all groups, training and instruction behaviors received the highest mean scores. These findings indicate that athletes tend to evaluate their coaches' leadership styles in a consistent manner, regardless of their sporting background. Overall, the study highlights the central role of instructional, democratic, and supportive leadership in promoting both athletic development and psychological well-being among athletes with physical disabilities.

Keywords: Coaching leadership, athletes with disabilities, leadership styles, social support, sport psychology.

Öz

Bu çalışma, fiziksel engelli sporcuların antrenörlerinin liderlik davranışlarını spor branşı ve spora katılım yılı değişkenleri açısından nasıl algıladıklarını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Araştırmada nicel tarama deseni kullanılmıştır. Veriler, tekerlekli sandalye basketbolu, ampute futbol ve bireysel spor branşlarında yer alan 127 lisanslı sporcudan toplanmıştır. Araştırmada temel veri toplama aracı olarak Sporda Liderlik Ölçeği kullanılmış ve analizler SPSS 22.0 programı aracılığıyla gerçekleştirilmiştir. Normallik testlerinin ardından bağımsız örneklem t-testi, tek yönlü ANOVA ve Pearson korelasyon analizleri uygulanmıştır. Bulgular, spor branşı ve spora katılım süresine göre liderlik algılarında istatistiksel olarak anlamlı bir farklılık olmadığını göstermiştir ($p > 0.05$). Tüm gruplarda en yüksek ortalama puanlar eğitim ve öğretim davranışı boyutunda elde edilmiştir. Bu sonuçlar, sporcuların sportif geçmişlerinden bağımsız olarak antrenörlerinin liderlik stillerini benzer biçimde değerlendirdiklerini göstermektedir. Genel olarak çalışma, fiziksel engelli sporcularda hem sportif gelişimin hem de psikolojik iyi oluşun desteklenmesinde öğretici, demokratik ve destekleyici liderlik davranışlarının merkezi rolünü vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Antrenör liderliği, engelli sporcular, liderlik stilleri, sosyal destek, spor psikolojisi.

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INTRODUCTION

Athletic performance, technical proficiency, and tactical skills play a crucial role in enabling athletes to demonstrate the mechanical and functional requirements of their respective sports disciplines (Öztürk et al., 2025; Koç et al., 2025b). Nevertheless, sporting success cannot be explained solely through these components. Competitive achievement is shaped by multiple interacting factors, among which leadership occupies a central position. Leadership represents a fundamental element of sport and is closely associated with team effectiveness and organizational functioning within athletic environments (Cotterill & Fransen, 2016; Çakır & Çatıkkaş, 2025). Moreover, the sustainability of performance and satisfaction largely depends on leadership styles and coaching behaviors that influence team cohesion, motivation, and interpersonal dynamics.

The concept of leadership has been interpreted in various ways across different contexts, leading to the development of diverse theoretical frameworks. Barrow (1977) defined leadership as a process of influencing individuals and groups toward predetermined goals, whereas Ross et al. (2004) emphasized the capacity to encourage cooperation among team members. Within sport settings, coaches are commonly regarded as primary leaders. In this regard, Chelladurai and Riemer (1998) described coaching leadership as a behavioral process aimed at enhancing athletes' performance and satisfaction. Similarly, Vella et al. (2010) conceptualized coaching leadership as an interactive process shaped by interpersonal relationships between coaches and athletes. Such relationships may directly affect athletes' perceptions of competence, confidence, commitment, and moral development.

The mediational model proposed by Smoll and Smith (1977) highlights the role of athletes' interpretations, memories, and evaluative reactions to coaching behaviors in shaping performance and satisfaction outcomes. According to this model, athletes' perceptions and responses are considered as influential as the coaches' actual behaviors. Coaching practices are also shaped by individual characteristics, personal intentions, training norms, and athletes' motivational orientations. Furthermore, the multidimensional leadership model developed by Chelladurai and Saleh (1980) categorizes leadership behaviors into preferred, required, and actual dimensions. This framework suggests that effective leadership emerges from the alignment between situational demands, team structure, and athletes' leadership preferences. When coaching behaviors correspond with athletes' expectations, higher levels of performance and satisfaction are more likely to occur.

Supportive leadership practices, including social support, positive feedback, and instructional guidance, have been shown to strengthen athletes' sense of belonging and commitment within teams (Aoyagi, Cox, & McGuire, 2008). In addition, coaches' motivational competence and teaching skills are closely linked to the formation of leadership behaviors and their impact on athletic development (Sullivan & Kent, 2003). These elements collectively contribute to the creation of a learning-oriented and psychologically supportive sport environment.

In recent years, research focusing on athletes with physical disabilities has increasingly examined whether perceptions of leadership behaviors differ across individual and team sports contexts. Within this framework, the present study aims to identify variations in how athletes with physical disabilities perceive coaching leadership behaviors and to examine the leadership characteristics demonstrated by their coaches.

Materials and Methods

Research Design

This study was conducted using a quantitative research approach based on a survey design. The survey model is commonly employed to describe existing situations as they naturally occur, without attempting to manipulate or modify the conditions under investigation. Within this framework, individuals or phenomena are examined in their original context and evaluated according to their current characteristics. In line with this approach, the present research aimed to document and analyze athletes' perceptions of coaching leadership behaviors under real-life conditions (Karasar, 2007).

Participants

The study sample consisted of 127 physically disabled athletes (107 men and 20 women) from Adana province who had been actively involved in team and individual sports activities for at least two years with a license 50 wheelchair basketball players, 39 amputee football players, and 39 individual sports players. All participants were required to have a physical disability diagnosis according to to have at least two years of competitive experience in wheelchair basketball, amputee football, or individual sports. At the time of data collection, all athletes were regularly participating in training and competitions.

Sample Size Determination

The minimum required sample size was calculated using Cochran's sample size formula (Cochran, 1977), which is commonly applied in large populations to determine an appropriate sample size based on a specified confidence level and margin of error. The calculation indicated that at least 95 participants were necessary for the present study. Accordingly, the final sample of 127 athletes exceeded the minimum requirement and was considered sufficient for statistical analysis.

Data Collection Procedure

Prior to data collection, all potential participants were informed about the purpose and significance of the study by the researchers. It was clearly explained that the information obtained would be used solely for scientific purposes and would not be shared with third parties. Participants were also assured that the data collected during the research process would be analyzed exclusively through statistical procedures, and that only aggregated numerical results would be reported. No personal identifying information was recorded at any stage of the study, and the findings would not be used beyond the stated research objectives.Participation was entirely voluntary, and

individuals who chose not to take part after receiving this information were not included in the study.

Data Collection Instruments

Personal Information Form

A personal information form was developed by the researchers to obtain demographic and background characteristics of the participants. The form included questions related to gender, age, educational level, and years of sports participation.

Leadership Scale for Sports

The Leadership Scale for Sports (LSS), originally developed by Chelladurai and Saleh (1980), was used in its "Athletes' Perception of Coach Behavior" (LSS-APCB) version. The scale consists of 40 items organized into five subdimensions: training and instruction, democratic behavior, autocratic behavior, social support, and positive feedback. The items reflect athletes' evaluations of their coaches' behaviors and are based on self-reported perceptions. The Turkish adaptation of the Athletes' Perception of Coach Behavior version was conducted by several researchers in Türkiye (Toros & Tiryaki, 2006; Güngörmüş, Gürbüz, & Yenel, 2008). The internal consistency coefficients calculated by Toros and Tiryaki (2006) are .80 for instruction, .79 for democratic behavior, .41 for authoritarian behavior, .75 for social support, and .60 for positive feedback. In this study, the internal consistency coefficients calculated using Cronbach Alpha are .85 for instruction behavior, .82 for democratic behavior, .81 for social support behavior, .77 for positive feedback, and .57 for authoritarian behavior. When the reliability coefficients calculated in this study are examined, it is seen that the reliability coefficient of the authoritarian behavior sub-dimension is low (.57). This value is similar to the Cronbach Alpha value calculated by Toros and Tiryaki.The distribution of items across the subdimensions is as follows: thirteen items for training and instruction (1, 5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 23, 26, 29, 32, 35, 38), nine items for democratic behavior (2, 9, 15, 18, 21, 24, 30, 33, 39), five items for autocratic behavior (6, 12, 27, 34, 40), eight items for social support (3, 7, 13, 19, 22, 25, 31, 36), and five items for positive feedback (4, 10, 16, 28, 37). All items are rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always), indicating the frequency with which athletes perceive their coaches to display the specified behaviors.

Statistical Analysis

All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS 22.0 software. Prior to conducting comparative tests, the distributional properties of the data were examined. Skewness and kurtosis values were assessed to evaluate normality, and values between −1.5 and +1.5 were considered indicative of a normal distribution in accordance with the criteria suggested by Tabachnick, Fidell, and Ullman (2013). The results confirmed that the data met the assumptions required for parametric testing. Accordingly, independent samples t-tests were employed for comparisons between two groups, while one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted for comparisons involving more than two groups. When significant differences were identified, post hoc analyses were carried out to determine the source of these differences. Given the unequal group sizes, the Bonferroni

correction method was applied. Relationships among variables were examined using Pearson's correlation coefficient.Descriptive statistics are presented as mean ± standard deviation. The level of statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$ (Koç et al., 2025a; Adıgüzel et al., 2024).

RESULTS

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Variable	Category	Mean	SD	n	%
Age (Years)	Wheelchair Basketball	35.54	11.52	—	—
	Amputee Football	31.55	10.47	—	—
	Individual Sports	28.26	9.36	—	—
	Total	32.11	10.94	—	—
Years of Sports	Wheelchair Basketball	13.12	8.34	—	—
Participation	Amputee Football	8.37	5.17	—	—
	Individual Sports	7.44	4.84	—	—
	Total	9.95	6.97	—	—
Weekly Training	Wheelchair Basketball	7.86	4.47	—	—
Hours	Amputee Football	6.13	2.62	—	—
	Individual Sports	12.31	8.11	—	—
	Total	8.71	5.99	—	—
Educational Level	Primary School	—	—	19	15.0
	Secondary School	—	—	55	43.3
	University	—	—	53	41.7
	Total	—	—	127	100.0
Sport Branch	Wheelchair Basketball	—	—	50	39.4
	Amputee Football	—	—	38	29.9
	Individual Sports	—	—	39	30.7
	Total	—	—	127	100.0

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the participants according to sport branch, training background, and educational level. The overall mean age of the athletes was 32.11 ± 10.94 years, with wheelchair basketball players displaying the highest average age (35.54 ± 11.52 years) and athletes in individual sports showing the

lowest mean age (28.26 ± 9.36 years). In terms of sports experience, the participants reported an average of 9.95 ± 6.97 years of involvement, with wheelchair basketball athletes having the longest participation history.

Regarding weekly training volume, athletes engaged in individual sports demonstrated the highest mean training duration (12.31 ± 8.11 hours), while amputee football players reported comparatively lower training hours (6.13 ± 2.62 hours). The overall mean weekly training time was calculated as 8.71 ± 5.99 hours.

With respect to educational status, the majority of the participants had completed secondary school (43.3%) or university education (41.7%), whereas a smaller proportion had primary school education (15.0%). Concerning sport branch distribution, wheelchair basketball represented the largest group (39.4%), followed by individual sports (30.7%) and amputee football (29.9%). These findings indicate that the sample consisted of athletes with diverse demographic and training backgrounds, providing a broad basis for subsequent analyses.

Table 2. Mean Scores of Athletes' Perceptions of Coaching Leadership Behaviors by Sport Branch

Dimension	Sport Branch	n	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	SD	F	p
Training and	Wheelchair Basketball	50	42.6200	7.16536	2.683	.072
Instruction	Amputee Football	38	42.5000	5.87597		
	Individual Sports	39	45.4103	5.75243		
Democratic Behavior	Wheelchair Basketball	50	37.7400	7.99952	2.040	.134
	Amputee Football	38	37.4737	5.14512		
	Individual Sports	39	40.1538	5.57975		
Autocratic Behavior	Wheelchair Basketball	50	17.5600	4.23378	1.179	.311
	Amputee Football	38	18.7895	3.93980		
	Individual Sports	39	17.4872	4.53566		
Social Support	Wheelchair Basketball	50	33.2600	6.61418	1.710	.185
	Amputee Football	38	33.5789	5.50003		
	Individual Sports	39	35.4872	5.36495		
Positive Feedback	Wheelchair Basketball	50	20.9400	3.92486	2.813	.064
	Amputee Football	38	20.7895	2.98788		
	Individual Sports	39	22.3846	2.73010		
Total Score	Wheelchair Basketball	50	164.8200	29.10129	1.773	.174
	Amputee Football	38	165.5263	22.95087		
	Individual Sports	39	174.2821	22.15133		

Table 2 presents the comparisons of athletes' perceptions of coaching leadership behaviors across different sport branches. The findings indicate that no statistically significant differences were observed among wheelchair basketball, amputee football,

and individual sports groups in any of the leadership subdimensions or in the total score ($p > 0.05$).

Table 3. Mean Scores of Athletes' Perceptions of Coaching Leadership Behaviors by Years of Sports Participation

Dimension	Years of	n	Mean (X)	SD	F	p
Training and Instruction	1–6 years	47	44.19	5.84822	0.832	.507
	7–12 years	40	43.82	7.15000		
	13–18 years	22	43.0455	5.62712		
	19–24 years	11	40.6364	6.39176		
	≥ 25 years	7	41.8571	9.02642		
Democratic Behavior	1–6 years	47	38.8511	5.90497	0.867	.486
	7–12 years	40	39.0250	6.91148		
	13–18 years	22	38.3182	5.41063		
	19–24 years	11	36.7273	7.33609		
	≥ 25 years	7	34.7143	10.81225		
Autocratic Behavior	1–6 years	47	16.8936	4.14012	1.717	.150
	7–12 years	40	19.0500	4.38500		
	13–18 years	22	18.5000	3.23301		
	19–24 years	11	16.8182	4.37763		
	≥ 25 years	7	18.0000	5.85947		
Social Support	1–6 years	47	34.8298	5.22668	2.149	.079
	7–12 years	40	35.0750	5.83705		
	13–18 years	22	33.2273	4.84947		
	19–24 years	11	31.0000	6.89928		
	≥ 25 years	7	30.1429	10.22136		
Positive Feedback	1–6 years	47	21.8936	2.89853	1.836	.126
	7–12 years	40	21.7000	3.37563		
	13–18 years	22	20.9545	3.25836		
	19–24 years	11	19.3636	3.66804		
	≥ 25 years	7	19.8571	5.17779		
Total Score	1–6 years	47	169.7660	22.48208	1.176	.325
	7–12 years	40	171.5500	27.65071		
	13–18 years	22	166.7727	21.12532		
	19–24 years	11	156.6364	26.66561		
	≥ 25 years	7	156.4286	39.40752		

Table 3 presents the comparisons of athletes' perceptions of coaching leadership behaviors according to their years of sports participation. The findings indicate that no statistically significant differences were observed among the experience groups in any of the leadership subdimensions or in the total scale scores ($p > 0.05$).

DISCUSSION

The present study examined whether athletes' perceptions of coaching leadership behaviors differed according to sport branch and years of sports participation. The

findings revealed no statistically significant differences in leadership perceptions across sport branches ($p > 0.05$). This result suggests that athletes with physical disabilities tend to evaluate their coaches' leadership styles in a similar manner, regardless of the specific discipline in which they are involved. Although different sports may require distinct physical, technical, and organizational demands, branch-related variations did not emerge as a determining factor in leadership perceptions within the current sample.

Previous studies have reported that coaching leadership behaviors may vary across sports contexts. For instance, Akgül and Gül (2022) identified positive associations between wrestlers' coaches' moral intelligence and training–instruction, democratic, and positive feedback behaviors. Similarly, Karahan and Mutlutürk (2023) found that athletes in team sports perceived higher levels of democratic, supportive, and positive feedback behaviors. Hanayoğlu et al. (2023) also reported that team sport athletes tended to perceive stronger instructional and social support behaviors compared to individual sport athletes. In contrast to these findings, the present study did not reveal significant branch-based differences, which may indicate that coaches working with athletes with physical disabilities adopt more holistic and inclusive leadership approaches that transcend sport-specific characteristics.

In addition, no statistically significant differences were observed in leadership perceptions according to years of sports participation ($p > 0.05$). This finding indicates that the duration of involvement in sport does not substantially influence how athletes evaluate their coaches' leadership styles. Some studies have suggested that experience level may affect leadership perceptions. Temel (2010) reported that coaches in individual sports displayed more autocratic behaviors, whereas those in team sports tended to be more democratic, primarily due to differences in athlete group size. Özmutlu (2011) found that servant leadership enhanced athlete satisfaction in amputee football and wheelchair basketball, particularly among less experienced athletes. Furthermore, Bensiz (2016) reported that social support and positive feedback decreased as the duration of coach–athlete relationships increased.

Conversely, Demir (2024) reported no significant differences in leadership perceptions according to age and sports experience, with democratic behavior being the most prominent dimension. Similarly, Hanayoğlu et al. (2023) observed that athletes with more than seven years of experience perceived their coaches as more instructional. In line with these findings, the results of the present study suggest that athletes' increasing experience may lead to a more conscious and balanced evaluation of leadership behaviors, particularly in relation to educational and supportive practices.

Overall, the findings indicate that leadership perceptions among athletes with physical disabilities are predominantly shaped by instructional, democratic, and socially supportive behaviors. Consistent with previous research (Özmutlu, 2011; Karahan & Mutlutürk, 2023), long-term and trust-based relationships between coaches and athletes appear to contribute positively to leadership perceptions. Moreover, leadership styles were found to be closely associated with athletes' motivation, satisfaction, and psychological well-being (Özmutlu, 2011; Sarıoğlu, 2020; Özalp, 2019). These results highlight that coaching leadership influences not only performance outcomes but also athletes' emotional stability, self-confidence, and sense of belonging.

LIMITATIONS

The limitations of this study include the fact that it was conducted with physically disabled athletes, the use of the Leadership for Sport Scale and the Athletes' Perception of Coach Behavior version, and the fact that the sample size consisted largely of male athletes.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that athletes with physical disabilities generally perceive their coaches' leadership behaviors as instructional, democratic, and socially supportive. No statistically significant differences were identified according to sport branch or years of participation, suggesting that leadership perceptions are shaped more by coaches' personal characteristics, communication styles, and empathetic capacities than by structural features of the sport.

Given that the vast majority of the sample consists of male athletes, it is recommended that studies be conducted to determine the perceptions of coach leadership behavior characteristics among the population of female athletes with physical disabilities.

Kısaltmalar / Abbreviations

LSS	: Leadership Scale for Sports / Sporda Liderlik Ölçeği
LSS-APCB	: Leadership Scale for Sports – Athletes' Perception of Coach Behavior / Sporda Liderlik Ölçeği – Sporcuların Antrenör Davranışlarını Algılama Formu
SPSS	: Statistical Package for the Social Sciences / Sosyal Bilimler İçin İstatistik Paket Programı
ANOVA	: Analysis of Variance / Varyans Analizi
n	: Sample Size / Örneklem Sayısı
%	: Percentage / Yüzde
Mean / $\bar{X}$	: Arithmetic Mean / Aritmetik Ortalama
SD	: Standard Deviation / Standart Sapma
t	: t-Test Statistic / t-Testi İstatistik Değeri
F	: ANOVA F Statistic / ANOVA F İstatistik Değeri
P	: Significance Value / Anlamlılık Düzeyi
α	: Cronbach's Alpha / Cronbach Alfa İç Tutarlılık Katsayısı

Beyanlar / Declarations

Etik Onay ve Katılım Onayı / Ethics approval and consent to participate

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During the preparation and writing of this study, the principles of scientific integrity, research ethics, and citation were observed in accordance with the Directive on Scientific Research and Publication Ethics of Higher Education Institutions. No manipulation or falsification was made to the collected data, and this manuscript has not been submitted to any other journal or publication venue for consideration. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Çukurova University Faculty of Medicine Non-Interventional Clinical Research Ethics Committee (Decision No. 129; Date: November 14, 2025). The study was conducted in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. The authors are solely responsible for any ethical or legal issues arising from this article.

Veri Ve Materyal Erişilebilirliği / Availability of data and material

Bu çalışmanın bulgularını destekleyen veriler, makul talepler üzerine sorumlu yazardan temin edilebilir. Veri seti yalnızca akademik amaçlar için erişilebilir olacak ve verilerin herhangi bir kullanımı, orijinal çalışmayı referans gösterecek ve katılımcıların gizliliğini koruyacaktır.

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. The dataset will be accessible only for academic purposes, and any use of the data will recognize the original study and maintain the confdentiality of the participants.

Çıkar Çatışması / Competing interests

Yazarlar, bu makalede sunulan çalışmayı etkileyebilecek herhangi bir çıkar çatışması veya kişisel ilişkiye sahip olmadıklarını beyan etmektedirler.

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Yazar Katkıları / Authors' Contribution Statement

Yazarlar çalışmaya eşit düzeyde katkıda bulunmuş, makalenin son hâlini okuyup onaylamış ve yayımlanmasından doğabilecek her türlü sorumluluğu ortaklaşa üstlenmiştir.

The authors contributed equally to the study, read and approved the final version of the manuscript, and share responsibility for all aspects of the published work

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