



## EXPERIENCES OF COACH-ATHLETE RELATIONSHIP: A CASE STUDY OF UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST, GHANA

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### Abstract:

**Background:** The purpose of this study was to explore the efficacy of the coach-athlete relationship in University of Cape Coast sports teams. The researcher employed the interpersonal constructs of closeness, co-orientation, and complementarity (3Cs model) to explore participants' feelings, thoughts, and behaviour respectively. **Method:** Qualitative data was obtained through semi-structured interviews, from 8 participants and their responses were content analyzed. **Results:** Analysis revealed that closeness (as defined in terms of intimacy, trust, respect, appreciation, and promising), co-orientation (termed as communication, self-disclosure, common goal, and general understanding), and lastly, complementarity (defined as roles, emotional support, academic support and financial support) have helped to improve the quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of the coach-athlete relationship among University of Cape Coast sports teams. **Conclusion:** It was concluded that participants showed a high level of closeness, co-orientation, and complementarity in their relationship.

**Keywords:** coach-athlete relationship, closeness, co-orientation, complementarity, 3Cs Model, dyad

### 1. Introduction

Participation in sporting activities at all levels of education, including the University, is considered a right. This right is expressed in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization {1}. Among other things, this Charter stipulates that all individuals must enjoy access to physical education and related sporting activities which are considered essential as far as the development of the individual's personality is concerned. Generally, at the tertiary level, participation of an individual in sporting activities represents the total development of the individual as viewed in the contexts of economic gains, intellectual advancement as well and refreshing to the mind and body.

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The activity of sports occurs in the presence of others. Following this premise, {2} developed a framework that argues that athletic performance is a product of the function of the intrapersonal, for example in the case of coping skills, and interpersonal as in the case of coach-athlete relationship variables {3}. This framework postulated by {2} in essence demonstrates that an athlete's intrapersonal and interpersonal psychosocial variables play a vital role in the performance of the individual. Whilst intrapersonal and interpersonal variables are key to athlete's performance, research on these domains of issues is scanty, with the predominant trend being the tendency of researchers in sports psychology to focus on motivation and anxiety, though the two also form part of the intrapersonal variables {4,5}. {6} stress this development, arguing that Western psychology has conventionally placed greater primacy on self-development as compared to interpersonal relationships mostly highlighting the ideals of autonomy, independence, and identity as crucial elements. {7} similarly express discontent with theories that only emphasize either intrapersonal or interpersonal variables but not the two simultaneously. The self-development syndrome is not only native to Western countries. Africans in general and Ghanaians in particular now acknowledge this concept as a result of cultural assimilation. The decline of the extended family in the Ghanaian context attests to this fact. Indeed, individuals now are more concerned about themselves than their extended relatives and even sometimes more about themselves individually than their nuclear families {8}.

Against this background, it is important to begin to explore the self as a form of social identity. As {9} argues, there is evidence that relationships with others in particular those relationships considered proximate and significant, also affect the self. In the setting of sports in general and more specifically in the coaching setting, athlete-coach interrelationship influences physical and psychological advancement or development {10}.

In the sporting milieu, coaching is understood as an interpersonal relationship that involves interactions between individuals in this context athletes and coaches {11}. Generally, it is argued that the quality of this relationship affects the athlete's well-being, development of skills, and performance in sporting activities {12,13}.

The coach-athlete relationship is considered key to effective coaching and also to enhancing the performance of the athlete {14,15,16}. In the arena of sports, the coach-athlete relationship plays a phenomenal role both at individual and team levels {12}. The relationship provides a mechanism through which both coaches and athletes fulfill basic practical, emotional, social, and psychological needs {17}.

This study was premised on the Jowett Conceptual 3Cs Model, comprising Closeness, Co-orientation, and Complementarity {10,18,3}. The model was utilized to assess the relationship and behaviours of the two actors. The model ascertains the emotions, cognitions, and behaviours of the coach and athlete concurrently. The constructs identified and used namely closeness {19}, co-orientation, {20}, and complementarity {21} were all used independently {22}.

{23} observes that qualitative studies assess what occurs inside the black box of how the coach-athlete relationship works out. The coaching discipline thrives on a framework that is in essence user friendly, trustworthy, and practical for use in the real-world setting. Coaches must constantly apply and reflect on these daily. {24} similarly argue for an expansion of pedagogical practice (i.e., how coaches create meaningful learning and development opportunities for athletes and/or teams). {24} further observe that there is an absence of a big picture that can inform pedagogical adoption in the context of coaching. Too much emphasis on tactics at the expense of not prioritizing investments in interactions with athletes potentially ruins relationships and leads to disconnect within the dyad when individual player care and attention are disregarded. The most vital elements that must characterize the coach-athlete relationship inevitably comprise respect, belief in, knowledge of, and contribution to the other's goals, and the element of care on the part of the coach. These are essential in the relationship {25,26}.

In Ghana, the University of Cape Coast (UCC) has been at the forefront of the Ghana Universities Sports Association (GUSA) competitions for the past eight years except for the 2021 GUSA at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) although all the universities scout athletes. This sterling performance of the UCC team has gained the university nationwide recognition regarding sports. The athletes are putting up these performances not because they are given more money (comprising camping allowances) and other incentives than the other universities in Ghana. For instance, the University of Ghana, Legon (UG) and University of Education, Winneba (UEW) pay more money (camping allowances and winning bonuses) than the University of Cape Coast, apart from the incentives that are generally given to all athletes who participate in GUSA Games. For such outstanding performances to be realized by UCC, there may be some contributing factors to their success, apart from money and other incentives. Could it therefore be that the performance of UCC sports teams is a result of effective and efficient coach-athlete relationships? The following research questions were answered in the study:

- In what ways do athletes describe their coach-athlete relationship?
- How do coaches describe their coach-athlete relationship?
- How efficient and effective is the coach-athlete relationship?

The purpose of this study, therefore, was to explore the efficacy of the coach-athlete relationship in UCC sports teams.

Literature perused by the researcher shows that the coach-athlete relationship has not been given the needed attention by way of research in Ghana. Although it is an issue that must be attended to, it has not been thoroughly explored. Given that there is a paucity of research on interpersonal relationships in sports generally {27} this current study seeks to advance deep into the processes underlying the coach-athlete dyad {23} using the qualitative approach, which is deemed appropriate for such studies {23}.

## 2. Literature Review

This study was premised on the Jowett Conceptual 3Cs Model.

The coach-athlete relationship has been defined as the state in which coaches' and athletes' feelings, communication, thoughts, and behaviours are communally and causally interconnected {13}.

First and foremost, closeness refers to feeling familiar (close) with the other member in the relationship. Feelings of like, trust, and respect, as opposed to dislike, distrust, and disrespect between a coach and an athlete, indicate a positive affective climate and mark the relationship's stability and members' satisfaction {20}.

Secondly, complementarity mirrors coaches' and athletes' behaviours that are supportive. There are two sets of complementary behaviours that coaches and athletes show on the pitch:

- a) corresponding refers to the same behaviours that the coach and the athlete are anticipated to show in training and competition such as responsiveness and openness {3};
- b) reciprocal refers to different behaviours that the coach and the athlete are projected to exhibit in training and competition such as when the coach directs or instructs and the athlete follows or executes instructions in training {28}.

These two sets of behaviours are thought to determine the efficient conduct of interactions between coaches and athletes. Complementarity refers to the type of behavioural interaction in which the coach and the athlete are engaged. In effect, complementarity reflects coaches' and athletes' acts of cooperation (Jowett, 2003).

Thirdly, co-orientation is operationalized through the means of communication and thoughts. Communication is the building block of all relationships. Communication (talk, self-disclosure, and dialogue) provides coaches and athletes with an opportunity to share one another's experiences from which co-orientation subsequently develops {29,30}. These three key relational constructs are said to define the quality of the sporting relationship between the coach and each athlete in a team. These properties are known as the 3Cs of the coach-athlete relationship. Relationships that possess such properties are said to influence and be influenced by several factors including individual difference characteristics (e.g., age, gender, personality) as well as social-cultural (e.g., race/ethnicity, culture, language, sport type) and relationship (e.g., typical versus atypical relationships, length of relationships) factors {31}.

## 3. Material and Methods

An exploratory case study of the qualitative research approach was used for the study {32}. Qualitative research explores a research problem by taking into consideration the opinions and viewpoints of participants on the research problem. Scholars in general consider the qualitative research approach subjective. However, it is particularly useful in exploring deep insights into issues which are based on individual feelings {33}.

### **3.1 Participants**

Eight (8) participants (5 athletes and 3 coaches) from UCC sports teams, with one (1) to four (4) years of experience as UCC athletes and at least ten (10) years of coaching UCC sports teams, were used for the study. This means the athletes and coaches have been in a coach-athlete relationship for at least one year before the time of the study and can reflect on the current experiences regarding their feelings, communication, thoughts, and behaviour. These participants were purposively selected for the study. Three (3) of the athletes were females and two (2) were males. One female and two male coaches were also used for the study. Coaches' average age was 39 years and the athletes' average age was 22 years. All the participants were from both individual and team sports such as athletics, soccer, table tennis, and volleyball. The names of the athletes with their levels and specific disciplines they compete in, were not mentioned to protect their identity. The same was done to the coaches who were used in the study.

### **3.2 Instrumentation**

Face-to-face semi-structured interview questions with twenty-five (25) items concerning the coach-athlete relationship concerning the Jowett Conceptual Model 3Cs (closeness, co-orientation, and complementarity) were used for athletes' and coaches' responses although items were structured in such a way that both coaches and athletes could respond to them separately. Face-to-face interviews allow for nonverbal language and visual cues although the interviewer's presence may bias responses {32,34}. Each interview, which lasted for at least thirty (30) minutes was recorded separately with permission from the participants and transcribed. Using interviews allows for collecting richer data and the interviewer has the opportunity to seek clarification, therefore information gathered can be said to be more accurate {35}.

In all, the interview questions were divided into four sections to cover the introductory section and the constructs understudied. The introductory section explored demographic and general questions from the participant's experiences and perspectives. For example, age, gender, responsibility, how many years participants have been participating in sports, how many years they have been training with their current coach/athlete, the athlete's/coach's major athletic achievements, etc. Section two included questions on closeness such as; what does it mean to you to have a close relationship with your coach/athlete; in what ways is the partnership trustworthy; how do you respect your coach/athlete? Section three explored questions on co-orientation. For example, items asked included; how well do you know each other; what issues do you commonly discuss with one another about training and competition; how are your performance goals related to your coach's own? The last section elicited questions on complementarity such as; can you describe the role that you take in the relationship; how do you receive your coach's comments, advice, and opinions; how easy is it to work with your coach? Before concluding the interview, participants were asked if they had further issues, they wanted to raise or discuss.

### 3.3 Procedure

Ethical standards were applied in the conduct of the studies. Approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), University of Cape Coast was sought before conducting the interview. An introductory letter from the Head of Department, Department of Health, Physical Education and Recreation (HPER) was sent to the participants to enable easy access to them for the study. Anonymity was ensured by using letters and numbers to represent the coaches and athletes such as first coach (C1) and first athlete (A1).

### 3.4 Data Analysis

The audio recorded during the interviews with coaches and athletes was transcribed verbatim. The interviews were conducted in English language therefore, there was no need for translation. After the transcription, member checking was used to determine the accuracy of the information gathered. This does not mean taking back the raw transcripts to the participants for accuracy; instead, the researcher takes back parts of the polished product (case analysed). This follow-up interview with participants ensures validity {32}. The researcher triangulated the views of coaches against the athletes and vice versa to authenticate the participants' and researcher's interpretation. This process added to the validity of the study {36}. Additionally, two academic staff (lecturers) from the Department of HPER, University of Cape Coast, assisted in formulating ideas and reviewing research procedures known as peer debriefing. This approach ensured validity {37}. An external auditor who is not familiar with the researcher or study and could provide an objective assessment of the study throughout the process of research was contacted to proofread to enhance trustworthiness {32}. Lastly, no attempt was made to generalize beyond the research context (UCC) as qualitative research merely attempts to propose theoretical propositions (analytic generalization) rather than statistical generalization {27}.

Content analysis was then used as a systematic way to explore the content of the obtained data (Smith, 2000). The process used to analyse the data included two main steps: categorization of the themes and coder interpretations. {32} observes that qualitative data analysis requires one to apply logic to the series of responses generated. Qualitative data analysis does not proceed in a linear style like quantitative studies. Hence, in this study, the researcher integrated logical deductions in analyzing data.

### 3.5 Categorization of Themes

The raw data units were assigned to the categories of the Jowett 3Cs model (closeness, co-orientation, and complementarity). The responses from the participants were moved from specific (raw data units) to general categories (first-order themes, second-order themes, and general categories). The raw data units were made up of both negative and positive statements. Frequency analysis and percentages were used to determine the number of participants who cited a theme within each of Jowett's 3Cs model.

### 3.6 Coder Interpretations

The inter-coder agreement was applied for face validity between the thematic categories and the constructs (closeness, complementarity and co-orientation) that they represent {38}. The data was validated by a lecturer who is an expert with experience in the Jowett 3Cs model. The idea was to find out whether the raw data units best fit in the right categories. This step helped settle interpretative disagreements and differences and ensured the trustworthiness of the data {39}.

## 4. Results

The statements, words, or phrases of the participants (1 statement/word/phrase = 1 raw data unit), were obtained from athletes and coaches at the University of Cape Coast who were purposively selected to participate in the study. Each statement, word, or phrase showed participants' feelings (closeness), behaviour (complementarity), and communication (co-orientation) that could be assessed via the Jowett 3Cs model framework. The frequency of the statements, words, or phrases representing Jowett 3Cs components (closeness, complementarity, and co-orientation) is presented below.

**Table 1:** Total Frequency for Responses and Percentages of Participants Under Jowett 3Cs Model

Participant	Closeness	Complementarity	Co- orientation	Total
Coaches (C)	34	21	25	80
Athletes (A)	49	42	41	132
Total for Frequencies	83	63	66	212
Total for Percentages	39.15%	29.72%	31.13%	100%

### 4.2 Closeness

Seven (7) of the interview questions were related to closeness. The questions explored the relationship in terms of second-order themes such as interpersonal, personal, and generic feelings of the first-order themes, for example, intimacy, trust, like, respect, appreciation, and promise. A total of eighty-three (83) representing 39.15% of raw data units were attributed to the construct. Seventy-seven (77) of the raw data units were positively framed and six (6) were negatively framed. Thirty-four (34) of the statements were responded by the coaches and forty-nine (49) responded by athletes.

The tables below show some examples of the positive and negative responses by participants about closeness.

**Table 2:** Positive closeness

Construct closeness	Raw data C1 = Coach 1, A1 = Athlete 1, A2 = Athlete 2, C2 = Coach 2, A3 = Athlete 3, A4 = Athlete 4, C3 = Coach 3, A5 = Athlete 5
Intimacy	<p>C1: <i>"It is a very very keen thing because definitely it is the athlete that you want to perform for you, so you get close to them."</i></p> <p>C2: <i>"I think that basically, it deals with your ability to know them, know who they are, what they stand for and then what they can do and what they cannot do. Possibly, what they like and what they do not like."</i></p> <p>A3: <i>"We have like a father and daughter relationship, where you can approach him. We are always like if you have a problem, he is always available to talk to you. I look at him like my lecturer, father, uncle, like anything that a family can be."</i></p> <p>A4: <i>"She is like a mother."</i></p> <p>A5: <i>"There is that kind of trust, like and intimacy between me and my coach."</i></p>
Like	<p>A3: <i>"I like him and the way he treats us is like his own kids."</i></p> <p>A4: <i>"She likes me, I also like her."</i></p>
Trust	<p>C1: <i>"Our achievements have been based on the trust because if I do not trust them to give me what I want, there is no way we would be able to achieve our target, so over the years it has been trust."</i></p> <p>A1: <i>"From what I have seen with my coach and how he relates to me, giving my trust to him will really, really help me in performing well. If you are close to your coach, there is the fact of getting some trust."</i></p> <p>A3: <i>"We trust each other and like I said we trust what he says and we follow his instructions because we know those are the best things for us."</i></p> <p>A4: <i>"We trust each other."</i></p> <p>A5: <i>"Ermm for me, there is that kind of trust, like and intimacy between me and my coach."</i></p>
Love	<p>C1: <i>"I think that there is this positive relationship between us. So, we really really relate very well to the extent that at times they come to me even when they are off the field."</i></p> <p>A2: <i>Having love and care for him."</i></p> <p>A4: <i>"Love is also there."</i></p>
Appreciation	<p>C1: <i>"I really appreciate it. More than if there is any other word to replace appreciation, I will use it."</i></p> <p>C2: <i>"Absolutely, because in UCC the academics is paramount. For athletes to come out on their own will to come and train is very complementary."</i></p> <p>A1: <i>"I really appreciate. At times I will just call him "coach" and we will communicate. I sometimes go to his office just to greet him."</i></p> <p>A3: <i>"This man goes through sleepless night just drawing out programme, spending the time with us so that we are able to deliver for him."</i></p>
Respect	<p>C2: <i>"I give them the best of respect and they give me in return. Because, I have athletes of different categories."</i></p> <p>C3: <i>"Basically, it is respect. Just see them as your co-equal yeah."</i></p> <p>A1: <i>"Then some form of respect and this will lead to good performance."</i></p> <p>A3: <i>"Is like I respect him."</i></p> <p>A5: <i>"Well, he is my coach so I have to give him the necessary respect."</i></p>
Promising	<p>C3: <i>"Is promising I mean based on the relationship that I have with my athletes, I would say is even giving some of them the chance to recommend people for UCC."</i></p> <p>A1: <i>"Is promising one. Promising because, for just two years that I have been with him, I have seen some form of improvement."</i></p> <p>A3: <i>"Very, very promising because it's going to be a long-lasting relationship even if am out of school, I will always come back to him for directions."</i></p>

	A5: <i>"It is promising because I even want to work with him after school."</i>
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**Table 3:** Negative closeness

Construct closeness	Raw data C1 = Coach 1, A1 = Athlete 1, A2 = Athlete 2, C2 = Coach 2, A3 = Athlete 3, A4 = Athlete 4, C3 = Coach 3, A5 = Athlete 5
Lack of trust	A5: <i>"Though he is my coach, there is no that trust between us to discuss about family."</i>
Dislike	C1: <i>"Oh, there is no way you will get 100% athletes. Lateness to training and ermm sometimes laziness."</i> C2: <i>"They are humans. Therefore, they cannot be that perfect. Athletes' lateness is one thing I personally frown on. I don't like it."</i> A2: <i>"He targets too high."</i> A3: <i>"He will insult you if you don't do well in academics."</i> A4: <i>"She is quick tempered. Yeah, sometimes the way and manner she will talk to you is really bad."</i>

From Tables 2 and 3 it is obvious that almost all the coaches and athletes showed a high level of interpersonal, personal and generic feelings (second-order themes) of the first-order themes (intimacy, like, trust, love, appreciation, respect and promising) which are commendable for coach-athlete relationship. The degree of closeness between these dyads has helped to improve the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of the relationship. It is important to mention that, intimacy, trust, appreciation and respect are the foundation on which closeness was built among UCC Sports teams. Almost all the participants showed a high level of the above-stated feelings in the interview. For instance, A3 said:

*"We have a father and daughter relationship, where you can approach him. He is always available to talk to him. I look at him like my lecturer, father, uncle, like anything that a family can be."*

A4 continues that:

*"She is like a mother."*

The feelings of intimacy expressed above by four out of the five athletes and all three coaches appear to be the most powerful factor for closeness. To buttress this point, C1 said:

*"...it is very very keen thing because definitely is the athlete that you want to perform for you so you get close to them."*

C2 also added:

*"I think that basically, it deals with your ability to know them, know who they are, what they stand for, and then what they can do and what they cannot do. Possibly, what they like and what they don't like."*

A feeling of trust among participants also accounted for the efficacy of the relationship. For example, C1 intimated:

*"Our achievements have been based on trust because if I don't trust them to give me what I want, there is no way we would be able to achieve our target so over the years is the trust."*

A1 added:

*"From what I have seen with my coach and how he relates to me, giving my trust to him will really, really help me in performing well. If you are close to your coach, there is the fact of getting some trust."*

All three coaches and three out of five athletes showed appreciation for the efforts put in by each other. C2 cited:

*"Absolutely, because in UCC academics are paramount. For athletes to come out on their own will to come and train is very complimentary."*

A3 also said:

*"This man goes through sleepless nights just drawing out programs, spending the time with us so that we are able to deliver for him."*

Respect was furthermore highlighted in the relationship. 4 out of 5 athletes talked about the tons of respect they have for their coaches and 2 out of 3 coaches stated the relationship is based on respect. C3 stated:

*"Basically, it is respect. Just see them as your co- equal yeah."*

A5 said:

*"Well, he is my coach so I have to give him the necessary respect."*

The future looked promising in terms of coach-athlete relationships as participants especially some athletes opined, they are willing to work with and seek directions from their coaches even after school. A3 averred that:

*"Very, very promising because it's going to be a long-lasting relationship even if am out of school, I will always come back to him for directions."*

C1 also intimated that:

*"I understand them and they also understand me. So, the future looks promising."*

Like and love are personal feelings expressed as coaches and athletes relate. None of the coaches, however, cited likeness and love in their interviews although 3 out of the 5 athletes insisted on their likeness and love for their coaches. A4 said:

*"She likes me, I like her."*

A2 also said:

*Having love and care for him."*

Given that love grows over time, it is expected that coaches develop love and likeness for their athletes as they reciprocate this love from the athletes, but these attributes were one-sided.

Against her own words A5 answered:

*"...though he is my coach, there is no that trust between us to discuss about family."*

when she previously stated:

*"Ermm for me, there is that kind of trust, like and intimacy between me and my coach."*

This could mean that the trust between the dyad is on the job but not outside it. The negative closeness of dislike was cited by all except A1. C3 also cited disrespectfulness sometimes on the part of athletes in the relationship. The athletes explained their displeasure in their statements. For example, A3 noted:

*"He will insult you if you don't do well in academics."*

A4 stated:

*"She is quick tempered. Yeah, sometimes the way and manner she will talk to you is really bad."*

The coaches too expressed negative feelings about their athletes. C1 stated:

*“Oh, there is no way you will get 100% athletes. Lateness to training and ermm sometimes laziness.”*

C2 said:

*“They are humans. Therefore, they cannot be that perfect. Athletes’ lateness is one thing that I personally frown on. I don’t like it.”*

### 4.3 Co-orientation

The construct of co-orientation also had seven (7) interview questions. The questions solicited information on how coaches and athletes share knowledge, understanding and goals. A total of sixty-six (66) representing 31.13% of raw data units were identified and connected with the construct. Coaches’ responses were 25, whereas athletes’ responses were 41. Four (4) of the responses were negatively framed, 2 each from both coaches and athletes.

Below is table 4 presenting some of the raw data units.

**Table 4: Co-orientation**

Construct Co- orientation	Raw data C1 = Coach 1, A1 = Athlete 1, A2 = Athlete 2, C2 = Coach 2, A3 = Athlete 3, A4 = Athlete 4, C3 = Coach 3, A5 = Athlete 5
Shared knowledge Communication	<p>C1: <i>“In terms of playing, we normally communicate. So, through communication, we try to talk about the game and sometimes go outside the game, try to find out how well they are doing.”</i></p> <p>C3: <i>“I will say I know most of my athletes very well. Because I do have communication, proper communication with most of them both male and female trying to know their fears, their problems, and their worries and I personally keep an open-door policy. You can come to my office anytime, call me at any time with any problem, or any situation you are in, and is within my remit I make sure I help you solve it. If it’s something that I have to escalate to my superiors too I do that so that at the end of the day, you the athlete will also have peace of mind to compete and train well.”</i></p> <p>A1: <i>“We talk yeah, we talk, talk on the phone, I see him around and go to him.”</i></p> <p>A2: <i>“We actually talk so I know him. I basically know everything about him and he knows everything about me. I talk to him about my stuff whether personal or training stuff.”</i></p> <p>A3: <i>“Ermm, we talk a lot, like if I have any problem, I can go to him.”</i></p> <p>A4: <i>“Yeah, we talk but to an extent. After training maybe, she will call and advise me on academics. Don’t really discuss about family.”</i></p> <p>A5: <i>“We really know each other because we do talk a lot about training programs and what will help the team to be perfect.”</i></p>
Self-disclosure	<p>C2: <i>“With my athletes, we talk actually about everything. Once they bring it on board, I give a listening ear.”</i></p> <p>C3: <i>“Ermm, it ranges from academics to solving personal struggles, personal issues, and sometimes too family issues.”</i></p> <p>A4: <i>“We talk about training, maybe performances about training, whether am improving, where am not doing well she tries to at least tell me to do.”</i></p> <p>A5: <i>“We discuss about training, competition, and family-related matters.”</i></p>

<b>Shared understanding</b> Common goal	<p>C1: <i>"Yeah, at a point in time we all come to one agreement. Sometimes you know that what the athlete is trying to do is not what we are gearing towards but in the end, we come together to achieve on goal."</i></p> <p>A1: <i>"We get the goals and we work towards it."</i></p> <p>A2: <i>"Is much related. Sometimes whatever I plan on getting, he is also planning on me getting that. So, if am for gold, he also going for gold."</i></p> <p>A4: <i>"They have some kind of link in a way."</i></p> <p>A5: <i>"We share the same goal because we all aim at achieving the gold medal."</i></p>
<b>General understanding</b>	<p>C3: <i>"Yes, most of the time there is. Where there are issues of misunderstanding, we talk, and dialogue to find a common ground to move the team forward."</i></p> <p>A2: <i>"Yes, because even though sometimes he ermm wants you to do something, when you plead with him that you can't do a particular activity, he understands you looking at the situation."</i></p> <p>A3: <i>"To me, I think he understands us a lot and we also understand him."</i></p> <p>A4: <i>"Ermm yeah but to a point we understand each other."</i></p> <p>A5: <i>"Though he is quick-tempered, we understand each other and we share ideas."</i></p>

Table 4 indicates that communication and self-disclosure formed the first-order themes of the second-order theme of shared knowledge. Again, the first-order themes of common goal and general understanding formed the second-order theme of shared understanding. The dyads showed a high level of co-orientation, almost the same as the construct of closeness.

All participants identified communication as the most positive tool for the coach-athlete relationship which contributed to their warm responses. For example, C1 said:

*"Yeah normally, what we discuss is ermm, the program ahead. What we have so if we have competition then after maybe we try to find out about their personal worries too."*

C3 also stated that:

*"Ermm, it ranges from academics to solving personal struggles, personal issues and sometimes too family issues."*

A1 continued that:

*"We talk yeah we talk, talk on phone, I see him around and go to him."*

A2 added that:

*"We actually talk so I know him. I basically know everything about him and he knows everything about me. I talk to him about my stuff whether personal or training stuff."*

The three coaches accentuated self-disclosure was used to improve the quality, efficiency, and effectiveness of the relationship. Three out of five athletes also showed self- self-disclosure has done the magic in the relationship. For instance, C2 said:

*“With my athletes, we talk actually about everything. Once they bring it on board, I give a listening ear.”*

A4 also stated that:

*“We talk about training, maybe performances about training, whether am improving, where am not doing well she tries to at least tell me to do.”*

The importance of common goals and general understanding was emphasized. Two out of three coaches stated they do things that are geared towards the same goal and 4 out of 5 athletes cited they have the same goals with their coaches. C1 stated:

*“Yeah, at a point in time, we all come to one agreement. Sometimes you know that what the athlete is trying to do is not what we are gearing towards but in the end, we come together to achieve on goal.”*

A5 also said:

*“We share the same goal because we all aim at achieving the gold medal.”*

The general understanding was seen to be the second most positive tool of co-orientation that enhanced the efficacy of the coach-athlete relationship in UCC sports teams. All except C2 (who did not comment on understanding) emphatically stated that the high performance of the teams was due to understanding. C3 for example said:

*“Yes, most of the time there is. Where there are issues of misunderstanding, we talk, and dialogue to find a common ground to move the team forward.”*

A2 commented that:

*“Yes, because even though sometimes he ermm wants you to do something, when you plead with him that you can't do a particular activity, he understands you looking at the situation.”*

#### **4.4 Complementarity**

Complementarity had six (6) interview questions that were answered. It included phrases/ statements that emerged from compatible behaviours (roles, tasks and support). A total of sixty-three (63) representing 29.27% of raw data units were related to the

construct of complementarity. Forty-two (42) statements were made by the athletes while twenty-one (21) statements were made by coaches. All the statements were positively framed unlike in the constructs of closeness and co-orientation where some of the statements were negatively framed.

Table 5 shows the representation of the raw data.

**Table 5: Complementarity**

<b>Construct Complementarity</b>	<b>Raw data</b> <b>C1 = Coach 1, A1 = Athlete 1, A2 = Athlete 2, C2 = Coach 2,</b> <b>A3 =Athlete 3, A4 = Athlete 4, C3 = Coach 3, A5 = Athlete 5</b>
<b>Reciprocal behaviour</b> Roles	<p>CI: <i>“Basically, what I do is ermm to stand as a coach and not a dictator so whatever that I bring out I try to find out from my athletes whether they are okay with it. And if they have any input. So therefore, whatever they bring, I weigh and see that it fits our aim then try the two and now find out from them which one they think is really workable to what we are targeting.”</i></p> <p>C3: <i>“I try to be a father figure for my athletes and ermm, I listen to my athletes’ views, I don’t try to be autocratic, doing stuff but I listen.”</i></p> <p>A1: <i>“I mostly do what he asks me to do because he has a plan for the competition. We have time for hard training, time to rest, time to do this, time to do that, some listening to my coach before competitions is what I do.”</i></p> <p>A2: <i>“Okay. So ermm with my coach I follow his instructions and my training schedule. So, he says you are doing 400m×5. I make sure I do everything.”</i></p> <p>A3: <i>“Ermm, oh yeah, he gives out the orders and then just like he has given them to us, we follow. So, he describes, and then we perform them. You will do something and he will be nodding his head, although he will give you a name, some funny name, just to make you laugh and to push you to do more.”</i></p> <p>A5: <i>“Well, he gives us the workout when we are on the field and we perform it.”</i></p>
Tasks	<p>A3: <i>“Yes, because even though he has taken us through the training programs, during competition stages, he does not rest. He makes sure that he is going up and down, doing everything possible so that we win our matches.”</i></p>
<b>Helping transactions</b> Emotional support	<p>C1: <i>“Yeah. Soo many ways and the greatest one is listening to what directions and advice are given and then doing the same thing. Whatever you tell them they do exactly that. Even if they won’t do it at all they do what you tell them to do.”</i></p> <p>C2: <i>“I think that over the years, they’ve actually given me that listening ear. There are times that I do call them at very odd hours even on Sundays, I get them to train that it’s been very very good.”</i></p> <p>A1: <i>“He always encourages me, motivates me, and talks to me that this, and that will help me to perform well in both sports and academics.”</i></p> <p>A2: <i>“Personally, he understands me so it’s kind of easy for me.”</i></p>
Academic support	<p>C2: <i>“And even with their academics, there are times that because I know them and I know their strength, I would have to do a little tuition for some of them.”</i></p> <p>A1: <i>“Ermm As a student, my coach mostly wants his athletes to perform well in both academics and sports.”</i></p> <p>A3: <i>“Ermm in terms of academics you will go to him, that you are having issues with some lecturers, he will go personally to the lecturers, talk to them and if possible, arrange ermm private classes for you.”</i></p> <p>A5: <i>“He has supported me in so many ways. Like in family matters and academics.”</i></p>
Financial support	<p>A2: <i>“Well, in finances, in prayers and in coaching.”</i></p>

	A3: <i>"In support, let me say ermm, sometimes I will go to him and tell him I am hungry. And then he will sit in his car and take me out and then buy something for me."</i> A4: <i>"In a way financially. Yeah financially, she has helped in a way."</i>
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Table 5 accounted for the construct of complementarity which was made up of first-order themes such as roles, tasks, emotional support, academic support, and financial support from the second-order themes of reciprocal behaviour and helping transactions.

The dyads showed another high level of complementarity, almost the same as the construct of co-orientation. All coaches and athletes cited reciprocal behaviour (role) as the most significant factor that accompanied good cooperation between the coaches and athletes. Coaches were seen by athletes to be leaders per the interview, as athletes were considered subordinates by coaches. A1 said:

*"I mostly do what he asks me to do because he has a plan for the competition. We have time for hard training, time to rest, time to do this, time to do that, so me listening to my coach before competitions is what I do."*

C1 added that:

*"I try to be a father figure for my athletes and ermm, I listen to my athletes' views, I don't try to be autocratic, doing stuff but I listen."*

A3 opined that the coach does not rest even during competitions after he has taken them through rigorous training sessions. For A3, it is necessary to complement the coach. It must be mentioned that the roles of both coaches and athletes enhanced their contributions to achieving their set goals.

Helping transactions which is the second-order theme of the first-order themes (emotional, academic, and financial supports) emerged as another powerful factor that influenced the relationship for its betterment. All three coaches suggested that there exists a high sense of listening and cooperation from athletes which contributed to reaching the set goals and attainment of success. As C2 put it:

*"I think that over the years, they've actually given me that listening ear. There are times that I do call them at very odd hours even on Sundays, I get them to train that it's been very very good."*

The athletes explained they were supported in different ways by coaches emotionally, academically, and financially. A1 cited:

*"He always encourages me, motivates me and talk to me that this, and that will help me to perform well in both sports and academics."*

A5 continued that:

*“He (the coach) has supported me in so many ways. Like in family matters and academics.”*

And lastly, A2 said:

*“Well, in finances, in prayers and in coaching.”*

## 5. Discussion

It must be highlighted that due to cross-over effects, some of the questions for the interview were rendered redundant for the constructs.

The purpose of the study was to explore the efficacy of coach-athlete relationship among UCC sports teams. To the best knowledge of the researcher, the demography which was used for the study has not been explored before in terms of coach-athlete relationship using the Jowett Conceptual 3Cs Model. A semi-structured interview was conducted to gather information from 3 coaches and 5 athletes. The study took place at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana.

The findings of the study revealed a high level of closeness among the participants in terms of intimacy, trust, appreciation, and respect, pointing to a promising future of relationship between coaches and athletes. It was discovered that there exists a strong bond between coaches and athletes (a fertile ground) that shaped the personal, interpersonal, and generic feelings of the dyads. This finding is consistent with previous studies on interpersonal {40,18}, suggesting that a degree of trust, respect, liking, and appreciation are important determinants of personal outcomes. Surprisingly, none of the three coaches talked about liking any of the athletes although 3 out of 5 of the athletes expressed sincere likeness for their coaches. This could mean that the coaches do not necessarily like the athletes personally, but are willing and ready to work with them, so they (the coaches) behave professionally. Professionalism seen in the coaches demonstrates the ability to be respectful, hardworking, rational, reliable and have integrity. Being professional shows how one values his or her business and therefore helps to limit inappropriate behaviour. Coaches who are professionals in their behaviour understand boundaries more clearly and solve any minor issues in an efficient and respectful approach {41}. Professionalism could therefore be the reason for closeness which is the result of high performance in UCC teams. Negative closeness was cited in the interview but could be said to be insignificant and had no adverse effect on the study. Without skepticism, it can also be said that closeness in the form of intimacy, trust, respect, appreciation, and the future that looked promising, facilitated open channels of communication including self-disclosure, common goal, and general understanding which are the first-order themes of the construct co-orientation. It would also appear that the dyads' ability to communicate openly, appropriately, and sufficiently may have assisted in the maintenance of the partnership over time {42}. Communication is the art

of a coach, concisely, accurately, courteously, completely and constructively sharing meaningful information with his or her athlete through an interchange of experiences. Coaches wish to motivate the athletes they work with and to provide them with information that will allow them to train effectively and improve performance {43}. UCC sports teams are performing high and winning trophies because one could say there is effective and effective communication (co-orientation) between the dyad.

The findings of this study revealed that, shared knowledge and shared understanding (second-order themes of co-orientation) existed and enhanced the coach-athlete relationship among UCC sports teams. These findings support the previous study by {39} that the quality of the coach-athlete relationship and its effect on team performance relies on communication. {30} opined that communication was another area that was examined as it was thought to be the “fuel of relationships”. The findings are also consistent with {23} claim that verbal communication produces and sustains relationships.

Complementarity occurred based on reciprocal behaviour and helping transactions (second-order themes). The nature of the coach-athlete relationship among UCC sports teams was seen to be cooperative in that, coaches were the dominant characters and the athletes as submissive characters. Coaches in the relationship gave instructions and athletes executed the given instructions. The coaches served as facilitators who led and transformed their athletes but did not impose their opinions on them. They supported their athletes emotionally, academically, and financially as suggested by the athletes in the UCC sports teams.

Athletes appeared to be satisfied and were always ready for their coaches' dominance as they indicated that they mostly did what they were asked to do because the coaches had the plans for the competition and so they were ready to listen to the coach before the competition. That was what the athletes did, although sometimes the coaches asked for their opinions. Such behaviour is supported by the assertion of {30} that, similarly, athletes accept the facilitative, supportive, and leading roles of their coaches while recognizing that they may have to assume a leading role (take charge, direct, lead the procedures) or following role (accept, listen, reflect) depending on the task at hand. {44} opined that this set of reciprocal complementary behaviours where one leads while the other follows has also been observed in the coach-athlete relationship. {45} added that athletes who share a good-quality relationship with their coaches experience high levels of satisfaction with their basic needs, which establishes a positive prediction of self-determined motivation and well-being.

The participants for this present study were from both team and individual sports yet the results were not influenced by that relationship. This is consistent with the contention of {28} that the nature of the sports has no bearing on the relationship developed. It is more of a personal choice of the athlete and coaches.

### **5.1 Recommendations**

It is recommended that coaches pay particular attention to coach-athlete relationships especially the Jowett's 3Cs Model which is a building block for high sports performance. Future researchers are asked to replicate the study in the settings of other academic sporting environments such as colleges of education, senior high schools and junior high schools.

The use of mixed research methods is also encouraged in future research. This would go a long way to address the weaknesses of better population coverage and response rate.

### **6. Conclusion**

The efficacy of the coach-athlete relationship among UCC sports teams was explored by applying the Jowett Conceptual 3Cs Model. The use of the constructs of closeness, co-orientation, and complementarity was an effective and efficient tool to explore the coaches' and athletes' feelings, communication, thought, and behaviour and to determine the extent to which the dyads understood each other. The participants exhibited high levels of closeness, co-orientation, and complementarity. This accounted for the high sports performance of UCC sports teams.

The findings of the research accentuated the quality of coach-athlete relationship, effectiveness, and efficiency are not solely dependent on the number of wins but the closeness, co-orientation, and complementarity of the dyads

### **Acknowledgements**

I commend Dr. Tweneboah Seth for reading through this piece of work and making constructive suggestions which made this work a quality material for reference. I also thank Mr. Aikins Addae for reading through the work for language corrections.

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### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The author declares no conflict of interest whatsoever.

### **Funding Statement**

No external funding was received.

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