



Trends and strategies of verbal communication in sports training a systematic review of psychological and linguistic perspectives

Tendencias y estrategias de comunicación verbal en el entrenamiento deportivo: una revisión sistemática de perspectivas psicológicas y lingüísticas

Authors

Daroe Iswatiningsih¹
Muhammad Andi Setiawan²
Diplan³

¹ Muhammadiyah University of
Malang (Indonesia)

² Muhammadiyah University of
Sampit (Indonesia)

³ Palangkaraya State University

Corresponding author:
Daroe Iswatiningsih
iswatiningsihdaroe@gmail.com

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Abstract

Introduction: Verbal communication significantly influences coaching effectiveness, yet studies bridging psychology and linguistics are limited and lack clarity in mechanisms and features.

Objective: This study synthesizes global research on coaches' verbal communication, highlighting trends, effective strategies, and research gaps through a psychological-linguistic lens.

Method: A Systematic Literature Review was conducted using the PRISMA protocol across Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, and PsycINFO. The review included empirical English-language articles (2017–2024) with psychological or linguistic insights. After screening, 28 articles were selected and analysed using Biblioshiny, NVivo, and VOSviewer.

Results: The United States led in publications, followed by the UK, South Korea, and Indonesia. Core themes included "communication," "performance," and "teams." Effective verbal strategies identified were reflective dialogue, corrective feedback, motivational self-talk, and emotionally supportive communication. Linguistic aspects like sentence structure and intonation were key.

Discussion: The findings highlight the interplay between coaching communication and sport psychology, showing that language shapes trust and meaning beyond instruction. Gaps include limited linguistic depth and a lack of real interaction data.

Conclusion: An interdisciplinary approach enhances understanding of coach-athlete communication. The study proposes the Interdisciplinary Coach Communication Model and recommends integrating pragmatic and linguistic training into coach education.

Keywords

Verbal communication; coaches; athletes; sports; psychology; linguistics; systematic literature review.

Resumen

Introducción: La comunicación verbal influye significativamente en la eficacia del coaching. Sin embargo, los estudios que vinculan la psicología y la lingüística son limitados y carecen de claridad en sus mecanismos y características.

Objetivo: Este estudio sintetiza la investigación global sobre la comunicación verbal de los coaches, destacando tendencias, estrategias eficaces y lagunas en la investigación desde una perspectiva psicolingüística.

Método: Se realizó una revisión sistemática de la literatura utilizando el protocolo PRISMA en Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed y PsycINFO. La revisión incluyó artículos empíricos en inglés (2017-2024) con perspectivas psicológicas o lingüísticas. Tras la selección, se seleccionaron 28 artículos y se analizaron mediante Biblioshiny, NVivo y VOSviewer.

Resultados: Estados Unidos lideró en publicaciones, seguido del Reino Unido, Corea del Sur e Indonesia. Los temas centrales incluyeron "comunicación", "rendimiento" y "equipos". Las estrategias verbales eficaces identificadas fueron el diálogo reflexivo, la retroalimentación correctiva, el diálogo interno motivacional y la comunicación de apoyo emocional. Aspectos lingüísticos como la estructura oracional y la entonación fueron clave. **Discusión:** Los hallazgos resaltan la interacción entre la comunicación del entrenador y la psicología del deporte, demostrando que el lenguaje moldea la confianza y el significado más allá de la instrucción. Las deficiencias incluyen una profundidad lingüística limitada y la falta de datos reales sobre la interacción.

Conclusión: Un enfoque interdisciplinario mejora la comprensión de la comunicación entre entrenadores y atletas. El estudio propone el Modelo Interdisciplinario de Comunicación entre Entrenadores y recomienda integrar la formación pragmática y lingüística en la formación de entrenadores.

Palabras clave

Comunicación verbal; entrenadores; atletas; deportes; psicología; lingüística; revisión sistemática de la literatura.

Introduction

Verbal communication is a pivotal component of effective sports coaching, fundamentally shaping the coach-athlete relationship, skill acquisition, and psychological development (Whales et al., 2020). In high-stakes competitive environments, the quality of this communication not only dictates the clarity of technical and tactical instruction but also significantly influences an athlete's confidence, motivation, and mental resilience (Avci et al., 2018). The practical implications of communication breakdowns are particularly evident in the Indonesian sports context, where such failures have been cited as a key contributor to underperformance. Notable examples include the communication challenges acknowledged by the head coach of the Indonesian national football team (Febriansyah, 2024) and miscommunication issues identified as a factor in the national weightlifting team's performance at the 2018 SEA Games (Raya, 2018).

Despite its acknowledged importance, research on coaching communication has been predominantly confined to a singular, psychological lens. This approach has yielded valuable insights into the affective outcomes of communication, such as its impact on motivation and team climate (Müller et al., 2023). However, it often overlooks the specific message delivery mechanisms, treating language as a transparent medium rather than a structured system. Consequently, the linguistic features that constitute effective coaching—including discourse structure, stylistic choices, and explicit instructional language (Sutcliffe et al., 2021)—remain critically underexplored (Qiu & Fang, 2022). This gap results in communication models that are often abstract and difficult to operationalise, limiting their utility for systematic coach education and development (Dias et al., 2024).

To address this limitation, a more holistic understanding requires an interdisciplinary synthesis of psychological and linguistic perspectives (Oxburgh et al., 2010). Such an approach allows for a comprehensive analysis of communication as both a social-psychological process and a structured linguistic practice. Psychology provides the framework to understand why certain communicative acts impact an athlete's mental state, while linguistics offers the analytical tools to deconstruct how these messages are effectively constructed and delivered. Integrating these viewpoints is essential for developing evidence-based, replicable communication strategies that are both psychologically impactful and linguistically sound.

This systematic review aims to synthesise international research on verbal communication strategies in sports coaching by integrating these complementary psychological and linguistic perspectives. The primary contribution of this paper is to develop a cross-disciplinary conceptual framework to better understand coaching practices and identify critical gaps for future research. Accordingly, this study addresses several key questions. It first examines the verbal strategies identified within psychological literature and their documented effects on athlete motivation, confidence, and team cohesion. Subsequently, it analyses the core linguistic features—such as discourse patterns, style, and lexical choices—that characterise effective coaching communication. The review then seeks to determine how findings from these two domains can be integrated into a comprehensive and actionable framework. Finally, it aims to identify the significant research gaps that an interdisciplinary approach can address, paving the way for more robust, data-driven communication models applicable to diverse coaching contexts, including Indonesia.

Method

Study Design

This study adopts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach, structured according to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) protocol (Alvarado et al., 2025; Awan et al., 2022; Ferk Savec & Mlinarec, 2021; Harie et al., 2023; Prabowo et al., 2025). This approach aims to systematically identify, evaluate, and synthesise the key findings from previous research related to verbal communication strategies in sports coaching, particularly from psychological and linguistic perspectives. By adhering to the PRISMA standards, this study aims to ensure transparency, reproducibility, and high methodological quality (Dany et al., 2025; Mercê et al., 2025; Tedjakusuma et al., 2025).



Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The article selection process for this systematic review is guided by the established inclusion and exclusion criteria (Aditya et al., 2025; Beck et al., 2025; Mesa et al., 2025). Articles included must substantively discuss coach verbal communication strategies in the context of sports training, analysed from a psychological and/or linguistic perspective. The following table outlines the inclusion and exclusion criteria for this study.

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Focus on Communication Context Perspective	Substantively discusses the coach's verbal communication. Sports training/physical activity (all types & levels). Psychological and/or linguistic analysis of the coach's verbal communication.	Primarily non-verbal communication without significant verbal content. Outside the context of sports training. No psychological/linguistic perspective.
Publication Type	Empirical research articles in scientific journals.	Non-research journal articles (editorials, reviews, abstracts, theses, etc.).
Period	2017–2024.	Published before 2017 or after 2024.
Language	English.	Languages other than English.
Academic Field	Psychology, social sciences, or humanities.	Outside psychology, social sciences, or humanities.
Title & Abstract	Relevant to verbal communication strategies in sports coaching.	Not relevant to the topic.

Search Strategy

To ensure a comprehensive and robust search, the literature review was conducted across four major international databases: Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, and PsycINFO. The search keywords, expanded to capture a wider range of relevant studies, were structured into three concepts: (1) communication type, (2) context, and (3) outcomes/perspectives. The following search string was adapted for each database: ("coach-athlete communication" OR "verbal communication" OR "instructional feedback" OR "coaching language" OR "coach talk" OR "sports communication" OR "athletic communication" OR "verbal cue" OR "verbal instruction") AND ("sport" OR "physical training" OR "athlete" OR "coaching") AND ("psychology" OR "linguistic" OR "discourse analysis" OR "pragmatics" OR "motivation" OR "learning" OR "performance"). Furthermore, to mitigate publication bias and locate studies not captured by the database search, two supplementary steps were taken: (1) a manual search of the reference lists of all included articles (i.e., snowballing) and (2) a targeted search for grey literature, such as dissertations and conference papers, in ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

Study Selection Procedure

The study selection was performed independently by two reviewers to minimise selection bias, following the four-stage PRISMA flow (Dualde et al., 2025; Molina et al., 2025; Nuraini et al., 2025; Pimenta et al., 2025). After combining search results and removing duplicates, both reviewers screened the titles and abstracts against the predefined inclusion criteria. Subsequently, the full texts of the potentially relevant articles were retrieved and assessed for eligibility. Any disagreements at either stage were resolved through discussion to reach a consensus or, if required, consultation with a third reviewer. The inter-rater reliability for the full-text screening phase was calculated using Cohen's kappa to ensure consistency in the selection process. This multi-stage process resulted in a final set of 28 eligible articles for inclusion in the synthesis. Below is the data extraction table for the articles included.

Table 2. PRISMA stage

PRISMA Stage	Action	Number of Articles
Identification	Initial search via Scopus database	504
	Time range limitation (2017–2024)	347
Screening	Document type limitation (journal articles only)	215
	Language limitation (English only)	195
Eligibility	Article type limitation (empirical research)	73
	Academic field limitation (psychology, social sciences, humanities)	53
Inclusion	Title and abstract relevance assessment	28
Included Articles	Articles meeting the inclusion criteria for analysis	28

Methodological Quality Assessment

Two reviewers independently assessed the methodological quality of the 28 included studies. The Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklists were utilised to accommodate the variety of research designs, and the appropriate tool for each study (e.g., Qualitative, Cohort, or RCT checklist) was selected. The appraisal focused on evaluating the rigour of each study's methodology, the validity of its findings, and the potential for bias. No studies were excluded based on their quality scores. Instead, the quality assessment results were used to weigh the strength of the evidence and contextualise the findings during the data synthesis phase.

Data Extraction and Synthesis Techniques

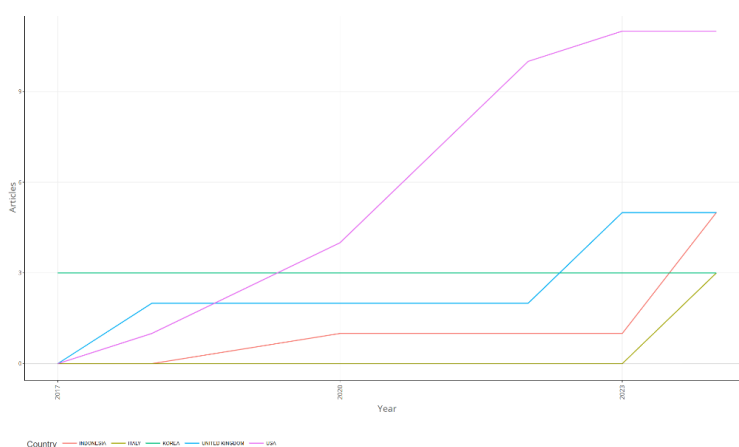
Data extraction from the 28 selected articles will be performed systematically using a standardised instrument, covering publication characteristics, context, focus on verbal communication, theoretical framework, methodology, effectiveness outcomes, and areas for future research. Data synthesis will integrate bibliometric analysis (Biblioshiny/R-Studio) to map the publication landscape, temporal trends, collaboration, and thematic structure through keyword co-occurrence visual representation. Qualitative content analysis (NVivo) will identify central themes related to communication strategies, psychological implications, and linguistic attributes of verbal communication. Complementarity of analysis will be achieved through semantic network visualisation (Vosviewer) to identify thematic clusters and conceptual relationships. Integration of these analyses aims to address research questions, identify key findings, formulate theoretical-practical implications, and outline future research directions.

Results

Study Trend Characteristics

An analysis of study trend characteristics was conducted to map the development and focus of research on verbal communication in the context of sports coaching. This review explores spatial, terminological, and thematic dimensions using five primary approaches: publication country distribution, word cloud visualisation, topic trends, co-occurrence network, and thematic evolution.

Figure 1. Country-Wise Publication Output Over Time



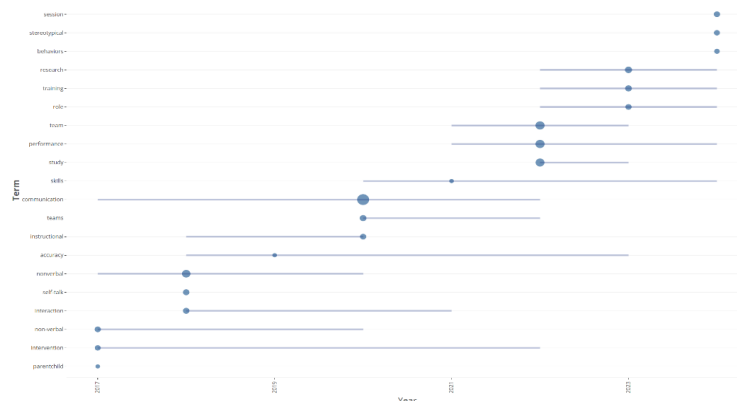
The distribution of publications by country reveals that the United States leads in article production, showing a significant increase since 2019. This is followed by the United Kingdom, South Korea, and Indonesia, which have maintained consistent contributions.

Figure 2. Word Cloud Visualisation



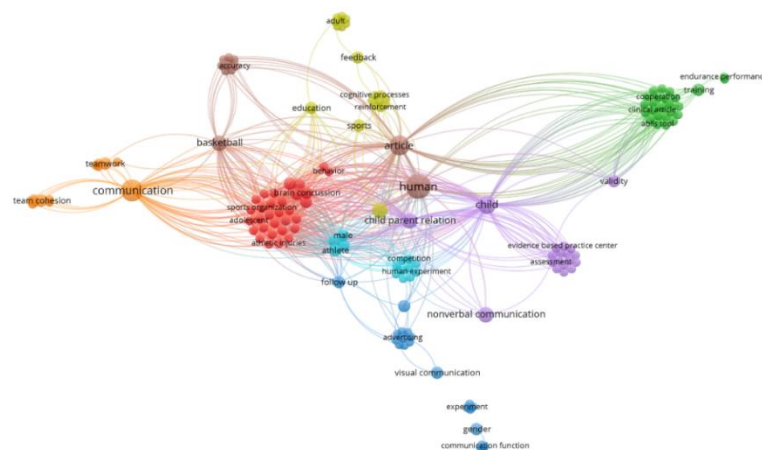
Cloud mapping highlights dominant keywords such as communication, performance, athletes, and team, reflecting the literature's focus on how communication impacts athletic performance and team dynamics.

Figure 3. Topic Trends



Topic trend analysis shows that terms like communication and teams remained consistently relevant throughout 2017–2024. Meanwhile, themes such as instructional, performance, and research have seen increasing attention in recent years, indicating a shift toward more instructional and evaluative approaches.

Figure 4. Co-occurrence Network



The co-occurrence network further supports the trend findings, illustrating interconnectedness among key concepts such as instructional feedback, motivation, and coach–athlete relationship, which have emerged as central themes in recent publications.

Figure 5. Thematic Evolution



Thematic evolution mapping visualises research themes based on their level of development (density) and relevance (centrality). The theme purpose significant sport is positioned in the motor themes quadrant, indicating it is both highly developed and central to the field. In contrast, themes like performance research literature and sports role child fall into the niche themes quadrant, suggesting potential for further exploration despite their current peripheral status. The theme study communication results are classified as a basic theme, which is relevant but still underdeveloped. Meanwhile, themes such as examined interaction importance and improved employed instructional methods are identified as either emerging or declining, marked by low development and relevance. These findings highlight the need for future research to strengthen strategic basic themes, enhance the connectivity of niche areas, and reassess the value of declining topics. Future directions may include developing evidence-based communication interventions to improve the effectiveness of sports coaching.

Verbal Communication Strategies

Verbal communication strategies are crucial in shaping interactions between coaches, athletes, and team members. Numerous studies have highlighted that effective communication enhances team cohesion and supports improvements in individual and collective performance. Within sports coaching, these strategies encompass reflective dialogue, corrective feedback, instructional and motivational self-talk, and emotionally supportive interpersonal communication. Each approach serves a specific function depending on the interactional context and the intended training outcomes.

Table 3. Verbal Communication Strategies

Theoretical Framework	Author & Year	Verbal Strategies Discussed
Self-Determination Theory (SDT)	Purnomo et al., 2024	Reflective dialogue, verbal motivation (autonomy-supportive)
	Oh, 2023	Positive coach–athlete communication (competence, relatedness)
	Davis et al., 2022	Supportive strategies: motivation, reassurance, openness
Cognitive Behavioural Theory (CBT)	Cranmer et al., 2020	Coach confirmation (acceptance/challenge as relational support)
	Latinjak et al., 2018	Instructional self-talk, motivational self-talk, corrective feedback
	Abdol et al., 2018	Instructional and motivational self-talk
Interpersonal Communication Theory	Bisio et al., 2024	Suggestive communication (e.g., deceptive feedback – mental regulation)
	Karafil & Ulas, 2023	General coach–athlete communication
	Purnomo et al., 2021	Messaging, listening, feedback, and emotional connection
Instructional Communication / Feedback Theory	Lower-Hoppe et al., 2020	Reflective dialogue (player-to-player relational talk)
	Pacholek & Zemková, 2022	Verbal encouragement, performance feedback, and goal-oriented communication
	Rey et al., 2022	Instructional authority in communication
Group Dynamics / Team Communication Theory	Kim & Park, 2020	Contextual verbal communication (training, crises, performance)
	Choi et al., 2019	Team communication, coach–athlete relationship
	Choi et al., 2020	Team communication and coordination

A synthesis of 28 selected articles reveals that while technical instruction remains fundamental in training, it receives comparatively limited explicit focus. Instead, studies emphasise broader aspects such as motivation and interpersonal relationships. Corrective feedback emerges as a key strategy in skill development, with studies examining its implementation and outcomes (e.g., Latinjak et al., 2018; Bisio et al., 2024; Pacholek & Zemková, 2022). Verbal motivation—whether delivered by the coach or used as athlete self-talk—is consistently reported as a critical factor influencing performance and psychological states (Purnomo et al., 2024; Abdol et al., 2018). Verbal cues in instructional self-talk are also recognised for aiding movement focus and execution (Latinjak et al., 2018). Finally, reflective dialogue is highlighted as an interactive communication approach that fosters athlete autonomy and decision-making (Lower-Hoppe et al., 2020; Purnomo et al., 2024).

Psychological Impact

Verbal communication between coaches and athletes affects not only technical performance but also profoundly influences athletes' psychological states. Studies show that forms of communication such as feedback, verbal instruction, motivational talk, and reflective dialogue significantly impact athlete motivation, self-confidence, focus, and emotional regulation. These effects appear consistently across individual and team sports and in various national contexts. Furthermore, verbal communication positively correlates with improved performance outcomes and team cohesion.

Table 4. Psychological Impact

Author & Year	Country	Sport	Sample	Psychological Impact
Lower-Hoppe et al., 2020	USA	American Football	4 NCAA Division I team captains	Enhanced team focus and collective confidence; communication linked to team performance
Latinjak et al., 2018	Spain	Ultimate Frisbee	32 novice players	Improved focus, emotional regulation, confidence, and error recognition
Oh, 2023	South Korea	General Sports	263 KOOC athletes	Increased team cohesion, motivation, and performance
Abdol et al., 2018	Not specified	Basketball	20 professional players	Reduced movement variability and improved shooting accuracy through instructional self-talk
Pacholek & Zemková, 2022	Not specified	Physical Fitness	432 male students	Improved motivation, strength performance, and physical output
Vives-Ribó & Rabassa, 2020	Spain	Women's Field Hockey	1 top-division team	Boosted confidence and motivation, reflected in competition results
Rey et al., 2022	USA	NCAA Team Sports	170 college athletes	Enhanced affective and cognitive learning, motivational states, and win percentages
Kim & Park, 2020	South Korea	Archery	8 Olympic archers	Affected self-awareness, confidence, anxiety, autonomy, and motivation
Cranmer et al., 2020	USA	Team Sports	117 Division I athletes	Strengthened self-confidence, team cohesion, and group performance

Several studies explicitly investigate the motivational effects of communication. For instance, (Oh, 2023) found that accurate and positive coach communication significantly correlates with higher athlete motivation. Similarly, Pacholek & Zemková (2022) reported that verbal encouragement and performance feedback boost both motivation and physical performance. In their qualitative study on Olympic archers, Kim & Park (2020) noted that communication during practice and psychological crises shaped athlete motivation. (Vives-Ribó & Rabassa, 2020) also observed enhanced motivation among elite field hockey players following implementation of the "Chain of Consciousness" verbal communication model.

Focus and concentration are additional psychological dimensions influenced by communication. (Lower-Hoppe et al., 2020) Noted that reflective dialogue and peer communication promote team focus in American football. Likewise, (Latinjak et al., 2018) found that instructional self-talk and corrective feedback significantly improved concentration among Frisbee players.

Confidence and self-efficacy were central themes across multiple studies. (Lower-Hoppe et al., 2020) observed increased collective confidence through team communication. (Latinjak et al., 2018) and (Kim & Park, 2020) reported enhanced individual confidence through effective verbal strategies. Furthermore, (Cranmer et al., 2020) demonstrated that coach confirmation behaviour increased athlete confidence, and (Abdol et al., 2018) found that improved movement accuracy from self-talk likely contributed to enhanced self-efficacy.



Linguistic Perspective

In the domain of sports coaching, communication is not only evaluated in terms of message content but also through the linguistic manner in which it is delivered. The linguistic perspective on coach-athlete verbal communication encompasses language style, sentence structure, word choice, intonation, cultural context and message multimodality. Linguistic analysis allows a deeper understanding of how athletes convey, receive, and interpret messages. The following studies indicate that elements such as conversational codes, instruction simplification, positive communication style, and multimodal approaches play a vital role in the effectiveness of sports communication. The table below summarises several studies that explicitly or implicitly apply linguistic analysis in the context of sports communication.

Table 5. Linguistic Perspective

Author & Year	Country	Sport	Linguistic Focus	Critical Note
Lower-Hoppe et al., 2020	USA	American Football	Conversational codes and verbal patterns	Strong linguistic framing; limited generalizability due to small sample
Purnomo et al., 2024	Indonesia	Multicategory	Coaches' language style and structure	Linguistic analysis secondary; more psychological than linguistic depth
Oh, 2023	South Korea	Multi-sport	Positive communication style	Limited explicit linguistic analysis; mainly psychological modelling
Abdol et al., 2018	–	Basketball	Sentence simplification in instructions	Linguistic aspect implicit; focus on motor performance
Pacholek & Zemková, 2022	–	Physical Fitness	Verbal stimulation	Lacks theoretical linguistic grounding; more physiological emphasis
Seo et al., 2017	USA	Sports Advertising	Cultural-linguistic comparison in ads	Strong linguistic-cultural insight; not directly linked to athlete communication
Azimi & Tamminen, 2022	Canada	Hockey & Soccer	Parent-athlete communication quality	Emphasises interpersonal tone; lacks formal linguistic dissection
Vives-Ribó & Rabassa, 2020	Spain	Field Hockey	Conscious linguistic approach	Moderate awareness of language role; lacks a structured linguistic framework
Rahmalina et al., 2025	Indonesia	Badminton	Multimodal verbal interaction	Strong theoretical linguistic foundation; limited generalizability
Milius et al., 2020	USA & Canada	Basketball	Tactical use of verbal language	Rich observational data; linguistic insights embedded in tactical framing

Analysis of the selected studies highlights the crucial role of linguistic perspectives in sports communication, as reflected in multiple aspects. Language choice and speaking style are significant, with an emphasis on positive communication (Oh, 2023), cultural alignment in advertisements (Seo et al., 2017), quality of parent-athlete interactions (Azimi & Tamminen, 2022), and the use of verbal stimulation (Pacholek & Zemková, 2022). Sentence structure is also key, especially in instructional simplification (Abdol et al., 2018). Furthermore, intonation and implicit meanings are explored through multimodal approaches (Rahmalina et al., 2025) and linguistic awareness (Vives-Ribó & Rabassa, 2020), while studies on conversational codes (Lower-Hoppe et al., 2020) also demonstrate their relevance. Although some studies broadly explore coaches' language style (Purnomo et al., 2024) and verbal tactics (Milius et al., 2020), it is important to note that not all research explicitly focuses on verbal linguistics—some address nonverbal communication or general team dynamics. The linguistic perspective—particularly in language selection, sentence structure, and implicit meanings in multimodal interactions—significantly contributes to understanding effective communication in sports settings.

Research Gaps and Limitations of Previous Studies

Despite the increasing number of studies on communication strategies in sports coaching contexts, a systematic literature review reveals several methodological and conceptual gaps and limitations in previous research. Some studies focus heavily on the general psychological effects of communication without distinguishing between verbal and nonverbal strategies, while others overlook the linguistic approach in analysing the content of coach messages. Certain research adopts retrospective or observational approaches restricted to specific contexts or populations (e.g., only elite athletes or team captains), thus limiting the generalizability of findings.

Moreover, linguistic aspects—such as language structure, speech acts, and pragmatic context—are rarely the central focus, although these are crucial for understanding the effectiveness of coaching communication. Important variables such as gender, cultural context, and communication dynamics over time are seldom comprehensively addressed. The table below summarises the key studies analysed in



this review, including their methods, sport contexts, communication strategies employed, and notable limitations for future research considerations.

Table 6. Research Gaps and Limitations

Author & Year	Country	Sport	Population	Limitations
(Lower-Hoppe et al., 2020)	USA	Football	4 NCAA Division I football team captains	No longitudinal analysis; focused only on captains, not coaches; did not explore gender or cultural contexts
(Purnomo et al., 2024)	Indonesia	Multiple categories (accuracy, martial arts, games, measurable)	173 youth athletes	There was no longitudinal exploration; it did not analyse linguistic aspects of verbal messages; it lacked communication recordings.
(Latinjak et al., 2018)	Spain	Ultimate Frisbee	32 novice Ultimate Frisbee players	Coaches not included; only self-directed communication, subjective retrospection; limited generalizability.
(Oh, 2023)	South Korea	Multi-sport (KIOC-registered athletes)	263 KIOC athletes	It did not explicitly address linguistic dimensions or specific types of verbal communication; it used a generalised communication approach.
(Labuschagne, 2017)	South Africa	Rugby	Iconic rugby sport images	Focused solely on non-verbal and paralinguistic communication; verbal communication is not explicitly examined
(Abdoli et al., 2018)	Not specified	Basketball	20 professional basketball players	Did not discuss the motivational self-talk effect or long-term outcomes
(Bisio et al., 2024)	Not specified	Running	26 participants	No stated limitations in the abstract; focused on placebo effects in sports performance
(Pacholek & Zemková, 2022)	Not specified	Physical Fitness	432 male university students	It did not deeply explore linguistic aspects; it focused only on the effectiveness of verbal stimuli.
(Azimi & Tamminen, 2022)	Not specified	Various Sports	28 parent-child dyads (30 hours of video)	Did not explicitly discuss specific psychological impacts of parental communication
(Shah et al., 2023)	Not specified	Elite Team Sports	4 elite teams (N = 67, 79% female)	Did not detail the specific link between verbal and non-verbal communication or individual psychological effects
(Seo et al., 2017)	Korea & USA	Sports advertising	64 Korean and 64 US students	Focused only on cultural preferences in advertisements; did not analyse verbal communication in sports training contexts
(Kuralbayeva et al., 2025)	Kazakhstan	Basketball, Volleyball, Football	240 multicultural university students	Effects varied by sport (significant in basketball and volleyball, not in football)
(Azimi & Tamminen, 2022)	Canada	Hockey & Football	10 adolescent athletes & parents (N = 20)	No significant quantitative changes, but clear qualitative differences
(Shimazaki et al., 2021)	Japan	Multi-sport (high school & university teams)	233 student-athletes	Effects of negative communication varied by age and gender
(Vives-Ribó & Rabassa, 2020)	Spain	Women's field hockey	1 top-division team	Needs further experimental validation
(Furley & Thrien, 2024)	Germany	General (multi-sport)	60 athletes	Provided micro-level insights into the effect of the coach's facial expressions
(Rahmalina et al., 2025)	Indonesia	Elite Badminton	Male doubles athletes at PON 2024	Local study with video-based communication analysis
(Karafil & Ulaş, 2023)	Turkey	General Sports	27 young adult athletes	No specific focus on linguistic aspects; emphasis on communication barriers and psychological impacts
(Rey et al., 2022)	USA	Division I Team Sports	170 collegiate athletes at Power 5 institutions	Emphasised power use in communication more than linguistic features of verbal communication
(Davis et al., 2022)	Sweden	Various Sports	350 Swedish athletes	Highlighted the importance of attachment orientation to the coach; did not focus directly on verbal linguistic features
(Shimazaki et al., 2021)	Japan	Multiple sports	233 high school and university athletes	Limited focus on subjective perceptions
(Milius et al., 2020)	USA & Canada	Basketball	1 head coach, 1 associate coach, 16 female athletes	Limited to one team; low generalizability; no long-term quantitative outcome measures
(Purnomo et al., 2021)	Indonesia	Various (pre-service coaches)	105 pre-service coaches	Only descriptive; no intervention or deep analysis; did not assess direct athlete impact.
(Choi et al., 2020)	South Korea	10 Sports	347 collegiate athletes	Self-report data, limited generalizability; no longitudinal exploration
(Kim & Park, 2020)	South Korea	Archery	8 Olympic archers	Focused solely on archery; small sample size; results not generalisable to other sports.
(Cranmer et al., 2020)	USA	Team Sports	117 Division I collegiate athletes	Focused only on Division I athletes; may not generalise to other levels
(Choi et al., 2019)	South Korea	Team Sports	294 collegiate team athletes	Limited to college athletes; results may not generalise to other populations.

Findings from the review of prior studies point to several methodological and substantive limitations that shape significant research gaps in the study of verbal communication in sports coaching contexts. Methodologically, many studies still rely on qualitative designs with small samples and context-specific



data, limiting generalizability. Descriptive-correlational research has not established causal relationships, while experimental studies are often limited to short-term measurements and do not explore long-term impacts of coach verbal communication on athletes.

Substantively, there is a lack of accurate empirical data, particularly from recorded coach-athlete interactions. The linguistic dimension of verbal communication remains underexplored, with many studies emphasising nonverbal or general team communication. Coaches themselves, as the primary agents in coaching communication, are often not directly involved in existing studies.

Furthermore, most research does not adequately consider gender differences, cultural background, or variations across sports disciplines, which could influence communication styles and effectiveness. Some studies are not directly relevant to the sports coaching context, as they focus on advertising communication or parent-child interactions instead. Therefore, there is an urgent need for empirical, linguistically focused research that examines the forms and impacts of coaches' verbal communication in real training contexts, accounting for cultural, gender, and sport-specific dimensions.

Discussion

The findings of this study unequivocally indicate that various verbal communication strategies in sports coaching strongly intersect with principles from sport psychology, particularly Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). Strategies such as reflective dialogue, motivational speech, and corrective feedback function as communication tools and as fundamental mechanisms to fulfill athletes' basic psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness (MD & Jenicek, 2012; Patten et al., 2010). More specifically, interactive reflective dialogue significantly enhances an athlete's sense of autonomy by empowering them to take ownership of their learning process and decision-making, activating metacognitive processes that enable athletes to reflect on performance and develop self-generated solutions. Rather than just outcome, praise and recognition of effort directly reinforce a sense of competence by activating brain reward circuits that strengthen motor learning and motivate the repetition of effective behaviours. Furthermore, these elements also foster a strong emotional connection between coach and athlete, which is crucial for fulfilling the need for relatedness. Instructional and motivational self-talk strategies are deeply rooted in CBT approaches, as they actively assist athletes in managing internal perceptions and strengthening self-regulation under competitive pressure (Temel, 2025). Moreover, verbal cues are a simple yet direct form of cognitive restructuring, clarifying movement focus or tactical strategies during competition (Daniels et al., 2007; Vrij & Vrij, 2020). From a linguistic perspective, coaches' communication transcends the mere conveyance of technical instructions; it fundamentally shapes the social construction of meaning (Grzegorzczuk, 2015). Discourse analysis reveals how conversational structures, word choices, and pragmatic aspects—such as intonation and implied meanings—critically affect perception, trust, and cohesion between coaches and athletes. This dimension emphatically highlights the necessity of an interdisciplinary approach to comprehend the intricate dynamics of coach communication fully.

The trend analysis of study characteristics provides key insights into the direction and focus of research in this field. Country distribution shows the dominance of the United States, with increasing contributions from the United Kingdom, South Korea, and Indonesia in recent years. Word cloud and topic trend analyses indicate that terms such as "communication," "performance," and "teams" remain central, while a growing focus on instructional and evaluation-based aspects suggests a significant methodological shift. Co-occurrence networks and thematic evolution further reveal that the theme of "purposeful significant sport" has emerged as a motor theme, whereas "performance research literature" and "study communication results" remain niche and basic themes, with substantial potential for further development. This study makes a significant contribution by classifying various verbal communication strategies and interpreting them through integrated psychological and linguistic lenses. While there has been initial exploration into linguistic dimensions, prior studies have largely focused on psychological or purely descriptive approaches. Bibliometric findings also underscore the need to further explore instructional and interaction-based communication themes, particularly by analysing recorded coach-athlete interactions.

Nevertheless, reviewing previous studies also reveals notable methodological and substantive limitations, highlighting critical research gaps that must be addressed. Methodologically, most studies still rely on qualitative designs with small samples and limited contexts, significantly restricting the generalizability of findings. Descriptive-correlational approaches have yet to adequately explain deep causal relationships (Abraham et al., 2023). Experimental studies are often limited to short-term measurements (Ngai & Lam, 2020; Sait et al., 2024), failing to capture long-term effects. This review has limitations in scope and depth of analysis, as it did not comprehensively evaluate the quality of evidence from each referenced study. Substantively, the use of actual empirical data—such as recordings of verbal coach-athlete interactions—remains remarkably scarce, hindering an in-depth analysis of actual communication dynamics. The linguistic dimension of coaching communication has not been deeply explored, as many studies still focus on non-verbal or general team communication. Coaches serve as primary actors in training contexts and are often not directly involved as research subjects.

Furthermore, gender, cultural background, and differences across sports disciplines are also underexamined, despite their immense potential influence on communication style and effectiveness. For instance, a superficial cultural analysis fails to adequately consider how communication norms vary across different countries and how this impacts the interpretation of a coach's message. These gaps underscore the pressing need for empirical, linguistically grounded research on verbal communication practices within specific sports training contexts.

The practical implications of these findings are highly relevant for coaches, curriculum designers, and sports institutions. Coaches should be trained to enhance their awareness of communication styles, including word choice, tone, and sentence structure, which profoundly affect athletes' responses. Coaching curricula should explicitly incorporate principles of pragmatics, discourse analysis, and sport psychology fundamentals to foster more effective and empathetic communication. Sport organisations need to develop policies that support continuous communication training and encourage the use of communication analysis tools for coach performance evaluation. Theoretically, this synthesis offers a robust foundation for developing an integrated coach communication model, encompassing cognitive, affective, and interactional dimensions. The proposed integrated conceptual model, the Interdisciplinary Coach Communication Model (ICCM), hypothesises that specific communication strategies influence athlete psychology and performance through mediating variables such as confidence, focus, and interpersonal relationships. The ICCM explicitly integrates SDT and CBT from a psychological perspective, and pragmatics and discourse analysis from a linguistic perspective, to provide a robust theoretical basis for future research. Subsequent studies should empirically explore this model through longitudinal and experimental approaches, enriching the dataset with recorded communication for in-depth linguistic analysis.

Furthermore, cross-cultural and cross-sport comparative studies would significantly expand the validity and applicability of the proposed model. It is crucial to compare the ICCM with existing theoretical frameworks in communication and sport psychology literature to highlight this interdisciplinary integration's uniqueness and added value. In contrast to previous reviews that tend to separate psychological and linguistic aspects, this study offers a conceptual integration of both better to understand the effectiveness of verbal communication in sports coaching. This synthesis introduces a novel interdisciplinary perspective and provides a conceptual basis for developing more contextual and athlete-responsive communication-based coaching approaches, ultimately holistically enhancing training outcomes and athlete well-being.

Conclusions

This study systematically synthesises verbal communication strategies in sports coaching by integrating psychological perspectives with linguistic approaches, particularly through discourse and pragmatic analysis. The findings indicate that communication strategies such as reflective dialogue, instructional self-talk, corrective feedback, and verbal cues enhance athletic performance and fulfil athletes' basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The interdisciplinary approach adopted in this study underscores the importance of understanding coach communication not merely as the delivery of technical instructions but as a social construction that shapes meaning, trust, and relational



dynamics within training contexts. Furthermore, the analysis of bibliometric trends and thematic evolution reveals that the field is gradually shifting toward more instructional, evaluative, and evidence-based approaches. However, significant gaps remain, particularly in exploring linguistic dimensions and coach-athlete verbal interactions. Practically, this study advocates for developing coach education programs that integrate pragmatic communication skills, linguistic sensitivity, and sport psychology principles to enhance communication effectiveness and the quality of coach-athlete relationships. Theoretically, the findings pave the way for developing an integrated coaching communication model, which can be empirically tested through longitudinal designs and cross-cultural studies in future research.

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Authors' and translators' details:

Daroe Iswatiningsih
Muhammad Andi Setiawan
Diplan

iswatiningsihdaroe@gmail.com
andiysetiawan@gmail.com
Diplan161181@fkip.upr.ac.id

Author
Author
Transalator