



## EVALUATION OF COACH LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOR - CASE STUDY OF KENYAN SWIMMING COACHES

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### **Abstract:**

The leadership behavior exercised by a coach is key to athletes' effectiveness. The study sought to evaluate the leadership behaviours employed by swimming coaches in Kenya and examine whether their leadership behaviours were similar to what other studies have found to be effective coaching leadership styles across various contexts and situations. The Leadership Scale for Sport (LSS) questionnaire was used to collect data on leadership behavior among the respondents. The study population comprised 28 swimming coaches (n = 24 males; n = 4 females) based in Kenya SPSS was used to analyse the data collected, where Mann-Whitney U test did not establish any significant difference across gender on the five types of leadership styles at  $p < .05$ . From the results, the most common leadership behavior among the swimming coaches was the use of Positive Feedback ( $\bar{x} = 4.5786$ ), followed by Training and Instruction ( $\bar{x} = 4.4588$ ) then Social Support ( $\bar{x} = 3.5804$ ) followed by Democratic ( $\bar{x} = 3.3690$ ), while Autocratic ( $\bar{x} = 2.2571$ ) was the least type of leadership style used. There was no significant difference across gender on any of the preferred leadership styles, with the ranking of the leadership styles being similar for both male and female coaches, as positive feedback was ranked highest and autocratic style ranked lowest. Kruskal Walli's test conducted across age groups of the coaches and the five leadership styles found no significant difference (at  $p = .435$  for Democratic leadership style;  $p = .763$  for Autocratic leadership style;  $p = .172$  for Social Support leadership style;  $p = .698$  for Training & Instruction leadership style). Studies done on coaching leadership styles preferred by athletes and have improved athletes' performance have shown Training & Instruction and Positive Feedback as the most preferred type of leadership style. The autocratic leadership style has been viewed to have negative influence and the athletes do not like this style of leadership from their coaches. In comparison to the Kenyan swimming coaches, they employed the most preferred styles of leadership with emphasis being on Positive Feedback, this was attributed to the fact that most swimming coaches trained children

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below 12 years who value positive reinforcement even as they are instructed on corrective strategies. An effective coach is capable of motivating athletes to do well and achieve their maximum potential, thus the preferred leadership styles by athletes of Training & Instruction and Positive Feedback that have been shown to assist athletes to improve on their performance should be adopted by coaches.

**Keywords:** swimming coaches; leadership styles; coaching behavior

## 1. Introduction

An effective leader is one who has the ability to influence and guide followers or members of an organization (Oxford Dictionary). Kevin Kruse (2013) expounds on leadership as a process of social influence, which maximizes the efforts of others, towards the achievement of a goal.

Among the responsibilities of the coach is leadership, which is intertwined with all other roles the coach plays (Vaughn, 2015). Leadership behavior exercised by a coach is key to athletes' effectiveness (Surujlal and Dhurup, 2012). As sports gain prominence professionally, both at national and international levels there is a need to ensure effective leadership within the sporting industry among the coaches and other stakeholders. An effective coach is capable of motivating athletes to do well and achieve their maximum potential. Coaching sports incorporates leadership principles which are part of the coach's behavioural process that are interpersonal and motivate athletes to attain higher competencies leading to success.

Chelladurai and Saleh (1980) developed the Leadership Scale for Sport (LSS) questionnaire that has been used to measure coaching behavior. The questionnaire comprises forty items that measure five coaching behaviours which include; democratic behavior, positive feedback, training behaviour, social support, and autocratic behavior. Whereas athletes are allowed to participate in decision-making under democratic behavior, there is limited involvement of athletes and the use of commands and punishments under autocratic behaviour. Positive feedback supports complimenting athletes for their performance to motivate them. Provision of the welfare of the athletes is the major tenet of social support as that satisfies the athletes' interpersonal needs. Training and instruction involve advice on tactics, techniques, and skills, of the sport so as to improve the performance of athletes. The questionnaire outlines coaches' perceptions of actual and preferred leadership styles.

This study sought to establish the preferred types of leadership styles the Kenyan swimming coaches employed and make comparison with what other studies have shown to be effective coaching leadership styles across various contexts and situations.

## 2. Literature Review

Coaching sports incorporates leadership principles which are part of the coach's behavioural process that are interpersonal and motivate athletes to attain higher competencies leading to success (Vaughan, 2015; Babbitt, 2019). A study by Zazarudin *et al.* (2009) among Malaysian intervarsity basketball players that sought to identify the relationship between leadership style of coaches and player satisfaction found that athletes preferred Training & Instruction coaching leadership style ( $M = 3.01$ ,  $SD = 0.82$ ) followed by Positive Feedback ( $M = 2.94$ ,  $SD = 0.85$ ), while Autocratic coaching leadership style was least preferred ( $M = 2.03$ ,  $SD = 0.96$ ). The study also compared correlation between preferred leadership styles and athletes' satisfaction. The overall correlations showed a positive relationship for each of the five leadership styles; democratic ( $r = .407$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ); positive feedback ( $r = .442$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ); training and instruction ( $r = .456$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ); social support ( $r = .428$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and autocratic ( $r = .413$ ,  $p < .0.01$ ).

Rodriguez (2009) used the Chelladurai's Perceived Leadership Scale for Sports as well as questions that measured swimmers' satisfaction, commitment, and turnover intention to examine the relationship with coaching leadership styles adopted by the coaches. The study respondents were 220 swimmers ( $n = 98$  males;  $n = 122$  females) from 20 teams across various colleges and Universities in the United States of America, their average mean age was 19.98 years. The results found Training & Instruction, Democratic behavior, and Positive Feedback to significantly correlate positively with athlete satisfaction. Social support though found to positively correlate with athlete satisfaction was not significant. Autocratic style of leadership behavior significantly correlate negatively with athlete satisfaction. Commitment was found to be positively related to the four leadership styles (Training & Instruction, Social Support, Democratic behavior and Positive Feedback) and correlated negatively with autocratic behavior. The results also found a significant difference in the relationship between the coaches' gender and autocratic behavior at  $F, (2,219) = 7.74: < .01$  as male coaches were perceived as significantly more autocratic than female coaches with a mean score of 2.38 and 1.94 respectively.

Sarpira, Khodayari, Mohammadi (2012) in their study among elite athletes (team and individuals) found significant positive relationship between all aspects of team cohesion and training & instruction leadership and Social Support (relationship-oriented) leadership styles. The study did not find any significant positive relationship between team cohesion dimensions and (autocratic) directive leadership style. The study concluded that the behavior of coaches in leadership style has a determining role in team cohesion, so coaches can improve the team cohesion by choosing an appropriate leadership style which consequently leads to success of athletes and achievement in competitions. Similar results were found in a study done by Alemu and Babu (2012) that aimed to examine the relationship between coaches' leadership styles and team cohesion among Ethiopian premier league soccer players. Training &

Instruction, democratic and social support leadership styles were found to have a significant positive relationship with team cohesion. The study found that coaches exhibited higher training and instruction and lower autocratic behavior. In addition, findings showed significant relationship between group cohesion and team success and the coaches of successful teams exhibited higher training and instruction behaviors. In summary, the effect of coaching behaviors on group cohesion and team success apparently demonstrated the importance of using the appropriate leadership styles.

These studies have indicated the need for coaches to adopt appropriate leadership styles that would contribute to success of athletes and desire to improved performance. It is important to recognize the influence leadership behaviors have on the psychological state of players, especially as sports evolve to be more challenging and multifaceted.

### 3. Results and Discussions

Data obtained was analyzed using statistical package for social sciences to establish correlation between the demographic information and the five elements of behavior (Training and Instruction - item 1 to 13; Democratic behavior - item 14 to 22; Autocratic behavior - item 23 to 27; Social support - item 28 to 35 and Positive feedback - item 36 to 40) on the LSS. Descriptive characteristics of the respondents and mean for each of five elements of leadership behavior was established. Mann-Whitney U test was carried out to establish if there was any significant difference for any of the leadership behaviour in comparison to gender and age of the coaches

**Table 1:** Descriptive information of coaches (N = 28)

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Male</b>	24 (85.7%)		
	<b>Female</b>	4 (14.3%)		
<b>Age (years)</b>	<b>18-29</b>	<b>≥ 30-39</b>	<b>≥ 40-49</b>	<b>≥ 50</b>
	10 (35.7%)	5 (17.9%)	10 (35.7%)	3 (10.7%)
<b>Region (geographical)</b>	<b>Capital City (Nairobi &amp; Environs)</b>	<b>Nyanza (Kisumu)</b>	<b>Coast (Mombasa)</b>	<b>Rift Valley (Nakuru/Eldoret)</b>
	18 (64.3%)	2 (7.1%)	2 (7.1%)	6 (21.5%)

**Note:** Refer to Appendix 1: Geographical Divisions of Kenya.

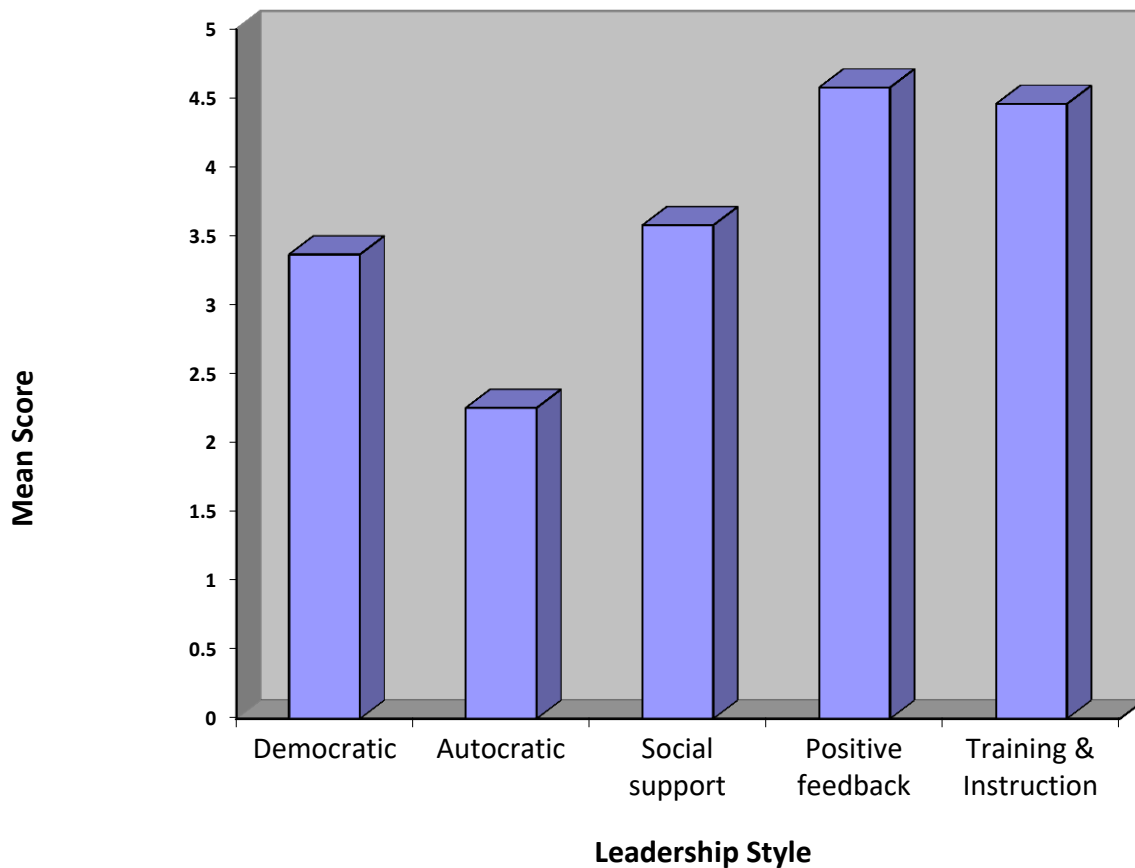
Table1 shows a summary of the descriptive information of the swimming coaches who responded to the questionnaire. Of the 28 coaches, 85.7 % (n=24) were male and 14.3% (n=4) were female. There was representation from each of the five Cities in Kenya which include Nairobi (Capital city of Kenya and environs), Mombasa (Coastal region of Kenya), Kisumu (Western region of Kenya) and Nakuru and Eldoret (Rift Valley region

of Kenya and environs). Among these coaches, 35.7% (n = 10) were below 30 years, while 64.3% (n = 18) were 30 years and above.

### 3.1 Preferences of LSS among Swimming Coaches in Kenya

Figure 1 show the preferences of the leadership styles among swimming coaches in Kenya. The most common leadership behavior among the swimming coaches was use of Positive Feedback ( $\bar{x}$  = 4.5786, SD = 0.55867) followed by Training and Instruction ( $\bar{x}$  = 4.4588, SD = 0.43488), then Social Support ( $\bar{x}$  = 3.5804, SD = 0.40997), followed by Democratic ( $\bar{x}$  = 3.3690, SD = 0.49419), while Autocratic ( $\bar{x}$  = 2.2571, SD = 0.81260) was the least type of leadership used.

Figure 1: Means of LSS Preference among Swimming Coaches



### 3.2 Evaluation of Items on Democratic Type of Leadership

Democratic type of leadership had a mean score of 3.369, being ranked as the fourth type of preferred type of leadership behavior by the coaches. Nine items were used to assess the democratic type of leadership and the descriptive summary of the responses of the coaches is as shown.

**Table 2: Item Score on Democratic Type of Leadership**

<b>Democratic : Mean = 3.369 + 0.49419</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std Dev</b>	<b>% Always &amp; Often</b>
I ask the opinion of the athletes on strategies for specific competitions.	3.96	0.922	60.7
I get group approval on important matters.	4.11	0.916	82.1
I allow athletes be involved in decision making.	3.61	1.031	50
I encourage athletes make suggestions for ways of conducting trainings.	3.68	1.090	67.8
I let the group set its own goals.	3.39	1.133	53.6
I let athletes try their own ways when if they make mistakes.	3.04	1.201	32.2
I ask opinions of athletes on coaching matters.	2.96	1.319	42.8
I let athletes work at their own speed.	2.89	1.227	42.1
I let athletes decide on strategy to be used in competition.	2.68	1.124	25

Within this type of leadership, getting group approval on important matters was item ranked highest with 82.1% of the respondents indicating so, while letting athletes decide on strategy to be used in competition and letting athletes try their own ways was not favoured by most respondents as only 25% and 32.2% respectively favoured this. This can be attributed to the fact that most coaches trained children 12 years and below, who are considered unable to make technical decisions on how to train and compete unless directed.

### 3.3 Evaluation of Items on Training & Instruction Type of Leadership

Training and Instruction type of leadership had a mean of 4.588, and was ranked as the second most preferred type of leadership behavior by the coaches. Most of the items in this type of leadership behavior scored above 70%. Thirteen items were used to assess the democratic type of leadership and the descriptive summary of the responses of the coaches is as shown.

**Table 3: Item Score on Training & Instruction Type of Leadership**

<b>Training &amp; Instruction : Mean = 4.4588+ 0.43488</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std Dev</b>	<b>% Always &amp; Often</b>
I see to it that every athlete is working to his capacity.	4.50	0.638	92.8
I explain to each athlete the techniques and tactics of the sport.	4.68	0.548	96.4
I pay special attention to correcting athletes' mistakes.	4.71	0.460	100
I make sure that his part in the team is understood by all the athletes.	4.39	0.786	89.3
I instruct every athlete individually in the skills of the sport.	4.39	0.685	89.3
I figure ahead on what should be done.	4.54	0.637	92.8
I explain to every athlete what he should and should not do.	4.61	0.685	89.3
I expect every athlete to carry out his assignment to the last detail.	4.43	0.742	85.7
I point out each athlete's strengths & weaknesses.	4.50	0.577	96.5
I give specific instructions to each athlete as to what he should do in every situation.	4.39	0.629	92.8
I ensure efforts are coordinated.	4.29	0.713	85.8

I explain how each athlete's contribution fits into the team.	4.14	1.008	71.8
I specify to each athlete what is expected of them.	4.39	0.832	85.7

Within this type of leadership, paying special attention to correcting athlete’s mistakes was the item favoured most by all respondents (100%). This was expected as that is the purpose for which coaches are engaged, to assist athletes improve on their skills by correcting their stroke mechanics. The item of explaining how each athlete’s contribution fits into the team scored the least percentage within the Training and Instruction type of leadership at 71.8%. This could be attributed to the fact that most of the swimmers that coaches were involved with started off at an individual level and not in a group, hence the need of the athlete to contribute to the team though important, may not have been considered as high as the other items.

### 3.4 Evaluation of Items on Social Support Type of Leadership

Social support type of leadership had a mean of 3.5804, being ranked as the third preferred type of leadership behavior by the coaches. Eight items were used to assess the democratic type of leadership and the descriptive summary of the responses of the coaches is as shown.

**Table 4:** Item Score on Social Support Type of Leadership

<b>Social Support: Mean = 3.5804 + 0.40997</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std Dev</b>	<b>% Always &amp; Often</b>
I help athletes with their personal problems.	4.21	0.917	82.1
I help members of the group settle their conflicts.	4.36	0.870	82.1
I look out for personal welfare of the athletes.	4.32	0.905	78.5
I do personal favours for the athletes.	3.82	1.090	60.7
I express affection to my athletes.	3.36	1.339	57.2
I encourage athletes to confide in me.	3.82	1.090	64.2
I encourage close and informal relations with athletes.	3.07	1.438	46.5
I invite athletes to my home.	1.68	0.683	17.9

Within this type of leadership, helping the athletes with their personal problems and to settle their group conflicts were the two items rated highest with 82.1% of the respondents indicating so. This could be attributed to the fact that the coaches felt that the athlete’s intra and inter personal relations would affect their performance. Inviting athletes to their homes was only supported by 17.9% of the respondents. This can be attributed to the fact that most coaches trained children and would be considered inappropriate to invite children to their homes.

### 3.5 Evaluation of Items on Autocratic Type of Leadership

Autocratic type of leadership had a mean of 2.2571 being ranked as the least preferred type of leadership behavior by the coaches. Thirteen items were used to assess the democratic type of leadership and the descriptive summary of the responses of the coaches is as shown.

Working relatively independent was rated higher at 39.3% in comparison to other items, which could be attributed to the coach being the adult and most athletes being children. The other items scored very low with “refusing to compromise a point” and “keeping to self” scoring 14.3% each. The coaches value the need to be interactive with the athletes for effective communication and be agreeable in some areas.

**Table 5: Item Score on Autocratic Type of Leadership**

<b>Autocratic: Mean = 2.2571 + 0.81260</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std Dev</b>	<b>% Always &amp; Often</b>
I work relatively independent of the athletes.	3.11	1.227	39.3
I do not explain my actions.	2.04	1.319	17.8
I refuse to compromise a point.	2.14	1.208	14.3
I keep to myself.	2.04	1.170	14.3
I speak in a manner not to be questioned.	1.96	1.290	17.9

### 3.6 Evaluation of Items on Positive Feedback Type of Leadership

Positive feedback type of leadership had a mean of 4.5786, and was ranked as the most preferred type of leadership behavior by the coaches. All the items in this type of leadership were scored highly (above 75%). Five items were used to assess the democratic type of leadership and the descriptive summary of the responses of the coaches is as shown.

**Table 6: Item Score on Positive Type of Leadership**

<b>Positive Feedback: Mean = 4.5786 + 0.55867</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std Dev</b>	<b>% Always &amp; Often</b>
I compliment an athlete for his performance in front of others	4.29	1.243	78.6
I tell athlete when he has done a good job	4.82	0.390	100
I see that an athlete is awarded for good performance	4.54	0.881	89.3
I express appreciation when an athlete performs well	4.79	0.418	100
I give credit when credit is due	4.46	1.138	85.7

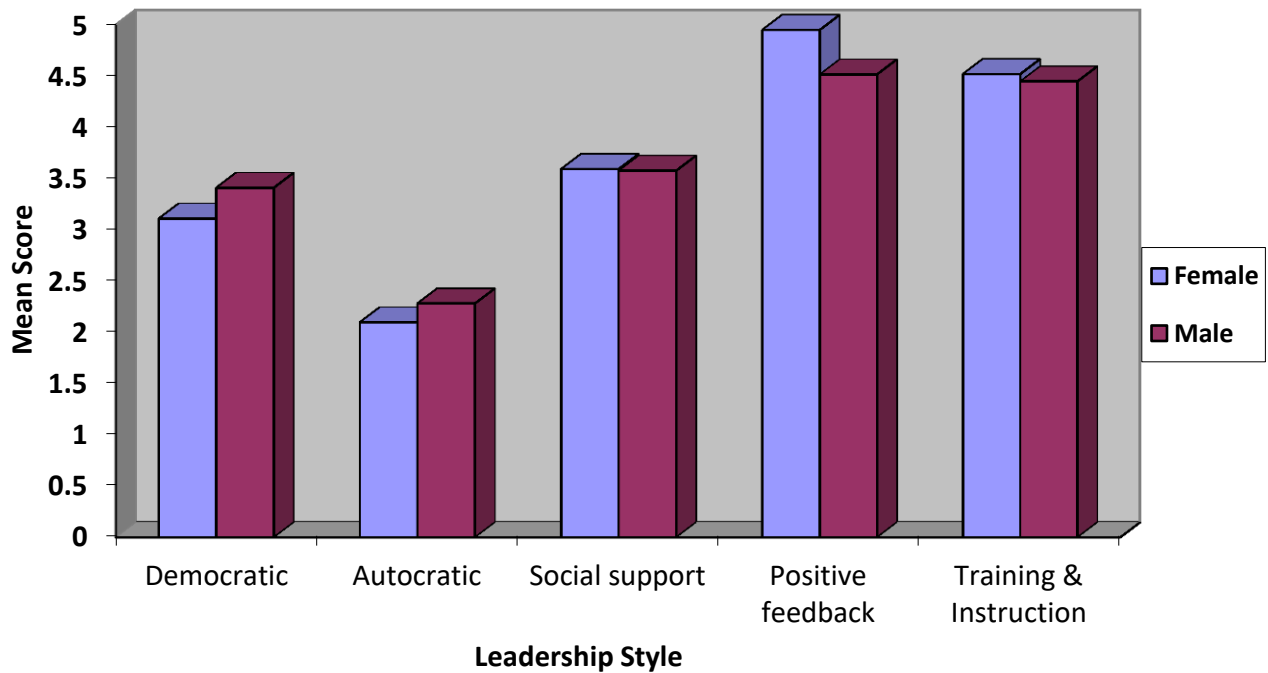
Within this type of leadership, telling the athletes they had done well and expressing appreciation to the athletes when they performed well was accepted by all the respondents (coaches) at 100%. The coaches viewed that this was a highly important aspect for the athletes, more so since most of the athletes were children who like constant appraisal for doing well. Though scoring highly (78.6%), the coaches did not at all times compliment the athletes in front of the others. May be some of the coaches felt that would be too much, as they considered telling the athletes they had done well was adequate.

### 3.7 Influence of Gender on Leadership Style

The study sought to find out whether gender influenced the style of leadership behavior adopted by the coach. Figure 2 shows descriptive summary of the responses between male and female coaches.



Figure 2: Gender and Leadership Style



Comparing the Leadership styles of the coaches across gender, both male and female coaches rated positive feedback highest followed by training & Instruction, then Social Support, Democratic and Autocratic. The male coaches scored a higher mean in the democratic ( $\bar{x} = 3.41$ ) and autocratic ( $\bar{x} = 2.28$ ) types of leadership compared to their female counterparts. The females scored a higher mean in the other three types of leadership styles, (social support  $\bar{x} = 3.59$ , positive feedback  $\bar{x} = 4.95$ , training & Instruction  $\bar{x} = 4.51$ ), compared to their male counterparts

Mann Whitney-U test was done to establish if there was any significant difference among the five types of leadership behavior across gender. Mann Whitney Test results showed that there was no significant difference for the Autocratic Leadership behavior comparing the male coaches (Md = 2.20, n = 24) and female coaches (Md = 1.90, n = 4), U = 42.50, z = -0.36, p = .728 with a low effect size r = .07. Similarly there was no significant difference in the Democratic Leadership behavior between the male coaches (Md = 3.89, n = 24) and female coaches (Md = 3.06, n = 4), U = 31.50, z = -1.09, p = .291 with a low effect size r = .21. There was also no significant difference in the Social Support Leadership behavior comparing the male coaches (Md = 3.56, n = 24) and female coaches (Md = 3.50, n = 4), U = 47.00, z = -0.66, p = .975 with a low effect size r = .12. Training and Instruction Leadership behavior was not significantly different comparing the male coaches (Md = 4.31, n = 24) and female coaches (Md = 4.50, n = 4), U = 32.00, z = -1.06, p = .322 with a low effect size r = .20. There was also no significant difference between male coaches (Md = 4.80, n = 24) and female coaches (Md = 5.00, n = 4), U = 28.50, z = -1.37, p = .259 with a low effect size r = .26 in the Positive Feedback Leadership behavior.

### 3.7 Influence of Age of Coach on Leadership Style

Kruskal Wallis Test was done to establish if there was any significant difference for each of the leadership style styles across the different age group categories of the coaches. For Democratic Leadership the difference between the rank totals of 11.80 (18-29 years), 14.60 ( $\geq 30-39$  years), 15.40 ( $\geq 40-49$  years) and 20.33 ( $\geq 50$  years) was not significant,  $H(3, n = 28) = 2.730, p = .435$ . Similarly, for Autocratic Leadership, the difference between the rank totals of 15.10 (18-29 years), 17.30 ( $\geq 30-39$  years), 13.25 ( $\geq 40-49$  years) and 12.00 ( $\geq 50$  years) was not significant,  $H(3, n = 28) = 1.159, p = .763$ . There was also no significant difference in the Social Support Leadership between the rank totals of 13.40 (18-29 years), 10.40 ( $\geq 30-39$  years), 18.85 ( $\geq 40-49$  years) and 10.50 ( $\geq 50$  years) was not significant,  $H(3, n = 28) = 4.992, p = .172$ . This was also the case for Positive Feedback Type of Leadership where the difference between the rank totals of 13.80 (18-29 years), 10.90 ( $\geq 30-39$  years), 14.90 ( $\geq 40-49$  years) and 21.50 ( $\geq 50$  years) was also not significant,  $H(3, n=28) = 3.698, p = .296$ . For Training and Instruction Type of Leadership the difference between the rank totals of 14.40 (18-29 years), 17.70 ( $\geq 30-39$  years), 12.55 ( $\geq 40-49$  years) and 16.00 ( $\geq 50$  years) was also not significant,  $H(3, n = 28) = 1.432, p = .698$ .

## 4. Conclusion

This study sought to establish the preferred types of leadership styles the swimming coaches employed and make comparison with what other studies have shown to be effective coaching leadership styles across various contexts and situations. The study also sought to find out whether gender and age of the coach had any significant influence on the preference of leadership style.

The most common leadership style employed by the swimming coaches was use of Positive Feedback, followed by Training and Instruction, Social Support, Democratic and the least was Autocratic. Across gender of the coaches, the ranking of the leadership styles was similar for both as Positive Feedback was ranked highest and Autocratic style ranked lowest. Though there was no significant difference across gender on any of the preferred leadership styles, the female coaches rated Positive Feedback, Training & Instruction, and Social Support higher compared to the male coaches. Democratic and Autocratic types of leadership styles were rated higher by the male coaches in comparison to the female coaches.

Coaching plays a significant role in sustaining youth sports participation (Vella *et al.*, 2013; Santos *et al.*, 2019) as coaches have the potential to create a conducive environment that will foster positive development, thus increase retention and interest in the sport (Santos *et al.*, 2019; Camiré *et al.*, 2011). Studies (Surujlal and Dhurup, 2012; Nazarudin *et al.*, 2009; Rodriguez, 2009; Pilus and Saadan, 2009) done on coaching leadership styles preferred by athletes and have improved on athletes' performance have shown Training & Instruction as the most preferred type of leadership style followed by Positive feedback, Social Support and Democratic. Autocratic style of

leadership was viewed to have negative influence and the athletes did not like this style of leadership from their coaches. In comparison to the Kenyan swimming coaches, they employed the most preferred styles of leadership with emphasis being on Positive feedback, this was attributed to the fact that most swimming coaches trained children below 12 years who value positive reinforcement even as they are given instruction on corrective strategies.

Swimming is an individual sport where coaches are responsible for fewer athletes which allows for individualized feedback and instruction for each athlete, hence the use and preference of the leadership style of Training & Instruction which involves corrective feedback to optimize the athlete's skill. The study established that the leadership styles employed by the swimming coaches are ideal and if other factors are improved on, the performance in the sport of swimming in Kenya can be taken to a higher level. The leadership of a coach style influences the turnover and retention rate of athletes in a team. This study did not focus on other factors (funding, resources) that significantly influence retention, consistency in training and consequently, performance.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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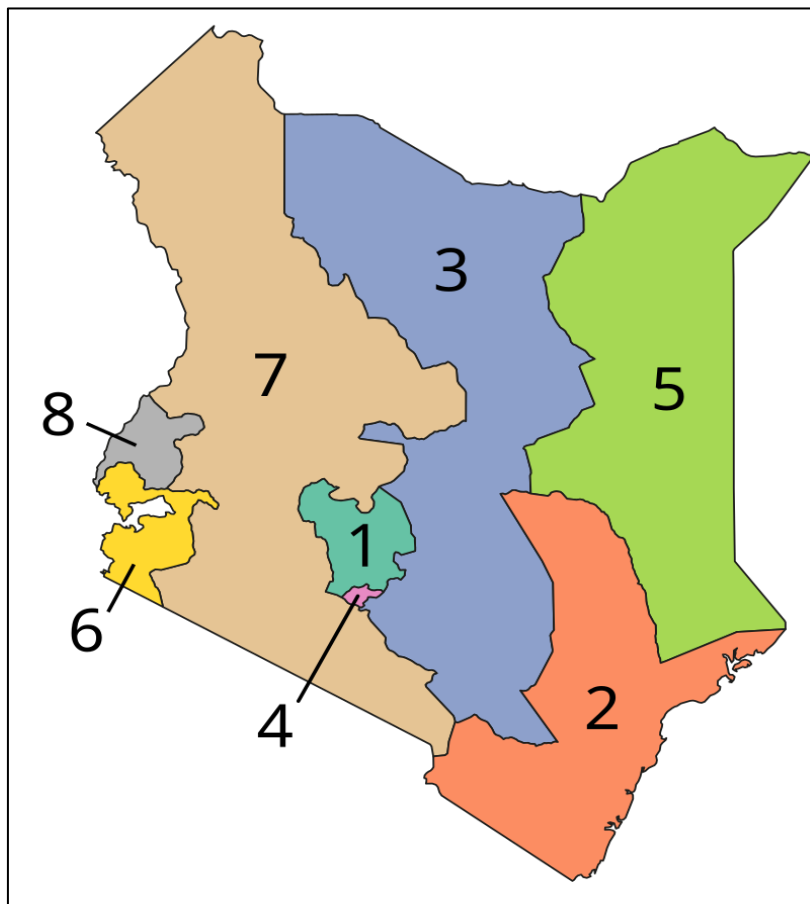
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### Appendix: Geographical Division of Kenya



Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Provinces\\_of\\_Kenya](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Provinces_of_Kenya)

1 - [Central](#); 2 - [Coast](#); 3 - [Eastern](#); 4 - Nairobi\*; 5 - Northeastern; 6 - Nyanza; 7 - Rift valley; 8 - Western

\*Capital City of Kenya

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