



A psychoanalytic perspective on constructive feedback interactions among table tennis athletes

Una perspectiva psicoanalítica sobre las interacciones constructivas en la retroalimentación entre los jugadores de tenis de mesa

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Abstract

Background and study aim: Table tennis training focuses primarily on physical and technical aspects, tending to neglect psychological aspects. Therefore, in-depth study is needed to understand how emotional dynamics influence performance in table tennis athletes. This study aims to explore the mechanisms of constructive feedback interactions through psychoanalysis in elite table tennis athletes, thereby understanding how emotional dynamics influence performance.

Materials and methods: The research method was mixed-methods. The qualitative phase involved psychoanalytic interviews with 6 experienced elite athletes to identify psychodynamic themes. The quantitative phase involved 30 elite athletes using total sampling with a validated questionnaire ($R > 0.361$; Cronbach's Alpha = 0.949). Data were analyzed using thematic analysis for the qualitative phase and descriptive percentage analysis for the quantitative phase.

Results: The findings showed that 90% of athletes were able to maintain emotional control and did not perceive criticism as a personal attack, indicating mature ego strength. Coaches succeeded in serving as a buffer for anxiety and creating a safe holding environment, resulting in 83% of athletes experiencing increased motivation after receiving corrective feedback. The democratic-interactionist coaching style was the dominant choice (73.3%), providing evidence of its effectiveness in reducing psychological retention and enabling the internalization of tactics at an automated level.

Conclusions: Constructive feedback interaction is a crucial mechanism that goes beyond mere technical instruction. The success of elite athletes depends on coaches to build a psychologically symbiotic relationship. This study provides practical insights for table tennis coaching, emphasizing the coach's psychodynamic sensitivity in managing anxiety to achieve sustainable performance.

Keywords

Elite table tennis, psychoanalysis, constructive feedback, psychodynamics, high-performance sports

Resumen

Antecedentes y objetivo del estudio: El entrenamiento de tenis de mesa se centra principalmente en los aspectos físicos y técnicos, descuidando los psicológicos. Por lo tanto, es necesario un estudio profundo para comprender cómo la dinámica emocional influye en el rendimiento de los tenistas de mesa. Este estudio tiene como objetivo explorar los mecanismos de las interacciones de retroalimentación constructiva a través del psicoanálisis en tenistas de mesa de élite, para así comprender cómo la dinámica emocional influye en el rendimiento.

Materiales y métodos: El método de investigación fue mixto. La fase cualitativa incluyó entrevistas psicoanalíticas con 6 atletas de élite experimentados para identificar temas psicodinámicos. La fase cuantitativa incluyó a 30 atletas de élite mediante muestreo total con un cuestionario validado ($R > 0,361$; Alfa de Cronbach = 0,949). Los datos se analizaron mediante análisis temático para la fase cualitativa y análisis porcentual descriptivo para la fase cuantitativa.

Resultados: Los hallazgos mostraron que el 90% de los atletas fueron capaces de mantener el control emocional y no percibieron las críticas como un ataque personal, lo que indica una fortaleza del ego madura. Los entrenadores lograron actuar como amortiguadores de la ansiedad y crear un entorno seguro, lo que resultó en un aumento de la motivación del 83 % de los atletas tras recibir retroalimentación correctiva. El estilo de entrenamiento democrático-interaccionista fue la opción predominante (73,3 %), lo que demuestra su eficacia para reducir la retención psicológica y facilitar la internalización de tácticas de forma automatizada. C

Conclusiones: La interacción mediante retroalimentación constructiva es un mecanismo crucial que va más allá de la mera instrucción técnica. El éxito de los atletas de élite depende de que los entrenadores construyan una relación psicológicamente simbiótica. Este estudio ofrece perspectivas prácticas para el entrenamiento de tenis de mesa, haciendo hincapié en la sensibilidad psicodinámica del entrenador para gestionar la ansiedad y lograr un rendimiento sostenible.

Palabras clave

Tenis de mesa de élite, psicoanálisis, retroalimentación constructiva, psicodinámica, deportes de alto rendimiento

Introduction

Table tennis is classified as a game sport (Fuchs et al., 2018). Table tennis training has traditionally focused on physical, technical, and tactical aspects (Aini et al., 2025; Tumuloto et al., 2024), but studies on the psychological dynamics in table tennis cannot yet be considered optimal. Although it is not a contact sport, table tennis also requires sound psychological performance to optimize match outcomes. Behind the practice of forehand and backhand techniques and agility lies a complex psychological dynamic that determines peak performance. One pedagogical tool in this process is the exchange of constructive feedback between athletes and coaches. Feedback is recognized as an information bridge to guide athletes in aligning actual movement execution with ideal performance standards. However, the effectiveness of feedback is never linear; it depends on how that information is perceived, processed, and internalized within the athlete's psychological structure.

Although research on feedback in sports has advanced significantly as highlighted in the study by Sagara et al., which emphasizes that effective, timely, and adaptive communication between coaches and athletes is crucial for skill development and athletes' psychological well being, as well as for preventing aggression to create a conducive environment (Sagar et al., 2013), Otte et al., in their research, focused on how communication between coaches and athletes impacts skill and performance development (Otte et al., 2020), Zubin states that the coach-athlete relationship is a form of interaction where thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are causally interconnected (Zubic, 2024). Stein et al. on the influence of coach feedback on the motivational climate of a hockey team demonstrate that the type, purpose, and perceived appropriateness of feedback by adolescent athletes are crucial factors in shaping the team climate (Stein et al., 2012). Adolescent athletes desire more positive and informative feedback, thus expecting fewer punishments and instances of being ignored (Stein et al., 2012). This discussion concludes that feedback interaction is a complex circular process integrating feelings, thoughts, and behavior; therefore, the effectiveness of coaching depends not only on technical instructions but also requires appropriate and adaptive communication and feedback.

Several of the studies mentioned above focus more on team sports other than table tennis and primarily on adolescent athletes, whereas in the context of elite table tennis athletes in Indonesia, there is currently insufficient evidence. Furthermore, based on field experience, coaching in table tennis still views the emotional realm as less crucial compared to technique and physical aspects. In this regard, a significant theoretical gap lies in the minimal use of a psychoanalytic lens to examine feedback interactions in high-performance sports, particularly table tennis. This gap is clearly evident in table tennis coaching in Indonesia.

History has shown that Indonesia has produced world-class table tennis masters such as Anton Suseno and Sugeng Utomo, who possessed exceptional technical skills and mental resilience. However, the continuation of this success is often hindered by mental blocks in talented athletes as they enter the elite level. In practice, it is common to find athletes with adequate physical and technical abilities who fail to apply their coach's instructions during critical moments of a match. Facing psychoanalytic challenges, this perspective allows for a discussion of feedback beyond technical transitions to encompass the creation of a safe environment for athletes. This allows coaches to implement the mechanical function of psychodynamics, which addresses anxiety and stress resulting from technical failures and integrates feedback. The coach's role as a supportive environmental figure is crucial in implementing theoretically constructive feedback to facilitate emotional empowerment. This indicates that the obstacles encountered are not merely cognitive, but involve psychodynamic barriers within the athlete-coach relationship that have not been deeply understood.

In sports coaching, coaches are often positioned as authority figures who trigger subconscious patterns of feelings and expectations stemming from past experiences. If communication and interaction are not managed well, even constructive feedback can be perceived by athletes as a threat to their ego. Conversely, if the coach is able to build a holding environment, feedback becomes a means of ego reinforcement that allows athletes to grow beyond their physical and technical limitations.

Based on the above studies, there is an academic gap in analyzing how the mechanisms of constructive feedback interaction operate within a psychoanalytic framework for table tennis athletes. The objective of this study is to explore the psychoanalytic perspective on constructive feedback interactions among elite table tennis athletes. Through a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative



methods, the hope is to obtain comprehensive data (Rohmah et al., 2024). This study aims to provide guidance for coaches to not only focus on physical and technical training but also to serve as emotional support capable of managing athletes' anxiety. Therefore, by understanding the psychoanalytic dynamics underlying feedback interactions, table tennis coaching shifts from a one-way authoritarian model to a more humanistic, interactionist model oriented toward the athletes' psychological maturity. Thus, a stable mental integration is built through healthy feedback interactions, serving as a foundation for Indonesian table tennis athletes to compete on the international stage and revive the glory once achieved by previous athletes.

Method

Study Participants

This research employs both quantitative and qualitative methods. A mixed-methods approach yields a more comprehensive analysis than either purely qualitative or purely quantitative methods (Rohmah et al., 2024; Yudhistira & Tomoliyus, 2020). The first stage involves the collection of qualitative data, specifically psychoanalytic interviews to explain psychological mechanisms, with the informants being 6 athletes selected based on sufficient experience, while the quantitative stage involves the distribution of a questionnaire to 30 athletes using total sampling. The qualitative instrument was a semi-structured interview, and the quantitative instrument was a questionnaire that had been tested for validity and reliability.

Organizational Study

Qualitative Phase

The procedure for the qualitative research phase begins with developing indicators and a theoretical framework, followed by formulating interview questions for the informants. These interview guidelines were provided to a doctoral-level academic expert in qualitative research methods; they were reviewed and deemed appropriate. A more detailed presentation is provided in the following table:

Table 1. Research Interview Guidelines

Variable	Indicator	Theoretical Framework
Interaction Constructive Feedback (Nash et al., 2017) (Groom et al., 2012)	Behavioral standards	Arousal, motivation, and self-efficacy; Standards are official rules for measuring weight, purity, and value. Behavioral standards are "something inherent in one's habitual knowledge." Characteristics of the behavioral control process include motivational consequences, arousal, and self-efficacy (Lun et al., 2018; Marciano, 2023; Pallavicini et al., 2021; Whelan et al., 2014).
	Performance standards	Technical, tactical, and physical; performance standards refer to an athlete's ability to demonstrate skills and abilities in sports, taking into account physical, technical, mental and environmental factors. This includes the athlete's physical fitness, technical ability, mental resilience, and understanding of game tactics. Performance standards in sports encompass physical, technical, and tactical aspects (Hadi et al., 2022; Hadi & Yudhistira, 2023).
	Two-way communication about what is right and wrong	Introverts and extroverts; two-way communication is an interaction using appropriate communication (Lestari et al., 2025) in training can minimize athletes' perceptual errors and foster healthy communication between athletes and coaches. The methods of communicating with athletes include both private and open communication.

Questions for the informant interview

1. If your coach provides constructive feedback during practice, do you feel a drop in your mood during practice?
2. When your coach provides constructive feedback during practice, do you feel an increase in motivation during practice?
3. Do you believe in your ability to get through the rigorous training sessions assigned by the coach as part of the mandatory training program?

4. If you receive 3–4 corrections from the Coach during a single technical training session, are you prepared to accept all of the Coach's corrections?
5. Are you prepared to correct the movement deficiencies pointed out by the Coach during the session by the next technical training session?
6. Are you ready to handle the high-intensity physical training the Coach assigns?
7. Are you ready to accept tactical corrections from the Coach, striving to adapt your movement performance according to the Coach's instructions?
8. Can you apply the playing tactics from the simulation to the actual game?
9. Can you accept every piece of feedback from the Coach and make immediate improvements?
10. Can you accept a Coach with an interactive or democratic style during practice?
11. Do you have difficulty interacting with the Coach during training?

The author, as an active interviewer, participated by reflecting on the questions to ensure the informant's understanding. This is important to assess transparency and self-awareness in addressing what the informant is being asked. Other research team members reviewed the interview transcripts to identify unasked questions and collected data via audio recordings. To minimize the tendency for social desirability bias, which often occurs in the context of elite athlete achievement, typically caused by external pressure to respond positively to the instrument, the following control measures were implemented: First, the questionnaire was administered uniformly through a digital platform to ensure no private data was included in each participant's responses. Second, participants were explained that the research was purely academic and had no connection to the training program.

Quantitative Phase

The procedure for the quantitative phase involves the researcher developing a framework of indicators and questions structured into a 1–5 Likert scale questionnaire with the following categories: "strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree." This questionnaire was then submitted to an expert faculty member knowledgeable in quantitative research methods. Based on their feedback, revisions were made, and the questionnaire was subsequently deemed valid. Next, the approved questionnaire is pilot-tested on 30 athletes outside the study's respondent group. The data obtained is analyzed to test validity, yielding a calculated R value > table R (0.361), while the reliability test shows a Cronbach's alpha value > 0.60 or 0.70. Thus, the developed instrument is valid and reliable. For clarity, the questionnaire guidelines and the results of the validity and reliability tests are presented in Tables 2 and 3 as follows:

Table 2. Questionnaire indicators and statements

Indicators	Statement
Behavioral Standards	I remain calm and do not get emotional when the coach provides sharp corrections to my technique
	The coach's criticism actually increases my motivation to train
	I feel confident and capable of completing the strenuous exercises the coach assigns
	I do not feel hurt when the coach points out the mistakes I make
Performance standards	I feel that the coach's feedback is very helpful in maintaining mental stability during matches
	I am able to absorb and practice 3–4 technical corrections at once during a single training session
	I am committed to correcting the movement errors the coach points out during the next training session
	I am ready to accept and carry out a physically demanding training regimen to improve my performance
	I am able to adjust my playing tactics on the field immediately after the coach gives new instructions
Two-way communication	I can apply the strategies learned during simulations to real game situations
	I feel comfortable sharing the challenges I face with the coach
	I find it easier to improve when the coach provides opportunities for discussion
	I feel there are no significant communication barriers that disrupt the training process with the coach
	The coach provides feedback in a way that makes me feel valued as an athlete
	I feel that the coach truly understands my emotional state when my performance is not good

Table 3. Pearson product-moment validity test

Item 1	Calculated R	Sig	Table R	Notes
Item 2	0.851	0.000	0.361	Valid
Item 3	0.815	0.000	0.361	Valid
Item 4	0.788	0.000	0.361	Valid



Item 5	0.777	0.000	0.361	Valid
Item 6	0.827	0.000	0.361	Valid
Item 7	0.83	0.002	0.361	Valid
Item 8	0.74	0.002	0.361	Valid
Item 9	0.763	0.000	0.361	Valid
Item 10	0.879	0.000	0.361	Valid
Item 11	0.857	0.000	0.361	Valid
Item 12	0.838	0.000	0.361	Valid
Item 13	0.802	0.000	0.361	Valid
Item 14	0.771	0.000	0.361	Valid
Item 15	0.708	0.000	0.361	Valid

Table 4. Cronbach's alpha reliability test

Indicator	N	Cronbach's Alpha	Description
Behavior, performance, and communication	15	0.949	Reliable

Data analysis technique

Qualitative data analysis techniques using thematic analysis through three stages: (1) after data collection, the team conducts repeated readings to familiarize themselves with the data and identify keywords in each question; (2) identifying themes and new insights to summarize broader concepts and examine relationships between concepts; (3) a process of selectively interpreting data related to the themes, resulting in meaningful findings (Harris et al., 2014; Smith, 2015). Furthermore, to test data validity, the researcher met with informants to present the results; after the informants reviewed the data and confirmed its validity, the discussion proceeded to a more in-depth analysis. Quantitative data analysis was performed using percentage analysis with the assistance of Excel. Pearson product moment test was conducted to test external validity, and Cronbach alpha test to test the reliability of the questionnaire.

Results

Theme 1: Behavioral Standards

- Arousal and emotional stability: Interview summary: "I don't feel discouraged or hurt when the coach reprimands me, as long as I know it's to correct a wrong technique, and I focus on what needs to be changed." Generally, athletes do not allow negative emotions to dominate their thoughts, even when the coach delivers training instructions in a stern tone. This indicates that athletes possess strong ego strength, capable of distinguishing between criticism of training techniques and personal attacks on self-esteem, thereby preventing the emergence of destructive defense mechanisms.
- Strengthening self-efficacy and constructive feedback: Interview summary: "The coach said I'd definitely be able to get through this physical training session as long as my breathing technique is correct; I'm confident and not afraid of getting overly tired." The athlete feels confident in completing the technical and physical training program after the coach explains the training objectives. From a psychoanalytic perspective, the coach serves as an idealized parent figure; the coach's words are internalized by the athlete as an additional source of strength that helps overcome anxiety and failure.
- Dynamics of a holding environment: Interview summary: "I dared to try the technical changes the coach requested because I knew that even if I failed, the coach would still help me improve and wouldn't blame me." The athlete feels productive because they feel safe to make mistakes while trying new techniques. The coach successfully created a space for the athlete to explore without fear of losing the coach's affection and support,
- Motivation as a sublimation of pressure: Interview summary: "When corrected, I don't feel ignored; the criticism is a sign that I'm still expected to win." Additional motivation emerges to prove one's ability after receiving corrections; athletes feel that feedback is a form of acknowledgment that the coach still cares about their progress. Athletes transform potential emotional conflict into positive energy to achieve better performance.

Table 5. Results of quantitative analysis of behavioral standards

Indicator	Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Code of conduct	1	0%	0%	10.00%	46.70%	43.30%
	2	0%	0%	16.70%	33.30%	50.00%
	3	0%	0%	13.30%	40.00%	46.70%
	4	0%	0%	10.00%	50.00%	40.00%
	5	0%	0%	12%	41.30%	46.70%

The results of the quantitative analysis show that ego stability—90% (combined “agree” and “strongly agree”)—means athletes can remain calm even in the face of sharp corrections from the coach. This indicates that elite athletes have developed mature defense mechanisms, specifically the ability to sublimate instructional pressure. Motivation and object of realization: 83.3% of athletes felt that criticism increased their motivation; this indicates that the coach has successfully positioned criticism as a reinforcing object, so that feedback is not perceived as an attack on the athlete’s ego integrity. Mental stability: 90% agreed that constructive feedback helps maintain mental stability. This reinforces the qualitative finding that the coach’s role in the containment function involves accommodating and managing anxiety. Qualitative analysis shows that athletes with peak performance engage in mature ego management. Subjects stated that rigorous training patterns are a coach's attempt to maintain a safe zone (holding energy) to remain competitive while still addressing anxiety management.

Theme 2: Adaptation of techniques and tactics

- Interpretation of Instructions: Interview Summary “When the coach provides 3–4 corrections at once and focuses on the sequence of movements, we don’t feel confused because for us, all of this is part of producing the correct striking technique.” Athletes process the feedback not in isolation but as a unified whole to coordinate movements such as the synchronization between footwork and arm swing, as well as the point of ball contact.
- Commitment to technical improvement: Interview summary: “When the coach provides corrections, we absorb and reflect on them; after the next practice, our goal is to avoid repeating the same mistakes, so I must demonstrate that I’ve improved.” Technical adaptation doesn’t occur solely during practice but continues through self-reflection, leading to changes by the next session.
- Understanding of game strategies: Interview summary: “When competing, we immediately recall the coach’s instructions from simulations. For example, if the opponent plays with an attacking strategy, we must quickly change tactics to withstand their onslaught and launch a counterattack. This happens automatically because we’ve been repeatedly reminded by the coach’s feedback.” Athletes are able to transfer previously simulated strategies into real match situations; this indicates that the coach’s feedback has been internalized into tactical automation within the athletes.

Table 6. Quantitative results of technical and tactical adaptation

Indicator	Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Techniques and tactics	6	0%	0%	10.00%	40.00%	50.0%
	7	0%	0%	10.00%	40.00%	50.00%
	8	0%	0%	10.00%	36.70%	53.30%
	9	0%	0%	10.00%	36.70%	46.70%
	10	0%	0%	10.00%	43.30%	53.30%

Quantitative analysis results, cognitive processes; 90% of athletes stated they were able to simultaneously process technical corrections that were not entirely appropriate. This indicates the efficiency of elite athletes’ memory performance, which allows them to make complex movement corrections without losing the flow of the game. Physical resilience and commitment; the combined “agree” and “strongly agree” scores on physical training aspects indicate that these are not only intellectually understood but also accepted as a tangible physical commitment. Match simulation; item number 10 showed the highest percentage in the “strongly agree” category at 53.3%, proving that constructive feedback is highly effective in bridging the gap between training and match reality. Tactical efficiency; although 16.7% of athletes were neutral regarding instant tactical changes, 83% demonstrated good tactical flexibility, indicating that the coach’s feedback has been internalized into the athletes’ procedural memory.



Theme 3: Two-way communication and interpersonal relationships

- Democratic-interactive leadership style; Interview summary: “We prefer it when the coach engages us in discussion rather than giving one-way orders; when we’re given the chance to explain why a shot went wide, we genuinely want to understand the issue—not just be blamed.” Athletes show a greater tendency to respond positively to coaches who use two-way communication; in this style, the coach provides space for athletes to express their perceptions of the techniques and tactics being practiced. Dialogic communication helps athletes feel personally valued, which in turn reduces psychological resistance.
- Effectiveness of accountability and minimization of barriers; Interview summary: “So far, there have been almost no significant barriers. When we disagree with the coach’s tactics, we speak up directly and usually explain our reasons. This kind of communication makes us not hesitate to try all of his instructions.” Interaction barriers are rarely found at the elite level due to a shared understanding of performance goals. If disagreements arise, a healthy emotional negotiation process takes place.
- Coaches as a source of comfort: Interview summary; “The coach knows when we’re under pressure; usually, they don’t immediately scold us about our technique, but instead talk to us heart-to-heart, which calms us down and helps us refocus on training and competition.” Responsive coaches are able to read athletes’ nonverbal cues, creating a sense of security that allows athletes to stay focused even under pressure.

Table 7. Results of two-way communication and interpersonal relationships

Indicator	Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Two-way communication and interpersonal relationships	11	0%	0%	0%	46.70%	53.30%
	12	0%	0%	0%	26.70%	73.30%
	13	0%	0%	10.00%	20.00%	70.00%
	14	0%	0%	3.30%	30.00%	66.70%
	15	0%	0%	10.00%	33.30%	56.70%

The results show that 100% openness in communication (scores of 4 and 5) indicates that athletes feel comfortable expressing training challenges. This suggests there are no rigid barriers, allowing the technical improvement process to proceed transparently. The dominance of a democratic style, with item 12 receiving a “strongly agree” score of 73.3%, confirms that elite athletes greatly need space for discussion. Psychodynamically, this reinforces a healthy working alliance. Ego validation and recognition: 96.7% of athletes felt that the coach’s feedback made them feel valued, which is an indicator of the coach’s success in maintaining self-esteem and thereby minimizing the emergence of emotional resistance. Empathy and containment: 90% of respondents acknowledged that the coach understood their emotional state when performance declined. This data supports qualitative findings regarding the function of containment, namely that coaches are able to alleviate anxiety through empathetic communication. That constructive feedback interactions can occur when athletes think critically in certain situations, so they can change external pressure into specific procedural thought patterns to relieve anxiety through communication.

Discussion

The purpose of this study is to analyze the dynamics of constructive feedback interactions in table tennis athletes through a psychosocial lens. Key findings indicate that the effectiveness of performance coaching depends not only on technical instruction but more fundamentally on interpersonal quality and psychosocial stability between coaches and athletes. Finding (1): Athletes do not perceive criticism as a personal attack but as support for progress; when coaches serve as effective support figures, athletes develop mature self-defense mechanisms. Quantitative data showed that 90% of athletes could control their emotional stability when receiving harsh criticism. This was supported qualitatively by the fact that athletes reported not being offended when receiving reprimands and technical corrections. In the context of elite table tennis, coaches successfully create a stable, supportive environment where athletes feel safe to acknowledge technical shortcomings without facing existential threats. This explains why



83.3% of athletes reported increased motivation after receiving feedback, even when the feedback was critical of errors during practice or competition.

Finding (2) indicates that, on the performance standards dimension, 90% of athletes were able to absorb information regarding improvements to 3–4 techniques simultaneously. This exceptional ability to process complex information demonstrates that constructive feedback has been deeply internalized into the athletes' cognitive structures. This internalization is clearly evident in their commitment to continuous movement refinement. Athletes not only refine their techniques during matches but also engage in mental reflection after training. The ability to transfer strategies from simulation sessions to real matches, endorsed by 96.7%, proves that feedback has reached a level of automation. Psychodynamically, this is the result of strong performance, indicating that coaches and athletes have achieved harmony. The pressure applied by the coach in the form of intense physical training was accepted by 53.3% of athletes as a form of care aimed at strengthening physical and mental capacity.

Finding (3): emphasizes that feedback interactions originate from symbiotic relationships but are formed in solid communication relationships.. two-way communication; one of the strongest findings in this study is the dominance of preference for democratic, interactive communication, with 73.3% strongly agreeing. Although the percentage shows a positive response to the coach's leadership style, this result needs to be studied more holistically, because this data is only seen from the athlete's perspective, there needs to be a study from the coach's perspective to ensure more in-depth results in the symbiosis of improving performance. Two-way communication acts as a bridge to minimize psychological retention. Athletes often experience mental blocks due to anxiety toward authority figures. However, with the presence of a discussion space, athletes feel validated as subjects rather than merely mechanical objects. When athletes feel understood during performance declines—90% of respondents agreed—coaches are actually managing the athletes' anxiety through an emotional process. Coaches acknowledge the athletes' chaotic mental emotions, process them through calm and logical feedback, and then return them to the athletes in the form of mentally understandable instructions. This process results in 100% of athletes feeling comfortable in expressing their challenges, making the coach a safe space to bear their emotional burdens.

Athletes are able to maintain emotional stability even when receiving harsh criticism. This aligns with previous studies, such as the concept of the holding environment, which suggests that early relational experiences with authority figures shape relational templates that influence how individuals respond to feedback later in life (Seeman, 2024) . In this context, coaches are able to provide constructive feedback as authority figures, so that athletes do not perceive criticism as a threat. However, it is also important to remember that the coach-athlete relationship carries the risk of intense emotional dynamics. Consistent with previous studies, without awareness of psychological boundaries, overly demanding interactions can lead to emotional abuse (Gervis & Dunn, 2004) . A high level of comfort in the study—100%—indicates that the coach successfully built a good relationship, which is referred to as effective psychological integration within an elite performance team (Mccalla & Fitzpatrick, 2016) . Furthermore, the cognitive ability to absorb instructions simultaneously is validated by previous studies indicating that elite athletes possess a cognitive structure that enables them to integrate various information sources efficiently (Zentgraf & Raab, 2023) . Furthermore, Stambulova et al. state that an athlete's career requires support from an interpersonal perspective to maintain performance stability (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019) . Additionally, the interconnection between talent detection, identification, and development indicates that the coach-athlete relationship must be continuous and adaptive (Zhao et al., 2024) .

This study offers a new perspective that, at the elite level, authoritarian power dynamics have shifted toward a symbiotic psychological partnership. Athletes' ability to transfer tactics from simulation to competition provides evidence that this process is highly dependent on the quality of democratic two-way communication. This offers practical novelty for coaching curricula for elite table tennis athletes. Another novelty concerns the methodology, as the mixed-methods approach successfully revealed the phenomenon of latent resistance. Quantitatively, it showed a high feedback rate of 90%; the qualitative approach successfully uncovered subtle gaps, such as psychodynamic barriers not detected by conventional questionnaires. This contributes to the field of psychology in identifying non-technical performance barriers in elite athletes.



Nevertheless, these findings still have several limitations, including the limited scope of quantitative participants with a small sample size, second, although the questionnaire instruments have been tested for validity and reliability, they still share item overlap across several dimensions, necessitating further exploration; while this study heavily relies on athletes' perceptions of their coaches, it has not fully integrated the coaches' perspective regarding the reasons behind specific communication styles. Therefore, future research should increase the sample size, explore the survey items, and incorporate feedback from coaches to understand the reasons for using the communication styles that have been implemented. This study shows that a democratic leadership style has a positive impact on athletes' internalization from a psychoanalytic perspective. However, this finding requires a holistic examination, as elite athletes tend to prioritize an ideal coach to maintain emotional stability, emphasizing trust in the coach.

Conclusions

It is concluded that constructive feedback interaction is a crucial mechanism in shaping the performance of elite table tennis athletes. Through the support of quantitative data and psychoanalytic analysis, it is clear that the success of technical instruction depends on the coach's ability to build a holding environment and perform containment functions. Two-way communication is not just a matter of coaching ethics, but rather a psychodynamic strategy to minimize resistance and strengthen the internalization of tactics until automation emerges. Two-way communication is not merely a matter of coaching ethics but a psychodynamic strategy to reduce resistance and strengthen the internalization of tactics. Elite table tennis coaches are advised to not only hone technical and physical skills, but also cultivate psychological sensitivity in order to balance the demands of high performance with the integration of mental protection in order to achieve sustainable performance at the international level.

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