



Bridging the gap: psychological foundations of coach communication in grassroots football in Indonesia and Malaysia

Reduciendo la brecha: fundamentos psicológicos de la comunicación entre entrenadores en el fútbol base de Indonesia y Malasia

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Abstract

Introduction: The harmonious relationship between coaches and players also determines the development of young football players and their long-term success in football. This relationship creates positive emotions such as interest, joy, and enthusiasm in football training. By building positive communication, coaches and players can implement proactive strategies, such as clarifying expectations.

Objective: This study aims to explore the effects of grassroots-level coach communication skills on grassroots-level football players' interest and engagement in Indonesia and Malaysia

Methodology: This study used a qualitative method with a grounded theory approach. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis of 25 licensed football coaches with at least 5 years of experience in Indonesia and Malaysia.

Results: This study found that being a grassroots-level coach differs from being a professional football coach. Coaches need to provide communication that is easy for children to understand to attract children's interest and involvement in football. Using football terms by modifying sentences in training will increase happiness, which causes children to want to continue training.

Discussion: Early-age football coaching generally highlights coaches' dilemmas in facing various challenges, including adapting to understanding early-age development. Coaches need to simplify general football terms so grassroots football players can easily understand them.

Conclusions: In addition to a professional license in football coaching, a special license is also required to become a grassroots football coach because specific communication skills are required for grassroots-level coaches in Indonesia and Malaysia.

Keywords

Communication, football coach, grassroots level, football development, sport psychology.

Resumen

Introducción: La relación armoniosa entre entrenadores y jugadores también determina el desarrollo de los jóvenes futbolistas y su éxito a largo plazo. Esta relación genera emociones positivas como interés, alegría y entusiasmo en los entrenamientos. Al fomentar una comunicación positiva, entrenadores y jugadores pueden implementar estrategias proactivas, como aclarar las expectativas.

Objetivo: Este estudio busca explorar los efectos de las habilidades comunicativas de los entrenadores de fútbol base en el interés y la participación de los jugadores de fútbol base en Indonesia y Malasia.

Metodología: Este estudio utilizó un método cualitativo con un enfoque de teoría fundamentada. Los datos se recopilaban mediante entrevistas, observaciones y análisis de documentos de 25 entrenadores de fútbol con licencia y al menos 5 años de experiencia en Indonesia y Malasia.

Resultados: Este estudio reveló que ser entrenador de fútbol base es diferente a ser entrenador profesional. Los entrenadores deben proporcionar una comunicación fácil de entender para los niños para atraer su interés y participación en el fútbol. El uso de términos futbolísticos modificando frases en los entrenamientos aumentará la felicidad, lo que incentivará a los niños a continuar entrenando.

Discusión: El entrenamiento de fútbol en edades tempranas generalmente destaca los dilemas de los entrenadores al afrontar diversos desafíos, incluyendo la adaptación y la comprensión del desarrollo en la primera infancia. Los entrenadores deben simplificar la terminología futbolística general para que los jugadores de fútbol base puedan comprenderla fácilmente.

Conclusiones: Además de una licencia profesional como entrenador de fútbol, también se requiere una licencia especial para convertirse en entrenador de fútbol base, ya que los entrenadores de fútbol base requieren habilidades comunicativas específicas en Indonesia y Malasia.

Palabras clave

Comunicación, entrenador de fútbol, nivel base, desarrollo del fútbol, psicología del deporte.

Introduction

The challenge of sustainability in professional football cannot be separated from the competence of coaches in carrying out the coaching process (Pache, 2020). Professional coaches in coaching education must carry out reflective practice, learning in higher education, developing intrapersonal knowledge, and using technology (Kuklick et al., 2015; Langan et al., 2013). In the football industry, the image of a coach can be the point of the rise or fall of a football team (Houben et al., 2022). The coach's ability to train and the methodology of organizing a football team are the keys to the team's success in the future (Bryson et al., 2021; Otte et al., 2020). Coaches fulfil many roles, including leaders, psychologists, friends, teachers, personnel managers, administrators, fundraisers, and role models (Côté, 2006).

Football coaching has always been key in developing talented football players from an early age, so the coach's role is the most important thing in the talent identification process. According to Fortin-Guichard et al. (2022), talent identification in football has many interrelated factors, including talent indicators that predict selection to a highly multidisciplinary professional academy. Coach coaching is the most important way to create a quality football club (Gómez et al., 2021). The qualities in question include how to train, organization, communication skills, organizational skills and psychological intelligence, which are important aspects in football coaching, especially if it starts from an early age, such as grassroots football. Bentzen et al. (2020) state that adverse emotional reactions and poor ability to manage coach stress can negatively impact a football team's sustainability. The coach becomes a mentor and parent for football players, so the coach's ability to control himself is important to identify whether the coach is qualified.

The quality of a coach comes from the level of understanding of being a coach, in which case coaching education determines whether the coach is competent or not. According to Hill et al. (2023), most coaching behaviours come from sports traditions, instincts, and previous experiences and tend to follow traditional methods that are inherited rather than adopting new evidence-based approaches related to athlete development. The results of this study indicate why football coaching is difficult to develop, not only related to changes in the times but also because the coach's mindset is a determinant of the sustainability of football players' achievements. The coach's experience in a professional football environment is a determinant of whether a football club can develop and achieve (Hegarty et al., 2018; Higham et al., 2022), so choosing a football coach based on his coaching education background is an important thing that parents must know.

In grassroots football coaching, the coach's communication skills in providing feedback through visual analysis can be a way to improve training practices (Wadsworth et al., 2018). The coach's experience of the importance, development, and integration of decision-making and visual exploration behaviour in a football academy setting (Maskell et al., 2024) certainly indicates whether the coach has competence in football coaching. This study focuses on the importance of grassroots coach communication skills in instructing grassroots players. Many coaches at the grassroots level have playing experience but do not have an adequate formal training background in teaching and educating young football players. This can lead to a lack of ability to create a supportive and motivating environment for children. Therefore, this study emphasizes the need for ongoing training and development for grassroots coaches to ensure that they have the competencies needed to guide and inspire young football players and ensure long-term success in a career towards professional football.

Method

This research uses a grounded theory approach proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1998), namely Evolved Grounded Theory (EGT), which emphasizes theory development. EGT is a research methodology that significantly appeals to various scientific disciplines because of its explanatory power. Strauss and Corbin (1998) show the evolution of grounded theory, which requires time and theoretical sensitivity to move continuously from data to theory. In qualitative research, three data collection methods can be used: interviews, observation, and document analysis (Lebar, 2021; Gibson & Brown, 2009). This research follows the principles of Strauss and Corbin's (1998) grounded theory, so data is collected using semi-structured, in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis. Integrating various methods

in the data collection process covers a method's weaknesses, giving reinforcement and confidence to the researcher in discovering and obtaining more comprehensive data.

Participants

The participants in this study were 25 football coaches from Indonesia and Malaysia. The criteria for participation in this study are youth coaches with at least five years of experience and a coach with a football coaching license. To make it easier for readers to understand this article, the researcher gave the codes JI for Indonesian coaches and JM for Malaysian coaches who participated in this study. The researcher also attached a table of participants in this study.

Table 1. Participant Information Indonesia

No	Age	Licence	Coaching experience	Status
JI1	30	C	10 Years	Active
JI2	38	C	12 Years	Active
JI3	31	C	6 Years	Not Active
JI4	43	B	17 Years	Active
JI5	53	B	16 Years	Active
JI6	49	B	15 Years	Active
JI7	45	B	18 Years	Active
JI8	42	A	14 Years	Active
JI9	36	A	13 Years	Active
JI10	42	A	6 Years	Active

Table 2. Participant Information Malaysia

No	Age	Licence	Coaching experience	Status
JM1	41	D	16 Years	Active
JM2	46	C	10 Years	Active
JM3	68	C	36 Years	Not Active
JM4	48	C	20 Years	Active
JM5	30	C	7 Years	Active
JM6	42	C	10 Years	Active
JM7	42	B	18 Years	Active
JM8	42	B	12 Years	Active
JM9	54	B	28 Years	Active
JM10	54	B	22 Years	Active
JM11	43	B	17 Years	Active
JM12	39	A	16 Years	Active
JM13	59	A	30 Years	Active
JM14	65	A	40 Years	Active
JM15	35	A	12 Years	Active

Procedure

This section will explain the research procedures, from research instruments to data analysis so that readers can understand how this research was carried out systematically and objectively

Instrument

The instrument used in the current research was examined for face and content validity. Regarding content validity, two experts in football, one in psychology, and two in qualitative research examined the instrument. The Cohen Kappa analysis was used to test the validity result, as seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Cohen Kappa results

Expert A	Expert B	Expert C	Expert D	Expert E	Kappa Coefficient Min
42-21	40-21	39-21	37-21	42-21	K=
K ₁ =	K ₂ =	K ₃ =	K ₄ =	K ₅ =	K ₁ +K ₂ +K ₃ +K ₄ +K ₅
42-21	42-21	42-21	42-21	42-21	5
0.952	0.904	0.857	0.761	1.000	0.894

Data analysis

The data analysis system in this study uses Strauss and Corbin's (1998) grounded theory approach, which involves progressive coding techniques that move data analysis from description through conceptual sequencing to theory. In the grounded theory approach, data is analyzed systematically to develop a theory that emerges from the data itself; this process involves several steps, starting with open coding, axial coding and selective coding, as proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1998). Data analysis in this study was also assisted by N-Vivo 14, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software that can help organize, code, and analyze research data efficiently and efficiently (Ekasatya & Afriansyah, 2016). In the data analysis process, the researcher also transcribed the research data by playing back the recording of the interview process and listening carefully to the recorded interviews, which were then put into writing. Transcribing data from 25 coaches took quite a long time because researchers needed to listen to around 1,643 minutes of research recordings or the equivalent of 27 hours and 34 minutes. Converting audio into transcripts of research data conducted for each participant resulted in 560 pages of transcripts with double spacing and using Times New Roman font size 12. After the data transcription process, the researcher returned the transcripts to the participants. This was done to agree that what the participants said was the same as what was intended in the chat meeting process. The next stage is for researchers to analyze the data that has been obtained, starting with open coding and axial coding and continuing with selective coding, which also uses N-Vivo 14 software as a tool to manage data obtained from interviews and document analysis. N-Vivo helps researchers manage and separate data according to the categories and themes obtained. For more details, the researcher explains the data analysis process in this study following the development of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Results

In this research, triangulation was employed to verify the data sources collected by the researcher. The primary purpose of this approach is to ensure that the research findings are not solely based on one source or method, thereby reducing bias and increasing confidence in the results. The researcher gathered data through interviews with 25 coaches from Indonesia and Malaysia. To strengthen the findings from these interviews, the researcher also analyzed documents provided by the coaches, including books created by the participants and various training programs designed for players, parents, and families.

Additionally, the researcher utilized other data sources, such as field observations. Observations were conducted at the soccer training grounds for U-17 players in both Indonesia and Malaysia. During these observations, the researcher took detailed field notes to capture all relevant insights, which aids in analyzing and interpreting the data. This observational approach is valuable for gaining a deeper understanding of the research topic and complements data collected through other qualitative methods, such as interviews and document analysis.

Communication between coaches and players is a crucial aspect of grassroots football development, laying the foundation for the sport's growth at the grassroots level. At this level, players are still in the learning and character-building stage, so the coach's role is limited to teaching techniques and tactics and includes mental and emotional support. Effective communication between coaches and players can create a supportive environment, increase motivation, and help players understand their roles and responsibilities on the field. Players' potential may not be optimally explored without good communication, and the coaching process can lose direction.

The uniqueness of football lies in the cooperation and enthusiasm between players in achieving a common goal, which is to score more goals than the opponent. Each player has their role and responsibility, from the goalkeeper to the striker, and a team's success depends significantly on the ability to coordinate, communicate and cooperate. Communication skills between football players in the game need to be developed because this sport is played collectively, as JM9 believes, namely,

"We will look at communication and body language when talking to others. It should be made part of the instrument in football coaching to ensure that each player not only masters the technical aspects but also in terms of communication aspects."



This statement is consistent with the answer of Coach JM7, namely,

"When we play with older people, he will play more maturely than the average person. Communicating; he realizes what he did wrong, so it is easier for others to reprimand him".

Good relationships among teammates will create a positive atmosphere, motivate players to work together to achieve the same goals and stimulate healthy competition within the team; the need to create an atmosphere as seen necessary by the JI9 coach who gave his opinion,

"how to work with friends, get along with friends, how to communicate with each other, respect others. We ask for that from the age of seven".

When someone is interested in being an under-17 football coach, he will dedicate himself to being a coach to help football players and not just as a coach who gets paid by parents or the academy. It is hoped that the coach's interest will produce competence in understanding the psychological treatment of players, such as providing motivation, using verbal communication, and giving rewards and punishments to strengthen the player's behaviour on the field. Coach JM1 conveys the ability to understand psychological treatment,

"If at the grassroots he loses, he is not in the mood to play; he cries and does not want to play. So now the coach needs to play an important role; we help him regain his spirit and raise his spirits. If he scores a goal at the grassroots, even though he loses, he feels happy because he scored. Even though he loses, we encourage him to score. Another thing is we give him a little reward, but sometimes we give him a reward like a shirt or even one ringgit, which is okay."

Meanwhile, coach JM14 also added,

"Only can help improve psychology; every second session adds confidence to people, and every time he does praise, praise is number one. As a coach, do not blame, blame every time, scream scream scream, so please do better, give credit for credit, I like it, it will automatically improve his psychology and motivation."

Being a football coach for a professional team differs from being a coach for an age group. Coaches at the grassroots or under-17 level are required to establish a personal rapport with the players they coach because they can create a motivating and comfortable environment for the players to stay on the right path, as stated by coach JI2, namely,

"I believe that coaches are not just teaching techniques; the coach's job is to take care of the players' mentality. Coaches are the people closest to the players."

Apart from that, coach JM13 also gave the opinion that,

"Another thing we need to know about training needs is how to communicate with students and coaches and the gap with players. In every session, be serious, enjoy, and have fun because this is the will that needs to be in the game".

From the above statement, being a coach for under 17 football players requires the ability to coach football and the psychological ability and communication skills to nurture and create players. Coaches can adapt training and communication methods to support each player's personal development and optimal performance. The urgency of transparent, open, and constructive communication between coaches and grassroots football players cannot be ignored, as this is the key to success in shaping skilled players who have a tough mentality and are ready to face future challenges.

Discussion

Talent development is critical to sporting success, so the skilled management role of a coach is an important component in finding, training, and maintaining young athletes (Mola & Shaw, 2024b). Sports coaching is an interdisciplinary endeavour where coaches integrate knowledge from various disciplines to support participants in achieving desired outcomes. According to Dempsey et al. (2024), coaches not only need to learn, but they need to learn something to help the development of athletes ultimately. The selection of a coach is key to a soccer player's success because the coach's influence is the main predictor



for young soccer players to be able to compete in the professional league in the future (Grossmann & Lames, 2013; Meyer & Klatt, 2021). It is important to develop a centred formal coaching education that will provide a diverse learning experience, especially in improving the development of young soccer players (Araya et al., 2014).

Early childhood football coaching generally highlights the dilemma of coaches in facing various challenges, including adapting to understanding early childhood development and parental behaviour that may hinder the course of football coaching (Gavin et al., 2023). The study results show that developing empathy must be the main focus in educational and achievement strategies for early childhood football players to achieve optimal results and create an inclusive and supportive environment (Sepdanius et al., 2024). This means that coaching education has a complexity that not only understands the concept of improving performance but also an understanding of the psychological and sociological context. The psychological context is an important part of grassroots football coaching because, through psychology, coaches can identify early childhood football players' mentality and fighting spirit. According to Chaeroni et al. (2024), psychological factors such as intelligence levels and player motivation can reflect coaches in determining coaching styles, thus opening the door to more adaptive and successful football learning (Akbar et al., 2024).

Coaches play a vital role in shaping the athlete's sporting experience through their regular interactions with their athletes, thus requiring professional knowledge and interpersonal skills in their coaching process (Erikstad et al., 2024; Kurniawan et al., 2024). Coaches need to understand aspects related to innovation, technology, mental health, and collaboration in shaping the future of football players so that investment in coach education and innovative sports science collaboration can be a powerful driver for change and evolution of the sport (Mola & Shaw, 2024a; Smidu & Dominteanu, 2024). This means that football coaching at the grassroots level has various components, and an increasing understanding of the concept of coaching has an important role in the evolution of football coaching.

Coaches at the grassroots football level are more proactive in developing professional football players (Rahaman et al., 2024; Purnomo et al., 2024). This is because the concept of training in early childhood must be related to the child's growth and development so as not to interfere with the child's growth and development in the future. The coach's understanding of the training program, which includes intensity and volume, is an indicator of improving the skills and performance of early-age athletes (Chen, 2024). In addition, understanding motor skills is also one of the keys to a player's success and is an initial factor mixed with special game techniques and tactics that impact game performance (Reza et al., 2024). Thus, the coach's ability to design variations of training that refer to the child's motor development phase is an important component in improving the abilities of grassroots-level football players.

The development of life skills in early childhood sports coaching provides the best opportunities for children to have a more meaningful future (Bae et al., 2024). Through grassroots-level football, children are trained to have skills in the field of football, which is not only an opportunity to improve their careers in the future but also an effort to prepare quality football players who will bring honour to the nation. Integrated training programs can provide better results than those that do not (Afrizal et al., 2024). This means that the components of the training program for grassroots-level football players need to be integrated into the sustainability of children's careers in the future while still paying attention to aspects of their growth and development.

The level of understanding of coaches in sports contexts is often associated with decision-making ability (O'Connor et al., 2017). Decision-making skills are a measure of the success of a sport, especially sports involving teams. The study's results stated that coaches' experience in sports determines the quality of athletes to remain sustainable in sports (Brown et al., 2023). The sustainability of athletes in sports is also related to the coach's understanding of physiological, anthropometric, sociological, and psychological attributes (Larkin & O'Connor, 2017). This statement is an important attribute in implementing a holistic multidisciplinary approach to identifying the talents of grassroots-level football players. In addition, creating a safe, challenging and stimulating environment for early childhood is also an important scenario for coaches to become fundamental figures in creating a healthier competitive football training environment for children (Bettega et al., 2023).

The different characteristics of football players are another challenge for football coaches; this is an identification criterion to be able to predict the abilities and skills of young football players (Sæther,



2017). The characteristics of football players are always related to the performance of players on the field. Coaches must understand the right concept when providing training programs at the grassroots level. According to Bognar et al. (2024) and Leyhr et al. (2021), increasing awareness of coaching for young football players involves the selection and subjective evaluation of players, as well as children's motor diagnostics as key factors influencing the development of junior football player talent in sports academies. Other studies also show that the quality of coach education is important acculturation for the sustainability of sports organizations (Barnes & Curtner-Smith, 2024), as is knowledge of how forms of socialization interact in shaping coaches' views and pedagogy, and the ways in which coach education develops more effective and safe programs for children (Barnes & Curtner-Smith, 2023).

Effective practice and instruction are skills that determine coach excellence (Williams & Hodges, 2023), as well as in the coaching environment, which is the primary teaching and learning medium for athlete skill development (Larkin et al., 2022). The role of a coach in sports is to develop the skills of his players, but the challenge for many coaches is to develop the game's intelligence and the players' ability to read the game. Coaches need to understand how the soccer coaching curriculum provides them with an understanding of the philosophy of soccer and outlines specific coaching strategies to improve players' technical and decision-making abilities (O'Connor & Larkin, 2015). The availability of a structured training program is an important point for coaches before training activities to support individual and team competencies that will ultimately become feedback that focuses on the task and performance of soccer players (Nicol & Allen, 2024).

Effective and adaptive communication from coaches plays a crucial role in fostering a positive learning environment, increasing player engagement, and promoting values such as sportsmanship and teamwork (Weinberg & Gould, 2018). Research by Côté and Gilbert (2009) indicates that grassroots coaches who communicate effectively are typically more successful in developing young athletes' technical, tactical, and psychosocial skills. Conversely, coaches lacking strong communication skills may struggle to deliver clear instructions, provide constructive feedback, or build empathetic relationships with their players, which can hinder the athletes' overall development (Horn, 2008). Therefore, enhancing communication skills among grassroots coaches should be a priority in training and certification programs.

The results of the study will have important implications not only for football players, coaches, and football academies but also for advancements in the field of sports psychology. By employing effective communication, coaches can significantly influence the behavior of football players, particularly at the grassroots level. A study by Smith and Smoll (2007) demonstrates that coaches who use positive communication and provide clear instructions can enhance players' self-efficacy. This finding supports the social-cognitive theory within the context of sports development. Additionally, the research strengthens the coaching efficacy model proposed by Feltz et al. (1999) by highlighting communication as a crucial aspect of coaching effectiveness. These insights can serve as a foundation for creating a more structured sports psychology training module, particularly focusing on positive reinforcement and promoting a growth mindset among young athletes (Weinberg & Gould, 2018). Therefore, this research not only adds to the literature on sports psychology but also offers practical guidance for coaches, academics, and football federations in designing evidence-based coaching programs.

Conclusions

The soccer training field is a fun place for children in their development as humans and soccer players in particular, because there are elements of happiness, games and meeting friends of the same age. Football coaches must utilize this happy moment to shape character, convey information, and influence children. The communication skills of coaches in this process are crucial because they not only provide instructions to underage soccer players but can also motivate children. Furthermore, good communication skills from coaches can modify children's behaviour, such as forming discipline in children and developing respect for fellow human beings and others. For that, in the coach's view, a special license is needed for this grassroots coach, which is different from the general soccer coach license because being a minor or grassroots soccer coach is different from being a professional soccer coach.



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