

Integrating sport psychology in grassroots football: enhancing performance and well-being

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ABSTRACT

Problems: this research examines the psychological aspects of developing early childhood football players (grassroots football). support from coaches and parents and a holistic training program were critical factors in optimizing a player's potential. **Purpose:** the research aims to understand how psychological factors influence grassroots football players. this research will likely provide an evaluation of the critical role of sports psychology in developing grassroots football achievements. **Methods:** this research uses qualitative methods with a grounded theory approach. a total of 10 licensed coaches with a minimum of 5 years-experience in football coaching. this research uses data triangulation, namely open semi-structured interviews, observation, and document analysis, as data collection procedures. the information collected is then analyzed using predetermined themes. **Results:** the research using the interview method shows that effective motivation methods include positive feedback, setting realistic goals, and creating a competitive but supportive environment. coaches provide praise, set small goals, and create a positive training environment to increase players' self-confidence. in managing player stress, coaches use personal approaches, open communication, and mental training to help athletes overcome pressure. improving social skills in grassroots players is carried out through group exercises that encourage cooperation and participation in community football events. **Conclusion:** the research results and discussion can be analyzed to show that collaboration between coaches and parents is essential in supporting children's potential, with coaches focusing on developing techniques and understanding of the game and parents providing moral support without excessive pressure. this research confirms the importance of a comprehensive psychological approach to optimally developing early childhood football players.

keywords: *grassroots football, early childhood, sports psychology, football*

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Introduction

Sports psychology is a branch of science that studies how psychological factors influence athletes' performance in sports and their influence on individual psychological well-being (Kurniawan et al., 2020). Aspects of sports psychology generally include Motivation, emotions, social skills, stress management, skills, cognition, attitudes, and character values (Purnomo et al., 2018). An athlete's mental or psychological state is included in the determining component of achieving an achievement. Many studies show how vital the role of psychology is in improving an athlete's ability when faced with competitive situations (Handayani, 2019). According to Irwanto and Romas (2019), An athlete's psychological profile is a general personality description in the form of intellectual and emotional potential associated with the sport. Sports psychology, in developing early childhood achievements, is an essential foundation for developing people who are superior and have character.

Football is one of the most popular sports in the world, and its development begins at an early age. Grassroots football is the initial phase where children and teenagers are introduced to the football world. In this phase, sports psychology becomes crucial to ensure healthy and optimal development. In many countries, the development of football players begins at an early age through grassroots football programs. This program aims to introduce the basics of football techniques and instill the values of sportsmanship and teamwork. Physiological and psychological factors are crucial in grassroots football development, so the

child's physical, motor, and personality development is highlighted most. According to Marheni, Cahyani, et al. (2019), The ability to carry out physical movements and actions in children is related to the child's self-confidence and the formation of the child's self-concept. According to Akbar, Karim, Zakaria, Kurniawan, Imami, et al. (2023). The challenges of grassroots football academies are generally based on player personality, environmental conditions, player discipline, and player attitudes, which determine the success of grassroots football.

The grassroots football coaching pattern is a procedure that must be used to ensure the sequence of the program is implemented, including targets, content, approaches, and coaching procedures. Research results from (Samratulangi & Faruk, 2020) show that the phases of grassroots football development include the entertainment phase (Fun phase), aged 6 to 10 years, and the formation phase (Foundation phase), aged 11 to 13 years; students are given the basics of movement and coordination skills through playing patterns and focusing all his physical skills. In grassroots football coaching, the internalization of rules is part of sports motivation because young players need to be taught how to appreciate the game as a whole, which covers all aspects, from tactics to fair play (Mallia et al., 2019).

Early childhood football development faces various psychological problems that affect the development of young players (Rossing et al., 2020). One of the main problems is excessive pressure from parents and coaches. Highly ambitious parents often demand high levels of achievement from their children, neglecting long-term happiness and development. This can cause stress, anxiety, and even mental fatigue in children, which can ultimately reduce their interest in playing football. Apart from pressure from parents, coaches who focus too much on winning can also have a negative impact. Coaches who emphasize match results can make children feel stressed and lose self-confidence. An overly competitive approach often ignores the importance of providing fun and educational experiences for children, which should be a top priority in early childhood football development. Coaches are the second parents for young football players, so it is important for coaches to understand the performance of early childhood football players in an effort to improve their achievements (Duggan et al., 2021; Horne et al., 2022; López de Subijana et al., 2021).

Another problem that often arises is social comparison. Children often compare themselves to their peers, which can lead to feelings of inferiority if they feel they are not as good as their peers. This comparison can lead to decreased Motivation and enthusiasm for playing and worsening overall mental health. Confidence is the main foundation of a young player in maintaining his motivation to continue training as an athlete (Handayani, 2019). In early childhood football development, children need an environment that supports and understands their emotional needs. Therefore, coaches and parents must actively provide support and ensure that children feel valued and supported on their journey to develop football skills. Coaches and parents are a unit that can be a source of motivation and enthusiasm for young players (Horne et al., 2022). Overall, it is vital to adopt a holistic approach in early childhood football development that focuses on the physical and technical aspects and pays attention to children's mental and emotional health. In this way, children can enjoy learning and playing football happily and are motivated to continue to develop.

According to Rossing et al. (2020), The early age group coaching model is implemented by showing an inclusive attitude that includes team unity, respect, and development in retaining young athletes. As children grow, they go through several stages of development because they have different needs and behaviors (Humaid & Yohannes Wattimena, 2019; Muslimin et al., 2022). Applying psychological theory to football involves using techniques to increase Motivation, manage stress, and develop the mental skills necessary for optimal performance. This research focuses on understanding how psychological factors influence grassroots football players. This is because there are still many grassroots coaches who equate the training method with senior players, besides that the low psychological approach to the coaching process is also a problem that is encountered in grassroots coaching. This research will likely provide an evaluation of the critical role of sports psychology in developing grassroots football achievements.

Method

This research uses qualitative methods with a grounded theory approach. Purposive sampling was considered, considering the participants' knowledge, expertise, and experience, as the research aimed to investigate the participants' perspectives on the essential elements of grassroots football. The current study includes two participant characteristics: holding a coaching license and having at least five years of coaching experience. The total participants in this research were 10 coaches from Indonesia with licence C AFC until A AFC. Othman Lebar (2021) states that in qualitative research, the sample size cannot be determined from the beginning of the study. However, in evolved grounded theory, data is determined by the saturation of information (saturation of information) when the researcher fails to collect new information with the next participant (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This research uses data triangulation, namely open semi-structured

interviews, observation, and document analysis, as data collection procedures. The information collected is then analyzed using predetermined themes.

Result

Research findings show that psychological aspects are essential in developing grassroots football players. Support from coaches and parents, as well as a holistic training program, is critical to optimize the potential of early childhood football players. The summary of the results of the interviews between researchers and trainers is as follows:

Question 1:

What is the role of Motivation in improving the performance of grassroots football players in your team?

Motivation plays a vital role in improving the achievements of young football players. In our team, Motivation is the main driver for players to train harder and play better. When players feel motivated, they are more enthusiastic about facing challenges and trying to achieve targets (summary of interviews P1 – P10)

Question 2:

What methods do you use to motivate grassroots football players to achieve better achievements?

We use various methods to motivate young football players. One of the main methods is to provide positive feedback. We always try to appreciate their hard efforts, even when the results are not optimal. In addition, we also set realistic and challenging short-term and long-term goals. We also create a competitive but supportive environment where players feel valued and motivated to give their best by participating in SSB sparring partners. We also encourage players to support each other and build solid teamwork because internal Motivation and support from teammates are essential to achieve higher achievements. (interview summary P1 – P10)

Question 3:

As a coach, how do you increase the confidence of grassroots football players who are just starting to progress in their careers?

As a coach, increase the self-confidence of grassroots football players in several ways, such as giving praise when players show progress or succeed in doing something well, setting realistic small goals so they can feel gradual achievement, creating a positive and supportive training environment, and building social and teamwork skills. (interview summary P1 – P10).

Question 4:

As a coach, how do you manage the stress of grassroots football players so they can still play optimally on the field?

Managing player stress, especially early on, requires an in-depth and personal approach. First, I always try to build a good relationship with every player. Understanding their personality, background, and what motivates them is a crucial first step. In addition, I employ several special techniques to help them manage stress, such as open communication, mental training, setting a practice schedule, and building teamwork. (interview summary P1 – P10)

Question 5:

As a coach, how do you improve social skills among grassroots football players?

To improve social skills among grassroots football players, I implemented key strategies, such as prioritizing group exercises that require cooperation and effective communication between players. That way, players learn the importance of collaborating to achieve a common goal. Apart from that, I also involve young players to participate in football events that involve many people in the community so that children can always get used to blending in with society. (interview summary P1 – P10)

Question 6:

How can coaches and parents support young children's football potential so they can develop well?

Collaboration between coaches and parents is essential to support early childhood football potential. From the coach's side, the approach must focus on developing basic techniques, understanding the game, and building a love of football. Coaches must create a fun environment that does not pressure children so that they feel motivated and enjoy every training session. On the

other hand, parents also play a vital role, and parents must provide moral support by always providing enthusiasm and appreciation for every effort their children make without putting excessive pressure on them to win. Parents must also ensure children get proper nutrition and enough rest to optimize their physical condition. Additionally, parents need to understand that each child develops at a different pace. (summary of interviews P1 – P10).

Discussion

Sports psychology is an integral part of early childhood football development because it develops young players' mental and emotional aspects, which are no less important than physical and technical aspects. Children are at a developmental stage at an early age where they learn to manage emotions, build self-confidence, and develop social skills. Sports psychology helps instill positive values such as sportsmanship, teamwork, and good work ethics. One of the critical elements in sports psychology is building intrinsic Motivation. Intrinsically motivated children tend to be more committed and enthusiastic in training and matches because they enjoy the process of learning and playing football (Larsen et al., 2015). This is important to ensure the continuation of their interest in sports, especially football so that children do not easily give up or lose interest when facing challenges or failure.

Additionally, sports psychology helps manage stress and pressure, often significant factors in competition. Children who learn to deal with pressure from an early age will be better able to face difficult situations in the future, both in sports and everyday life. With the proper guidance, children can develop the ability to stay calm and focused under pressure, which is essential for optimal performance on the field. A good sports psychology approach involves parents and coaches creating a supportive and positive environment. This helps children feel supported and appreciated, making it easier for children to develop well and reach their maximum potential. Overall, sports psychology plays a vital role in shaping young players' character and mentality, ultimately improving the quality of the game and overall player well-being.

Motivation

Motivation is one of the critical factors in sports psychology. In grassroots players, intrinsic Motivation, such as enjoyment of playing and the desire to learn, is more important than extrinsic Motivation, such as awards or recognition. Coaches can play an essential role in facilitating an environment that supports this intrinsic Motivation. The results reveal some of the words or topics most talked about by participants. According to research results (Akbar et al., 2024), Motivation is a fundamental aspect taught by coaches at grassroots football academies in Indonesia to improve player performance. Motivation is a mental strategy to help people train body movements and connect with others in individual and team sports. Athletes' mentality needs to be trained early (Marheni, Purnomo, et al., 2019). The encouragement of achievement motivation is significant for athletes because Motivation is the driving force that allows children to achieve what they aspire to (Paramita et al., 2021).

Confidence

Grassroots players with high self-confidence tend to perform better and are more resistant to pressure. This is based on the research results Octavianingrum & Ina Savira (2022), which state that the relationship between self-confidence and emotional regulation is an essential predictor of achievement. Coaches can increase a player's confidence through positive feedback and structured practice. The coach's communication skills play an essential role in understanding the athlete's condition and increasing the athlete's self-confidence (Kurniawan et al., 2020; Purnomo, Aisyah, et al., 2024). Self-confidence is fundamentally important, so coaches and parents play an essential role in building and maintaining children's self-confidence. Giving constructive praise, creating a supportive environment, and providing opportunities for success are some ways to increase children's confidence in football.

Stress Management

Managing player stress, especially early on, requires a deep and personal approach. Building a good relationship with each player and understanding their personality, background, and Motivation is a crucial first step, as well as implementing some specific techniques to help manage stress, such as open communication, mental training, setting a training schedule, and building teamwork to name a few strategies to help manage stress in early childhood football players. According to Akbar, Karim, Zakaria, Kurniawan, Cahyani, et al. (2023), working with a sports psychologist to increase mental awareness among junior athletes is essential in coaching football performance. Because stress is an inseparable part of competitive sports, even at the grassroots level. Young players often face pressure from the expectations of

their parents, coaches, and themselves. Stress management techniques such as relaxation, visualization, and time management can help players deal with the pressure of practice and competition. The role of creating programs that are integrated into sports psychology provides better results than those that do not and has a good impact on athletes in sports (Afrizal et al., 2024). Stress management is an important thing that needs to be evaluated by coaches, and this is because when athletes experience competitive anxiety, it can affect their performance (Annisa & Kurniawan, 2022).

Social Skills

Football is a team sport that relies heavily on social skills such as communication, cooperation, and empathy. Developing social skills through sports can help players on the field and in everyday life. Training programs should include activities that promote positive social interactions and teamwork. Football is a suitable means to shape social values through deliberate structuring. According to Purnomo, Ma'mum, et al (2024), Developing social values is a provision for the younger generation to continue participating in more competitive competition. Apart from that, according to Akbar et al. (2024), football is a medium that can shape character, which leads to the prevention of juvenile delinquency by emphasizing independence, responsibility, emotional management, good attitudes, respect for others, courage, alertness, improving social relationships and improving decision making. Social skills are a vital component in the development of grassroots football players. Mastering social skills helps children become better players on the field and more mature individuals ready to face various challenges in life. Coaches, parents, and the environment are essential in helping children develop social skills through positive guidance and support (Palou et al., 2020; Sampol et al., 2019).

Conclusion

Based on the research results, psychological aspects are vital in developing early childhood football players or grassroots football. Support from coaches and parents and a holistic training program have proven the key to optimizing a player's potential. Motivation is the main factor driving players to train harder and play better. Motivated players show enthusiasm for facing challenges and achieving set targets. Coaches use various methods to motivate players, such as providing positive feedback, setting realistic and challenging goals, and creating a competitive yet supportive environment. To increase players' self-confidence, coaches praise progress, set realistic small goals, create a positive practice environment, and build social skills and teamwork. Managing player stress requires a personal approach, including building good relationships, understanding the player's personality and background, and applying techniques such as open communication, mental training, and setting a good training schedule. Players' social skills are improved through group exercises that require cooperation and effective communication, as well as football events involving many community members to familiarize children with interacting with a broader environment. Collaboration between coaches and parents is essential in supporting children's football potential. Coaches focus on developing fundamental techniques, understanding the game, and creating a fun environment. Meanwhile, parents provide moral support, ensure that children get proper nutrition, get enough rest, and understand that each child's development is different. Overall, this research emphasizes the importance of a holistic approach involving psychological support, Motivation, stress management, and social skills to develop the potential of early childhood football players. Collaboration between coaches and parents is a critical factor in creating an environment that supports the optimal development of grassroots football players.

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