

Football training module for small sided game under national football development plan

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ABSTRACT

Problems: A national football philosophy or DNA was introduced to shape coaches to become players who not only have technical and tactical expertise, but also have their own style of play. **Purpose:** This study was conducted to identify the syllabus used to coach the District Training Centre (PLD) football team in Kuala Lumpur. The coaching process can be improved by having a source of knowledge and knowing what the syllabus of the sport is. Coaches need to build a wide knowledge space to adapt to environmental conditions. **Methods:** This qualitative study aims to identify what is the training syllabus used by the football coaches of District Training Centre of Kuala Lumpur. A total of seven trainers from the District Training Centre in Kuala Lumpur, who are also teachers, were involved as participants in the study and were interviewed to obtain data. The data from the interviews were analyzed using the 'thematic analysis' method. The number of participants for the study were determined by the level of "saturation of information", where the participants were interviewed until they were found to be unable to present new data compared to the previous participants. **Results:** Based on the research conducted, there are three approaches used, namely (i) tactical, (ii) knowledge of managing players and (iii) systematic training. By using the three approaches, coaches can diversify their teaching methods when coaching their football team, which can be used to build a good training program. **Conclusion:** these three syllabi or method can be used to build a good football training programme and help coaches to coach their District Training Centre (PLD) football teams.

Keywords: Football, football syllabus, football practice, small-sided game.



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Introduction

The coaching process can be improved by having a source of knowledge and knowing what the syllabus of the sport is. Coaches need to build a wide knowledge space to adapt to environmental conditions. Trainers also need to access opportunities for various learning methods including formal and informal, to help the learning process to improve their knowledge as coaches. This will create a multi-dimensional learning method that involves various sources of knowledge. Among the sources of knowledge used are through experience, observation, information exchange with other parties, self-reflection, advice from outsiders, past experiences and self-learning through readings and resources as well as research. These elements can be used as a syllabus that can be used as a reference for coaches to coach their teams (Gonzalez-Rivera et al., 2017). According to Bolter et al (2017), formal learning occurs through a structured delivery of a standardized curriculum where coaches are exposed to diverse knowledge to make them effective. This will increase theoretical and practical assistance efforts among coaches, in communicating information during training sessions (Campolini, Milistedt, Rynne, Brazil & Do Nascimento, 2019). According to Mukherjee, Chand, Wong, Choong, Lau, Wang, Tou, & Ng, (2016) & Walker, Thomas, & Driska (2018), coaches who go through formal training in the domain of knowledge are seen to be more desirable and approachable to players. The results of these formal courses or training are reported to further increase the number of positive outcomes such as leadership, emotion, and commitment (Camire, Rocchi & Kendellen, 2017).

In Malaysia, football is governed by the Football Association of Malaysia (FAM). There are various football structures in Malaysia starting from the grassroots level to the international level. At the grassroots

level, football is managed as a result of a collaboration between the Football Association of Malaysia (FAM), the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the National Sports Council and the Ministry of Education (MOE), under a programme known as the National Football Development Plan. It is a long-term plan where the first phase started from 2014 to 2020. The mission of the National Football Development Plan is to create a systematic and comprehensive football development ecosystem towards increasing the quantity and quality of the country's football players (Ministry of Youth and Sports, 2014). There are five strategic thrusts in the National Football Development Plan, namely:

1. Shaping style, improving quality and building self-esteem with national football DNA
2. Identify and shape the country's football heroes
3. Providing standard facilities to all
4. Improve coaching development
5. Strengthening the competition structure at various levels

Based on these five strategic thrusts, excellence in football can be enlivened holistically so that more individuals can contribute and be involved in the success of this plan. In this regard, a national football philosophy or DNA was introduced to shape coaches to become players who not only have technical and tactical expertise, but also have their own style of play. They also formed to have high mental endurance and physical fitness. The concept of 'The Malaysia Way' was introduced where the country's football DNA was introduced. In this DNA, the philosophy of Malaysia's football is to dominate all four important situations in a game namely: (i) possession of the ball effectively, (ii) pressure on the opposing team, (iii) quick to transition and at the same time, (iv) to have a strong mentality, proactive and creativity of players in every corner of the field, smart in decision-making and play without fear (Football Association of Malaysia, 2018). In this regard, the researcher is of the opinion that a study should be conducted to identify what syllabus is used by the football coaches of the District Training Centre involved under the National Football Development Plan.

Method

This study is a qualitative study - using an interview approach by the researcher. A total of seven (7) District Training Centre trainers from among teachers were involved as study participants and were interviewed through open-ended semi-structured interviews to obtain in-depth data. They are coaches involved with the state Sports School and District Training Centres in Kuala Lumpur schools. The interview sessions lasted between 30 to 60 minutes using a voice recorder. The number of participants for the study were determined by the level of "saturation of information", where the participants were interviewed until they were found to be unable to present new data compared to the previous participants. This research uses the Grounded Theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 2008, 1998, 1990). According to Strauss and Corbin, code is a concept that is often reduced in word by denoting what happens with a piece of data. Coding is also an analytical process that examines every line of words or paragraph for an event or experience and also a feeling that is named as a concept. Data from the interviews will be analyzed using coding methods as recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1998; 1990). According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), axial coding and selective coding are used after this open coding to build a model. Axial coding is a set of procedures where all the data obtained will be rearranged in a new way after open coding by linking to the relevant categories.

Table 1. Coaching Background and Demographics of Study Participants

| N | A | TC | EL | CI | S.S | TE | CE |
|----|-------------|-------------------------------|-------------|----|-----|-------------|----------|
| P1 | 45 years | DTC Bangsar | Mast ers | C | 1 | 15 years | 13 years |
| P2 | 41 years | DTC Bangsar | Degr ee | C | 1 | 20 years | 8 years |
| P3 | 42 years | DTC Bangsar | Mast ers | B | 1 | 20 years | 8 years |
| P4 | 53 years | Kuala Lumpur Sports School | Mast ers | B | 2 | 26 years | 26 years |
| P5 | 41 years | Kuala Lumpur Sports School | Degr ee | B | 1 | 26 years | 26 years |
| P6 | 41 years | DTC Pudu | Degr ee | B | 2 | 20 years | 13 years |
| P7 | 36 years | DTC Keramat | Mast ers | B | 2 | 10 years | 10 years |

| | | | |
|-----|--------------------------|----|----------------------|
| N | : Number | ES | : Educational Status |
| S.S | : Sports Science | CE | : Coaches Experience |
| A | : AgeTC: Training Center | CL | : Coaching License |
| TE | : Teaching Experience | | |

Results

After conducting interviews, it was found that there were three method or syllabus used by football teachers / coaches from the District Training Centre of Kuala Lumpur. The method or syllabus are; (i) tactical, (ii) knowledge of managing players and (iii) systematic training.

Tactical

P1 *"Positioning is where we play, and if we have a position, we don't run away from it. Along with positioning and passing, the team also has tactical and technical aspects to consider. These include how we attack and how often we must defend."*

P3 *"Finally, I saw what my players are capable of. If my team wants to play, for example, tiki-taka, but knowing the ability of the players, they can't execute it, I have to think of something else. So, the training really depends on me."*

Knowledge of Managing Players

P2 *"In coaching, it's essential to have knowledge of sports psychology, including how to manage players and their emotions. It's also important to understand fitness and how to run training sessions that improve it. Not all of this knowledge can be gained through coaching courses alone; some coaches need to seek additional resources to conduct better sessions."*

P6 *"I also incorporated soft psychology and cognitive psychology. I summarized everything into one training session, as I don't have a specific session dedicated to just one component."*

Systematic Training For systematic training, it is divided into training principles which include; (i) the training component and (ii) the training time used by the participants of the study.

Exercise Components

There are 12 training components used by football teachers/coaches of the District Training Centre (PLD), Kuala Lumpur. The components of the exercise are:

Pre-Season Programme

P1 *"We look at the game in terms of different phases, much like the professional leagues, where we have pre-season training, in-season training, and out-of-season training. I apply these principles to my students as well. For instance, if a game is scheduled in the 8th month, we begin pre-season training 3 months prior. In the 4th month, we focus on both pre-season training and some skill development. During the out-of-season period, fitness typically declines a bit, so we concentrate more on technique."*

P6 *"I believe that in the training sessions before competitions, we apply Sports Science to enhance our approach. During the pre-season, we focus more on technique and fitness, particularly agility, to improve the players' abilities. However, in the match phase or match zone, our emphasis shifts towards tactics."*

Warming Up

P7 *"I will combine the four components in my training session. An example is my warming up. I will do it one on one or two on two. Basically, I will do two on two. Where there is one team on the left and one team on the right."*

Main Session

P7 *"My approach is quite structured, starting with a warm-up, followed by a main session, and ending with a game session. However, the key is that from the warm-up to the main session and*

gameplay, everything is done in a real game situation. This principle applies throughout the training phases: Pre-Season Training, In-Season Training, and Out-Season Training. I use these phases with my students as well. For example, if we have a game in the 8th month, we start pre-season training 3 to 4 months prior. During that time, we focus on physical conditioning and some skill development. By the time we enter the season, we are already physically prepared, allowing us to shift our focus to skills and tactics.”

Game Session

P7 “My approach follows the usual structure: we have a warm-up, a main session, and a game session. However, what's important is that from the warm-up to the main session and gameplay, everything mimics a real game situation. The warm-up must resemble a real game scenario, as does the main session and group play. It's essential that every part of the training reflects a real game situation.

Technical

P6 “However, during the match sessions or match zones, we focus primarily on tactics. The technical aspect becomes secondary—we prioritize being more tactical. Regardless of whether we are attacking or defending, we adopt the same tactical approach.”

P7 “Our passing technique is already established. When a player receives the ball, controls it, and then gets beaten by an opponent, that situation is also technical. In a two-on-two scenario, players must understand where to run, when to run, and the timing of their runs. Therefore, we incorporate tactical training continuously.”

Attacking

P1 “Typically, we start our attacks from the middle of the field. I enjoy watching EPL matches to observe how teams execute their attacks, which gives me many ideas for training my players. If appropriate, we will adopt these strategies as part of our philosophy in VI, but it also depends on the game situation. While we usually attack from behind, we sometimes focus on attacking from the wings as well.”

P 5 “ If we want to initiate an attack from our defenders, we make sure to explain the reasoning behind this approach to the players and then apply it during our training sessions.”

Defending

P1 “The aspects of attacking and defending are different; however, as former players, we possess a deeper understanding of the game of football. When we transition into coaching, we develop our knowledge in ways that differ from those who haven't played. Beyond positioning and passing, the team also focuses on tactical and technical elements, including how we attack and how frequently we must defend.”

P7 “In terms of defense, I practice diligently with my team to ensure they are steady. I draw from Arrigo Sacchi's training methods, which I apply alongside Guardiola's more modern pressing game and strategies. This combination helps us develop a robust defensive approach.”

Small Sided Games

P6 “On Thursdays, we typically focus on set pieces or play small-sided games, often organizing matches between 11 versus 11. Fridays are reserved for very light training to help players prepare to face each other. Then, on Saturdays, we usually have a friendly game or match.”

Mental

P6 “Players also engage with aspects of sport medicine and cognitive psychology. I summarize all of this into one training session, as I don't have a specific session dedicated to just one component.”

P3 “We begin our training with mini tactics, focusing on the foundational elements of our game strategy. After establishing these tactics, we transition to the psychological aspect of training, which is equally important for players to understand and implement during matches. This structured approach helps players develop both their tactical awareness and mental resilience.”

Friendly Games

P2 *"Currently, I conduct training three times a week. According to the NFDLP guidelines, a coach is required to hold three training sessions each week, along with one friendly match. I have designated Saturdays as our day for friendly matches; however, there are times when we also organize friendly matches on regular training days."*

P7 *"If given the chance, I would like to hold friendly matches five days a week, including on Saturdays and Sundays. However, I currently don't have that opportunity or privilege. Instead, I am limited to three training sessions a week, which take place within a five-day span. On Saturdays and Sundays, I aim to find a friendly match, or after three days of training, I will organize a friendly match to follow. This way, I can incorporate both training and friendly matches into our schedule."*

Real Game Situation

P4 *"There is a significant advantage in having players who can share their real experiences from the game of football. Often, this involves former Malaysian players, and in these situations, they can describe scenarios more accurately. Their firsthand experiences allow them to provide precise examples of real situations on the field, which enhances the learning process. Having ex-players as coaches brings valuable insights that can greatly benefit the team."*

P7 *"My training approach includes a warm-up, a main session, and a game session, but what's crucial is that every phase mimics a real game situation. From warming up to gameplay, we focus on aspects like intensity, timing, and pressure, ensuring everything is game-like. Additionally, every session must involve a ball; it's rare for me to conduct a session without one. From the start of warm-up to group play, the emphasis is always on real game scenarios."*

Fitness

P1 *"Every month, except during the fasting month, we hold regular training sessions. Typically, these sessions run from 6:00 to 7:00 PM. During the fasting month, we adjust our schedule to train three days a week, starting at either 5:30 or 6:00 PM and concluding at 7:00 PM. This allows players to maintain their fitness levels even while observing the fast."*

P3 *"I focus heavily on fitness and technical aspects during training. A player's technique improves significantly with a higher level of fitness, allowing them to perform more accurately without getting tired, regardless of how late in the game it is. This is evident in what we see from league and professional players, who consistently demonstrate their skills even in the final minutes of a match."*

Training period/Number of training days/Training duration per day

P1 *"Every month, except during the fasting month, we train from 6:00 to 7:00 PM. During fasting, we modify our schedule to three days a week, starting at 5:30 or 6:00 PM. I prefer not to have long breaks; 2 to 3 hours is sufficient for maintaining activity. In fact, one and a half hours is often enough to teach essential skills. I apply this structure in Pre-Season, In-Season, and Out-Season Training, ensuring that players are physically ready and focusing on skills and tactics when the season starts."*

P2 *"I conduct training three times a week, as required by the NFDLP, which also mandates one friendly match session. While I typically stick to this schedule, I sometimes increase training to four days a week depending on the situation. My primary focus in training is on technical skills, emphasizing the fundamental aspects of football in every session. Additionally, I have a strong preference for fitness training, as I observe that most teams often engage in small-sided games to enhance their fitness and technical abilities."*

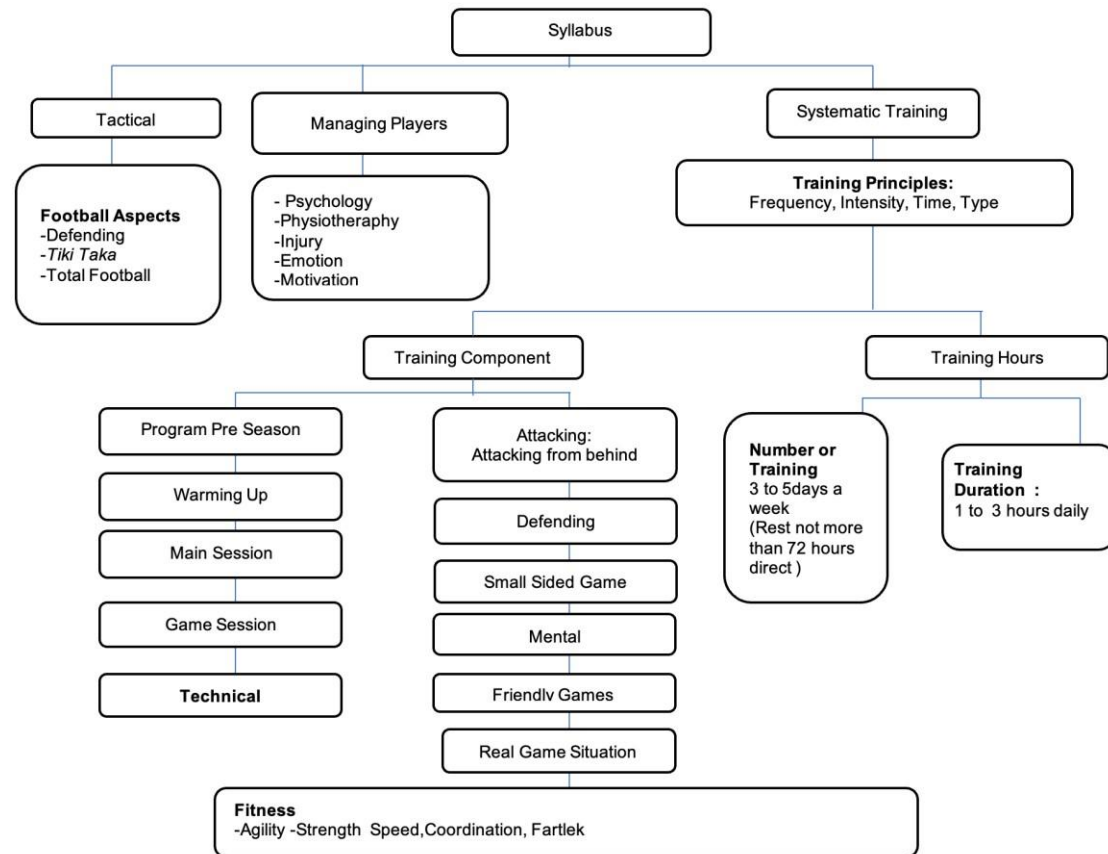


Figure 1. Syllabus of Small Sided Games Module for the National Football Development Program

Discussion

Coaches need an approach that can be used to evaluate the performance of a particular soccer skill (Bennet, Novak, Pluss, Stevens, Coutts & Fransen (2017). The performance of a team depends on the continuous training to meet the requirements of the competition. The training should focus on the development of individual players' performance and players can adapt the training to the actual competition situation. In this regard, the adaptation or modification of training carried out by coaches should be done to improve football skills. Among the training that can meet this criterion is training in the form of Small sided Games (SSG). (Aguiar, Goncalves, Botelho, Lemmink & Sampaio, 2015). This training approach has been identified to assist coaches in improving the fitness and performance of players as a team. (Iturricastillo, A, Granados, C, Los Arcos, A & Yanci, J, 2016)

SSG is used in the coaching and training process for team games because it exhibits the tactical and technical, physical and component involved in game performance. It also represents the same organizational characteristics as in the actual game. The game conditions can be modified to train specific components during the training, and it is able to improve the player's ability to solve tactical problems, assess space, and it is also able to provide information related to the tactical problems used and how they can be overcome using other SSGs (Bredt, Morales & Andrade, 2017). The specification aspects of a fitness training can also be absorbed through this SSG training. To improve fitness among the players, the team coach has added specific aspects in the training such as technical, tactical fitness and specific sports skills in the training. A frequently used exercise is SSG. It is made to improve the fitness and skills of players in a training session that uses a smaller number of players and different dimensions of space (Lachaume, Trudeau & Lemoyne, 2017). In addition to improving tactical and technical skills, SSG is also able to improve the physical fitness aspect of SSG players and fitness training is described as a smaller version of the actual game due to the use of fewer players and reduced space dimensions. It aims to increase the player's involvement in a training session and increase energy consumption and increase the physiological and physical load. This SSG is to build on situational limitations which are aspects of performance to be evaluated and help players showcase their potential and through the experience of physical, psychological and urgent technical needs (Ometto, Vasconcellos, Cunha, Teoldo, Souza, Dutra, O'Sullivan & Davids,

Conclusion

This study was conducted to identify the syllabus used to coach the District Training Centre (PLD) football team in Kuala Lumpur. Based on the research conducted, there are three syllabi or method, namely (i) tactical, (ii) knowledge of managing players and (iii) systematic training used by football coaches of District Training Centres (PLD) to coach their football teams. By using the three syllabi or method, coaches can diversify their teaching methods while coaching their football team. In this regard, these three syllabi or method can be used to build a good football training programme and help coaches to coach their District Training Centre (PLD) football teams.

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