

## ORIGINAL SCIENTIFIC PAPER

# 21<sup>st</sup> Century Coach Leadership Style towards Football Players' Motivation in Malaysian Sports Schools

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## Abstract

Malaysia has taken a rigorous approach to improving the quality and performance of its football teams. To match the strength of world-class football teams, the nation has taken a strategic approach by developing players' potential through the grassroots level. These players are brought together in sports schools across the country and trained by experienced coaches to showcase their talents, potentials, skills, and performance. Therefore, this study identifies the relationship between coach leadership style and the motivation of football players in sports schools. Furthermore, the study explores the dimensions of coach leadership style that have a high impact on improving player motivation. In this regard, a total of 313 footballers participating in the under-14 football tournament organized by the ministry of education and the national football development programme (NFDP) from sports schools across Malaysia surveyed as respondents. The findings show that there is a moderate positive relationship between coach leadership style and football players' motivation. Dimensions such as democratic and social consideration have a significant impact on increasing football players' motivation in sports schools. In conclusion, the football coach is the most crucial person in ensuring the motivation of football players at a high level. They have to use all of their existing skills to build a strong, motivated team and never tire of it when facing tough moments in the game.

**Keywords:** *football, sports school, players' motivation, coach leadership style, youth*

## Introduction

Football is one of the most popular sports throughout the world, regardless of gender, age or educational background. It is a sport that has a great aura in creating unity among all races and communities. Internationally, football teams from South American and European countries, such as Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, France, England, Spain, and Italy, are favourites among football fans, and their players are revered and idolized. Not to be overlooked is the Belgian football team that is now showing consistency and winning the top rating of the Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) in recent years (FIFA, 2020).

In many countries, the quality of the football team is improving over time. National football teams, such as those of Japan, South Korea, China, Saudi Arabia, and Iran, are the major forces in Asia to qualify for the World Cup every four years (Cho, 2015). The quality of their games is far superior to that of other Asian teams. This situation has been a concern for most other Asian football teams as the chances of qualifying for the World Cup are increasingly difficult (Amara, 2017). It is even more alarming when Australia's presence in the Asia Football Confederation (AFC) further complicates the dream of a lower-ranked football team to set foot on the world's leading football field.

As a developing country in Asian football, Malaysia is aware



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that higher level competition gives them a great opportunity to enhance their players' performance and overall team quality further. Therefore, the Football Association of Malaysia (FAM) is hoping for better-organized competition to enable them to compete against the top teams in Asia. Another opportunity is hosting the Asian Games in 2030, which means that Malaysian football teams automatically compete in the tournament (Rosly, 2019).

Of course, the most important thing to remember is that the process of football development starts at an early age. The method of finding talent from among young children is the most effective way of uncovering and shaping personalities, especially in physical, psychological, decision-making, and tactical development (Carroll, 2019). Children with potential should be brought together and given the full attention of the government by providing a wide range of facilities, initiatives, welfare and infrastructure training centres (Webb, Dicks, Brown, & O'Gorman., 2019). One measure taken by the Malaysian government is to place potential football students in sports schools around the country.

Football in Malaysia has experienced a slight decline in performance in recent times. According to FIFA (2020), Malaysia is ranked 167<sup>th</sup> out of 211 countries in the FIFA men's soccer rankings. The data in April 2020 is very different from the success Malaysia had on the international stage two decades ago. For example, Malaysia had previously ranked 75<sup>th</sup> in the FIFA rankings in August 1995 (Noor, 2014).

Several studies have found that the decline of Malaysian football is due to a lack of motivation among players (Govindan, Geok, Yusof, & Omar-Fauzee, 2019). Most players suffer from performance loss due to lack of motivation during matches. This situation is particularly worrying as it continues from the senior squad to the junior team. The national youth squad is among the school-aged between 13 and 17 years old. If factors such as motivation are not emphasized earlier, these young players will likely follow in the footsteps of senior players as they advance into the professional world (Dyakova, Dyakov, & Angelova, 2017).

Presently, a group of junior college football players has been gathered and are on-site at sports schools to pursue a more systematic intensive programme. These players train with a wide range of skills by experienced coaches, most of whom are former professional footballers and qualified teachers in the field of sports science (Govindan et al., 2019; Noor, 2014). The question arises: can these coaches improve the motivation of the football players at the school? The learning environment at a sports school is not the same as a regular school; apart from studying, students also need to focus on football (Din, Rashid, & Awang, 2015).

Several previous studies have shown that coach leadership style can enhance the well-being, motivation, and satisfaction of football among students (Lescroart, Brown, & Paskus, 2015; Mouloud & Elkader, 2016). However, the approach adopted by the study is very different as it involves respondents of different ages, study locations and methods of coaching techniques practised (Lee & Rengasamy, 2015). Given that Malaysia has a very unsettling history of football failure, it is appropriate that a study be conducted to examine the motivation level of junior players in the 2020s. Also, it is essential to examine the influence played by existing coaches to motivate players for the sake of football in Malaysia.

Based on recent issues, the study aims to identify the level of coach leadership style and football players' motivation at

Malaysian Sports Schools. It also examined the relationship between coach leadership style and motivation among football players. Finally, the study details the effects of coach leadership style that can influence football players' motivation.

## Methods

The population of this study is athletes involved in football games at State Sports Schools (SSS) and Malaysian Sports Schools (MSS). A total of 22 SSS and MSS schools exist throughout Malaysia, for athletes in the age range of 13 to 17 years. All athletes in various sports fields are trained intensively in sports, including academic accreditation by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) and the Ministry of Sport and Youth (MSY). According to the current situation, there are 6252 athletes in SSS and MSS. Of these, 550 are footballers between the ages of 13 and 14 who are participating in MOE-sponsored under-14 tournaments.

Based on the table of Krejcie and Morgan (1970), the minimum number of respondents to take in was 234 football players. To avoid problems such as missing questionnaires, inaccurate findings and incomplete forms, the number of respondents should be increased. Therefore, a total of 313 football players were selected as respondents in the study using a simple random sampling method.

The instrument used to measure coach leadership style is the Revised Leadership Scale for Sport (RLSS), which contains 60 items in total, covering six different dimensions (Zhang, Jensen, & Mann, 1997). The dimensions are about the leadership styles practised by the coach from the perspective of a young footballer. The RLSS has been widely used in studies involving coach leadership styles in various sports and has shown consistent values (Nazarudin, Omar-Fauzee, Jamalis, Geok, & Din, 2009; Sullivan & Dhurup, 2012).

Furthermore, another variable was the football players' motivation, which was adapted from the work of Pelletier, Rocchi, Vallerand, Deci, and Ryan (2013). The instrument called the "Revised Sport Motivation Scale" (SMS-II) was divided into six dimensions, with a total of 18 questions. Previous studies using SMS-II have shown a high degree of reliability and suitability for use in different sports environments (Pelletier et al., 2013; Schaefer, Vella, Allen, & Magee, 2016). The total number of items used for both instruments was 78 items.

In collecting research data, written consent must be made to the MOE. Only MOE can allow research to be conducted as this study involves students and organizations under their administration. Once the consent was obtained, the questionnaire was distributed personally by the researcher. In this case, a meeting and explanation session was conducted with respondents in the selected schools. This method is appropriate, and respondents had a fresh understanding of the objectives of the study (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2014). It is also able to prevent the confusion of the respondent when answering the question, and the researcher can interact with all the respondents.

## Results

### *The level of coach leadership style and football players' motivation*

To assess the level of coach leadership style, mean values were used consisting of five sections, namely very high (4.21–5.00), high (3.41–4.20), medium (2.61–3.40), low (1.81–2.60) and very low (0.00–1.80). These five categories are appropriate because the instruments used in this section are on a five-point scale. Based on the study, it found that four dimensions of coach leadership

style showed high levels: positive feedback, training and instruction, social consideration, and social support.

The other two dimensions were democratic and autocratic at the moderate level. Overall, the level of coach leadership style variables was high, with a mean value of 3.60, and the standard

deviation was 0.48. This finding proves that football coaches in sports schools across Malaysia have adopted high-style coach leadership to train Malaysian footballers under-14. The summary formulas for each dimension of coach leadership style are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** The Level of Coach Leadership Style

Dimensions	Mean±SD	Level
Democratic	3.04±0.76	Medium
Positive Feedback	3.80±0.71	High
Training and Instruction	3.98±0.68	High
Social Consideration	3.89±0.65	High
Social Support	3.64±0.72	High
Autocratic	3.26±0.77	Medium
Overall	3.60±0.48	High

Meanwhile, football players' motivation level was also measured in this study based on the mean values divided into seven sections: very high (6.00–7.00), high (5.00–5.99), average high (4.00–4.99) medium (3.00–3.99), low (2.00–2.99) and very low (1.00–1.99), which is appropriate since the instrument used to measure football players' motivation is a seven-point scale. Based on the findings, it determined that the three dimensions of football players' motivation showed high levels: intrinsic motivation, integrated motivation, and identified motivation. The results also show that two aspects of foot-

ball players' motivation are at the medium level: introjected motivation, and amotivation.

However, there is one dimension in football players' motivation at a moderate level: external motivation. When computed, the level of overall football players' motivation was medium quality with a mean value of 4.90, and the standard deviation was 0.83. The results show that under-14 football players in sports schools across Malaysia have an only moderate level of motivation. For more details, a summary of each player's motivation dimensions presented, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** The Level of Football Players' Motivation

Dimensions	Mean±SD	Level
Intrinsic Motivation	5.47±1.29	High
Integrated Motivation	5.29±1.30	High
Identified Motivation	5.46±1.31	High
Introjected Motivation	4.91±1.38	Medium High
External Motivation	3.71±1.76	Medium
Amotivation	4.58±1.75	Medium High
Overall	4.90±0.83	Medium High

*The relationship between coach leadership style and football players' motivation*

The results of the study show that there is a moderate positive relationship between coach leadership style and football players' motivation, which is clearly explained in the Pearson correlation coefficient (r), in which both variables accounted for r=0.488, p=0.000 (p<0.01). This fact indicates that the motivation of the under-14 football players in sports schools across Malaysia is only modestly related to the manner or style of their coaches implementing instruction or coaching. Although the relationship is simple, it is still essential for proving the existence of a coach in improving each player's motivation.

Out of the six dimensions of coach leadership style, five showed a significant relationship with football players' motivation, as shown in Table 3. Four dimensions showed a significant and modest positive relationship with football players' motivation: positive feedback (r=0.425, p<0.01), training and instruction (r=0.499, p<0.01), social consideration (r=0.545, p<0.01), and social support (r=0.462, p<0.01). Another dimension of democratic (r=0.137, p<0.05) had a significant positive and poor relationship with football players' motivation.

However, there is one dimension that has no significant negative relationship with football players' motivation, which is autocratic leadership (r=-0.067, p>0.05), which also sug-

**Table 3.** The Correlation Analysis between Coach Leadership Style and Football Players' Motivation

Dimensions	Variables	Football Players' Motivation	Sig
	Coach Leadership Style	0.488**	0.00
1	Democratic	0.137*	0.02
2	Positive Feedback	0.425**	0.00
3	Training and Instruction	0.499**	0.00
4	Social Consideration	0.545**	0.00
5	Social Support	0.462**	0.00
6	Autocratic	-0.067	0.24

Legend: \* - p<0.05; \*\* - p<0.01

gests that coaches who practice autocratic leadership styles are less comfortable with football players under-14 in sports schools across Malaysia. However, the practice of other coaches' leadership styles shows that the method is favourable and enhances player motivation. Table 3 below shows the correlation formulas between coach leadership style and football players' motivation.

#### *The effect of coach leadership style on football players' motivation*

Table 4 shows the study results generated by multiple linear

regression analysis. This test was conducted to identify which dimensions of coach leadership style affect football players' motivation. Based on the adjusted R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.317, it shows that there is a 31.7% contribution given by the dimensions of coach leadership style to football players' motivation. The input is not enormous, but it has a considerable impact on improving the motivation of football players in sports schools. Referring to the value of F=25.109 in the ANOVA analysis, it found that there was a significant difference in each dimension of coach leadership style over football players' motivation ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**Table 4.** The Regression Analysis between Coach Leadership Style on Football Players' Motivation

Dimensions	Beta	t	Sig.
(constant)		6.959	0.000
Democratic	-0.115	-1.995	0.047**
Positive Feedback	0.102	1.376	0.170
Training and Instruction	0.135	1.597	0.111
Social Consideration	0.307	3.414	0.001**
Social Support	0.137	1.829	0.068
Autocratic	-0.074	-1.468	0.143
R <sup>2</sup> value			0.330
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> value			0.317
F Value			25.109
Sig.			0.000**

Based on Table 4, the findings also show that there are two dimensions of coach leadership style that contribute significantly to football players' motivation. These dimensions were democratic ( $\beta = -0.115$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and social consideration ( $\beta = 0.307$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). However, the other four dimensions showed insignificant effects ( $p > 0.05$ ): positive feedback ( $\beta = 0.102$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), training and instruction ( $\beta = 0.135$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), social support ( $\beta = 0.137$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) and autocratic leadership ( $\beta = -0.074$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). Thus, the dimensions of coach leadership style accounted for 31.7% of the revenue from the adjusted R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.317.

## Discussion

The use of RLSS instruments (Zhang et al., 1997) and SMS-II (Pelletier et al., 2013) in this study is undoubtedly an exciting finding after the survey conducted on the respondents' aspect of Malaysia. Of interest is the fact that the respondents of the study were among the football players under the age of 14 who train in sports schools throughout Malaysia. This phenomenon makes these players closest to the coach and has a deep understanding of their coach's personality and behaviours.

As expected, the level of coach leadership style in sports schools across Malaysia is high. This is due to the growing sense of respect among young players who feel that coaches are individuals who need to be followed and followed closely (Webb et al., 2019). According to Keattholetswe and Maleté (2019), a coach is an influential individual in a team, because he or she determines the direction and fall or the rise of a team. This finding is also supported by Sullivan and Dhurup (2012), who stated that coaches are fair, transparent in guiding their players, and tolerant in their characters. Therefore, a well-respected coach will surely have the characteristics of each player under his guidance.

Meanwhile, the findings for the football players' motivation level showed inconsistent results. The dimensions of intrinsic motivation, integrated motivation and identified motivation are high. For example, Ryan and Deci (2007) stated that

athletes with intrinsic motivation would do a great job when training because of their deep interest in the role. Of course, the amotivation dimension is indicative of a high-quality level as most footballers are very excited to be able to train with friends and participate in organized games (Schaefer et al., 2016). This excitement intensified when coaches were continually giving encouragement, competent guidance, and lowering their egos to understand the needs and needs of players over time (Goose & Winter, 2012).

Studies show that there is a simple correlation between coach leadership style and football players' motivation. Baric and Bucik (2009) stated that the motivation of each player varies based on the behaviour taken by a coach. A coach who has a high ego is assertive, does not care about the well-being of a player and is less likely to drop a player's motivation during training or competition. At a young age, players need constant support, guidance, and encouragement to improve their self-esteem, confidence and motivation so that their performance is at their peak (Lee & Rengasamy, 2015; Mouloud & Elkader, 2016).

It is alarming to see that only 31.7% of the dimensions in the coach leadership style contribute to football players' motivation. This contribution comprised only two significant aspects of democratic and social consideration. It is clear that when coaches have democratic behaviour, they attempt to reach out to players with low egoism, ask for players' views, and discuss possible improvements (Nazarudin et al., 2009; Noor, 2014). Clearly, Keattholetswe and Maleté (2019) state that democracy can also be practised by enhancing good relations with players in addition to effective communication methods.

Another dimension that contributes to football players' motivation is social consideration. As previously explained, coaches are rational human beings and are caring toward their players (Chelladurai, 1980). This behaviour is very comforting to young footballers, especially those who are far from family. Loving, parenting, caring, aware of health issues and personal

issues are the most praiseworthy behaviours that every coach should have (Kucukibis & Gul, 2019) were doing three individual sports (table tennis, weight lifting, judo. It makes football players more motivated when they know they are not only well cared for but loved.

Football is not just an entertaining game: it is a sport that brings unity. Regardless of age, race or gender, the sport of football has a huge fan base. When asked, children say they want to be football players, as they grow up to be their idols. With players' high salaries and being recognized all over the world, these children must be excited to work, play ball in their hometown or location and embark on their dream of becoming a leading football star. Names like Cristiano Ronaldo, Lionel Messi and Neymar have always led to their

dreams at night.

It is very fortunate for the players at MSS and SSS to be selected to practice and seek intensive and systematic guidance. All of them are a national asset of choice among primary school students whose talents have been featured in previous tournaments. At the age of 14, these groups need to be formed, raised, and given proper guidance so that their potential and talent can be polished and shine one day. With the concept of structured training, adequate time management and nutrition according to the pyramid system provided, these young players can stand out and even shine on the higher stage. Although it would be a bit much to put the World Cup on target, it is still a privilege among Asian nations that it is realistic for them to lift Malaysia's name in the world of football.

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#### Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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