

**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
EDUCATION, PSYCHOLOGY
AND COUNSELLING
(IJEPC)**www.ijeipc.com**THE ROLE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT FACTORS IN THE
DEVELOPMENT OF ELITE FOOTBALL PLAYERS**

Nooraini Hamzah^{1*}, Zulakbal Abd Karim², Jeffrey Low Fook Lee³, Abd Rahim Mohd Shariff⁴,
Junaidy Mohamad Hashim⁵

¹ Faculty of Sport Science and Coaching, University Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Malaysia
Email: noorainihamzah810@gmail.com

² Faculty of Sport Science and Coaching, University Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Malaysia
Email: zulakbal@fsskj.ups.edu.my

³ Faculty of Sport Science and Coaching, University Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Malaysia
Email: jeffreylow63@gmail.com

⁴ Faculty of Sport Science and Coaching, University Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Malaysia
Email: abd.rahim@fsskj.ups.edu.my

⁵ Sultan Abdul Halim Campus, Teacher Education Institute, Ministry of Education, Malaysia
Email: junaidy@ipsah.edu.my

* Corresponding Author

Article Info:**Article history:**

Received date: 24.10.2024

Revised date: 11.11.2024

Accepted date: 22.12.2024

Published date: 31.12.2024

To cite this document:

Hamzah, N., Abd Karim, Z., Low, F. L. J., Shariff, A. R. M., & Hashim, J. M. (2024). The Role Of Social Support Factors In The Development Of Elite Football Players. *International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counseling*, 9 (56), 841-848.

DOI: 10.35631/IJEPC.956051

Abstract:

This concept paper will discuss the factors that may have an impact on the player's performance in achieving an elite level within the context of football. There are many factors that influence the development and performance of football players in reaching elite levels. These include physical, technical, tactical, psychological and social factors. In terms of social components, parents, siblings, teachers, coaches, training facilities, and the environment are factors that may influence performance. Therefore, the primary aim of this concept paper is to investigate the impact of social and environmental support factors on elite players, particularly in football. Previous research has found that social factors such as parental and coach support may influence the player's performance in reaching the elite level. Additionally, another factor that is still debated is the role of the training environment for football players. Suitable and conducive facilities and environments have been found to improve the player's performance in achieving the elite level. The findings obtained will help in producing a conceptual framework of social support factors and training environment facilities that play an important role in influencing athlete performance in football.



Introduction

Football is a sport that captures the interest of many and is the most popular worldwide (Varmus et al., 2022), played with the objective of scoring more goals than the opposing team (Collet, 2013). The significant increase in participation in sports around the world (Parent et al., 2017) has led to mounting pressure to succeed in the field as elite football players, prompting the establishment of various talent development systems aimed at addressing these challenges (Barrerios et al., 2014). The development of potential players in football is a significant task, as indicators that predict future performance in high-performance sports are challenging (Johnston & Baker, 2020). To develop football players who can compete up to the elite level requires a structured and effective development system. Apart from the physical, technical and psychological factors, one often overlooked element is the social support of the players. Social support from family, peers, coaches, and the local community is an element that cannot be taken for granted, in addition to intensive physical training programs. This factor not only provides emotional encouragement and motivation to the players but also helps build mental resilience, perseverance, and self-confidence to face challenges in the competitive world of sports (Kegelaers & Wylleman, 2019). Social and environmental support factors, such as parental support, sibling influence, the roles of teachers and coaches, training facilities, and living conditions, play a crucial role in shaping the motivation and performance of players toward achieving an elite level (Li, 2022). Therefore, this concept paper aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the influence of social support on the development of elite football players. This study also offers practical insights for sports management, parents, siblings, teachers, and coaches to consider in shaping programs and fulfilling appropriate roles toward the development of elite football players.

Literature Review

The development of elite athletes is significantly influenced by early involvement in structured sports activities, with notable differences between successful and less successful athletes, as highlighted in various studies. Ford et al. (2009) emphasized the importance of early soccer participation by comparing elite youth players in the Premier League Academy with recreational players. Their findings revealed a higher annual training hour average among elite players aged six to twelve. Expanding on this, Ford et al. (2012) conducted a study involving 328 elite players from multiple countries, demonstrating a consistent pattern of early specialization and structured training starting at age five. Similarly, studies by Roca et al. (2012) and Haugaasen et al. (2014) underscored the importance of cumulative training hours and targeted activities in attaining elite status, highlighting the critical role of guided training during early development. However, these studies were limited to youth athletes. Hornig et al. (2016) addressed this gap by investigating the development pathways of elite Bundesliga players in Germany, who balanced unstructured and structured soccer activities throughout their formative years. Supporting these findings, Hendry and Hodges (2018) revealed that self-initiated play outside structured training significantly contributed to motivation and skill acquisition, emphasizing the need to explore sociocultural factors shaping athlete development.

Recent studies have also explored the development pathways of female and adult athletes. Ford et al. (2020) found that elite female soccer players followed similar early specialization patterns to their male counterparts, with increased structured training during adolescence. Barth and Gullich (2020) highlighted the positive impact of participating in multiple sports during childhood on adult performance in elite track and field athletes. A systematic review by William et al. (2020) identified a multidimensional approach to talent development in soccer, integrating physiological, psychological, and sociological predictors. However, significant gaps remain, particularly in understanding sociological factors such as family support and economic background, as well as the lack of longitudinal studies tracking athletes from childhood to professional levels. Taken together, these findings highlight the importance of adopting comprehensive talent development frameworks that prioritize the well-being of athletes while enhancing performance.

Problem Statement

Identifying and providing young players with a suitable environment to reach their potential as elite football players is a significant issue in football (Sarmiento et al., 2018; Williams & Reilly, 2000). Football academies have endeavoured to identify and nurture players' talents to reach the elite level. A recurring question of interest for researchers and coaches is related to the best practice to develop players who have been identified as talented in football (Williams et al., 2020). In the context of social predictor factors, this is rarely considered by researchers (Williams et al., 2020) and how these social factors can influence the talents of elite youth football players (Reeves et al., 2018). There is a need to examine the specific characteristics of social support environment to improve understanding of the potential mechanisms involved in the relationship between the effects of birthplace and performance in football (Maayan et al., 2022).

Objectives

1. To study the developmental pathways of elite football players related to age achievement, the amount of football-related activities, and participation in other sports.
2. To investigate the influence and role of parents, teachers, and siblings in the development of elite football players.
3. To study the role played by coaches in the development of elite football.

Methodology

In this research, the study approach to be used is through a mixed-method research approach (quantitative and qualitative) to achieve the objectives of this study. In this study, the researcher selected purposive sampling, also known as Purposeful Sampling (Othman Lebar, 2018). Therefore, this study will involve a total of 30 elite football players the Kedah Darul Aman Football Club (KDA FC) in the quantitative study through the Participation History Questionnaire (PHQ; Ford et al., 2010). The inclusion criteria of the participants are those who had been selected into the development programs in the state of Kedah and are currently playing with elite teams, namely the President's Cup team and the KDA FC Super League team. In the qualitative study, a total of eight parents, five KDA FC football coaches, five teachers, and eight siblings of KDA FC elite football players will be interviewed. In this qualitative research, data will be collected through semi-structured interviews to obtain specific information related to the interested participants (Merriam, 2009). The purpose of this study is to gain a deep understanding of the social support factors needed for talent development in the context of elite football players (Hodge et al., 2012; Newport et al., 2022). In depth questions

will be posed to the parents, teachers, coaches, and siblings of the participants. In addition to conducting in-depth interviews, document analysis is another method of data collection that will be used in this research. The process is to ensure the validity and relevance of the interview findings by reviewing documents related to the schools and residences. Documents such as newspapers, meeting minutes, official reports, or personal documents such as diaries and letters can be collected and referred to by researchers (Creswell, 2014). Similar data will be useful to complete the data that will be obtained through interviews (Yin, 2011). Before starting the study, the researcher will also attend an ethics course in order to meet the requirements to carry out the study and in accordance with the standards set by the Malaysian Ministry of Education (KPM) and Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI).

The implementation of the data analysis process for the quantitative study to be conducted in this research will involve the researcher ensuring that the data obtained from the questionnaires will be analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 26.0 software. Descriptive and inferential analyses will be carried out on the data obtained based on the needs of the study. In order to measure frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation for the variables involved, the researcher will use descriptive analysis. Meanwhile, to examine the differences that exist within the variables of the group, the researcher will analyse the data inferentially using statistical procedures involving an independent t-test and two-way ANOVA. For the analysis of qualitative data to be obtained from the interviews, the researcher will use thematic analysis techniques using the ATLAS.ti software. Qualitative data analysis is a process that needs to be done by following steps sequentially, starting from specific to general, where interview data analysis involves various stages of analysis (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The six phases of thematic analysis, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), will be used in this analysis. In the first phase, the researcher will begin to familiarize himself with the data by repeatedly conducting analysis and making meaning of the data. In the second phase, the researcher will generate initial codes, create themes, and offer interpretations based on personal views or from a perspective grounded in the literature. The researcher will print and read the interview transcripts on paper while making annotations and will note down the initial codes by identifying similar patterns that are found, which will then be grouped into identified themes or categories and subsequently uploaded into ATLAS.ti (Yin, 2011). This coding process will be repeated several times to form strong categories, that is, smaller themes, to give meaning to the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher will organize the categories under the main theme. Descriptions and themes will be produced in the fourth step by using the coding process to produce descriptions of themes for analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) using narrative excerpts to convey the findings of the analysis. Saturation will be reached when no new themes emerge from additional datasets (Given, 2015). In the next stage, the researcher will identify the importance and meaning of the theme as well as the similarities, differences and relationships between the themes. Themes will be named based on the essence of the findings they represent. If a category does not fit a theme, the category will be removed and reassigned to another theme that best represents the findings under that category. Next, the researcher will write in sentence form a description and scope for each theme, and will be compiled to produce a data analysis codebook that forms a collection of all abstracted data. The results of this codebook will be presented to the members of the supervisory committee for review, which will involve a process of refining and redefining the categories and themes aimed at ensuring that they represent the actual findings. The last phase, which is the sixth, involves the researcher producing a complete written report dividing it according to research

questions, categories, and themes. This will include interpretations and explanations of the findings that will be obtained later.

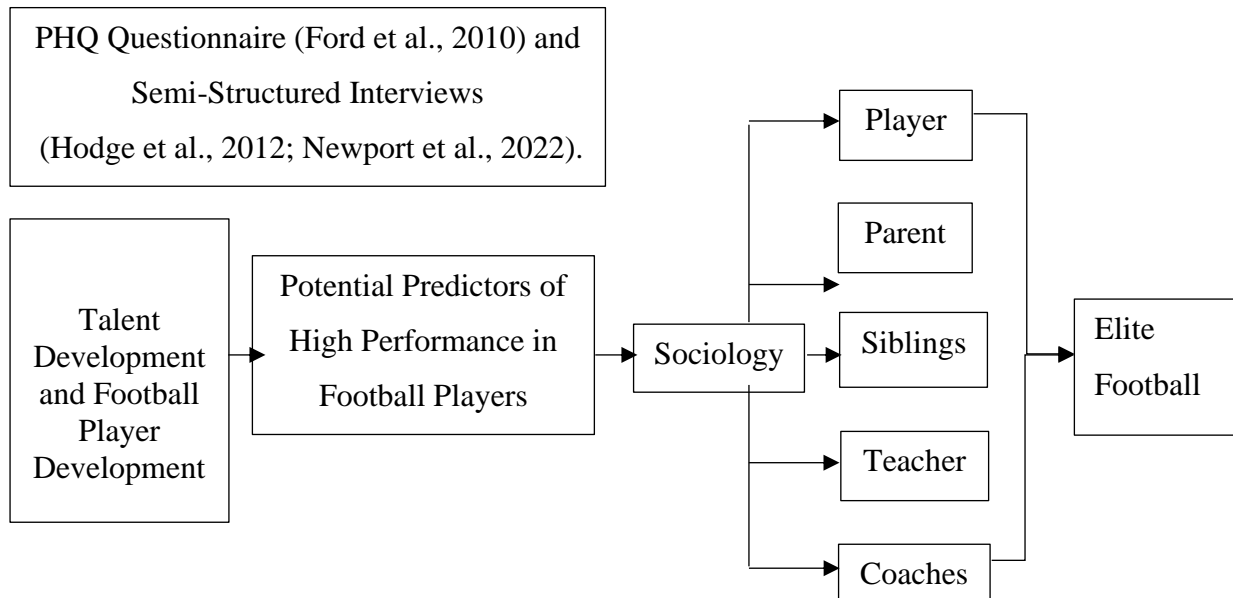


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Expected Research Findings

This study is expected to be able to explore the role of social support factors that influence their success in reaching the elite level through the profile of elite players, tracing the development pathway of elite football players in relation to the age of achievement, the amount of football-related activities, and participation in other sports. This study will also be able to identify the challenges faced by elite football players during the development phase and the solutions they employ to ensure the success and effectiveness of football players in reaching the elite level. Additionally, a deep understanding of the roles played by parents, siblings, teachers, and coaches in the development process for players to reach the elite level was explored, such as skill development, planning, training, logistics, time management, healthy competition, and challenges. This study will also identify the solutions and strategies employed by elite football players to overcome these challenges, such as decision-making, problem-solving, discussions, expressions, support, and motivation. Through the results of the research design that will be implemented in this study, this research will be able to explore in-depth the role of social support factors in the development of elite football players.

Implications Of The Research

Based on the study's findings and expected outcomes, this research is anticipated to propose several ideas and suggestions that can achieve the objectives and answer the research questions. This study will suggest useful information about the roles that need to be undertaken to enhance the talent and development of players, which will not only benefit the football industry in the country but also society as a whole. Furthermore, stakeholders in player development will gain accurate information to identify the potential of players in developing elite-level players through methods and approaches that can uncover talent and development in football based on

social factors. Government bodies such as the Ministry of Youth and Sports (KBS) can also plan and coordinate programs to develop players. Similarly, the Ministry of Education Malaysia (KPM), with the involvement of various parties within educational institutions, provides useful feedback through teachers and coaches in the development of football. There is a lack of studies on sociological factors, which results in the prediction of potential talent and the development of players being affected (Reeves et al., 2018), making this study potentially open new discoveries in sociological research by empirically discussing it in the context of elite football player development through exploring the role of social support. Theoretically, this study will also contribute to the existing knowledge in the field of player development to further enhance a deeper understanding of social support factors in the development process of elite football players.

Through this research, it is expected to yield encouraging findings, thereby contributing to solutions and addressing the research questions while achieving the outlined objectives. The results of the analysis will demonstrate that the research questions can be answered robustly, thus opening new avenues in the field of research regarding the role of social support factors in the development of elite football players. The findings obtained are not only expected to accurately answer the research questions but will also provide new perspectives on the issues of player development being studied. It is hoped that the results of this study will successfully clarify several questions that have previously been unclear among researchers, sports practitioners, and the community, thereby contributing to the advancement of knowledge in the field of player development, particularly in football, to reach the elite level through the role of social support.

This concept paper can help broaden the understanding of social support factors and the training environment that influence a player's performance in reaching the elite level. Therefore, it can contribute to the field of football and provide new insights for those involved in more effective player development. Additionally, this study can offer fresh perspectives for researchers to conduct further studies in this area.

Furthermore, this concept paper is also important for enhancing a general understanding of the significance of social support factors in developing elite football players. By understanding these factors, the public can play a better role in supporting players in their efforts to achieve elite-level performance.

Overall, this concept paper is significant in contributing to the field of sports and can help enhance the understanding of the influence of social support factors on the development of football players to achieve elite level. Therefore, it can provide new insights to researchers, sports practitioners, coaches, and the public regarding the roles that need to be undertaken in assisting players to achieve performance as elite players.

Conclusion

In conclusion, social support factors play a crucial role in influencing football players to reach the elite level. Factors such as support and good relationships with family, teachers, and coaches, as well as a conducive development environment, alongside the ability of parents, siblings, teachers, and coaches to provide motivation and perform their roles effectively, can positively impact the player's performance at the elite level. Therefore, related research focusing on the role of social support factors in influencing the development of players to reach

the elite level needs to be published to enhance understanding in this field. This study is also expected to build a conceptual framework that encompasses the essential elements of the role of social support in the development of elite football players.

Acknowledgement

Thanks to all whose invaluable assistance made the production of this article possible. Special thanks are extended to Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI), Faculty of Sport Science and Coaching (FSSKJ), and the Persatuan Pengajian Siswazah (PPS) UPSI for their invaluable support in the successful completion of this paper. Gratitude is also owed to the Ministry of Education Malaysia (KPM), for sponsoring the first author.

References

- Barrerios, A., Cote, J., & Foncesca, A. M. (2014). From early to adult sport success Analysing athletes' progression in national squads. *European Journal of Sport Science*, 14, 178-182. doi:org/10.1080/17461391.2012.671368.
- Braun, V., and Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77. doi:10.1191/1478088706ap063oa
- Collet, C. (2013). The possession game? A comparative analysis of ball retention and team success in European and international football, 2007–2010. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, 31(2), 123-136.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research Design Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (H.S. Content (ed.); Fifth Edit). SAGE Publications.
- Ford, P. R., Low, J., McRobert, A. P., & Williams, A. M. (2010). Developmental activities that contribute to high or low performance by elite cricket batters when recognizing type of delivery from bowlers' advanced postural cues. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology*, 32(5), 638–654.
- Given, L. M. (2015). *100 questions (and answers) about qualitative research*. SAGE publications.
- Hodge, K., Pierce, S., Taylor, M., & Button, A. (2012). *Talent development in the New Zealand sporting context: Final report*. <https://www.srknowledge.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Talent-Development-in-the-New-Zealand-Sporting-Context.pdf>
- Johnston, K., and Baker, J. (2020). Waste reduction strategies: factors affecting talent wastage and the efficacy of talent selection in sport. *Front. Psychol.* 10:2925. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02925
- Kegelaers, J. J. and Wylleman, P. (2019). Exploring the coach's role in fostering resilience in elite athletes.. *Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology*, 8(3), 239-254. <https://doi.org/10.1037/spy0000151>
- Li, W. (2022). Modeling and analysis of influencing factors of competitive performance of wushu athletes. *Wireless Communications and Mobile Computing*, 2022, 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2022/4408506>
- Maayan, Z., Lidor, R., & Arnon, M. (2022). The Birthplace Effect in 14-18-Year-Old Athletes Participating in Competitive Individual and Team Sports. *Sports (Basel, Switzerland)*, 10(4), 59. <https://doi.org/10.3390/sports10040059>

- Merriam, S. B. (2009). Case studies as qualitative research. In C. F. Conrad, J. G. Haworth, & L. R. Lattuca (Eds.), *Qualitative research in higher education* (pp. 191-200). Boston, MA: Pearson Custom Publishing.
- Newport, R. J., Walters, S. R., Millar, S., Dickson, G., & Lenton, A. (2022). The Early Sport and Play Experiences of Elite New Zealand Hockey Players From Rural and Regional Communities: A qualitative descriptive study. *The Qualitative Report*, 27(1), 289-313. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2022.5201>
- Othman Lebar. (2018). *Penyelidikan kualitatif: Pengenalan kepada teori dan metode* (ed. ke-2). Tanjung Malim: Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris.
- Parent, M. M., Kristiansen, E., & Houlihan. (2017). Introduction. In Introduction. In E. Kristiansen., M. M., Parent., and B. Houlihan (Eds). *Elite Youth Sport and Policy Management: A comparative analysis* (pp. 1-10). London. Routledge.
- Reeves, M. J., McRobert, A. P., Littlewood, M. A., & Roberts, S. J. (2018). A scoping review of the potential sociological predictors of talent in junior-elite football: 2000–2016. *Soccer & Society*, 19, 1085–1105.
- Sarmiento, H., Anguera, M. T., Pereira, A., & Araujo, D. (2018). Talent identification and development in male football: A systematic review. *Sports Medicine*, 48(4), 907–931.
- Varmus, M., Kubina, M., Boško, P., & Mičiak, M. (2022). Application of the Perceived Popularity of Sports to Support the Sustainable Management of Sports Organizations. *Sustainability* (Switzerland), 14(3). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14031927>
- Williams, A. M., & Reilly, T. (2000). Talent identification and development in soccer. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, 18(9), 657–667.
- Williams, A. M., Ford., P. R., & Drust, B. (2020). Talent identification and development in soccer since the millenium. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, 38(11–12), 1199–1210. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02640414.2020.1766647>
- Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.