



## Optimizing Football Player Development in Indonesia and Malaysia: Sports Psychology's Take on the Affective Domain

*Optimización del desarrollo de los futbolistas en Indonesia y Malasia: la perspectiva de la psicología del deporte en el ámbito afectivo*

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** Problems with the characteristics of young players often threaten the continuity of their careers in football. Negative behaviours such as ego, lack of discipline, star syndrome, and fickle commitment are some of the many examples that occur among young football players. The affective domain assesses the psychological adaptability of young football players in the development path, both in calm situations and when facing the pressure that often arises in matches or training.

**Objective:** The aim is to make young players excel in both psychomotor and affective aspects, which are important domains in sustainable football coaching. This research seeks to discover the urgency of the affective domain of psychology in the development pathway of football players in Indonesia and Malaysia.

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

**Results:** The role of coaches in paying attention to emotional and mental training is the basis for the development of sports psychology in children.

**Discussion:** Children's involvement in football provides opportunities to develop life skills and trains them to have good character that will be useful in social life

**Conclusions:** This research is expected to evaluate the implementation of mental training in fostering potential football players and supporting character development programmes through football.

### Keywords

Affective domain., football., grassroots level., sport development., sport psychology.

### Resumen

**Introducción:** Los problemas con las características de los jugadores jóvenes a menudo amenazan la continuidad de sus carreras en el fútbol. Comportamientos negativos como el ego, la falta de disciplina, el síndrome de la estrella, el compromiso voluble son algunos de los muchos ejemplos que se dan entre los jóvenes futbolistas. El dominio afectivo evalúa la adaptabilidad psicológica de los jóvenes futbolistas en su camino de desarrollo, tanto en situaciones de calma como ante la presión que suele surgir en los partidos o entrenamientos.

**Objetivo:** El objetivo es lograr que los jugadores jóvenes destaquen tanto en los aspectos psicomotores como afectivos, que son dominios importantes en el entrenamiento de fútbol sostenible. Esta investigación busca descubrir la urgencia del dominio afectivo de la psicología en el camino del desarrollo de los jugadores de fútbol en Indonesia y Malasia.

**Metodología:** Este estudio utilizó un método cualitativo con un enfoque de teoría fundamentada y los datos se recopilaron a través de entrevistas, observaciones y análisis de documentos de 25 entrenadores de fútbol con licencia y al menos 5 años de experiencia como entrenadores en Indonesia y Malasia.

**Resultados:** El papel de los entrenadores a la hora de prestar atención al entrenamiento emocional y mental es la base para el desarrollo de la psicología deportiva en los niños.

**Discusión:** La participación de los niños en el mundo del fútbol no sólo brinda oportunidades para desarrollar habilidades para la vida, sino que también les capacita para tener un buen carácter que será útil en la vida social.

**Conclusiones:** Se espera que esta investigación sea una evaluación de la implementación del entrenamiento mental en el fomento de jugadores de fútbol potenciales, así como el apoyo a programas de desarrollo del carácter a través del fútbol.

### Palabras clave

Dominio afectivo., fútbol, nivel de base., desarrollo deportivo., psicología del deporte.

## Introduction

Sports and psychology are inseparable, as psychology is always linked to an athlete's mental development, which will impact their performance. Optimization of an athlete's mental function, such as the affective domain which involves feelings, emotions, and attitudes by covering a person's way of handling things emotionally, such as feelings, values, appreciation, enthusiasm, motivation, and attitudes (Belaire et al., 2024; Crombie et al., 2011; Goodyear et al., 2023; Hoque, 2016; Jeon et al., 2021; Schwingshackl et al., 2006). According to Shearer et al. (2021), a review of the three indicators of physical literacy assessment explicitly falls into the affective domain that can be used in a pragmatic assessment approach. This means that sport is an activity that has a complex value on an athlete's behavioural and mental development. The affective domain in the context of football players in the developmental pathway assesses the psychological ability of young players to adapt, both in calm situations and when facing pressure. The affective domain controls negative emotions that help create a healthy and peaceful sporting environment (Engels et al., 2021).

Players with a good affective domain can maintain composure, control their emotions, and stay focused on the game, even in difficult situations. This aspect is important to build the character of players who are mentally tough, able to work together with the team and learn from failure. The affective domain can be strengthened through psychological guidance and practice of emotionally challenging game situations. Research results show that players who are in a positive state (i.e. winning the match) produce more precise and more cohesive descriptions of the game, compared to players who are in a negative state (losing players), describe the game more interpretatively (Braun et al., 2021; Yang, 2024). These meanings suggest that the interpretation of an athlete's behaviour is related to his or her achievements. The influence of mood and emotion are used interchangeably in the general sports psychology literature so that self-efficacy training, quality of life improvement, morale enhancement, motivation, and perception are used as efforts and allocation of focus towards a positive direction (Tenenbaum & Filho, 2018). These descriptions are consistent with the elements of play in team sports that influence attitudes and behaviours (Choi et al., 2021; Ritzhaupt et al., 2021), where an athlete's affective abilities can block negative traits in both training and competition.

The affective domain relates to an athlete's emotional control, especially in team or group sports. The emotional level of each member in a team sport is a different level based on their experience so that it will impact different behaviours (Micklich, 2012; Nikolic et al., 2024; Vankúš, 2021). Therefore, participation in physical exercise can not only directly increase the level of subjective well-being but also indirectly affect emotional management and emotional application ability to increase life satisfaction towards a more positive direction (Howley et al., 2022; Pan et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2022). The role of coaches and sports psychologists is to develop training methods that engage emotionally and improve mental play in the competitive season (Levillain et al., 2022). This is a way of preparing athletes to have mental toughness and fighting power in events full of pressure and challenges. Mental toughness is part of the affective domain that plays an important role in athlete performance (Guszkowska & Wójcik, 2021). Football has complex issues related to cooperation and mutual respect as a team sport. These attitudes are a basic need in maintaining sustainable achievement coaching. Football players with good affective abilities such as emotional control, self-confidence, and cooperation skills can be an important foundation for creating positive seeds in the football field. According to (Chen & Zhang, 2022), competency needs that involve individual feelings are based on environmental control and the development of their ability to adapt. Therefore, creating a conducive training environment can help develop compelling aspects fully.

The affective domain is important in youth football coaching because it shapes players' attitudes, values, emotions, and motivation. At a young age, children's characters tend to be unstable and prone to showing negative behaviours such as egoism, uncontrolled emotions, lack of discipline, or lack of respect for coaches and teammates. The concept of coaching through an affective domain approach focuses on technical skills and builds positive values such as cooperation, sportsmanship, responsibility, and respect for the process. Challenges in youth coaching, such as lack of motivation or pressure from the surrounding environment, can be overcome through strengthening affective aspects. The affective domain is an important part of the coaching process for Indonesian and Malaysian youth footballers. The coach's abil-

ity to motivate and build emotional relationships with players can create a conducive training environment, thus making the affective domain help children manage their emotions, appreciate the coaching process, and develop strong character. This is essential to support the long-term success of youth football coaching.

## Method

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

## Participants

The participants in this study were 25 football coaches from Indonesia and Malaysia. The criteria set in this study are youth coaches who have at least five years of experience. Experience as a coach is a resource that can be utilized and has implications for the future training of football players (Watts & Cushion, 2017). In addition, the criteria set for participation in this study is a coach with a coaching licence in football. Trained coaches can have a more positive impact on young athletes than untrained coaches with athletes' psychosocial well-being (Sullivan et al., 2012); education such as a coaching license is critical to maintaining and developing the quality of coaching (Bolter et al., 2018). The coaching process in sports is a complex and unique process that necessarily involves a formal setting derived from coach licence education and an informal setting from experience as a coach (Werthner & Trudel, 2006). To make it easier for readers to understand this article, the researcher gave the code JI for Indonesian coaches and JM for Malaysian coaches who participated in this study. The researcher also attached a table of participants in this study.

Table 1. Participant Information Indonesia

| No   | Age | Licence | Coaching experience | Status     |
|------|-----|---------|---------------------|------------|
| J11  | 30  | C       | 10 Years            | Active     |
| J12  | 38  | C       | 12 Years            | Active     |
| J13  | 31  | C       | 6 Years             | Not Active |
| J14  | 43  | B       | 17 Years            | active     |
| J15  | 53  | B       | 16 Years            | Active     |
| J16  | 49  | B       | 15 Years            | Active     |
| J17  | 45  | B       | 18 Years            | Active     |
| J18  | 42  | A       | 14 Years            | Active     |
| J19  | 36  | A       | 13 Years            | Active     |
| J110 | 42  | A       | 6 Years             | active     |

Table 2. Participant Information Malaysia

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



## Procedure

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

### Instrument

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

Table 3. Cohen Kappa results

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

## Data analysis

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

## Results

Affective aspects are important for football players as they not only affect their performance on the pitch but even shape the character and dynamics of the team as a whole. The ability to control emotions during matches, maintain motivation, and have a positive attitude towards teammates and coaches can improve the quality of players' skills in playing football. This affective category refers to an individual's emotional aspect or feelings; this relates to the affective domain, which includes attitudes, feelings and emotions. Understanding and managing these affective aspects is key to the holistic development of football players; it will help them develop as players and emotionally and socially balanced individuals. The researcher's efforts in analyzing the affective domain on the continuity of young players' achievements through semi-structured interviews with coaches, where the research results are described directly by the researcher in the form of a narrative, can change the sentences the coaches have conveyed. The results of this study indicate that it is important for players to understand the affective dimension, which relates to the ability to control emotions and feelings that can impact behaviour, decision-making and social interactions, as expressed by coach JM7:



'One more to make decisions, the other for me is that he has emotions, yes, a player who feels perfect in the eyes of the coach, from a mental point of view, in terms of anger management, he is not psychopathic like a madman, he is calm. Do not collect stupid cards, such as swearing at people or opening the jersey.'

This result proves that the player's psychological ability to face the match on the field has an important influence on the success of a match. Sometimes, a player can disrupt the focus of a team just because he cannot reduce emotions when dealing with referees and opposing players. In addition, the cognitive aspects that football players need to have under the age of 17 are associated with the ability of players to overcome and control their anxiety in important matches. The effort in training that has been done will be translated into a match. A process of practice becomes useless when the player cannot control his anxiety experienced. This statement is in line with what coach JM11 said:

'Sometimes there are players who want to see the match, want to play for the match, nervous, afraid, nervous, if they are mentally weak, enter the field nervous, afraid, do not enjoy the game, so all the muscles cannot do that, I think it is about anxiety, it is fear, it is a feeling of fear that causes him to think'

Based on the results of these interviews, it is evident that the affective domain and cognitive domain have a relationship with each other so that the perceptions generated by the mind will produce behaviour that can be positive or negative. Players are often faced with match pressure, which generally comes from the opposing team's supporters. The distraction diverts the focus of playing and thus disrupts the game strategy that the coach has determined; therefore, by managing stress effectively, players can maintain the focus and peace of mind needed to make wise decisions in rapidly changing situations on the field. Coach JI1 also expressed the need for players to control pressure.

'Many ask the coach how not to be nervous, how not to be tense, nervous and want to compete at all stages. Usually, those who ask are 17 years old and above'

This means that with so many questions from football players under 17 years old to coaches, it means that the ability to control stress needs to be given to football players. Another coach who also stated the need for emotional or stress control was JI3, namely

'Like the grassroots community, this is very important because the psychological condition of the players is not yet stable, still unstable, so they are often emotional, individuals cannot control their own emotions'

In this research, the coach also conveyed that football players must be confident in the process they have gone through so far, as coach JM10 said:

'To become a professional player, we need to believe in ourselves. I want to become a professional player. I can say what I want to do, and the coach will help me'

Coach JM14 gave the view that:

'First, we have to believe in ourselves. First, you must believe in yourself, which makes you steady and strong. You enter the field; there is no one you face. You will be calm and play happily, and there is no sense of pressure'

Coach JI8 said first confidence also conveyed a similar statement:

'You have to believe in yourself; if you do not go with confidence, you will not go this far, so confidence and belief that you will become an elite player is the key'

The results of this interview identified that a positive environment can form a positive domain for youth football players. The environment is an important aspect, so the coach's ability to provide positive affirmations is an important requirement for the successful development of youth football. A positive environment makes the coach think positively, especially when implementing optimal playing strategies. Besides having good self-confidence, football players under the age of 17, still in the affective aspect, also need to have motivation; this aspect is related to setting goals that have been formed. Once goals are set cognitively, the following effective process required by players is known as motivation.

Indonesian and Malaysian young players generally have characteristics that change depending on how the environment affects them, so positive motivation is a key driver in addition to dedication, hard work



and perseverance in achieving this goal. Young players need an environment and an emotional connection from the coach to increase their affective positivity. The similarity of Indonesian and Malaysian cultures also provides an overview of the characteristics of youth football players, where adolescents who are nurtured through the sport of football need the closeness of the coach through providing motivation that can be a positive affirmation of players in improving the mentality of competing players during the game. The coach's ability to elaborate a cultural approach of courtesy and togetherness through persuasive communication motivates players to be even better. Motivation will also play an important role in maintaining the spirit of training, improving and maintaining discipline in the face of challenges on the field; according to what coach JM9 said:

'The x factor is high self-motivation to become a footballer, always curious, always doing more on what is applied on the field'

These findings highlight how the lives of Indonesian and Malaysian U-17 adolescents have similar characteristics, and the role of the coach as a guideline is an important point in fostering mental players. The coach's understanding of the identification of the affective domain can later guide the player's mental development sustainably. Information related to motivation was also emphatically conveyed by coach JM19, namely

'One of the most important teenagers is motivated; he is interim. There is a coach who motivates the team captain, and then the team captain motivates the players'

At the same time, players must be highly committed to achieving what they want. Committed players must also maintain and examine the requirements to become professional players relating to the physical, technical, tactical and psychological needs of the players themselves. This commitment is also included in the readiness to face competitions that will occur in the future; as coach JM15 expressed:

'The important thing is that we see it is commitment, whether we want motivation or not, confidence is the person, confident'

JM8 also stated:

'So he is there because of his high level, he commits to training, his commitment during training, and what we give him, he can do. It does not matter if the intensity is low, medium, or high; he can follow our instructions if we call it in-game violence'

The coach's statement on providing a positive affirmation of player commitment can indicate that football coaching is the best place to improve the affective domain and move in a better direction. This finding is evidence that the development of youth football pathways does not only focus on technical factors alone. The coach's ability to understand each player's character is one way to find out the weaknesses and strengths of players, especially those related to the affective domain.

## Discussion

Motivation, emotional response, self-concept, and resilience are findings that support the affective domain by focusing on personal improvement in children and adolescents (Teraoka et al., 2021). Learning experiences in sporting activities have a positive effect on the affective domain (Fonteyn et al., 2024; Habyarimana et al., 2022; Sgrò et al., 2020); this strategy can be a coping used by football players to maintain their physical abilities and mental well-being (Modena et al., 2022). Failure and victory in every football event provide different meanings for each player, where players who have a higher affective domain will make every moment of the match a motivation to grow to be even better. There is no exception to the goal celebration as an act of rejoicing in the success of scoring a goal, which causes reactions such as enthusiastic body movements and uncontrollable joy (Lev et al., 2020). This identifies that external factors received by football players can determine their behaviour. Psychological research has shown that affective states such as expectancy influence (physically active) behaviour linked to environmental conditions during sports activities (Hösl et al., 2023).



Football has stresses that can arise when the team is behind the score, facing a stronger opponent or in a pivotal moment (such as a penalty or final match), so coaches at the grassroots level have a central role in building players' affective domains. According to (Dorji et al., 2020; Micklich, 2011), Developers and instructors of balanced programmes, by ensuring equal cognitive, affective and psychomotor learning domains, can have a socio-behavioural impact to show better performance and fewer symptoms of stress. The use of acquired knowledge, skills, and training abilities assists youth in successfully navigating the challenges of the professional football environment and performing more optimally (Blake & Solberg, 2023). Creating a peaceful environment is part of affective learning characterized by positive levels of social emotions and peaceful social interactions (Belton et al., 2022; Ross, 2023). Grassroots coaching emphasizes basic motor skills and character development to foster collaborative attitudes, mutual support, and understanding that football is a team game that requires complex cooperation. Strengthening the affective domain in grassroots football is an important foundation for developing physically skilled players and psychologically and socially mature players.

Experiences of competence and motivation are important in sustainable performance coaching (Elsborg et al., 2021). Understanding the affective domain resulting from relationships between sports organizations can be used to develop promotion procedures and maintain a healthier performance coaching environment (Brand & Ekkekakis, 2021; Mastromartino & Zhang, 2020). A grassroots environment dominated by parental involvement must include practical skills in addressing discomfort during the coaching process. This is because parents' behaviours and expectations can create barriers for coaches in developing sustainable achievement coaching programmes. According to (Fontana et al., 2022; Lauer et al., 2010), parental involvement in performance sports dramatically influences children's success in achieving peak performance. In particular, parental involvement strategies in facilitating children's sports must focus on education and support without excessive expectations (Knight et al., 2017).

Grassroots-level football players are at the amateur level, so players with a strong affective domain will find it easier to develop to a professional level; they have not only technical abilities but also a strong mentality in dealing with various pressures in a football career in the future. The affective domain can be used simultaneously as an emotional regulation for elite football players, which in turn can improve performance and achieve success (Oguntuase & Sun, 2022; Ruoxi et al., 2023). Emotions are a micro foundation that can influence human behaviour, so emotional intelligence is an important psychological factor influencing the growth and development of high-performance sports coaching (Dong et al., 2022). Results related to emotional health consistently have a positive impact on the emotional mechanisms underlying risky behaviour, thus helping to establish action guidelines and improve programs to prevent and reduce the adverse effects of risky behaviour (Estrada Fernandez et al., 2022; Sánchez-López et al., 2022). Other research results also state that motor, cognitive and affective representations are an inseparable unity (Pronizius et al., 2024). This study extends the literature on achievement coaching behaviour where a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between emotional intelligence, self-efficacy and sports commitment is crucial (Hameli & Ordun, 2022; Sambol et al., 2022).

The affective domain assesses the psychological adaptability of young players both in calm situations and under pressure, which often occurs in matches or training sessions. Developing the affective domain teaches young players to manage emotions, work together as a team, and maintain motivation despite challenges. At this level, the main focus is not only on the results of the match but also on the formation of the player's mentality and personality, such as when players are taught to remain sporting even though their team loses or faces unfavourable referee decisions. Situations like this train grassroots-level football players to remain calm, reason, and respect all parties in the game by paying attention to the affective domain; training programs at the grassroots level not only create technically competent players but also individuals who have emotional resilience, good teamwork, and a high sense of sportsmanship. This is a strong foundation for player development at a higher level and creates a generation of footballers who excel not only on the field but also in everyday life.

## Conclusions

The football player development pathway is an important foundation and phase in football, especially in shaping the character and abilities of players starting at an early age. The player development pathway focuses on technical, tactical and physical aspects and the development of affective aspects, such as



motivation, confidence, emotional control and commitment. Through continuous coaching and creating an environment that supports the growth of players' intrinsic motivation, it is key to face challenges during matches. In addition, interaction within the team helps build confidence through collective experiences and shared achievements. Other affective aspects, such as emotional control, are taught through competitive situations that require players to manage pressure wisely. Instilling positive values early on is strategic in producing a generation of players who are technically superior and have a winning mentality that supports their future success.

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