

## The Development of the National Football Development Program (NFDP) Coaching Process Model: Emphasis on Small Sided Game (SSG) Approach

### El desarrollo del modelo de proceso de entrenamiento del Programa Nacional de Desarrollo del Fútbol (NFDP): Énfasis en el enfoque del juego reducido (SSG)

\*Zulakbal Abd Karim, \*Asraf Razak, \*Fakrul Hazely Ismail, \*Abdul Rahman Muhammad, \*\*Syed Kamaruzaman Syed Ali,  
\*, \*\*\*Amin Akbar

\*Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (Malaysia), \*\*Universiti Malaya (Malaysia), \*\*\*Universitas Negeri Padang (Indonesia)

**Abstract.** Small-sided games (SSGs) are played on reduced pitch areas, often using modified rules and involving a smaller number of players than traditional football. These games are less structured than traditional fitness training methods but are very popular training drills for players of all ages and levels. At present, there is relatively little information regarding how SSGs can best be used to improve physical capacities and technical or tactical skills in footballers. However, many prescriptive variables controlled by the coach can influence the exercise intensity during SSGs. In the context of soccer instruction, SSGs are frequently employed to give an engaging method of preserving the dynamics of an official game while making particular alterations to concentrate on certain behaviors and movements. Models for coaching provides some insight and guidelines into what coaches do. The purpose of the study is to build a coaching process model based on the "Small Sided Game" approach. The qualitative method was conducted in this study. The researcher used snowball sampling in which 10 sports schools coaches under NFDP program were interviewed. The numbers of participants were determined by saturation of information. The variation in exercise intensity during SSGs can improved with consistent coach encouragement but it is still more variable than traditional generic training methods. SSGs containing fewer players can exceed match intensity and elicit similar intensities to both long- and short-duration high- intensity interval running. This study implied the construction of the football coaching process model that can benefit the national football development at the grassroots level and provide alternative sources of knowledge for teachers or football coaches to coach their football teams.

**Keywords:** Small Sided Game (SSG), Coaching Process Model, NFDP Football Coaches

**Resumen.** Los juegos reducidos (SSG) se juegan en áreas de campo reducidas, a menudo utilizando reglas modificadas e involucrando a un número menor de jugadores que el fútbol tradicional. Estos juegos están menos estructurados que los métodos tradicionales de entrenamiento físico, pero son ejercicios de entrenamiento muy populares para jugadores de todas las edades y niveles. En la actualidad, hay relativamente poca información sobre cómo se pueden utilizar mejor los SSG para mejorar las capacidades físicas y las habilidades técnicas o tácticas de los futbolistas. Sin embargo, muchas variables prescriptivas controladas por el entrenador pueden influir en la intensidad del ejercicio durante los SSG. En el contexto de la instrucción de fútbol, los SSG se emplean con frecuencia para brindar un método atractivo para preservar la dinámica de un juego oficial mientras se realizan modificaciones particulares para concentrarse en ciertos comportamientos y movimientos. Los modelos de coaching proporcionan información y pautas sobre lo que hacen los coaches. El propósito del estudio es construir un modelo de proceso de coaching basado en el enfoque del "Juego Pequeño". En este estudio se utilizó el método cualitativo. El investigador utilizó un muestreo de bola de nieve en el que se entrevistó a 10 entrenadores de escuelas deportivas bajo el programa NFDP. El número de participantes estuvo determinado por la saturación de información. La variación en la intensidad del ejercicio durante los SSG puede mejorar con el estímulo constante del entrenador, pero sigue siendo más variable que los métodos de entrenamiento genéricos tradicionales. Los SSG que contienen menos jugadores pueden exceder la intensidad del partido y provocar intensidades similares a las carreras en intervalos de alta intensidad, tanto de larga como de corta duración. Este estudio implicó la construcción de un modelo de proceso de entrenamiento de fútbol que pueda beneficiar el desarrollo del fútbol nacional a nivel base y proporcionar fuentes alternativas de conocimiento para que los profesores o entrenadores de fútbol entrenen a sus equipos de fútbol.

**Palabras clave:** Juego reducido (SSG), modelo de proceso de entrenamiento, entrenadores de fútbol del NFDP

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Zulakbal Abd Karim

zulakbal@fsskj.upsi.edu.my

## Introduction

Football is a very complex sport that involves unexpected movements throughout the match (Mascio et al., 2015; Okilanda et al., 2024). In Malaysia football is regulated at the grassroots level through the National Football Development Program (NFDP), which was developed in collaboration with the Football Association of Malaysia (FAM), the Ministry of Youth and Sports (KBS), the National Sports Council

(MSN), and the Ministry of Education of Malaysia (MOE) (Akbar et al., 2023; Ramalu et al., 2021). Faced with this scenario, increasing physical activity practices by teachers and educational institutions plays a fundamental role in supporting the health of school children, and supporting the adherence to healthy habits, in particular through the sport of football (Concha-Cisternas et al., 2023).

Through the '1 Murid 1 Sukan' (1M1S) Policy, the MOE has taken the initiative to provide a Sports Training

Module for School Sports Club Advisory Teachers. The Ministry of Education Malaysia (2011) stated that the priority of this policy is to give attention and focus to the less active students so that they can engage in sports activities. In other words, the module prioritizes students' active involvement in sports rather than the preparation for tournaments as required by teachers. To be able to play football in properly and correctly, players must have proper technique and also have excellent physical abilities (Akbar, Karim, Zakaria, Hazely, et al., 2024; Doewes et al., 2020). The In preparation for the annual tournament, several teachers took their own initiative such as participating in coaching courses, watching and analyzing football matches (Stoszkowski & Institute, 2010), watching training sessions, and obtaining resources or other reference materials on the internet (Koh, Lee, & Lim 2018). However, what are the official sources of knowledge of school teachers to coach their school football team (Ismail et al., 2020).

The performance of teams and players (individually) in sports is usually determined by technical, tactical, physiological, and psychological aspects in which each of these aspects can only be seen to be effective with careful preparation and players have gone through an efficient training system (Akbar, Karim, Zakaria, Khan, et al., 2024; Bangsbo, 2015; Khairul et al., 2023). Consequently, a lack of football coaching knowledge among teachers or coaches causes them to face a difficult situation during the preparation of the football competition season if there is no official reference provided by the authorities. It is undeniable that there are school football teachers or coaches who have a background in Sports Science or Physical Education (Urrutia et al., 2023). Although their existing knowledge to train the physical aspects using the physical fitness component is very solid, the training they do is likely isolated, general, and not specific to football according to certain age categories. They need to adapt their existing knowledge in line with the characteristics of the football game while planning their team's training sessions.

There are various football structures in Malaysia starting from the grassroots to the adult level. At the grassroots level, football is managed through the collaboration between the Football Association of Malaysia (FAM), Ministry of Youth and Sports (KBS), National Sports Council (MSN), and Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) through the National Football Development Program (NFDP). The NFDP is a step taken by the Ministry of Youth and Sports (KBS) in the government's effort to restore the glorious days of national football. It is a grassroots-specific program implemented by identifying talented players aged seven to 17, then these players will be placed in registered training centers to receive quality training throughout the year (Kementerian Belia dan Sukan, 2014). Nevertheless, in 2019, the national youth football team represented by NFDP players was unqualified for FIFA U-17 World Cup (MSN, 2019).

Despite those failures, is there a holistic guide or official

reference that NFDP coaches can use to coach their football teams?. In today's modern football era, isolated training is no longer relevant (Karim et al, 2018). Players are more motivated to do small SSG activities instead of the 10-lap field runs to increase their cardiovascular endurance (Özcan et al., 2018) (Razak et al., 2020). In team sports settings, the small-sided games (SSG) have been used as key context tools to stress out the players' awareness about their in-game required behaviours (B. Gonçalves et al., 2016). SSGs in football are widely considered to offer many practical advantages that have led to its popularity as a training modality in football at all ages and levels (Hill-Haas et al., 2011).

The use of SSG in football training has increased significantly in recent years. SSG method of training is very similar to the conditions of a football match, and its use as part of training periodization (Bujalance-Moreno et al., 2019). Tactical principles can influence the intensity and movement of a football player during training (Belozo et al., 2016). SSG is enough to shape a real game situation by reproducing the situations that occur in the match to meet the needs of the real match (Fernández-Espínola et al., 2020; Lizana et al., 2015). In addition, SSG is suitable and very popular among players regardless of age and level as well as complementing the needs of players as a team in the training stage (Gómez et al., 2015).

Barnson (2014) and (Purnomo et al., 2024) stated that it is unreasonable for coaches to train without any principles or guidelines. At the same time, it can be seen that sports science can play a role to improve coaching competencies. Coaches need to have a source of coaching knowledge to improve their coaching skills (Karim & Nadzalan, 2017). Training a football team without modules or specific teaching materials as a guide will waste the time of teachers and coaches, not achieving the player age category objectives, the players do not achieve the proper performance and cannot contribute to the football team development (Lingen, 2016). In conclusion, isolated training is no longer relevant in the current era of modern football (Karim et al. 2018). Players are more motivated and do not feel bored during training sessions when teachers or coaches do SSG activities rather than running a 10 lap field to increase cardiovascular endurance. So the aim of this research is to build a coaching process model based on the "Small Sided Game" approach with a training method that is more interesting, not boring and can achieve the holistic goals of football. The results of this research can be used as a reference for football coaches in Malaysia.

## Materials and Methods

This qualitative method used the Evolved Grounded Theory (EGT), Strauss and Corbin (1998) as the steering methodology. All the data was generally collected by interviews, observations, diaries, or other written documents. The theory is gradually produced from raw data collection

and evolved from phenomenon-naming and theme (Zulakbal Abd Karim, 2016).

### Participants

Researchers used snowball sampling to obtain the necessary information and research data. In this research, as many as ten coaches were involved in efforts to develop the football training process in Malaysia with the criteria of being involved as coaches in the NFDLP program and having a coaching license from FAM or AFC. In qualitative research, the number of research samples depends not on the number of samples but on information saturation (Fraenkel et al., 2012). In addition, the researcher used semi-structured open-ended interview questions, as Patton (2006) suggested. In contrast to qualitative research instruments, researchers will measure validity and reliability after interviewing research participants based on themes obtained from interview transcripts.

### Data collection procedure

The data collection process began by interviewing coaches involved with the NFDLP nationwide regarding their understanding and frequency of using SSG in their training sessions. Data collection used semi-structured open interviews (Patton, 2002). Then, the researcher produced transcripts of the interview and analyzed the data using the thematic analysis by (Braun & Clarke 2006) and identified specific themes.

In-depth semi-structured interviews were utilized to examine how participants organized and comprehended their coaching experiences. This allowed for the exploration of newly discovered themes in following interviews. Probe questions were also employed to delve deeper into ideographic themes and matters pertinent to each participant. Initial data analysis procedures involved writing up digitally written transcripts of each participant's interview response. Following the principle of EGT Strauss and Corbin (1998) data construction, data deconstruction and data reconstruction stages were systematically conducted.

### Data analysis

The process of data analysis was carried out in concert with the actual data, tentative theory creation, and the memos being interplayed gradually, whereby the collected data was broken down, conceptualized, and tentative themes discussed, in accordance with the fundamental principles of Strauss and Corbin (1998) and evolved grounded theory principles. Later, the information was organized into the themes and categories. By comparing the categories, with the data, and with my findings as proposed by (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), the categories and tentative themes were then validated against the data.

## Results

Ghazali and Sufean (2016) Research reporting is a method of presenting information based on research data. Besides, it also means written communication that aims to convey a meaning to the proposed party, a document that provides information on all types of reports, findings, new ideas, conclusions, and recommendations on a matter that has been obtained.

The Model of NFDLP coaching process was successfully produced through the data analysis (Figure 1.1). The main theme in this research is characteristic for grassroots football coaches consist five steps of football coaching process such as identifying football problem, planning, task delegating, task execution/SSG, LSG/real games situation training and coaching have been produced.

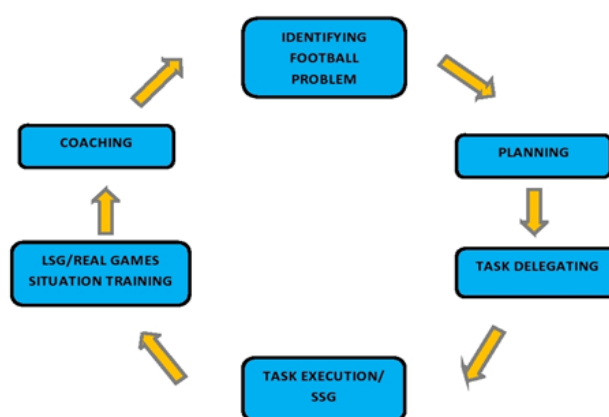


Figure 1. NFDLP Coaching Process Model

### Identifying Football Problem

Identifying the problems and weaknesses that the team faces is very important in the game of football. As a coach, the ability to identify team and player problems is very important in preparing a quality team. In this study, it was found that the selection of appropriate training methods and types is very important because the mistake of choosing inappropriate training at a certain age level will have a great impact on the performance and psychology of the player.

In addition, the player's level of self-confidence is an important factor in the psychological aspect of a player that needs to be paid attention to. Players or athletes who have a high level of self-confidence will be more confident and able to perform well in training and competition (Kassim & Isa, 2017). In this case, it was also found that tactical aspects that are suitable and easy for players to understand should be taken seriously by coaches, especially those involving young players who are in the learning process.

### Planning

Identifying the problems and weaknesses that the team faces is very important in the game of football. As a coach,

the ability to identify team and player problems is very important. As a coach, training planning is very important to ensure that his team is successful or not. Before implementing any training plan, the trainer must be prepared in terms of knowledge, skills, ideas and confidence in implementing the plan in addition to aspects of basic facilities, equipment and logistics must also be taken into consideration. This finding is also in line with the opinion of Zulakbal Abd Karim (2022) who explains that in order to plan a training program well and focus, coaches need to acquire and have as much diverse knowledge in the field of sports.

In addition, when planning training, coaches also need to take into account several factors such as the number of athletes and their age level, the level of fitness of the athlete, the level of mastery of the athlete's skills as well as the appropriate training place (Karim, 2022).

### *Task Delegating*

The task delegation system in football is very important to forge success or maintain the success of a team. The development of the world of soccer is very challenging with various new techniques and tactics, demanding that a team further develop their wings or organizational structure so that various things can be done effectively and efficiently (Mitchell, 2020). By delegating effectively and establishing a system, adverse decisions can be minimized as much as possible in addition to the wisdom in planning effective and structured training strategies and methods. The psychosocial components related to physical activity across different genders are diverse and encompass various aspects, including perception of competence, outcome expectations, attitudes, perceived barriers and risks, subjective norms, social support, motivation, enjoyment, decisional balance, and body image (Ramírez-gomez et al., 2023). Responsibilities as a coach are very important because it is not only necessary to plan the training session but also the coach also has to manage the tasks related to selecting the player team for the match, planning strategy, analysis of the match, presentation of the players, motivating the players before and during the match and ensuring the level of health and player's physical condition. Therefore, the division of duties between coaches is very important to be implemented efficiently so that the management and administration of a team runs smoothly.

### *Task Execution / SSG*

Task execution is a consistent process of doing planned tasks and producing expected results by one individual or a group of individuals joint into a team, in compliance with preset requirements and expectations. It determines a sequence of tasks assigned to the team for implementation. Every task has a range of preset parameters or attributes that define execution sequence and implementation time. For example, priority and due date are attributes preset prior to implementation to determine in what sequence tasks are

supposed to be executed and within what time limits (Mitchell, 2020). According to (Iyer & Banerjee, 2016) to plan and implement a task plan or project, there are seven steps that need to be followed which are create tasks, prepare a timeline, assign tasks to the team, track progress, communicate regularly, engage with external stakeholders and schedule change effectively.

It is important that coaches, families and related parties can understand and help the needs of football players as well as contribute with relevant information about football (Flach et al., 2023). According to Karim (2022), the implementation of effective training and achieving objectives is born from coaches who have the competence to plan and implement effective training sessions for players. While carrying out the training tasks, all training objectives are set such as improving weaknesses, solving game problems that arise as well as improving performance to a good or maximum level by strengthening mental, physical, technical and tactical aspects.

Coaches used small-sided games a lot in their training, and all indicated that they were one of the most effective tools to help players develop, as players are more likely to gain more touches of the ball, and have to make quicker decisions in the smaller format of the game (Akbar et al., 2023; Konstantinos & Shane, 2017). Therefore, the coach must strive and always be prepared with knowledge, experience, level of competence, mental and physical at all times. According to (Ismail et al., 2020) study, they think that the competence of the coach can also be seen and identified through three main categories, namely during training, matches and management where the coach has to play an important role to improve individual and team performance.

### *Large Sided Games (LSG) / Real Games Situation Training*

The LSG training refers from eight to 11 sides' games (L. Gonçalves et al., 2022). It also used big size pitch than SSG. According to (L. Gonçalves et al., 2022), the purpose of LSG training is to implement the task execution from SSG training. Learning process can happen while playing and then respond to a real game situation. Coaches also can evaluate the player's performance from SSG to LSG training. The physiological aspect shows that smaller training formats are more suitable for increasing physiological stress, while larger formats can be used to increase match-specific demands, so it is important that coaches can modify or introduce rules in the SSG format to adapt them to competition demands (Aguiar et al., 2013; Martinez-Lorca et al., 2023). Applying such games over the entire season enables one to develop a direct connection with particular instances that take place in training and competitions. Other technical/tactical drills can include position games such as specific movements made by players with or without the ball, aiming to optimize the synchronization between teammates

or simulations of real games. Among the more focused exercises, there are running-based exercises, neuromuscular training, speed exercises, or coordination drills.

### Coaching

The skill to play football does not just come, it requires a long process of continuous practice. The will to train diligently and compete with an unyielding spirit on the field requires a psychological aspect to accompany it. The willingness to practice and compete is obtained from the high motivation of each player, achievements will not come alone but with careful planning and take a long time (Pamungkas et al., 2023). According to (Côté, 2006) and (Karim & Nadzalan 2017), coaches are the main contributors in the development of athletes. In this study, it can be concluded that the knowledge and skills of coaches are very important in producing quality players. The application of the coach's knowledge and skills to the players is proof of the coach's excellence. Coaches are the main factor in the production of competent players because coaches can help players to improve performance and game skills as well as help in maturing their psychosocial aspects. In this context, it is important for coaches to be able to distinguish between activities that players can actually do, because when doing tasks that are far from their motor skills, it is likely that players will feel incompetent and become frustrated when faced with tasks with inappropriate motor demands. with the reality they imagine (Gonzalez-Huenulef et al., 2023; Vigário et al., 2020).

Suggested strategies to reduce the amount of team inactivity include: devising activities where players receive immediate feedback from the activity itself rather than the need to stop the activity; coaches observing the play more by allowing the activity to continue for longer so players can problem-solve before the coach steps in and provides solutions; providing feedback or using questioning with individual players rather than stopping everyone (i.e., bringing the player briefly to the sideline or the coach entering the field to quickly talk to the player) reducing the length of any stoppages by using cue words and names for games or activities to reduce the amount of explanation required (O'Connor, Larkin, & Williams 2018).

Motivation and feelings of satisfaction with the services offered by the coach are positive predictors in increasing the extrinsic motivation of football players (Aznar-Ballesta & Vernetta, 2023; Zapata Huenullán et al., 2023). According (Nash & Sproule, 2011), also asserted that an effective coach is a coach who is sensitive to using various types of coaching knowledge and skills in training players. Coaches need to take a coaching license is also very important to increase knowledge and variety of training which in turn can improve self-competence as a coach (Karim & Nadzalan 2017). Therefore, the coach is not only responsible for pro-

ducing excellent results but also succeeds in producing mature and disciplined players both outside and on the field.

### Recommendation

There are several suggestions for further studies. First, future researchers can conduct a study on the construction of football coaching process model by using qualitative methods through interviews, observations, or analysis of coaching documents among football coaches to obtain data.

Qualitative study using grounded theory can help future researchers to obtain information to construct football coaching model. The qualitative data also can further strengthen the findings to produce coaching process model. In addition, future researchers could produce coaching process model on other sports, such as handball, volleyball, netball, and hockey.

As a practitioner in the field of football coaching, the researchers suggested that the football coaching courses could provide content on the importance of the NFDP Coaching Process Model.

### Conclusion

The variation in exercise intensity during SSGs can improved with consistent coach encouragement but it is still more variable than traditional generic training methods. SSGs containing fewer players can exceed match intensity and elicit similar intensities to both long- and short-duration high- intensity interval running. This study implied the construction of the football coaching process model that can benefit the national football development at the grassroots level and provide alternative sources of knowledge for teachers or football coaches to coach their football teams. It can be concluded that with a coaching process model, teachers or sports coaches in schools have the alternatives and options as a reference source to train their school teams. The coaching process model also used by expert coaches to improve sport performance in football was an important basis for formalizing coaching knowledge.

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#### Datos de los/as autores/as:

Zulakbal Abd Karim	zulakbal@fsskj.upsi.edu.my	Autor/a
Asraf Razak	asrafrazak@gmail.com	Autor/a
Fakrul Hazely Ismail	fakrul_11@yahoo.com	Autor/a
Abdul Rahman Muhammad	abdulrahman@gmail.com	Autor/a
Syed Kamaruzaman Syed Ali	Syedkamaruzaman@gmail.com	Autor/a
Amin Akbar	aminakbar@fip.unp.ac.id	Autor/a
Brainy Course	brainycourse11@gmail.com	Traductor/a