

The efficacy of youth football coach - perception of players and coaches of different age groups of Portuguese football

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Abstract:

This study aims to understand the perceptions of youth football players and coaches, about the importance of the efficacy factors on the success of the coach. The translated and adapted version of the Coaching Efficacy Scale (CES) of Feltz et al. (1999), the CESp (Duarte, Garganta and Fonseca, 2012), was applied to a sample of 266 Portuguese football players and 22 coaches, participants on district championships in the Porto Football Association, one of the most representatives of Portugal. Using the CESp, players and coaches assessed the importance assumed by four coach's efficacy factors (i.e., motivation, strategy, technique and character) in coach success. The data analysis showed that: 1) the motivation and character are the most valued factors by players and coaches, with the same rank order; 2) there're significant differences in the importance attributed by the coaches to the motivation and strategy factors and the behaviors they adopt in practice; 3) there're significant differences between the efficacy factors ranking made by different age group players (i.e., Under 15, Under 17 and Under 19); 4) there was a positive and consistent relationship between the players' evaluation of the efficacy factors' importance and their perceptions about the behaviors adopted by their best coaches. It seems that the conclusions of this study can help to improve the coaching process, especially in what concerns to differentiate the emphasis to the efficacy factors across different age groups, for instance, considering the athletes expectations, one of the key variables in the coaches' success.

Key words: football, coach, player, efficacy, youth.

Introduction

The efficacy of youth coach has been little explored, taking into account the potential it has in the sport experience of young people and children, once it is related to their learning and performance (Feltz, Chase, Moritz, and Sullivan, 1999). One of the most pressing models to study coach efficacy is the conceptual model of Feltz et. al. (1999), which considers a range of information sources about the efficacy and the outcome effects of the coach efficacy. The factors that this model considers as fundamental in the coaches' action are motivation, game strategy, technique and character building, considering also the coach experience, the previous success, the perception of the ability of athletes and support school / community as efficacy sources. The motivation refers to the coaches' capacity to influence the athletes' skills and psychological condition and strategy represents the coaches' skills in promoting a successful performance of their teams during competition. Technique corresponds to coaching skills in diagnosing and providing instruction during practice; whereas, character building relates itself to the coaches' beliefs in their capacities to promote athlete's personal development and positive attitude towards sports.

Note that the effectiveness and efficacy models of the coach study tend to focus on the perceived efficacy, that is usually evaluated based on the coaches' and player s' opinion, as suggested by several authors (Alzate, Lazarus, Ramirez and Valencia, 1997; Bandura, 1997; Chase, Lirgg and Feltz, 1997; Lent and Lopez, 2002). Horn (2002) stresses the importance of the player's perception about the behavior of their coaches, emphasizing the relevance that assumes in the efficacy evaluation. In this sense, Smoll and Smith (1996) found that the psychological impact of sports participation in youth athletes is closely related to their memory and perception of their coaches' behavior.

Resulting from the Feltz et. al. (1999) model, the Coaching Efficacy Scale (CES) is considered as the most appropriate instrument in coach efficacy evaluating, comprising the existence of the four factors already described. The CES has been predominantly used in Anglo-Saxon original studies (Boardley, Kavussanu and Ring, 2008; Campbell and Sullivan, 2005; Chase et al 1997; Feltz, Hepler and Roman, 2009; Fung, 2003; Kavussanu, Boardley, Jutkiewicz, Vincent and Ring, 2008; Myers, Feltz, Maier, Reckase and Wolfe, 2006;

Myers, Wolfe, and Feltz, 2005; Sullivan and Kent, 2003; Thelwell, Lane, Weston and Greenlees, 2008), being practically inexistent investigations of this nature in other contexts. There are several studies targeting youth coaches, particularly of university teams, but with emphasis on different sports practiced in Anglo-Saxon contexts (Chase et al, 1997; Feltz, et al, 1999; Feltz et al 2009; Maleté and Feltz, 2000; Myers et al, 2005; Sullivan and Kent, 2003). Although Feltz et al. (2009) and Kavussanu et al. (2008) investigations integrated football coaches in their samples, we only found an investigation in the specific context of the youth football coach efficacy, developed by Kowalsky et al. (2007) with a sample of American athletes aged 11 to 14 years. In this study, the researchers concluded that there is a tendency for coaches been young and with previous experience, and that these factors relate to the overall youth coach efficacy. It also enables us to know that coach age and education, experience as a player, gender and previous experience as a coach, are aspects that does not predict the overall efficacy of the coach.

One aspect that justifies the comparison of the perception of athletes and coaches is the obvious discrepancy found in several previous studies (Kavussanu et al, 2008; Kenow and Williams, 1992; Short and Short, 2004; Vargas-Tonsing, Myers and Feltz, 2004). In all studies the perceived efficacy of the coaches in the various factors was higher in athletes, so it is pertinent scrutinize about the reality that we propose to investigate, the youth football training. In the case of this research with youth coaches, we believe that the perception of athletes may be more favorable once, according to the study McDonald, Coté and Deakin (2010), there is a great concern by coaches, to base on the coach-athlete relationship in teaching and communication skills, which naturally enhances his image in young athletes. In that way it seems relevant understand how athletes of different ages value the coach efficacy factors, since that was not much explored in previous studies.

The importance that expectations assume on self-perceptions and performance of athletes (Horn, 2008) makes relevant the analysis of most valued aspects by young athletes in coaches. The youth coach do a specialized task where expectations are crucial in athletes learning (Liukkonen, Laasco and Telama, 1996) and should therefore adapt to the daily expectations of athletes, both in training and in competition (Lyle, 2002), stimulating a correct orientation of the same (Adelino, Vieira and Coelho, 1999). Thus the athletes' favorite coach is presented as the one closest of its expectations, and the analysis of the perceptions they have about this figure will help to enable a better understanding of the most valued factors by young athletes towards their satisfaction and consequently their performance.

In order to better understand the perceptions of coaches about the importance of the different efficacy factors, it is also important to know more about their behavior in practice, which led us to include this analysis in our investigation. For Martens (2002) there should be a theoretical and practical complement, where the knowledge of the coach, assumed in their perceptions will support their actions, as recommended by Jones, Armour and Potrac (2003). Lyle (2002) even considers that practical training constitutes an essential parameter of the coach conceptual framework, with a significant research interest. In this context it is important to take into account aspects such as coaching philosophy, the nature of group training, and experience as a player and coach (Cushion and Jones, 2001).

Method

Participants

The total study sample was composed by 288 male individuals divided into two categories, with 266 athletes and 22 football coaches of different age groups, Under 15 (U15), Under 17 (U17) and Under 19 (U19), participating in the Porto Football Association district championships, one of the most representatives of Portugal. This is a representative sample of the studied population, namely of youth coaches and young athletes, and it should be emphasized that analyzed coaches presented an age between 18 and 39 years old. These are coaches with an experience ranging between 1 and 8 years, with a mean of 4 years. In turn, the age of the athletes studied is between 14 and 19 years of age. The Under 15, present 14 and 15 years, the Under 17, 16 and 17 years, and finally the Under 19, comprises ages between 18 and 19 years.

Instrument

The instrument used in this investigation was the CESp (Duarte et al., 2012) resulting from a transcultural adaptation of CES (Feltz et al., 1999) to the Portuguese population, especially in football specific context, which showed good indices of reliability and fit adjustment to the original model with the four efficacy factors. Considering the purposes of this study, there were made some changes in the statement that precedes all items used to evaluate the perception of coaches and athletes. Thus, coaches were initially asked "In your opinion, what is the importance of each of the following factors in the success of coach?". Furthermore, to get information about the behaviors that coaches use to adopt in their practice, coaches also replied a second version of this instrument with the following question: "Now indicate how frequently you adopt each of the behaviors and postures stated below." On other hand, athletes after completing a first instrument similar to the coaches, later completed a second version initiated by the following question: "Think about the best coach you have worked with and indicate how frequent he would adopt each of the behaviors or postures stated below."

According to the Feltz et al. (1999) original model, each statement of the CES refers to a coach specific efficacy factor, considering the following dimensions: motivation, game strategy, technique and character building. The motivation group items as "develop self-esteem of their athletes", "develop team cohesion", among others. In the other hand the strategy factor have items such as "maximize the strengths of their team during the competition" and "adjust the game plan to the potential of his team". The technique factor involves items such as "demonstrate football skills", "individually train the technical aspects of their athletes" among others, and character factor is featured with items such as "promote attitudes of fair play in your athletes " and " promote an attitude of respect for others".

Also mention that in this study was used a 5 categories Likert scale, according to the suggestion of Myers et al. (2005). Thus, in the first version for coaches and athletes was considered the following scale: 1 = "not important" to 5 = "totally important.", as well in the second version was used 1 = "never" to 5 = "always".

Procedures

The questionnaires were completed simultaneously for all members of the teams, in their club facilities, and always in the presence of the first author of this study. The purposes of the study were explained and the confidentiality of the responses were guaranteed to all participants, having been emphasized to young athletes that the study was designed to evaluate the factors they believe most contribute to coaches' success, and not to ask them to assess their current coaches.

The questionnaires were analyzed using an optical reading system, having been statistically analyzed through SPSS software, version 20, using descriptive (mean and standard deviation), inferential (t-test for independent measures) and correlation (Pearson's coefficient) analysis of all studying variables according to previously defined study objectives. ANOVA was also used in the comparison of the athletes' perceptions of the three age groups included in the sample.

Results

Table 1 shows the comparison on the importance attributed by coaches and youth players to efficacy factors in the success of coach, showing that all were considered important for both samples, emphasizing the motivation factor for coaches and athletes, and character, only for coaches, with very high values.

Table 1. Mean (M), Standard Deviation (sd), Ranking (rk) and t-test (t) Comparison of Player's and Coaches' Perspectives About the Most Important Factors to the Sports Success of the Football Coach

Factor	Players		Coaches		t-test (t)
	rk	m ± sd	rk	m ± sd	
Motivation	1°	4,45 ± 0,40	1°	4,62 ± 0,35	t= - 2,03; p= 0,95
Strategy	4°	4,26 ± 0,46	3°	4,41 ± 0,35	t= -1,46; p= 0,17;
Technique	3°	4,27 ± 0,48	4°	4,39 ± 0,40	t= - 1,11; p= 0,14;
Character	2°	4,33 ± 0,55	2°	4,53 ± 0,48	t= -1,70; p= 0,52

The results, presented in table I, indicate some differences in the efficacy factors evaluation rank, although without statistical significance. Thus, both coaches as athletes attribute greater importance to motivation and character factors, with the technique have been the third most valued factor by athletes, and strategy by coaches.

The table 2 presents the results regarding the relationship between the importance attributed by coaches to the four efficacy factors in attaining the success, and the behaviors they adopt in practice, showing that coaches believe that all factors are important in that process and therefore they use to adopt according behaviors in their practices.

Table 2. Mean (m), Standard deviation (sd), Ranking (rk), Paired t-test (t), Correlation (r) between the Importance Given and Adopted Behaviors by the Coach

Factor	Importance given by coaches		Adopted behaviors		t-test (t)	r
	rk	m ± sd	rk	m ± sd		
Motivation	1°	4,62 ± 0,35	2°	4,43 ± 0,44	t=3,61; p= 0,00	0,82; p= 0,00
Strategy	3°	4,41 ± 0,35	4°	4,06 ± 0,82	t= 2,57; p= 0,02	0,70; p= 0,00
Technique	4°	4,39 ± 0,40	3°	4,25 ± 0,51	t= 1,95 p= 0,06	0,76; p= 0,00
Character	2°	4,53 ± 0,48	1°	4,46 ± 0,54	t= 1,23 p= 0,23	0,83; p= 0,00

Indeed, it's important to emphasize the strong and positive correlations between the valuation that coaches attribute to the four factors and the behavior frequency they reported to adopt in their daily sport training process, suggesting closeness between what they consider important and what they do in practice. In spite of that, it was also found there were some statistically significant differences in the valuation associated to motivation and strategy factors, as well in the ranking order (as told in table II).

We also analyzed the relationship between the importance that players attribute to the efficacy factors in the success of the coach and their perceptions about the behavior adopted by the best (or favorite) coaches of the athletes. According to the perceptions of the athletes all factors would be highly valued by their best coaches, with motivation and character presenting the highest average value, which is consistent with the importance that the athletes themselves attribute to them, even with the same ranking order (see table III).

Table 3. Mean (m), Standard Deviation (sd), Ranking (rk), Paired t-test (t) and Correlation (r) between the Importance Given and the Best Coach Behavior to the Players

Factor	Importance given by players		Best coach behavior		t-test (t)	r
	rk	m ± sd	rk	m ± sd		
Motivation	1°	4,45 ± 0,40	1°	4,31 ± 0,47	t= 5,28; p= 0,00	0,54; p= 0,00
Strategy	4°	4,26 ± 0,46	4°	4,14 ± 0,51	t= 4,16 p= 0,00	0,49; p= 0,00
Technique	3°	4,27 ± 0,48	3°	4,21 ± 0,48	t= 2,20; p=0,03	0,55; p= 0,00
Character	2°	4,33 ± 0,55	2°	4,29 ± 0,55	t= 1,27; p=0,21	0,58; p= 0,00

The results presented in table III also showed moderate to strong positive correlation between the athletes' evaluation of the four efficacy factors and their perceptions about how their favorite coaches adopt the correspondent behavior in their practices. However, it should be noted that the values corresponding to the behavior frequency of their best coach were always lower than the values corresponding to the athletes' evaluation of the factors, being that differences statistically significant for all factors, excepting the character.

Table 4 presents the comparison of the efficacy factors' evaluations made by the athletes of different age groups.

Table 4. Mean (m), Standard Deviation (sd), Ranking (rk) and ANOVA, concerning the most important factors for determining the Sports Success of the Football Coach, in the opinion of athletes U15, U17 and U19;

Factor	U15		U17		U19		Anova	
	rk	m ± sd	rk	m ± sd	rk	m ± sd	f	p
Motivation	1°	4,51 ± 0,40	1°	4,44 ± 0,42	1°	4,41 ± 0,38	1,36	0,26
Strategy	3°	4,37 ± 0,44	3°	4,24 ± 0,44	4°	4,20 ± 0,48	3,00	0,05
Technique	4°	4,38 ± 0,47	4°	4,22 ± 0,46	2°	4,22 ± 0,48	3,20	0,04
Character	2°	4,48 ± 0,47	2°	4,31 ± 0,51	3°	4,22 ± 0,60	5,01	0,00

As we can see in table IV, it appears that the three groups of athletes considered all efficacy factors important to the coach success. However the factors' ranking order made by U19 athletes was different to the ranking orders made by the other two groups of athletes. Motivation was the most valued factor by the three groups followed, on U15 and U17, by the character factor, with the strategy and technique factors receiving less importance. To the U19 athletes the second most valued factor was the technique, followed by the character and strategy.

Furthermore, the ANOVA test showed that the differences between the answers of the age groups were statistically significant in strategy, technique and character. More specifically, it was found that the differences were statistically significant between the U15 and U19 evaluations of the strategy, technique and character factors, and between U15 and U17 evaluations of the strategy and technique factors.

Table 5 presents the results of the comparison between the perceptions of the three athletes' age groups about the frequency of that behaviors adopted by their best coaches in their practices.

Table 5. Mean (M), Standard Deviation (sd), Ranking (rk) and ANOVA, for the factors most valued by the Best coaches of athletes U15, U17 and U19, for determining the Sports Success of the Football Coach.

Factor	U15		U17		U19		Anova	
	rk	m ± sd	rk	m ± sd	rk	m ± sd	f	p
Motivation	1°	4,40 ± 0,46	2°	4,31 ± 0,44	1°	4,22 ± 0,50	3,24	0,04
Strategy	4°	4,25 ± 0,46	4°	4,25 ± 0,49	4°	3,94 ± 0,52	12,02	0,00
Technique	3°	4,30 ± 0,46	3°	4,28 ± 0,47	3°	4,07 ± 0,47	7,04	0,01
Character	2°	4,38 ± 0,51	1°	4,32 ± 0,49	2°	4,21 ± 0,62	2,46	0,09

The results of table V indicate that the values' ranking orders made by the U15 and U19 were equal: motivation related behaviors were indicated as the more frequent, followed by the character related behaviors, with the technique and strategy related behaviors being less frequent. On the other hand, for U17 character related behaviors were more frequent than motivation related behaviors.

The ANOVA also showed that the differences between the values indicated by the different age groups were statistically significant in motivation, strategy and technique factors. More specifically, there were statistically differences between the values reported by U15 vs U17, U17 vs U19 and U15 vs U19 to the motivation related behaviors, and between U15 vs U19 and U17 vs U19, to the strategy and technical related behaviors.

Discussion

The comparison between coaches and athletes answers, showed quite similar perspectives when ranking in the same order the efficacy factors, emphasizing the priority for motivation and character, in both cases. Noteworthy, the difference between athletes' and coaches' perceived importance of efficacy wasn't statistically significant, suggesting therefore proximity between them about this subject. Indeed, is noted than in other studies concerning this subject there are large differences between the perception of the coaches and players (Kavussanu et al, 2008; Kenow & Williams, 1992; Short & Short, 2004; Tonsing Vargas et al, 2004). The congruence in the perception of coaches and athletes may indicate a closer coach-athlete relationship, with an emphasis on motivational aspects that, according to Macdonald, Cotê and Deakin (2010), usually are appreciated by athletes. The close relationship between coach-athlete, according Lavoï (2007), influences the psychosocial development of children, in particular their motivation. Moreover, the priority valuation of the motivation factor by coaches and athletes in our sample, seems to be in agreement with reviewed literature that highlights the extreme importance of psychological aspects, particularly the motivation, in young footballers training (Bayer, 1987; Gouveia, 2002; Holt and Dunn, 2004; Kowalsky et al., 2007; Lavoï, 2007; Pacheco, 2001), contradicting the conclusions from Harwood (2008) study, with young players, where the author refer that the coaches give little importance to the psychological aspects.

The higher appreciation of the character factor in this investigation is also in agreement with Brusser and Camuthers (2010) and Gonçalves (2004) who consider essential a positive contribution by the coach to the lives of young people, through the transmission and assimilation of fundamental social values. In this regard Kowalsky et al. (2007) also reinforce the necessity of the youth coach to constitute himself as a good example and a role model for young players, taking into account that they are forming their personality and acquisition of values and key references for their future and for their character.

It should be noted that the ranking order of the way the coaches adopted the factors' related behaviors in practice is different from the importance they attach to them, being the character the most adopted. This difference may be due to the need that coaches find in practice to assert themselves as a good model for athletes, contributing positively to the development of their personality and to the acquisition values that will shape their character (Kowalsky et al, 2007; Pacheco, 2001;). In fact, also Brusser and Camuthers (2010) and Gonçalves (2004), stress the importance that this factor seems to have in youth training, because it is a sensitive phase of their sports formation.

It was also found that the importance given by the athletes to the efficacy factors has a positive correlation with their perceptions about the behaviors their best coaches would adopt in the practice, with the same ranking order. In this regard Tonsing-Vargas et al. (2003) consider that the coaching efficacy is a predictor of the player efficacy. For the player the effective coach is the one that leads or has led the players to better efficacy levels. In other words, it is meant that's normal that the athlete's expectations are framed according to the coach that promote higher levels of satisfaction and probably allowed them to achieve success, valuing certain efficacy factors. Moreover, this proximity suggests that the coach should consider their athlete's expectations, revealing the importance of their experience as players, as advocates Mielke (2007). Feltz et al.

(2009) show that the same experience as a player is one aspect that makes the coach more confident in their actions and that enables the coach to get the best performance from their players, making it more relevant and also well satisfied with his coach. The satisfaction of players, according to Feltz et al. (1999), presents itself as a source of coach efficacy and is, according to Jowet, Shanmungan and Caccoulis (2012), one of the most important aspects in determining the quality of the coach-athlete relationship. Still, it was also evident that athletes when evaluating the importance of the motivation, strategy and technique factors indicated values significantly higher to the values they indicated to the related behaviors' frequency that their best coaches would adopt in their practices, which suggests that even those do not provided a full satisfaction of the athletes.

These differences in the factors evaluation may be associated to a less experience of the coach once (our sample has a mean of 4 years' experience), considering that according to some authors (Kavussanu et al, 2008; Marback, Short, Short and Sullivan, 2005; Myers, et al, 2005), the coach experience predicts its efficacy in all factors. The factor related behaviors where the difference was more marked were the motivation ones, appearing to be less frequent than the player's preferences.

According to Mesquita (1997), each level of practice has its own characteristics. Thus, we also analyzed the differences in the factors evaluation between the various group ages studied, verifying for instance that the U15 associated significantly higher values than the U19 to the technical and character factors. Several authors consider essential in youth training stimulate their technical qualities and character (McCalister, et al, 2000, cited by Brusser and Camuthers, 2010; Constantino, 2002). However, in the case of U19 athletes we must overlook to the fact of that they are almost in the adult age with a significant advance in sports training, reason why they can believe those factors becoming less important. Thus, and as suggested by Elmore (1987), this idea should mean that age interferes with the athletes' perceptions and aspirations, inducing different evaluations of the efficacy factors over their training process, which justifies further research in each one of the age groups, in order to understand the specific needs and expectations of athletes.

The differences found in the perceptions of the athletes about the behaviors adopted by their best coaches in practice, can also be related to the experience of athletes. Indeed, the lower valuation by the best coaches of U19 athletes in motivation, technique and strategy factors, comparatively with the younger aged athletes, can be related with the fact they were more experienced, and probably had contact with more coaches than the younger athletes, and that can provokes them more difficulty to define their favorite coach. According with that possibility, they can provide their perceptions not about a specific coach but about a mix of their best coaches, which can decrease the average values. Moreover, it is likely that younger athletes still have few references about the ideal coach and the importance of efficacy factors, although focusing on a coach that is closer to their psychological needs, especially on motivation. In this respect, Lavoie (2007) considers that the proximity in the relationship between the coach and the athlete is fundamental in child psychosocial development, particularly in its motivation, which emphasizes the importance of stimulate this relationship, in order to approach to their expectations.

Conclusions

The analysis of the results stands out the agreement between players' and coaches' opinions about the high importance of the motivation and character factors, which seems to be the most relevant factors in children and young sport process. Also, the agreement between athletes' expectations and coaches' perspectives may confer them some advantage once the knowledge of their expectations has a strong relationship with the coach efficacy.

The results also suggest the need to adapt the coach practical behavior according to the context that it encounters, particularly in terms of circumstances, constraints and objectives that the same practice imposes, by virtue of the differences found between the importance attributed by the coaches and their practical valuation.

Despite the overall analysis of the results showed a positive relationship between the factors valued by the players and the factors valued by their best coach is evident, in the comparison between age groups, that athletes, depending on their age, have a favorite different profile coach, according to the differences in the factors valuation. Indeed, previous comparison of the importance attached by athletes, from each one of the competitive levels, to the efficacy factors determined a different value depending on age, emphasizing the need, by the coach, to adapt his behaviors, according to the different level of practice.

We also emphasize the fact that it is a research developed in young ages so that the use of the results in other realities may be inadequate. The results of this study allow a better understanding of the Portuguese reality, with regard to the training of young people, encouraging a proper organization of the coaches training plans with the priority valuation of the motivation and character factors, still suggesting the adaptation of coaches training to the competitive level in which they are inserted, in form to also improve the transfer to the practical context.

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