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Examining Football Coaches' Suitability to the Long-Term Athlete Development Model in the Context of Self-Efficacy

Futbol Antrenörlerinin Uzun Vadeli Sporcu Gelişimi Modeline Uygunluklarının Öz-Yeterlik Bağlamında İncelenmesi

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine football coaches' level of compliance with the Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) model and its relationship with their perceptions of self-efficacy. The research was conducted using qualitative methods and a phenomenological design. The study group consisted of 25 football coaches with at least three years of experience working in different age groups. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, evaluated using descriptive analysis, and thematically analyzed using MAXQDA 2020 software. The analysis revealed four main themes: (1) Coach competence and continuous development, (2) Long-term development and phasing, (3) Motivation and athlete relationships, and (4) Differences between theory and practice. The findings revealed that the majority of participants were generally familiar with the LTAD model but experienced various difficulties in implementing the model with a holistic approach in field practices. In particular, it was determined that some coaches still adopted chronological age-based approaches in their programming processes and did not pay sufficient attention to the principle of developmental appropriateness. In terms of self-efficacy, it has been observed that coaches' professional experience, social support resources, and individual beliefs directly influence their ability to implement the LTAD model. However, the inconsistency in field practice among some coaches with high self-efficacy suggests that self-efficacy needs to be developed alongside knowledge and experience. The gap between theoretical knowledge and field reality has increased the need for flexibility and creativity, especially in the post-pandemic period. In conclusion, this study demonstrates that to ensure sustainable athlete development based on the LTAD model, coaches must be supported not only by technical competencies but also by pedagogical, psychological, and communication skills. It is also recommended that coach training should be structured around practice as well as theoretical foundations.

Keywords Football, football coach, self-sufficiency, long-term athlete development

Öz

Bu araştırmanın amacı, futbol antrenörlerinin Uzun Vadeli Sporcu Gelişimi (LTAD) modeline uygunluk düzeylerini ve bu uygunluğun öz-yeterlik algılarıyla olan ilişkisini incelemektir. Araştırma, nitel yöntemle ve fenomenoloji deseniyle gerçekleştirilmiştir. Çalışma grubunu, farklı yaş gruplarında görev yapan ve en az üç yıl deneyime sahip 25 futbol antrenörü oluşturmaktadır. Veriler, yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yoluyla toplanmış, betimsel analiz yöntemiyle değerlendirilmiş ve MAXQDA 2020 yazılımı kullanılarak tematik olarak analiz edilmiştir. Analiz sonucunda dört ana tema belirlenmiştir: (1) Antrenör yeterliliği ve sürekli gelişim, (2) Uzun vadeli gelişim ve aşamalandırma, (3) Motivasyon ve sporcu ilişkileri, (4) Teori-pratik farklılıkları. Bulgular, katılımcıların büyük kısmının LTAD modeline genel olarak aşina olduğunu ancak modelin saha uygulamalarında bütüncül bir yaklaşımla hayata geçirilmesinde çeşitli güçlükler yaşadığını ortaya koymuştur. Özellikle bazı antrenörlerin programlama süreçlerinde hâlâ kronolojik yaş temelli yaklaşımlar benimsediği, gelişimsel uygunluk ilkesine yeterince dikkat etmediği tespit edilmiştir. Öz-yeterlik bağlamında, antrenörlerin sahip oldukları mesleki deneyimler, sosyal destek kaynakları ve bireysel inançlarının LTAD modelini uygulama becerilerini doğrudan etkilediği gözlemlenmiştir. Bununla birlikte, yüksek öz-yeterlik algısına sahip bazı antrenörlerin saha uygulamalarında tutarsızlıklar sergilemeleri, öz-yeterliğin bilgi ve deneyimle birlikte geliştirilmesi gerektiğine işaret etmektedir. Teorik bilgi ve saha gerçekliği arasındaki boşluk, özellikle pandemi sonrası dönemde esneklik ve yaratıcılık ihtiyacını artırmıştır. Sonuç olarak, bu çalışma, LTAD modeline dayalı sürdürülebilir sporcu gelişiminin sağlanabilmesi için antrenörlerin yalnızca teknik yeterliliklerle değil; pedagojik, psikolojik ve iletişimsel becerilerle de desteklenmesi gerektiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Ayrıca antrenör eğitimlerinin teorik temeller kadar uygulama odaklı yapılandırılması gerektiği önerilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Futbol, futbol antrenörü, öz yeterlilik, uzun vade sporcu gelişimi

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Introduction

Training is a process guided by scientific, especially pedagogical, principles to foster development in sports. This process aims to influence athletes in a planned and systematic manner, leading them to achieve superior success in one or more sports (Sevim, 2007). Furthermore, training is not limited to athletes; it is a concept that enhances the physical efficiency and skills of all age groups (Demiral et al., 2023).

Football is the world's most popular sport, played in nearly every country, and stands out for its unpredictable and exciting movements, attracting both athletes and spectators. When considered in terms of protecting and improving health, football is a highly suitable sports platform for lifelong mobility and promoting health awareness. Football is a sport that requires high-intensity and intermittent physical exertion, necessitating the development of aerobic and anaerobic capacity at a high level. It also requires significant physical qualities such as high-level technical ability, strength, agility, and endurance (Özkan and Özkan, 2016; Yel, Güzel, Kurcan, Aydemir, 2023). Therefore, Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) is crucial in football.

Scientifically based, multidimensional developments in sports remain crucial for both healthy living and Olympic success. Performance development is defined as a long-term process of practice and training, and success is achieved through systematic efforts. Long-term athlete development plays a critical role in achieving sustainable success. Côté's sports participation model laid the foundation for talent selection and training, and today, the Canadian model is widely adopted for long-term athlete development (Duman, Duran Akbaş, & Bayraktar, 2024). Canada has implemented the long-term athlete development (LTAD) model as a government policy. The LTAD model, developed by Istvan Balyi and his colleagues, is an athlete-centered, coach-supported model (Balyi, Way, & Higgs, 2013).

When the Long-Term Athlete Development Model (LTAD) is examined, it appears to encompass a broad spectrum of an individual's life, from birth to death. It can be said that it addresses the active lifestyle by dividing it into various periods to cultivate healthy individuals. The model offers a structure that includes the most appropriate training, competition, and recovery processes for each stage of athletic development. It also provides children with various opportunities to develop into healthy and active individuals (Athletics Canada, 2015). Furthermore, the Long-Term Athlete Development Model not only helps young people become healthy individuals but also improves their physical performance. This reduces the risk of injury and enhances psychosocial development (Demiral, Duran Akbaş, & Bayraktar, 2024).

Self-efficacy beliefs are not only a fundamental element of individuals' motivation and behavior, but also influence actions that can create change in their lives (Arseven, 2016). Bandura (1977) defines self-efficacy as "an individual's confidence in their own abilities to design and implement the necessary courses of action to manage future situations."

The concept of self-efficacy originates from the social-cognitive theory developed by Albert Bandura and the principle of reciprocal determinism, one of its fundamental building blocks. According to this principle, personal factors, the environment, and the

behaviors exhibited by an individual interact to determine the individual's next behavior (Bandura, 1986). Self-efficacy is a key personal factor in the functioning of the principle of reciprocal determinism (Sakız, 2013). The fundamental principle of Self-Efficacy Theory is that individuals are more likely to perform actions for which they feel competent and less likely to perform actions for which they feel incompetent (Arseven, 2016).

Football is one of the world's most popular sports due to its dynamic nature, high tempo requirements, and physical demands on both athletes and spectators (Uluca et al., 2024). As a result, football requires long-term, systematic, and scientific approaches to athlete development. A planned and phased training structure is crucial for a development process that aims for sustainable success, especially from the youth level. In this context, the Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) model plays a critical role in sports like football, which require multifaceted physical and technical skills.

The LTAD model provides a structure that supports an individual's lifelong participation in physical activity and guides athlete development by dividing it into phases. The model aims to plan appropriate training, competition, and recovery processes based on the athlete's age, developmental level, and needs (Balyi, Way, & Higgs, 2013). This model encompasses not only physical performance but also the athlete's psychosocial development. It supports injury prevention (Athletics Canada, 2015; Demiral, Duran Akbaş, & Bayraktar, 2024). In Turkey, the adequacy of applications of this model depends largely on the knowledge, attitude, and competence levels of the coaches who implement it on the field.

Football coaches play a decisive role in the development of athletes. In particular, if coaches working in child and youth age categories act with an understanding consistent with the LTAD model, it directly impacts the athlete's long-term success and healthy development. At this point, coaches' self-efficacy, that is, their confidence in their ability to effectively implement this model using their own knowledge and skills, becomes a critical element for the success of the model. As defined by Bandura (1977), self-efficacy is an individual's belief in their capacity to plan and execute the necessary actions to manage the situations they encounter. This concept, one of the fundamental building blocks of social-cognitive theory, is a process that mutually influences an individual's behavior, environmental interactions, and personal factors (Bandura, 1986).

Aim of the research

This study aims to examine the extent to which football coaches adhere to the Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) model, their experiences with this process, and the relationship between their perceptions of self-efficacy and this process. In this context, the primary focus of the study is to reveal how coaches' adherence to the LTAD model relates to their level of self-efficacy.

Materials and Methods

Research Model

This study aimed to access football coaches' experiences with the LTAD model and determine their self-efficacy levels. Qualitative research methods and techniques were

used in interviews with football coaches to establish a sense of the LTAD model and self-efficacy and to gain in-depth knowledge on the subject. For this purpose, a phenomenological design, a qualitative research method, was used to determine the opinions of football coaches in this study (Patton, 2002). A phenomenological design is a qualitative research design that attempts to examine the shared ideas/views of participants who have experienced a phenomenon (Creswell, 2018) and to provide an in-depth description of how phenomena such as known experiences, perceptions, and situations are understood by different individuals (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Research Group

The study group consisted of 26 football coaches with at least three years of active coaching experience, across a range of age groups, who participated in football coach training programs conducted by the Turkish Football Federation (TFF). One participant was excluded from the findings because he expressed his desire to withdraw during the interview. Therefore, 25 coaches participated in the study. Participants are designated by codes K1-K25. Criterion sampling, a purposive sampling method, was used in the study. This method (Patton, 2014) is preferred for conducting in-depth research and information-rich situations for a specific purpose. The criteria for selecting participants were having coached in a range of age groups and at least three years of experience. Demographic information of the participants is provided in Table 1.

The Role of Researchers

One of the researchers participated in this study alongside the participant group. The other two served as instructors in the coach training program. This experience sparked the researchers' understanding of the research topic, and they conducted the necessary preliminary preparations by reviewing the relevant literature. The interview questions were finalized by consulting two field experts, and a semi-structured interview form was created. The interviews were conducted by the researcher using a semi-structured interview form and a voice recorder. The data obtained were analyzed by the researcher using the MAXQDA 2020 qualitative data analysis program.

Table 1: Demographic data

Participant	Years	Graduation	Document	Years in business	Age Group it Works With	Previous Age Groups of Work	institution
K1	40	high school	UEFA C	10 year	A team	U17, U15	Club
K2	37	high school	UEFA C	3 year	U17	U15, 13, A	Club
K3	53	high school	UEFA C	10 year	A team	U19, 17, 15	Club
K4	42	high school	UEFA C	8 year	5-14 between	5-14 between	Football School
K5	45	high school	UEFA C	3 year	U15	U19, U13	Club
K6	35	high school	UEFA C	5 year	A team	A team	Club
K7	38	high school	UEFA C	10 year	U17, A team	A team, U19	Club
K8	38	University	UEFA C	12 year	A team, U17	U19, 17, 15	Club
K9	41	University	UEFA C	12 year	A team, U19	A team, U19	Club
K10	22	high school	UEFA C	3 year	U13	U13	Club
K11	34	high school	UEFA C	10 year	U15	5-14 between	Club / Football School
K12	38	high school	UEFA C	6 year	U17	U17	Club
K13	25	University	UEFA C	3 year	5-14 between	5-14 between	Football School
K14	34	University	UEFA C	12 year	5-14 between	5-14 between	Football School
K15	22	high school	UEFA C	3 year	Women A team	Women A team	Club
K16	27	University	UEFA C	5 year	U17	A team	Club
K17	23	associate degree	UEFA C	3 year	5-14 between	5-14 between	Football School
K18	30	University	UEFA C	4 year	U15	U13, U17	Club
K19	34	PHD	UEFA C	9 year	U17	A team, U15	Club
K20	25	University	UEFA C	3 year	5-14 between	5-14 between	Football School
K21	26	associate degree	UEFA C	5 year	U17	U13	Club
K22	21	high school	UEFA C	3 year	Women A team	Women A team	Club
K23	28	associate degree	UEFA C	3 year	U13	U15	Club
K24	40	high school	UEFA C	7 year	A team	U19	Club
K25	32	PHD	UEFA C	6 year	5-14 between	5-14 between	Football School

Data Collection Tools

Data were collected through face-to-face interviews using a semi-structured interview form consisting of 10 questions, which was compiled based on a literature review. The form also included a section containing questions about the participants' demographic information. Before the interview, participants were informed about the purpose of the research, how the data would be used, the interview procedure, that information regarding the participants' identities would not be used, and that the audio recordings would be deleted after transcription; the interview location and time were determined according to the participant's wishes. Suitable conditions were prepared for the interview environment to ensure the quality of the audio recordings. Each interview lasted approximately 40-50 minutes. The interview questions are given below. In order to obtain more in-depth information based on the participants' opinions, questions such as "why," "how," "which," etc., were added to the questions to create additional questions at the end.

1- What does Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) mean to you?

2- How do you tailor your training plan to different age groups?

3- Do you consider your technical knowledge and skills to be sufficient?

4- How effective do you think you are at developing game strategies and tactics?

5- What methods do you use to motivate athletes?

6- What do you do to support the character development of athletes?

7- Where do you usually learn your coaching skills?

8- What differences do you see between theoretical education and practical application?

9- What were the biggest challenges you encountered while working with the LTAD model?

10- In what areas of coaching do you need more support or training?

Process

Data was collected online. The research form was created using Google Forms and delivered to participants via digital means (email, social media, messaging apps, etc.). The introductory section of the form includes an informed consent form for participants; the purpose of the study, confidentiality policies, and voluntary participation principles are explained. Participants who consented were included in the study by completing the form. Completion of the form took approximately 15-20 minutes.

Participants' personal information will be kept confidential, data will be analyzed only for scientific purposes, and will not be shared with any third party.

Data Analysis

The data were interpreted using the descriptive analysis technique (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018) and by dividing the experiences based on the description into main themes and summarizing them (Ersoy, 2016). This technique was used in this study to effectively explain the participants' views and convey them to the reader in an organized and interpreted manner. For this purpose, themes were defined based on the participants' opinions, and the codes in the coding key were assigned under these themes, taking into account expert opinions.

The audio recordings were transcribed as is without any editing. The data were converted into categories and codes and listed under the appropriate theme based on the participants' responses to the questions. The resulting themes, categories, and codes were sent to two academics conducting qualitative research and working in the field of coach training for comparison. In this stage, where inter-coder agreement statistics were examined, codes with a reliability of less than 75% were removed from the study.

Validity and Reliability

Creswell (2018) emphasizes that to enhance the reliability of a qualitative study, long-term collaboration and collaboration with participants are essential, as are providing detailed information to address any questions they may have. During data collection, the researchers were present at the coach training program's location for five days, including breakfast and meals, with one researcher participating in the coach training process. Two other researchers served as instructors in the program. As Yıldırım and Şimşek

(2011) noted, this fostered an atmosphere of trust between the researchers and participants, and this trust led to interviewees being more candid in their responses. Patton (2014) emphasizes the need for multiple expert opinions to eliminate bias during data analysis. In this study, the data were further analyzed by a faculty member specializing in qualitative data analysis to ensure accuracy and objectivity. This minimized errors arising from a single unit of analysis. At this stage, research questions were asked in the same order and participants' opinions were recorded with a voice recorder to ensure consistency throughout the study. The technique suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) was used to calculate inter-coder reliability, and reliability was measured at 0.90 (90%). Validity was also ensured by directly quoting participant opinions. A comparison between two coders was conducted on 250 coding units. The analysis revealed that consensus was reached in 225 units and disagreement occurred in 25 units. Based on these results, the inter-coder reliability rate was calculated as follows:

Reliability = Consensus / Consensus + Disagreement = 225/225+25 = 0.90

The resulting 0.90 rate indicates a high level of consistency between the codes. According to Miles and Huberman, a reliability rate above 80% is expected. In this respect, it can be stated that the thematic coding is reliable and the analysis results are built on a solid foundation.

Results

This section of the research presents the findings related to the analysis conducted on the data obtained from the participants. In this study, which used qualitative research methods, data was collected through face-to-face interviews using a semi-structured interview form.

In this study, four main themes were identified as a result of the thematic analysis conducted based on the responses of 25 participants to 10 different questions. The majority of participants emphasized that long-term athlete development should be achieved in a gradual and planned manner. In particular, it was stated that applying the LTAD model appropriately to age and developmental stages is critical for athlete development. Regarding coach competence, many participants stated that while their technical knowledge was sufficient, they also reported deficiencies in continuous development and field practice. Regarding motivation and athlete relations, it was observed that coaches primarily used methods such as rewards, positive feedback, and individual communication. Regarding theory-practice differences, it was frequently mentioned that there were difficulties in applying theoretical knowledge to the field and that field experience was critical. While participant responses generally indicated a positive development trend, they revealed that some challenges encountered in field practice and coach training persist.

Direct quotes from participants' views were included in the discussion of the research findings. At this stage, participants' real names were kept confidential, and each participant was presented with a code name, "K1" or "K2.".

Table 2: Frequency across Themes (Number of Responses).

Theme	Frequency
Coach Competence and Continuous Development	100
Long-Term Development and Staging	75
Motivation and Athlete Relations	50
Theory-Practice Differences	25

Table 2 shows the number of responses given by participants according to the themes created. Accordingly, there were 100 responses in the Coach Competence and Continuous Development theme, 75 responses in the Long-Term Development and Staging theme, 50 responses in the Motivation and Athlete Relations theme, and 25 responses in the Theory-Practice Differences theme.

Table 3: Long-Term Development and Staging Chart.

Participant	Answer Given
K1	Athlete development continues as long as they are actively playing.
K2	The LTAD model is planned according to age and developmental stages.
K5	Learning continues throughout one's career.
K18	Continuous improvement must be ensured.
K25	One should always be open to improvement.

This theme emphasizes the need to focus on long-term development processes, not just short-term performance goals, throughout an individual's athletic career. Participants emphasized the importance of a progressive education and training process tailored to an athlete's age and developmental stage. They emphasized that not only the athlete's physical abilities but also their mental, emotional, and social development should be considered.

In this context, the LTAD (Long-Term Athlete Development) model should be used as a guide, emphasizing the necessity of long-term and systematic planning to ensure lasting success and a sustainable athletic career. Participants emphasized that developing basic motor skills and a general sports culture, rather than premature specialization, will contribute to an athlete's long-term success.

Table 4: Coach Competence and Continuous Improvement.

Participant	Answer Given
K1	Coaches may be resistant to development due to high egos.
K3	Coaches must constantly improve themselves.
K9	The number of developing coaches is decreasing.
K13	In theory, there is competence, but in practice, there are problems.
K16	Implementation in the field is proving difficult.

This theme demonstrates that coaches' professional competencies should not be limited to initial training but should be continually updated throughout their careers. Participants emphasized that while theoretical knowledge may initially appear sufficient, the complexities, moments of crisis, and individual differences encountered in field practice necessitate coaches' openness to development. It was also noted that some coaches, by displaying their egos, are closed to innovation and criticism, which can negatively impact both their own development and the progress of the athletes they coach. In this context, it was stated that effective coaching practice should be

complemented not only by knowledge accumulation but also by openness to learning, field experience, and the ability to keep up with current approaches.

Table 5: Motivation and Athlete Relations

Participant	Answer Given
K2	I use goal setting and reward methods.
K5	Bonuses and verbal motivation are important.
K7	Sincere and paternalistic communication increases motivation.
K19	I use game elements to provide motivation.
K24	Positive feedback supports development.

This theme focuses on the importance of effectively utilizing athletes' intrinsic and extrinsic motivational sources and establishing healthy communication with athletes in the coaching process. Participants noted that methods such as goal setting, rewards, providing positive feedback, and one-on-one communication are effective in increasing individual motivation. It was particularly emphasized that coaches should consider athletes' individual needs and emotional well-being, and that establishing a sincere and supportive relationship enhances athlete performance.

Furthermore, it was stated that motivation should not be solely shaped by competitive outcomes; rather, it should focus on the process and support athletes' self-confidence and long-term commitment to the sport. It was particularly emphasized that trust and mutual respect form a critical foundation in coach-athlete relationships.

Table 6: Differences Between Theory and Practice

Participant	Answer Given
K8	The theory may not fully translate into practice.
K12	Learning through practice is more lasting.
K13	Theory doesn't always work in the field.
K16	The theory can be difficult to apply in practice.
K25	Immediate situations are more decisive than theory.

This theme emphasizes that theoretical knowledge cannot always be directly translated into field practice, and that coaches and athletes must develop flexible and creative solutions in practical applications. Participants noted that models presented within a theoretical framework are often designed for ideal conditions, while the reality of the field is much more variable and dynamic. Therefore, field experience is a crucial factor supporting theoretical knowledge and enabling sound practical decisions. It was stated that coaches should develop the skills to adapt to the situation, make spontaneous decisions, and demonstrate flexibility, rather than simply applying theoretical knowledge in the field. These findings indicate the need to align field practice with theoretical training, and that field experience should be given greater importance in coach training processes.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study are largely consistent with the literature on athlete development and coaching practices. In particular, the findings that athletes should be supported with plans appropriate to their age and developmental stages, in line with Côté's (1999) Long-Term Athlete Development model, are parallel to existing research. The participants' emphasis on the gradual development process highlights the risks of early specialization and the importance of lifelong participation in sport.

The study observed that coaches' awareness levels of the LTAD model varied, and some coaches, despite having general knowledge of the model's stages, did not adopt a systematic approach to implementation. This finding is similar to the Canadian example in the literature. The LTAD model implemented by the Canadian Athletics Federation does not limit the coach's role to supporting physical development; it also encompasses psychological, social, and pedagogical dimensions (Athletics Canada, 2003; Duman, Akbaş & Bayraktar, 2024). In particular, Canadian coaches' consideration of athletes' developmental stages when implementing the LTAD model directly contributes to success. Olympic success between 2000 and 2024 demonstrates the effectiveness of this systematic structure (Duman et al., 2024). In the Turkish case, adapting a similar model to football infrastructure is considered a step aligned with long-term success goals (Özkan & Özkan, 2016). One of the key points highlighted in the LTAD model is that coaches should plan according to the developmental stages of child and young athletes. However, the study found that some coaches still program according to chronological age and adopt performance-focused approaches rather than developmental appropriateness. This situation aligns with the warning emphasized in the Athletics Canada (2003) report that "premature specialization" can negatively impact athletes' later performance.

Self-efficacy refers to individuals' belief in their own competence to perform a specific task (Bandura, 1997). According to Bandura, self-efficacy has four primary sources: direct experiences of success, indirect experiences (modeling), verbal persuasion, and the individual's physiological and emotional state (Bandura, 1994; Sakız, 2013). In this context, football coaches' past successes, the support they receive from their peers, and the relationships they establish with role models can directly impact their self-efficacy levels. Indeed, the inconsistency some coaches exhibit in their on-field practices despite high levels of self-efficacy demonstrates that this source needs to be reinforced not only with knowledge but also with experience. Furthermore, when evaluated from the perspective of self-efficacy theory, it is known that coaches with high self-efficacy have more developed coping skills in difficult situations and are more resilient to negative feedback (Bandura, 1994; Sakız, 2013). In this respect, the impact of not only coaches' technical competence but also their self-efficacy levels on long-term athlete development is noteworthy.

Findings on coach efficacy, Cushion et al. (2003) supports the concept of the "gap between theoretical knowledge and field practice." It was observed that coaches' openness to professional development should be increased, and field experience and practical solution-generating skills play a complementary role to theoretical knowledge. This finding suggests that the content of sports education programs should not be

limited to the transfer of theoretical knowledge but should be supplemented with practical training.

The results obtained in terms of motivational strategies can also be evaluated within the framework of Deci and Ryan's (1985) theory of self-determination. The participants' emphasis on positive feedback, goal setting, and individual support is consistent with approaches aimed at strengthening athletes' intrinsic motivation. Furthermore, establishing trust-based communication in the athlete-coach relationship has been shown to have a direct positive impact on athletes' self-confidence and performance.

The findings regarding the theory-practice gaps support the work of researchers such as Knowles et al. (2005), who emphasize the uncertainty and need for flexibility encountered in coaching practice. The findings of this study also confirm the need for theoretical knowledge to be adapted to the dynamic and changing conditions in the field. Overall, this study provides important clues that training programs should be restructured with a more holistic, flexible, and practice-oriented approach to support the long-term development of athletes, increase coaches' field skills, and strengthen motivational strategies.

In conclusion, this study examined coaches' views on athlete development, coach competence, motivational methods, and theory-practice fit using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that athlete development should be supported through long-term, gradual processes, and that coaches should not rely solely on technical knowledge but strive for continuous improvement. It was observed that positive communication, reward, and individual support strategies were effective in increasing athlete motivation, but theoretical training did not always directly translate into field practice.

While participants' responses generally indicated a conscious approach to athlete development, they also revealed that some structural and individual shortcomings persisted in practice. The inter-coder reliability rate of 90% indicates that the thematic structures obtained were established with high consistency. The study concluded that planned training processes, coach training, and motivational strategies should be addressed from a holistic perspective to support athletes' long-term success. It has been demonstrated that for the LTAD model to be effectively implemented, coaches must possess not only technical knowledge but also developmental awareness, self-efficacy, field experience, and flexible application skills. It is crucial for coaches working with children and young athletes, in particular, to embrace long-term, holistic development approaches rather than premature specialization. Consequently, sustainable athlete development will only be possible by restructuring coach training to encompass multidimensional competencies.

Suggestions

Interdisciplinary approaches should be adopted in the areas of athlete development, coach competence and motivation.

Sports federations, clubs and academic institutions should collaborate to make coach training more comprehensive.

Policy development studies should be carried out with the joint participation of athletes, coaches and managers based on the findings of the research.

In future research, the relationships within the athlete, coach, and parent triangle should be examined more deeply.

Kısaltmalar / Abbreviations

LTAD	Long-Term Atlete Development
TFF	Turkish Football Federation
SPSS	Sosyal bilimler için istatistik paketi (Statistical package for the social sciences)

Beyanlar / Declarations

Etik Onay ve Katılım Onayı / Ethics approval and consent to participate

Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma ve yazım sürecinde "Yükseköğretim Kurumları Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiği Yönergesi" kapsamında bilimsel, etik ve alıntı kurallarına uyulmuş olup; toplanan veriler üzerinde herhangi bir tahrifat yapılmamış ve bu çalışma herhangi başka bir akademik yayın ortamına değerlendirme için gönderilmemiştir. Makale ile ilgili doğabilecek her türlü ihlallerde sorumluluk yazara aittir. Çalışma için etik onay, Gazi Üniversitesi Rektörlüğü Etik Komisyonu tarafından verilmiştir (belge no. 23/09/2025 2025-1603). Tüm katılımcılar bu çalışmaya gönüllü olarak katılmıştır.

During the preparation and writing of this study, scientific, ethical and citation rules were followed in accordance with the 'Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Guidelines'; no alterations were made to the collected data, and this study has not been submitted for evaluation to any other academic publication medium. The author is solely responsible for any violations that may arise in connection with this article. The Ethical approval for the study was granted by the Ethical approval for the study was granted by the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Gazi University, Faculty of Social and Human Sciences (document no. 23/09/2025 2025-1603). All participants voluntarily participated in this study.

Veri Ve Materyal Erişilebilirliği / Availability of data and material

Bu çalışmanın bulgularını destekleyen veriler, makul talepler üzerine sorumlu yazardan temin edilebilir. Veri seti yalnızca akademik amaçlar için erişilebilir olacak ve verilerin herhangi bir kullanımı, orijinal çalışmayı referans gösterecek ve katılımcıların gizliliğini koruyacaktır.

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. The dataset will be accessible only for academic purposes, and any use of the data will recognize the original study and maintain the confdentiality of the participants.

Çıkar Çatışması / Competing interests

Yazarlar, bu makalede sunulan çalışmayı etkileyebilecek herhangi bir çıkar çatışması veya kişisel ilişkiye sahip olmadıklarını beyan etmektedirler.

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Yazar Katkıları / Authors' Contribution Statement

Çalışmanın tasarımı ve planlanması: M.İ.Ö., A.E.; Veri toplama, analizi veya yorumlanması: M.İ.Ö; Makalenin yazımı: M.İ.Ö., A.E..; Veri düzenleme, yöntem belirleme, yazım – özgün taslak, yazım – gözden geçirme ve düzenleme: M.İ.Ö..; Tüm yazarlar, makalenin önemli noktalarını eleştirel bir şekilde gözden geçirmiştir. Tüm yazarlar makalenin son halini onaylamıştır.

Design and planning of the study: M.İ.Ö., A.E.; Data collection, analysis or interpretation: M.İ.Ö.; Manuscript preparation: M.İ.Ö., A.E..; Data organization, methodology development, writing - original draft, writing – review and editing: M.İ.Ö..; All authors critically reviewed the key points of the manuscript and approved the final version.

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