The key themes of issues and challenges in developing the quality framework for football coaching education in Malaysia

Fakrul Hazely Ismail | Zulakbal Abd Karim | Mohd Faridz Ahmad | Noor Izwan Nasir

Abstract: Sports coaching education and development has consistently been a topic of discussion on a global scale. Coaching education is considered to be essential for both sustaining and improving the quality of sports coaching. The development of a quality framework for sports education will serve as a guide to ensure consistency, relevance, and effectiveness in coaching and enable coaches to optimise athlete development and performance. This study aims to discuss the issues and challenges of developing the Malaysia Football Coaching Education Quality Framework. This study uses the qualitative method of Evolved Grounded Theory (EGT). The data from five football coaches (n=5) nationwide from the National Sports School, State Sports School, District Training Centre and Tunas Academy representing the executing group and five football stakeholders (n=5) representing the management group were collected from semi-structured in-depth interviews, observations and writing documents to determine the main issues and challenges. The data were transcribed verbatim and analysed using ATLAS.ti software through open coding, axial coding and selective coding processes. The following three themes emerged in the context of issues and challenges in developing the Malaysia Football Coaching Education Quality Framework: 1) Accredited Coaching Course/Coaching Certification, 2) Opportunity to Attend Coaching Course, and 3) Coaching Syllabus. Therefore, the findings will help national football stakeholders develop the Malaysia Football Coaching Education Quality Framework. Through this framework, stakeholders and governing bodies can cooperate to upgrade the existing program and improve the quality of football coaching education in Malaysia. In fact, quality football coaches can help to produce quality footballers in Malaysia. In addition, the Malaysia Football Coaching Education Quality Framework can become a guideline for football coaches in Malaysia.

Keywords: sports coaching education, coaching effectiveness, qualitative, issues/challenges, football coaching framework.

1. Introduction

Football is considered one of the most popular sports in the world, involving physical, technical, tactical, and psychological aspects (Alves et al., 2017). The Federation of International Football Association (FIFA) has established a legal framework and invested significant financial resources in many parts of the world to assist soccer development and maximise its social and economic benefits (Mwasiagji et al., 2022). Football is a phenomenon in today’s world, including in Malaysia (Salim et al., 2022). Football has a long history in Malaysia, dating back to the advent of the British. Malaysia began establishing a football competition called the Malaya Cup in 1920, which was eventually renamed the Malaysia Cup in 1963. The Football Association of Malaysia (FAM) is the governing organisation of football in Malaysia. It is an autonomous organisation in charge of developing national football. Football games were introduced at the school level under the Ministry of Education (MOE) recognition.

Coaching education qualifications are part of a qualification framework. It is based on learning outcomes. The sports framework is based on occupational and professional profiles developed with branch organisations, employers, and sports sector employees (Resende et al., 2016). Implementing the learning outcome approach is broader than describing the qualification frameworks developed. It also includes methods of assessments, the curriculum, validation mechanisms, and the freedom to develop individual pathways. With massive football participation worldwide, it is difficult to underestimate coaches’ collective influence on participants’ lives. Consequently, building a systematic football coaching education framework and infrastructure to recruit, develop and support football coaches is necessary. Coaching education programs offer a framework that coaches can use in their coaching (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). However, because of the nature of the framework, coaches frequently hesitate to develop a heuristic model. Many frameworks have defined coaching functions or skills since these abilities are required for a coach to perform successfully in his or her environment and complete tasks (Kubischta, 2018).
Some key challenges are faced by coaches in Malaysia, including the education curriculum for coaches (Kassim, 2014). There are various issues highlighted in this regard. Among them are the coaches involved in not receiving proper accreditation, lack of good technical knowledge, coaching allowances, coaching licence issues and coaching skills among the coaches themselves (Karim, 2016). This research objective is to develop the Malaysia Football Coaching Education Quality Framework. The study also identified the benefits and effectiveness (Karim et al., 2018) of the Malaysia Football Coaching Education Quality Framework for football coaches in Malaysia.

Sports coaching education and development has consistently been a topic of discussion on a global scale in several Western nations, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (Nelson et al., 2013). Coaching education programs such as coaching courses are essential to helping coaches gain knowledge and enhance their competency (Ismail et al., 2020). Coaches’ expertise includes many facts, such as which drills are most suited to an athlete’s developmental level and which are most likely to improve player skill levels (Karim & Nadzalan, 2017). Coaches must also understand how to condition athletes safely. They must be able to manage successful practices and modify in-game scenarios.

The FIFA reported that the primary issue that can directly or indirectly impact soccer development at the grassroots level and club performance is the applicable regulatory framework (Mwasiaji et al., 2022). A regulatory framework is a collection of all applicable legislative documents and how they are administered, which is generally sanctioned by industry regulators to govern specific activities by a designated agency or entity. In addition, according to numerous studies, Diejomaoh et al., (2015) suggested that a robust legal and regulatory framework by national governments and football regulating organisations is part of the contextual variables required for football development.

Numerous studies affirm that coaches gain knowledge and information from formal professional clinics, seminars, and workshops. Although coaches have their own sources of knowledge, formal, nonformal, and informal sources influence coaching in general. To ensure that athletes can face any challenges posed by club management, players, or supporters, a coach must have superior knowledge of planning effective coaching and coaching process development (Clemente et al., 2015). Hence, this study is important for developing the Malaysia Football Coaching Education Quality Framework as the main guideline for football coaches. It can also improve football coaching education in Malaysia and produce quality footballers.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Participants

The researcher used purposive sampling followed by theoretical sampling in this study, as suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998). First, the researcher used stratified purposive sampling to direct his selection of his subjects to locate and select cases linked to the phenomena of interest that were rich in information. The focus of purposive sampling is the development of theory through constant comparative analysis of data gained from theoretical sampling. The theoretical sampling process of participants begins with identifying a relevant sample. The process continues until theoretical saturation is reached.

The samples used in this study were divided into two groups (the Executing Group and Management Group). Table 1 shows that five coaches (n=5) from the National Sports School, State Sports School, District Training Centre and Tunas Academy represented the executing group, Table 2 shows that five participants (n=5) from the National Sports Council, the FAM and the MOE represented the management group. The ages of the participants in both groups ranged from 37 to 52 years. In general, all research participants in this study had experience as football players and had more than 10 years of experience in the field of coaching and coaching management. Interview findings indirectly help the researcher carry out this study well apart from findings through observation and document analysis. The written approval of the MOE via the Educational Research Application System (eRAS 2.0).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Academic Qualification</th>
<th>Football Coaching Qualification</th>
<th>Coaching Experience</th>
<th>Best Achievement (Player)</th>
<th>Best Achievement (Coach)</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E1</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>B License</td>
<td>15 Years</td>
<td>Inter Varsity Games</td>
<td>Asian School Games</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E2</td>
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<td>Degree</td>
<td>A License</td>
<td>15 Years</td>
<td>International National</td>
<td>AFC U19</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
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<tr>
<td>E3</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>B License</td>
<td>13 Years</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>MSSM/NFDP Carnival</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E4</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>C License</td>
<td>12 Years</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>NFDP Carnival</td>
<td>Part Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E5</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>D License</td>
<td>17 Years</td>
<td>International</td>
<td>National Futsal League</td>
<td>Part Time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Primary data
2.2. Research Design

This study was conducted using the qualitative method of evolved grounded theory (EGT) (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The researcher is an instrument for qualitative methods (Lebar, 2017). As a consequence of the literature review, and through the validation process by five experts, the researcher developed an interview guide to ensure that the questionnaire used in the interviews focused on the objective of the study. The interviews primarily consisted of open-ended inquiries and were conducted in a one-on-one format, enabling the participants to discuss the matters at hand. The utilisation of open-ended questions in interviews enables the interviewer to pose the same or similar inquiries to multiple participants, hence facilitating the acquisition of consistent responses. The use of a semistructured interview methodology enables the researcher to establish predetermined questions. On the other hand, the responses to inquiries are subject to further questioning and can be expanded upon based on the requirements of the researcher and participants. An open-ended semistructured data gathering interview was conducted by the researcher (Patton, 2014). According to Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) principle, data gathering analysis occurs continuously and iteratively, and the continual comparison of new data with past data occurs during theoretically directed data collection after the initial purposefully selected participants. Until theoretical saturation is attained, theoretical sampling is used. In addition, data from the observations, and other written documents were also used in this study. EGT also emphasises theory development (Lebar, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This study aligns with previous research, such as that of Khairulhalimi and Karim, (2020), Ismail et al., (2020) and Côté et al., (1995).

2.3. Analysis

In grounded theory, a key data analysis element is coding, which labels particular data segments of a specific type. All the data of this study were collected from semistructured in-depth interviews, observations, and writing documents. Five football coaches (n=5) from the executing group were accredited by the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) “A”, “B”, “C” and “D” licences, and five participants from football stakeholders were interviewed over five months, ranging from 50 to 90 minutes. The aim of the study, the risks, and the protection of the conducted research were briefly explained to the research participants. Before they sign the consent document, they are also permitted to ask questions.

Before beginning the interview, the participants had the chance to provide instructions. As Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggested, the data were transcribed verbatim and analysed. The data analysis process was carried out simultaneously with the actual data, tentative theory creation, and memos being interplayed progressively, whereby the data collected were broken down, conceptualised, and tentative themes discussed, following the basic principles of Strauss and Corbin and EGT principles. The information was broken down into codes and categories. As proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1998), the categories and tentative themes are cross-checked against the data by comparing the categories, the data, and the conclusions.

This study was analysed using Atlas.ti software through open coding, axial coding and selective coding processes. Coding is an analytical procedure that involves identifying data concepts, similarities, and conceptual repetitions. Coding is the essential link between gathering or generating data and developing a theory to explain the data for data analysis in this study (Chun Tie et al., 2019). Strauss and Corbin (1998) highlighted three steps fundamental to grounded theory in qualitative research. Other measurements, such as the theoretical sensitivity, process, conditional matrix, and theoretical sampling, will throughout these three stages. In addition, they stated that coding is a concept that is frequently reduced to words to describe what a data item is. It is an analytical procedure that examines the data line by line or paragraph by paragraph for an event or experience and the concept. According to Chun Tie et al., (2019), coding is specific, conceptualised, and reorganised in a new fashion. Using the recommended coding procedure, data from this interview should be analysed.

3. Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Academic Qualification</th>
<th>Football Coaching Qualification</th>
<th>Coaching/Managing Experience</th>
<th>Best Achievement (Player)</th>
<th>Best Achievement (Coach/Manager)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>PhD</td>
<td>B License</td>
<td>18 Years</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>IPT League</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>44</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>A License</td>
<td>14 Years</td>
<td>Malaysia Super League</td>
<td>Malaysia Super League</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M3</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>D License</td>
<td>10 Years</td>
<td>Malaysia Super League District</td>
<td>MSSM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M4</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>A License</td>
<td>20 Years</td>
<td>Malaysia Super League</td>
<td>Malaysia Super League</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M5</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>C License</td>
<td>15 Years</td>
<td></td>
<td>IPT League</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Primary data

Table 2 Management Group Demographic Table.
3.1. Issues and Challenges

The analysis of the data allowed us to establish three core categories that make up the key issues and challenges in developing the Malaysia Football Coaching Education Quality Framework (Table 1): i) an accredited coaching course/coaching certification, ii) an opportunity to attend a coaching course, and iii) a coaching syllabus.

Currently, there are many issues and challenges in football coaching. According to Ramalu, et al., (2020), football coaches face demanding schedules and time commitments, competing demands on their attention, and the stress of winning and losing. They also endure several difficulties, irritations, conflicts, and tensions, the magnitude of which is frequently underestimated. In addition, according to Karim, et al., (2018), coaches in Malaysia encounter several significant difficulties, including a lack of a clear coaching direction, few chances for coaches, and uncertificated awareness about their future employment.

3.2. Accredited Coaching Course/Coaching Certification

An accredited coaching course or certification is an essential requirement for a coach at the grassroots or elite levels. Attending the coaching course can also enhance the knowledge and competency of the coach. Taragos and Strand, (2021) reported that coaches who have a coaching licence have a better level of quality than coaches who do not have a coaching licence. The problem identified among coaches, especially at the grassroots level in Malaysia, is that a few coaches and teachers train school students who do not have an accredited coaching licence. This statement is as stated by EG1, "As long as I have been involved in the coaching field, especially at the grassroots level, there are still coaches who do not have a coaching licence. Similarly, schoolteachers who coach football teams also do not have a coaching licence".

EG3 also opined, "There is a former player I know who does not have a licence even at the Grassroots Coaching Level coaching the Academy team. Academy management trusts him as an experienced former player". EG3 was added, "My friend has a B Licence and coaches a social league team. He had a long-term goal of coaching, but with the competition of numerous coaches and time constraints, he still does not want to upgrade the level of football coaching certification".

The statement supported by MG2, "Throughout my observation and experience at schools, many physical education teachers involved in school team football coaching only had Grassroots Coaching and D Licence. They do not want to attend the next-level coaching course because they think they cannot go further."

EG5 mentioned that, "The governing bodies and states’ FA should organise the refreshment course, grassroots, D licence, and C licence frequently because of coaching demand if you can see too many football academies in Malaysia now. To date, Selangor, Johor, KL, Negri Sembilan, and several FA states have always organised these courses. I hope all states in Malaysia can organise the courses and cooperate with NGOs.

However, EG4 thought, "Currently, I see many coaches from the community, especially among the parents, attend the Grassroot Football Coaching Courses because of their passion, and they want to enhance their coaching knowledge." According to Selimi et al., (2023), formal coach education is considered an integral and necessary component of a coach’s developmental journey.

3.3. Opportunity to Attend a Coaching Course

The opportunity to attend coaching courses is a subtheme in the issue of coaching education in Malaysia. According to the FAM F:30 report, there are two paths of coaching education, namely, the community path and the professional path, where a holistic approach involving technical, tactical, mental, and physical components is emphasised to improve how to change the game according to the situation. EG5 said, "Not all coaches have the opportunity to attend the coaching course. Due to the financial constraints of expensive course fees, some find it difficult to get permission from the head of the department. Problems such as this sometimes prevent coaches from moving forward."

According to the EG2 opinion, "I think the chance for a school-level coach to become a professional coach is quite difficult. For example, my friend had an A Licence but was not allowed to become a professional coach, or even an assistant, possibly because too many coaches and former players were involved. I think the chance for a school-level coach to become a professional coach is slim. For example, my school has a coach with an A Licence but was not allowed to become a professional coach, even as an assistant, maybe because there are too many coaches among former players." Former players often become involved in the field of coaching after retirement. Eligibility factors in academics also limit them from obtaining better jobs in addition to being coaches.

Even the factor of playing experience gives them advantages to be professional coaches compared to coaches from among teachers. According to Nash and Sproule (2009), playing is one of the primary keys to a coach’s performance. Gonzalez-Rivera et al., (2017) mentioned that the coach’s experience as a former athlete is one of the critical sources of knowledge.

3.4. Coaching Syllabus

https://www.malque.pub/ojs/index.php/mr
The absence of a coaching module was one of the issues raised by all research participants. Many participants in the interviews expressed irritation about the lack of guidelines for coaches, including coaching syllabuses, coaching curricula, coaching modules, and other words intended to serve a similar capacity for their coaching programs. For example, MG1 said, “The governing body should establish the basic football match analysis for the new coaching syllabus. It can also help coaches understand how important the syllabus is in modern football. In addition, coaches do not need to take sports science courses separately. The governing bodies need to combine the syllabus with existing football coaching courses”. MG3 suggested, “I think for the future, FAM and AFC need to upgrade the grassroots coaching course like C to A Licence due to demands of the grassroots football. There are different approaches between the grassroots and adult football levels.” The following suggestion was also agreed upon by the EG4: “The governing body in this country should revise the coaching syllabus, especially in grassroots football. We need to upgrade the syllabus to the same as the existing syllabus.” All the statements parallel Jiang and Yin (2022), that a sports curriculum can develop social skills and sports coaching in academic and career development.

![Image](https://www.malque.pub/ojs/index.php/mr)

**Figure 1** The key theme of issues and challenges in developing the Malaysian Football Coaching Education Quality Framework.

4. Discussion

This study examines the issues and challenges in developing the Malaysian Football Coaching Education Quality Framework. The study’s findings revealed three main issues and challenges: an accredited coaching course/coaching licence, the opportunity to attend the coaching course and the of a coaching syllabus.

The issues and challenges that have been identified are also very important in helping to develop a coaching framework. Through these results, stakeholders can improve the framework that will be produced and improve the existing program infor producing quality football coaches. Previous studies have emphasised the importance of issues and challenges, as mentioned by Işık et al., (2022). Therefore, formal education can develop coaches’ competencies (Galdino et al., 2023).

5. Final Considerations

In conclusion, stakeholders and governing bodies should develop the Malaysian Football Coaching Education Quality Framework based on the issues and challenges that have been identified. It will help stakeholders and governing bodies provide the best syllabus, new knowledge, and coaching education to produce the Malaysian Football Coaching Education Quality Framework as the main guideline for football coaches in Malaysia. Hence, findings will also help to improve the quality of football coaching education in Malaysia and to produce top-class football players.

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Ethical considerations

The application to use human research subjects from the ethics committee of the Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI) Research Management and Innovation Centre (RMIC) are the procedures that must be followed. Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in this study.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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