

Malaysia Football Coaches: Development Characteristics

Zulakbal Abd Karim¹ & Ali Md Nadzalan¹

¹Department of Coaching Science, Faculty of Sports Science & Coaching,
Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris

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Abstract

In this study, the defining development pathways of “A”, “B” and “C” licenced coaches in Malaysia, were examined from the perspective of identifying critical issues and challenges. This research was guided by principles of evolved grounded theory (EGT), (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Twelve participants were recruited based on the principles of theoretical sampling (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), eventually a cross section of “A”, “B” and “C” licenced coaches were recruited that adequately represented the various levels. In-depth semi-structured interviews were used to explore how participants organised and understood their coaching experiences was used with a recursive design whereby newly identified themes could be explored in subsequent interviews. Furthermore, probe questions were also used to explore ideographic themes and issues relevant to each interviewee. Initially data analysis involved creating electronic written transcripts of the participant’s answer during the interviews. The data underwent systematically construction, deconstruction and reconstruction stages. As expected, stages of development emerged as a central overarching category. Based on the analysis, the following four stages of development emerged, a) pre-accreditation, b) participation, c) developmental and d) performance. These four stages of development formed the central structure of the constructed grounded theory.

Keywords: Coaching Development Pathways, Coaching Competencies, Coaching Challenges, Coaching Issues, Coaching Knowledge

1.0 Introduction

The most popular sport in Malaysia is football and Malaysians love to play and watch football (Pundyk, 2004). Malaysia was formerly the king of Southeast Asian football and widely respected in the Asian continent. Despite performance inconsistencies in several decades, football is still considered as the number one sport in Malaysia based on television audiences, compared to other sporting events viewed (Hamid & Kendall, 2008). Malaysia has 11 “Professional Diploma” coaches, approximately 700 “B” license coaches, 318 “Advanced” coaches (equivalent to “B” license), approximately 4,000 “C” license coaches, approximately 1,000 “Preliminary” coaches (equivalent to “C” license) (Karim, 2016).

Sport coaches have a crucial role in contributing to individual and team performance (Holt, 2016). Unlike the scientific study of athlete development, scant attention has been paid to the intricacies of coach development stages (Nash, 2008). Football coaching can be a fulfilling and rewarding vocation. Inherent in the coaching role, however, there are many challenges and stressors. Football coaches face demanding schedules and time commitments, excessive workloads, conflicting roles and the pressure to win and cope with defeat. According to Surujlal and Nguyen (2011) football coaches face a number of challenges, frustrations, conflicts and tensions, the enormity of which is often underestimated. McNamara (2001) suggested that, the 'chaotic lifestyle' includes travel, regular dislocation from family and friends, long undefined hours, limited time for oneself and lack of job security.

2.0 Method

Evolved grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was adopted as the steering methodology in the current research. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), data is generally collected by using interviews, observations, diaries, or other written documents. The resultant theory is gradually built from the accumulation of raw data and evolves from the naming of phenomena and themes.

2.1 Participants

The coaches involved were deliberately and exclusively recruited from Malaysia. The procedure for identifying these participants initially focused on specifying the characteristics relevant to sampling, in this case coaches holding Asian Football Confederation "C," "B", and "A" licences. With the assistance of FAM, participant coaches were recruited from the Malaysian School Sports Council Football tournament, National Youth League, and the Malaysian Super League.

3.2 Procedures

Following the basic principles of Strauss and Corbin (1990) and evolved grounded theory (EGT) principles, the process of data analysis was conducted in concert with the actual data, tentative theory creation, and the memos being interplayed progressively, whereby the data collected was broken down, conceptualised, and tentative themes discussed. The data was later transformed into codes and categories. The categories and the tentative themes were then verified against the data by comparing the categories, with the data and the conclusions as suggested by Strauss and Corbin, (1990). The methods used permits analytical techniques, it also enables a richer and deeper framework for understanding the complexity of development in the dynamic field of coaching development (Pellegrino, Chudowsky & Glaser, 2001).

2.2.1 Step I – Open Coding

Open coding involves assigning provisional conceptual labels to events and other phenomena. In the current research, each conceptual label was generated from a line-by-line analysis of the transcribed interviews. During this open coding phase, flexible coding was used to include any conversation event with the participants that were interesting or relevant to the general aim of the study. Throughout the study, the data were continuously questioned and compared and led

to coding more incidents, memories, experiences, information and knowledge provided by the participants. Through the open coding procedure, approximately 3,200 codes were identified from participants in Malaysia. This resulted from line-by-line micro-analysis of the interview transcripts.

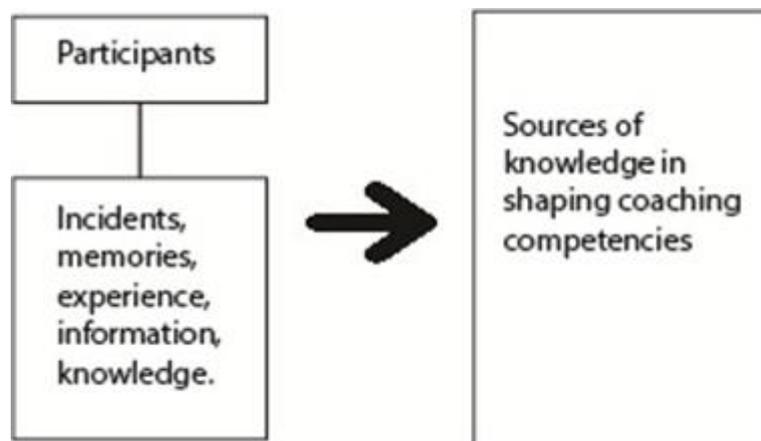


Figure 1. Open Coding

2.2.2 Step II - Theoretical Sensitivity.

According to Glaser (1978), theoretical sensitivity is essentially a personal quality of the researcher, referring to an awareness of the subtleties in meaning of the data. That is, researchers possess varying degrees of sensitivity depending on previous reading and experience within relevant contexts. Glaser and Strauss (1967) discussed how theoretical sensitivity refers to the attribute of having insight, the ability to give meaning to data, capacity to understand, and importantly the capacity to separate the most pertinent information out. This process occurs on a conceptual level, rather than a concrete level.

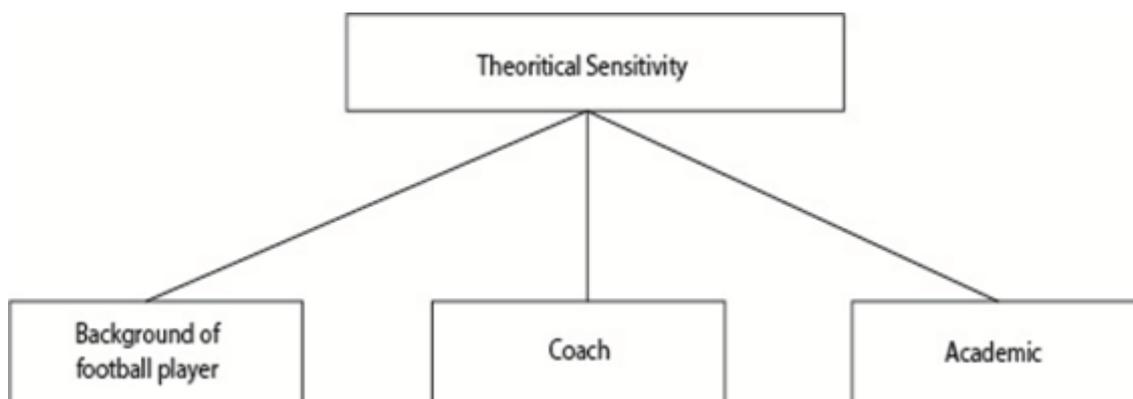


Figure 2. Theoretical Sensitivity

2.2.3 Step III – Axial Coding

Consistent with the EGT model, the axial coding phase was carried out to identify links between the categories/themes that were developed in the open coding step. The general or more inclusive concepts that emerged from the data were placed in the phenomenon segment in the axial coding phase. Other concepts were then provisionally linked to these concepts. Data that appeared to fit the criteria as potentially causal conditions, intervening conditions, or other

components in the axial coding phase were provisionally placed until they were verified by further interviews and observations.

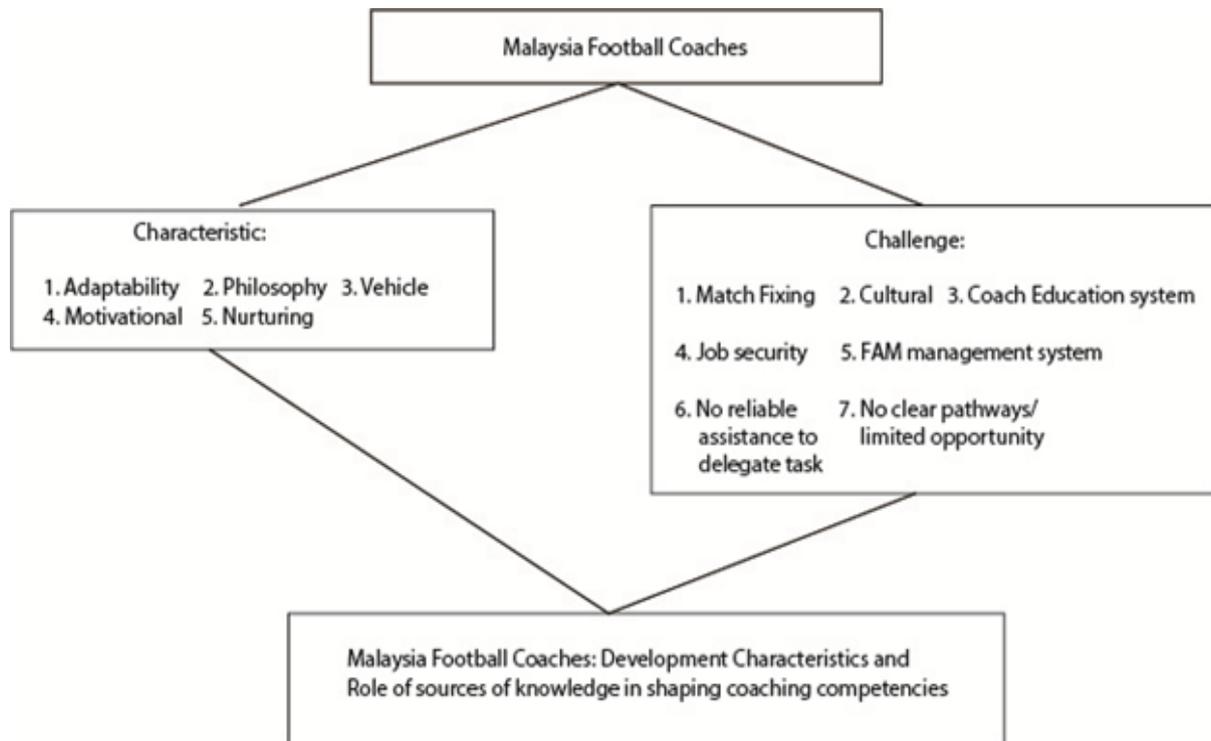


Figure 3. Axial coding

2.4 Step IV – Selective Coding

Selective coding (SC) was used to determine core categories by intergrading and refining the developing theory. At this selective coding stage, categories were basically descriptions of data and not yet a fully-developed theory. The first step in this SC process was deciding on a central category that represented the main theme of this study. Each concept identified as a phenomenon during the axial coding process was accepted as a main category and each of these main categories was related to the core category.

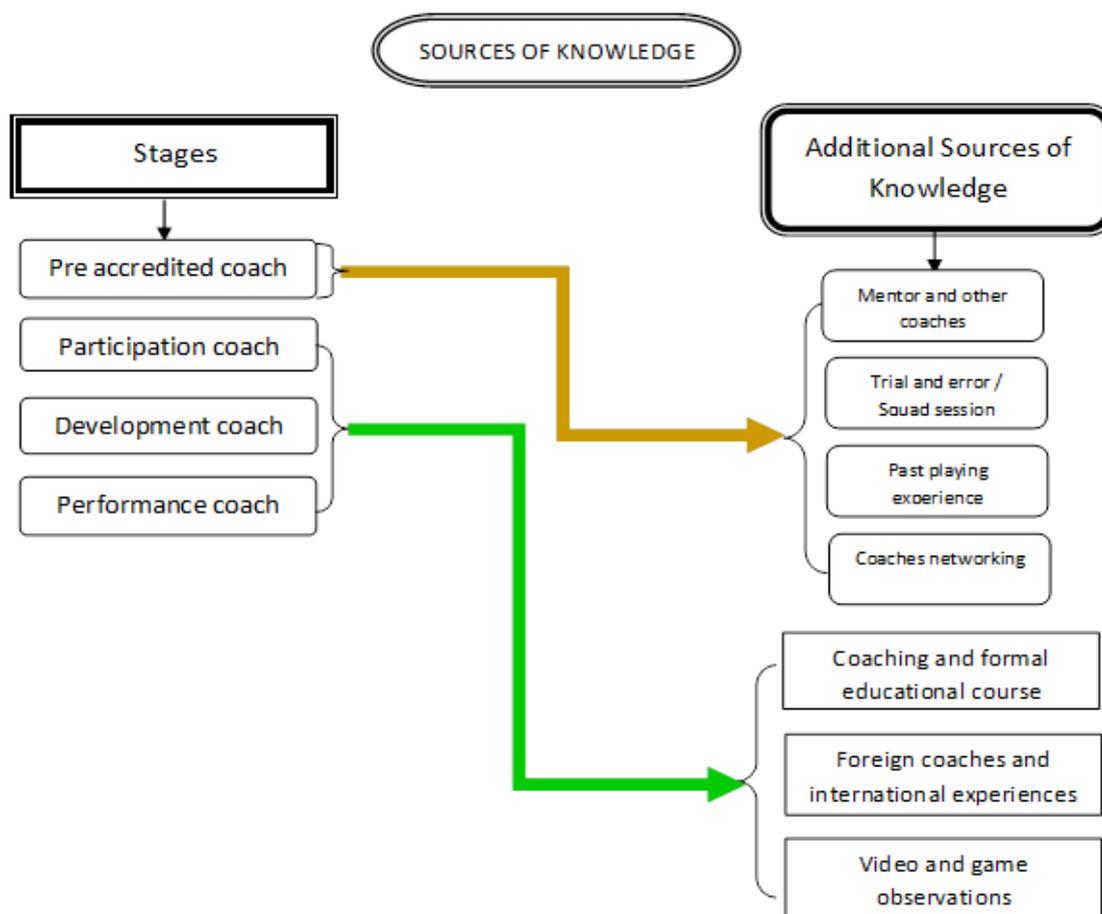


Figure 4. Selective Coding

3.0 Results

3.1 Stages of Development

Stages of development (SOD) emerged as one of the main categories. The SOD category was highly relevant to the main aim of this study, namely to establish and delineate the stages of development for football coaches in Malaysia. Based on the analysis, the following four stages were identified: Pre-accreditation coaches, Participation coaches, Developmental coaches and Performances coaches.

3.1.1 Pre-Accredited Coach (PAC)

As indicated in the following quotes, the building blocks of coaching behaviour began before they were qualified with formal accreditation by the Football Governing Bodies (FGB). For example, coach A1 discussed how he decided to commence coaching because he was not enjoying playing anymore overseas, and believed he could probably give more as a coach. "I just decided to get into coaching straight away and it's just taken off from there". Similarly coach A2, started coaching when still at university and he progressed from there because it was part of his university degree, "I went and did my degree at University and just started coaching there and I continued at every level". Meanwhile for coach A3, the start of his coaching career was completely unplanned. He was asked initially to coach by a parent who knew him as a player; "A tiller did some work in my kitchen and his son asked me, can you coach

me? Suddenly I felt the urge to do it" ... "I want you to do some private coaching with my son and it started from there". Coach A4 explained how he had begun thinking about getting involved in coaching, initially because of an injury saying; "I played for about 4 or 5 years before an injury occurred and that's when I started to think about coaching".

3.1.2 Participation Coach (PC)

Conversely, coach B3 mentioned the categorisation of coaching context according to the age group and stated that; "I started when I was 16 as a coach and I did a couple of years coaching in junior football". Coach A3, expressed his views about the importance of unstructured situations in this early stage of his development. He stated that the best way to learn football is in unstructured situation saying that; "my philosophy is, the less I say, the less I appear, the best the session will be". Coach A3 also explained about the happiness that he wants players to feel in this stage, "when they are happier, they are a lot more creative, they are fresher, it is players centred". Coach A3 also stressed the point of happiness and enjoyment in training; "in my planned cycle, the tenth session is reserved for providing the equipment to the players and that's all.

3.2 Developmental Coach (DC)

Coaches at this DC stage were mostly involved in youth football. One of the coaches (A3) who had been involved in coaching at numerous levels and stages of development, chose to coach at the DC stage because of the influence he could provide to these young players at this stage, "I preferred coaching at the youth level... after I was getting feedback from my superior, my mentors and considering all my experience at all different areas of coaching, I preferred youth coaching, because the skill that I can impart to the youth". Coach A3 adding that "the biggest issue globally is why can't there be recognition especially for development coaches or elite youth coaches". According to coach A3, the FGB are unable to provide enough resources to those who are coaching at the DC stage; "why can't we attract enough good coaches at the development stage? The reality is that people want to spend the money at the top". Coaches don't get the sack often but coaches don't get the accolades that they need either".

3.3 Performance Coach (PC)

Coach A3 stressed the point of uncertainty in the PC stage where sudden resignations and sacking occurs with disregard is one of the challenges coaches face. Coach A3 was disgruntled and stated; "I found in the senior coaching or at the club state league level, there were lack of professionalism". A sudden resignation or sackings occur and with disrespectfully, especially when the club wants to be promoted up to the state one or two level. They couldn't handle it professionally".

4.0 Discussion

This study explored the breadth and depth of what coaches are required to do and know. Coaching knowledge encompasses a broad range of information, for example which drills are best suited to athlete developmental level and most likely to improve player skill levels. Coaches must also know how to condition athletes safely.

They must know how to run a productive practice and how to make adjustments in game situations. But knowledge alone does not guarantee success. It is important that a coach understands when, where, and how to use information effectively. The coach will need to master communication and motivational skills to get their point across to players. The coach needs to be both aware of what knowledge is needed and how to develop these knowledge bases.

According to coaches interviewed, the ability to motivate players is a desirable trait that not every coach possesses. This somewhat elusive ability to motivate players is nevertheless a “tool of the trade” among successful football coaches. Coaches also expressed the view that even at the highest level desire and ability does not guarantee success. The coaches explained in different ways at length the many benefits of motivational skills as a coaching tool. According to the coaches interviewed, coaches above all else seek to help athletes to realise their personal potential by motivating athletes to overcome their weaknesses and build on their strengths.

5.0 Conclusion

The stages of development found in this study emerged as a central overarching category. Four stages of development emerged in the analysis; i) pre-accreditation, ii) participation, iii) developmental and iv) performance. These categories were relevant for Malaysian football coach samples and to a degree corroborate the findings of Schinke, Bloom and Salmela (1995). These four stages of development formed the central structure of the constructed grounded theory.

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Corresponding Author

Zulakbal Abd Karim

Department of Coaching Science,

Faculty of Sports Science and Coaching

Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris

Tanjong Malim, 35900

Perak, MALAYSIA

Email: zulakbal@fsskj.upsi.edu.my