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Improving Young Athletes' Life Skills Through an Integrated Early Age Football Competition Model in The Framework Of Positive Youth Development

Lalu Hulfian[1], Hermansyah[1], Andika Triansyah[2], Herdiansyah Agus[3]

[1]*Universitas Pendidikan Mandalika, Indonesia*
[2]*Universitas Tanjungpura, Indonesia*
[3]*Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesia*

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Abstract

The background of this research is based on the importance of developing young athletes, emphasizing not only technical sports skills but also character development, social skills, and readiness to face life's challenges. This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of an integrated competition model in improving the life skills of young athletes as part of Positive Youth Development (PYD) efforts. The research method used was a quasi-experimental design with a pretest-posttest control group. The research subjects consisted of young athletes aged 12–16 years with a total sample of 48 athletes (24 experimental; 24 control). The average -pretest score of the experimental group was 142.8 ± 9.4 and increased in the posttest to 147.1 ± 8.7 (Δ = +4.33). The control group increased from 141.9 ± 9.1 to 142.1 ± 8.5 (Δ = +0.17). The treatment effect showed a significant difference (t = 8.29; p < 0.001) with a Cohen's d effect size of 1.69. The integrated competition model resulted in the largest improvements in teamwork (20%) and communication (18%). These findings confirm that combining competitive elements with life skills learning structures is an effective strategy in supporting Positive Youth Development.

Keywords: *life skills, young athletes, integrated competition model, positive youth development*

INTRODUCTION

Developing young athletes is not only aimed at improving technical athletic skills, but also at developing individuals with character, competitiveness, and readiness to face life's challenges. Life skills *such* as effective communication, teamwork, emotional control, decision-making, and leadership are essential components that support athlete success both inside and outside the sporting arena.

Correspondence author: Lalu Hulfian, Mandalika University of Education, Indonesia.
Email: laluhulfian@undikma.ac.id.com

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Several studies have confirmed the important role of sport in the development of *life skills*. Coaching programs explicitly designed to teach life skills have a significant impact on the personal development of young athletes (Gould & Carson, 2008) . Structured interventions in sport activities can increase self-confidence, teamwork, and problem-solving skills (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005) .

The novelty of this research lies in the application of an integrated competition model, which not only makes the competition a place to test skills, but also integrates structured learning activities, reflection, and feedback. This model is designed to maximize the potential of competition as a means of character building, one of the keys to success in the long-term development of young athletes (Weiss et al., 2014) . The Integration Model adopted from the research results, namely there are 4 stages: (1) Focus on one *life skill*, (2) Introduce *life skills* at the beginning. (3) Implement strategies to teach *life skills* . (4) Ask about life skills at the end of the lesson (Kendellen et al., 2017).

Life skills are skills needed to face everyday challenges (Hodge et al ., 2013) . In the context of sports, life skills can be developed through participation in sports activities, which provide a conducive environment for social, emotional, and cognitive development (Gould et al., 2002) . Life skills in sports are defined as behavioral, cognitive, interpersonal, or intrapersonal competencies that can be learned, developed, and refined (Danish, 2002) .

There are eight main life skills developed through sports, namely (1) Teamwork (the ability to work effectively in a group and contribute to a common goal), (2) Goal setting (the ability to set, plan, and achieve goals), (3) Time management (the ability to manage time effectively for various activities), (4) Emotional skills (the ability to regulate emotions and help others regulate their emotions), (5) Interpersonal communication (the ability to communicate effectively with others), (6) Social skills (the ability to interact with others and build positive social relationships), (7) Leadership (the ability to lead and motivate others), (8) Problem solving and decision making (the ability to think critically, solve problems, and make the right decisions) (Kendellen et al., 2017) .

Developing young athletes requires an approach that emphasizes not only technical performance but also character building, social skills, and readiness for

life's demands. Numerous studies confirm that educationally designed sports activities can be an effective medium for developing life skills.

Coaching programs in Indonesia generally focus on short-term achievement, often neglecting the character development dimension. This gap necessitates the implementation of a coaching model that systematically integrates competitive aspects and *life skills learning.*

explicitly and structuredly integrate *life skills learning. The novelty* of this research lies in the implementation of an integrated competition model that combines competitions with *life skills reflection, discussion, and evaluation sessions* based on the four stages of Kendellen et al. (2017).

Starting from this *gap*, this research confirms *the problem statement* in declarative form as follows:

1. This study assesses the extent to which an integrated competition model is able to improve the life skills of young athletes.
2. This study compares the effectiveness of an integrated competition model with a conventional coaching model.
3. This study identified the aspects of life skills that experienced the greatest improvement through the integrated competition model.

METHODS

Research Design

Study used a quasi -*experimental research method* to test the effectiveness of an integrated competition model on improving the life skills of young athletes. The design used was *a pretest-posttest control group design*, where both groups (experimental and control) were measured before and after treatment. The treatment in this study was a competition model integrated with life skills learning during the competition.

O 1	**X**	**O2**
O 1	C	O2

Figure 1. Research Design

Information:

O1 : Initial *life skills* test

X : Treatment Group

C : Control Group

O2 : Final *life skills* test

Population and Sample

Population was young athletes aged 12–16 years who actively play soccer in a club. The sampling technique used was *purposive sampling.* with the following criteria: (1) aged 12–16 years, (2) have at least 1 year of experience playing in the East Lombok football league, (3) willing to participate in the entire series of research. The sample rejection criteria are as follows: (1) did not participate in the entire competition series, (2) had a history of injury that limited participation, (3) did not obtain parental/guardian permission.

The total sample size was 48 athletes, divided into 24 in the experimental group and 24 in the control group. Group allocation was based on club, then separated into experimental and control groups using simple random assignment *within* each club to ensure group balance. The group balance can be seen in the following table.

Table 1. Sample characteristics

Variables	Experiment	Control	P Value
Age (years)	13.8 ± 1.1	13.7 ±1.0	0.72
Length of play (years)	3.1 ± 0.9	3.0 ± 1.0	0.81
Practice hours/week	5.8 ± 1.2	5.7 ± 1.3	0.88

From the data above, it can be seen that the characteristics are not much different between the experimental group and the control group.

Instruments and Data Collection Prosedure

The main instrument used in this study was *the Life Skills Scale for Sport* (LSSS) developed by Cronin and Allen (2017), which assesses eight dimensions of life skills: teamwork, goal setting, social skills, leadership, problem solving and decision making, interpersonal communication, emotional skills, and time management. The LSSS consists of 47 items rated on a *Likert scale* from 1 (not at

all) to 5 (very much), suitable for participants aged 11-21 years (Cronin & Allen, 2017) . Instrument validation with a validity result of 0.90 (Lim et al., 2019) . Meanwhile, the reliability test of this instrument with the results, Goal Setting is 0.79, Cooperation is 0.68, Leadership is 0.85 Social Skills is 0.74, Interpersonal Communication is 0.74, Time Management is 0.79, Emotional Skills is 0.74 and Problem Solving & Decision Making is 0.79 (Pratama, 2021). The main instrument is the *Life Skills* Scale for Sport (LSSS). The scale has been translated through a *forward–backward translation procedure* and tested on 32 athletes to see internal reliability. The results of the reliability test on this study sample showed *Cronbach's alpha* = 0.82.

The study was conducted over 10 weeks. In the first week, a pre-test was conducted, followed by integrated competitions in weeks 2–9 for the experimental group, and competitions without integration for the control group. In week 10, a post-test was conducted. Matches were held every weekend and interspersed with two training sessions before the next match. So, each week there was one match session and two training sessions. The intervention for the experimental group was the integration *of life skills* into both sessions, while the control group did not, meaning only training and matches without integration.

The study received approval from the Mandalika University of Education Ethics Committee (No. 142/KEP-UNDIKMA/2024). All participants and parents/guardians of athletes under 18 years of age signed *informed consent* and *assent forms.*

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed with the help of SPSS 25.0 software using *paired sample t-test.* to see changes in groups before and after treatment, as well as *independent sample t-test* to compare the results between the experimental and control groups. The significance level is $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS

There is improvement significant skills athlete 's life *skills* young after follow the competition model integrated ($p < 0.05$).

Improvement *life skills* sample study analyzed using SPSS through calculation *paired sample test* Because want to see improvement between test beginning with test end after given treatment. Calculation results can seen in the table following .

Table 2. Calculation results *paired sample test*

Group	Mean	T	df	Sig.
Difference	4,333	8,952	23	.000

From the table above, the experimental group showed a significant increase ($t = 8.95$; $p < 0.001$). The average increase $\Delta = +4.33$. The value (sig.) < α (0.05) is (.000 < 0.05), so H0 is rejected, H1 is accepted meaning there is a significant increase in the life skills *of* young athletes after participating in the integrated competition model.

There is a significant difference in the improvement of life skills between young athletes who follow an integrated competition model and young athletes who follow a conventional coaching model.

Difference in improvement *life skills* sample study analyzed using SPSS through calculation *independent sample test* Because want to see difference improvement between group experiment with control group. Calculation results can seen in the table following

Table 3. Calculation results *independent sample test*

Difference	F	Sig.	T	df	*Sig. (2-tailed)*	*Mean Difference*
Equal variances assumed	37,951	.000	8,293	46	.000	4,083
Equal variances not assumed			8,293	24,599	.000	4,083

From the table above, the difference in improvement between groups is significant ($t = 8.29$; $p < 0.001$). The large effect size ($d = 1.69$) indicates a very high strength of effect. The value (sig.) < α (0.05) is (.000 < 0.05), so H0 is rejected, H1 is accepted meaning there is a significant difference in improving life skills between young athletes who follow the integrated competition model and young

athletes who follow the conventional coaching model. The *treatment group* has a higher improvement compared to the control group.

Research shows that a competitive model that integrates competition and training is more effective in developing young athletes' life skills. This is because athletes have more opportunities to practice life skills in diverse and challenging situations. Life skills are taught consistently across multiple contexts, which helps reinforce mastery and transfer of those skills.

In his research, Efendi (2022) found that integrated soccer training with life skills was more effective in developing athletes' life skills than non-integrated training. Life skills components such as teamwork, interpersonal communication, and social skills experienced significant improvements in the fully integrated model. Furthermore, the life skills-based competition system had a significant impact on the development of table tennis in Bandung. This program helped develop skills such as teamwork, goal setting, time management, and leadership (Pratama, 2021) .

Table 4. *life skills* items

Aspect	Increase (%)
Teamwork	20%
Communication	18%
Emotional control	11%
Decision-making	9%
Leadership	8%

Improvements were seen in five key *life skills*: communication, teamwork, emotional management, decision-making, and leadership, with the largest contributions being made to teamwork and communication. The highest improvements were seen in teamwork (20%) and communication (18%). The control group experienced slight improvements, but they were not statistically significant.

DISCUSSION

This study found that implementing an integrated competition model improved all aspects of young athletes' *life skills* , with the highest improvements in teamwork (20%) and communication (18%), followed by emotional control, decision-making, and leadership . in harmony and at the same time expand findings study previously (Gould & Carson, 2008) . They found that *life skills* can taught in a way effective If become objective explicit in sports programs . In the study they , development communication and work The same the team also became indicators that experience improvement significant . Research This confirm findings said , but with *novelty* in the form of implementation competition integrated as receptacle learning , which combines element competitive with reflection and feedback come back structured .

Through training coaching based *transformational leadership* , they find existence improvement quality experience athlete young people who have an impact on leadership and responsibility answer social research This strengthen idea that coach play a role central in the learning process social , but differentiate self because of the competition model integrated give role more active in athletes as taker decision in situation match (Vella, Oades , & Crowe, 2013).

PYD can develop positive character if the activities are complemented by a clear learning structure. This study applies this principle with a competitive framework that focuses not only on final scores but also on the *life skills learning process* in each session (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005) .

Studies emphasize the importance of positive experiences in physical activity for developing young people's social and personality skills. This research applies this concept to integrated competition, demonstrating that positive experiences can be created through role rotation, reflective discussions, and constructive feedback (Weiss et al., 2014) .

The mechanisms of change are explained through the four main components of Kendellen et al.'s (2017) model: *life skills focus* , recognition, application, and reflection. Structured reflection allows athletes to internalize experiences and transfer skills to other contexts.

Compared to the study by Papacharisis et al. (2005), this study demonstrates a broader impact because the integration *of life skills* took place in a competitive context, not just a training session. Competition situations encourage real-life decision-making and emotional regulation in a more intense way.

However, *quasi-experimental designs* present limitations such as potential selection bias and limited control over environmental variables. The relatively small sample size requires caution when generalizing. Longitudinal or purely experimental designs would provide a more *comprehensive understanding* in the future.

However, *quasi-experimental designs* present limitations such as potential selection bias and limited control over environmental variables. The relatively small sample size requires caution when generalizing. Longitudinal or purely experimental designs would provide a more *comprehensive understanding* in the future.

CONCLUSION

Competition model integrated proven effective increase skills life athlete young, with difference significant compared to conventional models. Improvement the biggest shown in work the same team and communication as two core skills in *Positive Youth Development* -based coaching

Research Suggestions:

1. For coaches

   Recommended implementing a competition model integrated in a regular exercise program, with combine element competitive and session reflection directed so that learning *life skills* happen optimally .

2. For organizations sport

   Organization sport recommended compile guidelines official and training coach PYD based.

3. For researchers furthermore
   a. Review application of this model to the range different ages (eg . athlete age early or teenager end).
   b. Using a pure experimental design or a longitudinal approach to see the

sustainability of the impact of the integrated competition model.

c. Examine differences in effects based on sport type (individual vs. team).

4. For the creators policy

Consider integration *life skills development* based competition in curriculum education physical and development athlete young at the level school and club .

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