

Coaches' pedagogical beliefs at Hungarian football academies

Abstract of PhD Thesis

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1. Introduction

After reviewing a significant amount of literature interpreting the concept of education, it can be stated that education or nurture is a complex, systematic, conscious, value-generating process aiming at personality and skill development, affecting both the community's and the individual's life. By stating this I do not aim to exclude those few theories declaring that in this process the educator is merely an adult and the educated a child.

This theory applies to sport too, which is considered a special value-creator and -mediator agent as it has been scientifically proven that all forms of sport are important tools of personality development. Given this, we could assume that the coach, being the person leading the sport activity is the planner and carer of this development. Despite this, it is not generally accepted by public opinion that the main aim of the coach besides performance enhancement is to pursue a consciously organized and valuable educative work. It is rather evident that school teachers' work is socially considered a pedagogical activity; however, this statement does not hold for coaches' activity, as their supposed main aim is rather performance enhancement than education. In case we agree with the proclamation that sport activities are efficient tools of personality development, we may as well safely define coaches as pedagogues.

2. Objectives

The primary aim of my dissertation was to introduce the pedagogical beliefs of coaches employed at Hungarian football academies through an extensive empirical research. Amongst many areas dealing with pedagogical beliefs, I focused on education, conception about children and differentiation. The collateral aim of my thesis was to contribute to the process of becoming a coach-educator by supporting the preparation of the curriculum of football coach education programmes based on the results presented in the dissertation. I anticipated the promotion of the right use of pedagogical 'tricks' in everyday life, as well as the establishment of a good coach-athlete relationship, always

considering the enhancement of the football coaches' pedagogical activity first. My research questions and hypotheses serve the objectives stated above.

2.1. Hypotheses

I assumed that

- H_{1a}**: football coaches acknowledge the relevance of pedagogical knowledge;
- H_{1b}**: football coaches' pedagogical beliefs are homogeneous;
- H₂**: football coaches prefer community values; however, their approach to those is inconsistent;
- H_{3a}**: different football coaches' views on the efficiency of educational tools are similar;
- H_{3b}**: different football coaches' views on pedagogical convictions are similar;
- H₄**: there is pedagogical antinomy between the football coaches' declared and realised pedagogical beliefs;
- H_{5a}**: there is a connection between football coaches' age and their pedagogical beliefs;
- H_{5b}**: there is a connection between coaches' years of professional experience and their pedagogical beliefs;
- H_{5c}**: there is a connection between football coaches' previous player experience abroad and their pedagogical beliefs;
- H_{6a}**: football coaches consider it important to be liked by their athletes;
- H_{6b}**: football coaches place the responsibility on external factors when they fail to establish good relations with their athletes;
- H_{7a}**: there is a connection between football coaches' age and their conception about children;
- H_{7b}**: there is a connection between football coaches' years of professional experience and their conception about children;
- H_{7c}**: there is a connection between football coaches' previous player experience abroad and their conception about children;
- H_{8a}**: football coaches consider the age and the skills of the players the most important factors when differentiating;

H_{8b}: during their practical work, coaches consider the age of their players the most important instead of their skills;

H_{8c}: football coaches do not consider position-based differentiation important neither in practice nor in theory;

H_{9a}: there is a connection between football coaches' age and their beliefs about differentiation;

H_{9b}: there is a connection between football coaches' years of professional experience and their beliefs about differentiation;

H_{9c}: there is a connection between football coaches' previous player experience abroad and their beliefs about differentiation.

3. Methods

3.1. Characteristics of the examined population

My research was conducted amongst the coaches working at Hungarian football academies, the institutions providing the most up-to-date professional background for recruits in competitive sports. I found it important for the participants of the research to form a precisely definable population by certain traits, such as thematic professional competences, activity in identical organizational structures, the special situation of these organizational units in talent management, and the age groups of their athletes.

The headcount of the whole population was provided by the leaders of the football academies concerned (N=217). Among these, 196 coaches participated in the research. Only one academy's coaches (Ferencvárosi Torna Club Labdarúgó Zrt.) were underrepresented in the research, at all other academies the presence of football coaches was not lower than 80%.

3.2. Methods of data collection

3.2.1. Analysis of documents

In order to have a deeper insight into the topic, I found it important to review the history of Hungarian coach education, in particular football coach

education. I examined documents (books, journals, print products) that introduced its evolution, specialization, institutional changes, the opinions related to all those, and the relevant legislative environment.

3.2.2. Survey questionnaire

When choosing the research methods used in my study, to be able to employ statistically workable data was an equally important factor, this is why I used a survey questionnaire. I narrowed down the topics of the national pedagogue research conducted in Hungary in the early 2000s (Golnhofer & Nahalka, 2001), to those I found relevant for coaches, and compiled a new questionnaire based on the interview outline used in that research. The paper-based surveys were filled individually by the coaches at each academy. Filling the survey was supported by my assistance in all cases. The data collection lasted from 31st March 2017 to 14th June 2017.

3.2.3. Structured interviews

In order to interpret most the research results in a reliable way, I complemented the data collection methods with structured interviews. When planning the interviews I took into consideration the survey's structure and its results. I focused on the question groups that could potentially help the evaluation and generalisation of the results.

3.3. Methodology of data processing

In my thesis, I analysed the coaches' beliefs taking into consideration their age, years of professional experience and previous player experience abroad as categorical variables when using crosstabs. In order to discover correlations, the following statistical methods were used:

- Pearson's chi-squared test
- Kendall's tau correlation coefficient
- Hierarchical cluster analysis

4. Results

4.1. Beliefs related to education or nurture

4.1.1. Educational effects

According to the two-thirds of coaches, the most effective way of education can be reached by *showing a good example* (mean=4.64; SD=0.62) and by *being consistent* (mean=4.64; SD=0.64). The high mean value and the low value of standard deviation both suggest homogeneous opinions.

Amongst the results, downgrading *affection* as a tool of education deserves special attention. Despite the fact that the main task of coaches, especially the ones working in elite sport academies is performance enhancement, it could be expected from them to relate to their athletes with care. This is important as the lack of affection can damage the development of their personality. Additionally, the lack of emotional attachment at a young age might lead to quitting sport activities. More attention could be drawn to the development potential of youngsters' emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2008) during coach education as it could trigger the decrease of coaches' incomprehension when it comes to young athletes' dropout and help promote their retention (Varga, 2017).

When ranking the most effective ways of educating young players on a scale of 10, *theoretical pedagogical knowledge* came out the last, which means that coaches equally underrate the consequences of missing pedagogical knowledge and of the lack of emotional ties.

To examine, whether some grouping of values can be discovered, that is whether some connections can be found between the values effecting education I applied hierarchical cluster analysis and the Furthest neighbour principle. Although some variables (e.g. *giving a good example – affection; the coach's personality – consciousness; patience – consistency; professionalism – ambitious work*) indeed form a group, and coaches have similar perceptions of the values, despite the fact that the linkages are rather

loose. *Theoretical pedagogical knowledge* has been left out even from these loose connections.

4.1.2. Educational values

Four groups of complex variables were considered in the process of revealing educational values: intellectual, individual, community-social and moral values.

The values ranked the highest were *honesty* and *uprightness*, which both belong to the group of moral values. At first sight it can be surprising that *talent* was only ranked to the 13th place out of 20 (SD=0.70), as at academies' excellence programmes talent is a key to success. In this case, this can be explained with the assumption that coaches expect that talent cannot be developed through education.

4.1.3. Convictions about education or nurture

Six complex variables were examined when measuring the coaches' beliefs and convictions about education: (1) ability of development and being educated, (2) community-individual, (3) capability ethics, (4) effort, (5) the coach's leadership style, (6) the role of the coach's personality.

In general, coaches believe that their *committed personality* is the factor that most affects their activity. Despite this, more than 60% of them agree with the statement that *coaches have a low impact on the development of their players' personality*, which means they question their players' potential to be educated. When analysing the statement above, significant differences were found based on the coaches' age, years of professional experience and previous player experience abroad. The beliefs related to the extent a player can be educated by a coach show a heterogeneous picture. The coaches consistently believe that *without congenital qualities a player can never become successful* (3rd rank out of 17, standard deviation 0.75). Despite the fact that the two concepts are not synonymous, it seems inconsistent that the coaches underrate talent, while they consider congenital qualities to be a prerequisite for athletes in order to become successful.

4.2. Conviction about children

4.2.1. The relevance of coach-athlete relationship

By examining coach-athlete relationship it has been found that the two-third of the coaches participating in the research considers unbearable their athletes' positive attitude. It has also been found that coaches working at football academies only consider the affective side of the educator-educated relationship important. Based on the results of the research, they would preferably have a coach-athlete relationship based on trust, however the standard deviation belonging to this value (SD=1.00) shows that their opinion is not homogenous.

Significant relationships were found when investigating the connection between years spent in the profession for the coaches who did not desire to be liked by their athletes (by giving the answer "*being accepted by the athletes is enough*"). Pearson's chi-squared test ($\chi^2=17.89$, $df=8$, $p=0.02$) showed that coaches having more than 12 years of work experience do not hope to be liked by their players, which can be explained by the assumption that they do not believe in their educative force as much as in the earlier parts of their career.

4.2.2. Quality of the relationship between football coaches and their junior-age players

Coaches participating in the research responded sensitively when it came to human relationships, especially taking into consideration that nearly three-fourth of them expressed to have experienced failure in a relationship with their players.

The first six causes of the failure marked by the participants were external (they typically put the blame on the players and their parents). This is consistent with Heider's (2003) theory, which states that it is a general human attitude to look for external factors when finding the cause of any behaviour. The results showed the most common excuse was that *the players did not accept the behavioural norms transmitted by the coaches*. Concerning this answer, it may be assumed that coaches referred to norms related to the micro

community rather than generally accepted social patterns. Significant difference was found when comparing this answer and the coach's previous player experience abroad ($\chi^2 = 6.28$; $df=1$; $p=0.01$). Coaches having previous player experience abroad faced more issues when developing relations with athletes.

When comparing the replies '*I could not develop a good relationship with the player because he had a wrong perception about his qualities*' and '*(...) because he did not accept my methods*' to the coaches' age and their years spent in their profession, significant results were found. The ratio was the highest amongst coaches older than 46 and those who have been working as coaches for more than 12 years (44.4% and 45.90%) and selected '*the player had a wrong perception about his qualities*'. This answer was the least popular among coaches aged 38-46 ($\chi^2 = 9.78$; $df=2$; $p=0.008$).

The value '*the player did not accept my methods*' was most popular amongst older ($\chi^2 = 5.49$; $df=2$; $p=0.06$) and more experienced ($\chi^2 = 5.95$; $df=2$; $p=0.05$) coaches, which can be explained by their sensitivity to the denial of coaching methods.

4.2.3. Coaches' opinions about the players' desirable and undesirable qualities

The most adequate picture about the coaches' conception about children can be drawn by examining which of the players' qualities are liked or disliked by the coaches.

Before doing the research, I supposed that the most important quality of a player for coaches is to be talented and enthusiastic towards football. However, contrary to this, the results of the research showed that coaches believe it is not the most important requisite for players to like football – this value was ranked 4th out of 6. It also became obvious that talented youngsters do not necessarily become the coaches' favourites. On one hand the majority of coaches agreed with the proposition that the '*players' congenital qualities have a key role in their prospective successes*', however when classifying the

values of education, talent only came to the 13th place out of 20. This shows inconsistency, which may be explained by the coaches' indecisiveness and unstable opinions.

Coaches working at football academies consider team and community the most important values, as according to their answers, the most damaging quality of a player is *community-destroying behaviour*. The respondents do not consider *intelligence* the most important when it comes to thinking of a player's good qualities (11th rank out of 20). The results show on one hand the coaches' performance-oriented approach to their work, and on the other hand, indirectly that they expect success-orientation from their players too, as they marked that they like their players to be purposeful.

There are hardly any coaches who did not declare that some of their players' characteristics irritate them. When comparing the questions about undesirable and desirable qualities, consistent replies were found as the antonyms were ranked similarly when asking about the most and least desirable qualities of a player: *lazy* (2nd) vs. *hardworking* (2nd), *apathetic* (3rd) vs. *motivated* (1st), *undisciplined* (4th) vs. *disciplined* (5th). No significant results were found in terms of the coaches' preferences based on the different background variables.

4.3. Football coaches about differentiation

4.3.1. Coaches' opinion about the important factors of differentiation

Based on the relevant data, football coaches considered players' *age* (1st, mean 4.5) and *qualities* (2nd, mean 4.4) the most important factors during differentiation out of 6 values. They ranked the players' *personality* to the 4th place, not realising its importance (mean 3.7).

A statistically significant relationship was found between the years spent in the profession and differentiation by positions ($\chi^2=16.27$, $df=8$, $p=0.04$), which means that more experienced coaches tend to recognise better the importance of position-based differentiation.

4.3.2 Practical aspects of coaches' differentiation

Based on the results, at first sight it seemed that coaches realise their declared opinion related to age specificities in practice as well. Nevertheless, when comparing the results of questions dealing with differentiation in theory and practice, it became clear that coaches gave more importance to the theory of differentiation, than to the application of it, especially when it came to differentiating by age, which suggests inconsistency in the replies. In the same time, when interviewing the coaches, it seemed they do differentiate in practice.

Considering that coaches do not find differentiating by positions important in theory either, so in this question there was no dissonance between theory and practice. Even the report of Double Pass, the independent Belgian audit firm showed that more attention has to be drawn to differentiating by position in the work of Hungarian football academies. This however does not match the point of view of the coaches interviewed as all of them highlighted the importance of position-based differentiation as the most important aspect used in practice.

5. Findings/Conclusion

5.1. Verification of hypotheses

H_{1a}: It has been proven that *football coaches acknowledge the relevance of pedagogical knowledge*. Coaches that participated in the research classified highly the values and content of education and nurture, as well as the tools triggering the effects of education on the Likert-scale.

H_{1b}: The hypothesis stating that *the pedagogical beliefs of football coaches are homogeneous* has been rejected as the values of standard deviation belonging to the evaluation of beliefs are high.

H₂: The hypothesis stating that *football coaches prefer community values; however, their approach to those is inconsistent* has been proven. On one

hand, coaches highlighted the importance of educating players for community life and respecting the game, the team and the opponent. On the other hand, they underrated communal and social values when prioritizing educational values.

H_{3a}: The hypothesis stating that *different football coaches' view on the efficiency of educational tools is similar*, has been rejected. The dendrogram created by the hierarchical cluster analysis showed that only two-three opinions were closely related, and the connection between groups of educational tools was rather loose. Some educational tools do not belong to any of the groups. The value of Kendall's tau correlation coefficient was low in all cases. These all support the statement that coaches think differently of the influence of educational tools.

H_{3b}: The hypothesis stating that *different football coaches' views on pedagogical convictions are similar* has also been rejected. When analysing the data by hierarchical cluster analysis the results showed that the coaches only believed in two-three pedagogical convictions but only loose connection was found between them. In this matter, two opinions stayed out from the assembling. The value of Kendall's tau correlation coefficient was low in all cases.

H₄: The hypothesis stating that *there is pedagogical antinomy between the football coaches' declared and realised pedagogical beliefs* could not be either proved or rejected. However, the results of the research show coaches are not fully aware of their pedagogical beliefs. Additionally, they tend to think they are an exception, despite this they believe other coaches do not contribute to the players' personality development.

H_{5abc}: No significant connection could be found when examining football coaches' pedagogical beliefs and their age, years of professional experience and previous player experience abroad on the level of significance $p < 0.05$ accepted in social sciences. The only relation was found between the statement '*coaches have low impact on the development of their players' personality*' by the background variables age ($\chi^2 = 14.67$ df=6, $p > 0.01$), years

of professional experience ($\chi^2=15.73$, $df=6$, $p<0.05$) and previous player experience abroad ($\chi^2=12.92$, $df=6$, $p<0.05$). In this aspect, the hypothesis has been proven, however not in other aspects, considering the medium or low level of significance.

H_{6a}: The hypothesis stating that *football coaches consider it important to be liked by their athletes* has been proven. According to the research the two-thirds of the coaches prefer to be liked by their players. The statement claiming that coaches are indifferent towards their players' feelings was rejected by coaches.

H_{6b}: The hypothesis stating that *football coaches put the blame on external factors when they fail to establish good relations with their athletes* has been proven. They mostly blamed the players and their parents when failing to establish good relationship with them as the first six causes were external ones.

H_{7a}: The hypothesis stating that *there is a connection between football coaches' age and their conception about children* has been proven in two contexts. First of all, when examining the question why they failed to establish good relations with their athletes and the answer given was (1) *'they did not accept my methods'*, or (2) *'they had a wrong perception about their qualities'* differences could be found when examining the age of coaches. Other conjunctions were not discovered when using Chi-squared tests.

H_{7b}: The hypothesis stating that *there is a connection between football coaches' years of professional experience and their conception about children* has been proven in three questions. Significant linkage was found when using Pearson's Chi-squared tests between the years of professional experience and the statement *'I do not desire to be liked by my players'* ($\chi^2=17.89$, $df=8$, $p=0.02$), bad coach-athlete relationship due to the player's wrong perception about his qualities ($\chi^2=10.52$; $df=2$; $p=0.005$), and bad coach-athlete relationship due to the denial of the coach's coaching methods ($\chi^2=5.95$; $df=2$; $p=0.05$). No significant linkage was found between coaches' conception about children and their age in other questions.

H_{7c}: The hypothesis stating that *there is a connection between football coaches' previous player experience abroad and their conception about children* has been proven in one question. Pearson's Chi-squared test showed significant linkage between the coaches' previous player experience abroad and bad coach-athlete relationship due to the denial of the coach's coaching methods ($\chi^2=6.28$; $df=1$; $p=0.01$). Other significant connections were not found during the research; therefore I reject the other components of the hypothesis.

H_{8a}: The hypothesis stating that *football coaches consider the age and the skills of the players the most important factors when differentiating* has been statistically proven. Answers given to the related questions showed that when differentiating, coaches find distinction based on age and the player's skills the most important.

H_{8b}: Based on the results of the research, the hypothesis stating that *during their practical work, coaches consider the age of their players the most important instead of their skills* has been proven. When prioritizing differentiation factors applicable in practice, coaches ranked the age of the player to the first position; however, when taking into consideration the player's skills, only technical elements were highlighted by the respondents. Answers related to the players' qualities were ranked as significantly less important compared to their theoretical preferences of differentiation, especially when considering physical and mental qualities as these were generally ranked at the end of the range.

H_{8c}: The hypothesis stating that *football coaches do not consider position-based differentiation important neither in practice nor in theory* has been verified during the research. Position-based differentiation was ranked at the second last place on ranges in both practical and theoretical fields of differentiation. Coaches ranked these factors relatively low on a 5-point Likert-scale compared to the differentiation factors placed to the top ranks.

H_{9a}: The hypothesis stating that *there is a connection between football coaches' age and their beliefs about differentiation* has been proven in one

aspect. Based on my results, there are significant differences in terms of the coach's age and reliance on observation as a tool when getting to know the players. This however was in contrast with common anticipation, as young coaches were more optimistic and trusted their observation capacity to a greater extent ($\chi^2=10.66$; $df=4$; $p=0.05$). Older coaches preferred objective methods in order to get to know their players and differentiate them during their professional work. The other parts of the hypothesis were rejected, as no significant results were found in this regard.

H_{9b}: The hypothesis stating that *there is a connection between football coaches' years of professional experience and their beliefs about differentiation* has been proven in two components. It became clear that more experienced coaches tended to realise the importance of position-based differentiation ($\chi^2=16.27$, $df=8$; $p<0.05$) and differentiation based on the players' mental qualities ($\chi^2=18.35$; $df=8$; $p<0.05$) more. Other components of the hypothesis could not be justified.

H_{9c}: The hypothesis stating that *there is a connection between football coaches' previous player experience abroad and their beliefs about differentiation* was justified in the question of paying attention to players' injuries during their work as those possessing player experience in another country paid more attention to potential injury situations than those not having any experience abroad ($\chi^2=10.17$; $df=4$; $p<0.05$). This could be explained by the fact that they had more work experience as players so they encountered more injuries. The research only showed significant results in this question, all other parts of the hypothesis are to be rejected.

5.2. Summary, recommendations

The most important conclusion of the study is that the pedagogical views of coaches do not constitute a system in their thinking. They do not possess a coherent, decisive idea about the interpretation and content of pedagogical beliefs, their effective tools, pedagogical convictions and the role of nurture in their work. Being the first comprehensive study of Hungarian football coaches' pedagogical beliefs, the results of the dissertation cannot be compared with previous data, nor can it be declared whether the situation got better or worse. Due to the lack of international literature in this field, Hungarian football coaches' beliefs cannot be compared to those of their foreign colleagues. It is rather clear however that when qualifying coaches, their educational work gets less attention compared to their professional work.

Coaches possessing good knowledge in psychology, communication theory, management and pedagogy are unquestionably more confident, assertive, decisive and potentially more successful too. Based on the results of my study I openly recommend the revision of the social science module of the curricula of coach training programmes in terms of extent and content on all levels, and, based on the revision, the revaluation, modification and amplification of it, with pedagogical knowledge in the first place. This may be followed by the institutional regulation and inspection of coaches' practical work in education.

List of own publications

- Varga D. (2017) Coaches: Pedagogues of Sport? Methodological Attempt to Study the Pedagogical Beliefs of Hungarian Football Coaches. *Physical Culture and Sport Studies and Research* 76:(1) pp. 23-34.
- Varga D. (2017) Képben a gyermekkép: Labdarúgó edzők nézetei a mester és utánpótláskorú tanítványai kapcsolatáról. *Magyar Sporttudományi Szemle* 18:(3 (71)) pp. 46-51.
- Varga D, Földesi Gy, Gombocz J. (2018) Declared Pedagogical Values of Coaches at Hungarian Football Academies. *Physical Culture and Sport Studies and Research* 77:(1) pp. 17-24.
- Varga D, Kovács E, Gombocz J. (2018) Edzők gyermekfelfogása a magyarországi labdarúgó akadémiákon. *Magyar Sporttudományi Szemle* 19:(1 (73)) pp. 44-50.