THE EFFECT OF THE PERCEIVED COACH MOTIVATIONAL CLIMATE AND MORAL DECISION-MAKING: A STUDY AMONG UNIVERSITY FOOTBALL PLAYERS

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Abstract*: The motivational climate created by coaches refers to the player's perception of the environment created by their coach. Coaches establish a motivational climate by shaping norms, fostering effective communication, and demonstrating actions that can affect how players act towards each other in football. The objectives of this study were to identify the main perceived coach motivational climate and the effect of perceived coach motivational climate on moral decision-making among Institutions of Higher Learning Football League players. This study was carried out on 195 football players in Division 1 from 13 university teams. The findings showed that players primarily perceive the coach motivational climate as a mastery climate, and there is a significant effect of perceived coach motivational climate on attitudes to moral decision-making among Institutions of Higher Learning Football League team players (B = 0.534, t = 4.611, p < 0.05). From the findings, it is proven that perceived coach motivational climate influences attitudes toward moral decision-making. The study can offer crucial insights that can guide future research for developing an entirely new typology within the research domain. Overall, further research is needed to fully understand how a specific coach's motivational climate can influence player perceptions of moral decision-making and ethical behaviour.*

Keywords*: perceived coach motivational climate; moral decision-making; drop out; university football players.*

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Introduction

Football at the university in Malaysia has become an important part of the country's sports scene, gaining prominence through various leagues. University leagues and competitions, such as the Institutions of Higher Learning Football League (IPT Football League) organized by the Ministry of Higher Education, serve as key platforms for nurturing talent. The Institutions of Higher Learning Football League is a nationwide tournament featuring higher learning institutions. This league has contributed to the professional development of university players, many of whom transition to local football clubs (Muhamat Laila, 2012). Abundant universities offer structured football programs and scholarship opportunities to encourage participation. However, despite the opportunity provided, players are strictly evaluated to qualify themselves to compete for national teams, leading to conflicts in players behaviours and decision-making (Turan & Cirmi, 2021). Players encounter decision-making that is influenced by their moral tendency, which is frequently influenced by a motivation created by coaches that can greatly affect their behaviours and decisions when faced with ethical dilemmas.

Literature Review

Moral decision-making in sports is the process of choosing the right course of action in situations when players are confronted with ethical dilemmas. It involves situations within the competitive context where players' decisions, influenced by personal beliefs, cultural norms, and social pressure, shape the players ethical character and require players to respond in a course of behaviours aligned with their morals (Garrigan et al., 2018). Thomson et al. (2005) highlighted that players make moral decision-making by identifying the issue in the current situation, clearly defining their goals, analysing potential solutions, and considering the consequences of each option. According to Turan and Cirmi (2021), moral decision-making also involves choosing what is right based on an individual's moral values, as it has been determined that three different components of decision-making incorporate moral values which are acceptance of cheating, acceptance of gamesmanship, and keeping winning in proportion. Therefore, these three components are considered as antisocial behaviours in sports (Mallia, 2019).

In real-life football situations of antisocial behaviours, football players may engage in unnecessary body contact to draw a foul, or other players might intentionally counter the ball to delay a goal-scoring as a wasting time tactic. In Malaysia, Ahmad Shushami and Abdul Karim (2020) reported that 84.62% of injuries occurred in football during the Malaysian Games, in 2018. Uzor and Ujuangu (2020) also highlighted that the players in team sports have suffered injuries due to an overemphasis on a winning mentality that has led players to inflict injuries on their opponents including acts of aggressive tackle and reckless play. Players who are severely injured not only reduce their physical activity but also actively increase their need for frustration and lack of motivation, leading to increased levels of dropout from sports (Pulido et al., 2018). However, players determine their decisions not solely based on their internal beliefs but also heavily influenced by the motivational climate and pressures from the coaches.

The motivational climate created by coaches refers to the player's perception of the environment created by their coach. Coaches' motivational climate can influence how much freedom players feel to make their own choices, their confidence in their abilities, and how they handle wins and losses and can affect how players act towards each other (Kapitanski, 2022; Pérez-Romero et al., 2022; Woods & Parry, 2022). In other words, coaches are like team

leaders who make the rules, praise players for getting better, give helpful advice, teach what is important and can encourage any kind of motivational climate to control and develop their players. Based on the Achievement Goal Theory, Ames (1992) described two different team environments based on the balance between mastery climate and performance climate influenced by environment and expectations from others.

Mastery climate focuses on a higher level of sportsmanship and long-term player performance and coaches view mistakes made by players as a natural part of learning and improvement (Castillo-Jiménez et al., 2022). Research consistently shows its benefits for players including greater enjoyment, positive development and sportsmanship (Engan & Sæther, 2018). In football, coaches provide positive feedback, acknowledge players contributions, and foster a supportive environment where players feel safe to experiment and learn from mistakes for individual growth over winning. This leads to increased motivation, improved performance, greater sportsmanship, and stronger team cohesion, ultimately contributing to both individual and team success. Castillo-Jiménez et al. (2022) establishes a significance link between this coaching climate and players overall enjoyment of the sport. Research by Kapitanski (2022) found that players perceive mastery climate as the dominant motivational approach. This means players appreciate coaches who prioritize teamwork and skill development. Similarly, Castro-Sánchez et al. (2019) discovered a clear preference for a mastery climate compared to a performance climate. These findings highlight that football players value coaches who foster a supportive environment focused on learning and improvement.

In contrast, the performance climate focuses on short-term results and winning at a cost mentality and coaches encourage the players that the priority in the sports competition is the value of winning itself rather than enhancing personal progress (Engan & Sæther, 2018; Garrigan et al., 2020; Van De Pol et al., 2020). In football, a performance climate focused on winning and public recognition leads to negative consequences like stress, demotivation, dissatisfaction, tendency to practice cheating and antisocial behaviours. As Gómez-López et al. (2020) found, players perceived performance climate may experience frustration and decreased motivation, especially after losses, due to the fear of punishment and the emphasis on winning over individual development. Coaches who focus on society judgements and public evaluation may create pressure to win at all costs, potentially leading players to be demotivated and have a tendency to drop out of the sports (Van De Pol et al., 2020). Therefore, it is important in this study to assess coaches' intentions and their behaviours to identify how players perceive the motivational environment that could affect player satisfaction, commitment, enjoyment and the team's overall success.

Studies indicate that coaches who prioritize a mastery climate can create a supportive environment that fosters ethical decision-making while coaches who prioritize a performance climate are more focused on short-term results and a winning-at-all-cost mentality. Strand and Ziegler (2010), Strand (2013), and Strand et al. (2018) found that coaches and players clearly understand that some gamesmanship actions are inappropriate, as demonstrated by the low scores of the items, but these actions still happen because when faced with the challenge of behaving ethically to win which many coaches and players feel that winning is more important (Strand & Slater, 2023). Research highlights coaches are the most significant figures within a player's social context as coaches are seen as role models and authority figures, making

thempowerful agents in shaping players' attitudes, beliefs, and actions both on and off the field (Sipavičiūtė & Šukys, 2019).

Research Methodology

This section explains the use of methodology for this proposed study. In this particular study, the quantitative research method was used to investigate the effect of perceived coach motivational climate on moral decision-making among Institutions of Higher Learning Football League players. This study implemented a quantitative research method using a survey design. Aliaga and Gunderson (1999) described quantitative research design as a research approach explaining phenomena by collecting numerical data, characterized by close-ended questions that are then analyzed using statistical approaches.

Population and Sampling Technique

The research population of Institutions of Higher Learning Football League players typically comprises a substantial group of individuals who are the central subject of a scientific inquiry. Probability sampling is used in this study because each sample in the population has an equal chance of being elected and a known probability of being selected (stratified random sampling). The sample is referred to as representative because the characteristics of a properly drawn sample represent the main population in all ways (Showkat & Parveen, 2017). According to the Ministry of Higher Education (2023), the Institutions of Higher Learning Football League in Division 1 comprise a total of 390 players for the session 2023/2024. These players are divided between 13 teams. Based on the table derived by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), the number of samples suggested is 195 respondents.

In this research, the total population size (N) is 390 football players, and one subgroup (Nh) consists of 30 players. Based on the table derived by Krejcie and Morgan table (1970), the total sample size (n) to select is 195 football players. Within each subgroup (nh), 15 players are selected by using a random sampling method. This approach ensures that each subgroup is adequately represented in the final sample, allowing for more accurate insight into the characteristics and behaviours of the entire football players population. The strata sample size for Division Institutions of Higher Learning Football League players for the 2023/2024 session is computed as follows:

$$nh = (Nh / N) * n = (30 / 390) \times 196 = 15$$

nh= sample size for subgroup, Nh= population size for subgroup, N= entire population size, n= entire sample size

Instrumentations

In this research, the questionnaire consists of demographic items that aim to analyse the player's demographic background, including age, team origin, and level of education. Section B is related to motivational climate, represented by 33 items from 2 factors which are mastery climate and performance climate. Meanwhile, section C is related to moral decision-making, represented by 24 items from 3 factors which are acceptance of cheating, acceptance of gamesmanship, and keeping winning in proportion.In Section B, the Coach Perceived Motivational Climate in Sport Questionnaire (PMCSQ-2) developed by Balaguer et al. (1997) is used to assess the motivational climate of football players. Items were related to mastery climate and performance climate. All items in Section B are rated on a 5-point Likert Scale

format ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Past research by Balaguer et al. (1997) on Spanish tennis players reported support for the factorial validity and internal consistency values, which were specifically .89 for mastery climate and .87 for performance climate.

In Section C, items from the instruments of Attitudes to Moral Decision-Making in Youth Sport Questionnaire (AMDYSQ) adopted from Lee et al. (2007) are used to assess the moral decision-making of football players. Only questions related to the moral decision–making on behaviours among football team players are chosen. Items are related to acceptance of cheating, acceptance of gamesmanship and keeping winning in proportion. All items in Section C are rated on a 5-point Likert Scale format ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Higher mean scores for the subscales reflected stronger anti-social attitudes. Lee et al. (2007) reported support for the factorial validity and internal consistency with Cronbach alpha = .89 and .62, .61 for the factors of acceptance of cheating, acceptance of gamesmanship subscales, and keeping winning in proportion, respectively.

Table 1: Coefficient Alpha of Subscale Coach Perceived Motivation Climate in Sport Questionnaire (PMCSQ-2)

Coach Perceived Motivation Climate in Sport Questionnaire (PMCSQ-2)	Number of Questions	Cronbach Alphas
Mastery Climate	1-17	.897
Performance Climate	18-33	.871

Table 2: Coefficient Alpha of Subscale Attitudes Moral Derived Decision Making in Youth Questionnaire (AMDYSQ)

Attitudes Moral Derived Decision Making in Youth Questionnaire (AMDYSQ)	Number of Questions	Cronbach Alphas
Acceptance of Cheating	1-9	.893
Acceptance of Gamesmanship	10-18	.629
Keeping Winning in Proportion	19-24	.612

Research Procedures

The study received approval from the ethical committee at the author's institution (reference: REC/10/2024 (PG/MR/500)). Following this, coaches were contacted and informed consent was obtained via email. Consent from each team's coach was required to access player information, ensuring that the data collection process upheld player privacy and confidentiality. The researchers then explained the study's purpose and provided instructions before respondents completed the questionnaire. Each respondent was given an informed consent form before data collection, outlining that confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained. They were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time and that all information gathered would remain confidential. Respondents were asked to fill in the details in the questionnaire and were given 30 minutes to complete it.

Results and Discussion

Table 3: Descriptive Results of Coach Perceived Motivation Climate in Sport Questionnaire (PMCSQ-2)

Coach Perceived Motivation Climate in Sport Questionnaire (PMCSQ-2)	Mean	Standard Deviation
Mastery Climate	4.37	.437
Performance Climate	3.17	.66

Significance level: 0.05 (2-tailed)

As displayed in Table 3 the mastery climate among institutions of higher learning football league team players overall was at a high level (Mean = 4.37 and SD = 0.437). Furthermore, players rated all 17 items of mastery climate at a high level (Mean between 3.99 and 4.51). Meanwhile, players rated their performance climate among institutions of higher learning football league team players at an average level (Mean = 3.17 and SD = 0.660). All items of performance climate yielded mean scores at an average level (Mean between 2.40 and 3.47). The results demonstrate a clear preference for significantly higher mean values for mastery climate compared to performance climate.

The descriptive results showed that players value coaches who prioritize their personal progress, create a positive learning environment, and set them up for future success. This research finding aligns with research by Kapitanski (2022) found that players perceive mastery climate as the dominant motivational climate (Mean = 4.18). A similar finding by Castro-Sánchez et al. (2019) discovered a clear preference for mastery climate (Mean = 3.98) compared to a performance climate (Mean = 2.38). The results concur with previous research indicating that the coach mastery climate basic psychological needs were positively associated with enjoyment, Achievement optimal social functioning, well-being, and self-development and negatively related to burnout and dropout (Robazza et al., 2023). These findings highlight that football players are encouraged to experiment, collaborate, and set goals for themselves, fostering a supportive environment where mistakes are seen as opportunities to learn and promote long-term engagement in the sport.

Table 4: Regression of the Effect of Perceived Coach Motivational Climate on Moral Decision-Making

	Unstandardized B	Std. Error	Standardized Beta	T	Significant
Constant	1.262	0.440			
Perceived Coach Motivational Climate	0.534	0.116	0.315	4.611	0.000
R2	0.099				
F	21.260				
Significant	0.000				

Significance level: 0.05 (2-tailed)

Simple linear regression analysis was conducted for the effect of perceived coach motivational climate on attitudes to moral decision-making among institutions of higher learning football league players. Table 4 illustrates the results of simple linear regression for perceived coach motivational climate affecting the attitudes to moral decision-making. Based on the table above, this showed the linear model was significant, thus they had a significant influence on attitudes toward moral decision-making ($p < 0.05$). Hence, it was found that the p-value = 0.000 less than $\alpha = 0.05$, so that, there is a significant effect of perceived coach motivational climate on attitudes to moral decision-making among Institutions of Higher Learning Football League team players (B = 0.534, t = 4.611, $p < 0.05$).

Studies have shown that coaches can foster a mastery climate, emphasizing effort and skill development, fostering better sportsmanship compared to or fostering a performance climate solely focused on short term results and winning values (Castillo-Jiménez et al., 2022). Coaches can significantly affect their players' personal beliefs about success and failure by fostering a specific motivational climate. Coaches who emphasize a mastery climate, which focuses on personal improvement, effort, and teamwork, can create an environment that fosters ethical decision-making among football players by promoting sportsmanship and positive values (Castillo-Jiménez et al., 2022). In a mastery climate, players are encouraged to measure success based on their own growth rather than winning at all costs and antisocial practice in sport competition. This ultimately leads to greater players satisfaction, improved performance, maintain motivation and a more positive sporting experience.

The findings of this study provide significant guidance for coaches and sports administrators, particularly in the context of creating a positive and ethical sporting environment. For example, coaching certification programs in Malaysia, such as those operated by the Football Association of Malaysia (FAM), should establish codes of conduct that emphasize ethical decision-making, respect, and teamwork to foster a mastery climate in football. These regulations should be mandatory for all coaching staff and players. Furthermore, the sports administrator needs to develop KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) for football programs at all levels that include ethical behaviour, player satisfaction, and continuous participation as success indicators, rather than just performance indicators such as wins or rankings. Therefore, the coaches can achieve the KPIs by conducting regular assessments of the motivational climate in football programs, which should be done using tools such as player feedback.

Conclusion

In the competitive environment of football, the influence of a coach extends far beyond tactics and physical conditioning. Coaches shape the motivational climate, which profoundly affects players' attitudes toward various aspects of the game, including moral decision-making. The relationship between perceived coach motivational climate and attitudes toward moral decision-making in football is complex and multifaceted. Coaches, players, and football institutions all have roles to play in ensuring that the competitive nature of the sport does not come at the expense of moral integrity (Lamat et al., 2016). Therefore, the study is able to offer crucial insights that can serve as a guiding foundation for future research for developing an entirely new typology within the research domain. Understanding the effect of perceived coach motivational climate on moral decision-making has practical implications for coaching education and player development. Coaches should be trained not only in technical and tactical aspects of football but also in fostering a motivational climate that promotes ethical behaviours.

Author's Declarations
Mohamad Firdaus Ahmad conceptualized and designed the study, verified the data, discussed the results, and took the lead in writing the manuscript. Nurul Sabrina Binti Mohd Zain conducted the literature review, prepared the data, and handled data collection. Nur Syazwani Safwan contributed to interpreting the results and writing the content. All authors provided valuable feedback, contributing to the research, analysis, and development of the manuscript

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