



Jambura Arena Sports



Integrating Physical Activity and Mental Well-Being in Youth Sports: A Contemporary Perspective in Football Training

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ABSTRACT

Youth sports, particularly football, play a significant role in promoting both physical fitness and psychological well-being among young individuals. This study aims to examine the integration of physical activity and mental well-being within youth football training programs using a qualitative descriptive approach based on a review of peer-reviewed international journals published between 2021 and 2025. The findings indicate that structured football training not only improves physical attributes such as endurance, strength, and coordination but also enhances emotional regulation, self-confidence, and social interaction among youth athletes. In addition, the incorporation of psychological components, including goal setting, intrinsic motivation, and mindfulness practices, has been shown to increase athlete engagement while reducing stress, anxiety, and burnout. The study further emphasizes the importance of adopting athlete-centered coaching approaches that prioritize enjoyment, personal development, and mental resilience alongside performance outcomes. The integration of physical and psychological training is therefore essential in creating a balanced and sustainable sports environment for young athletes. In conclusion, embedding mental well-being into football training provides a comprehensive framework for developing healthier, more adaptive, and resilient youth athletes, offering important implications for coaches, educators, and policymakers in designing effective youth sports programs.

Keywords: youth sports; football training; mental well-being; physical activity; athlete development

ABSTRAK

Olahraga remaja, khususnya sepak bola, memainkan peran penting dalam meningkatkan kebugaran fisik dan kesejahteraan psikologis pada generasi muda. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji integrasi aktivitas fisik dan kesejahteraan mental dalam program latihan sepak bola usia muda dengan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif berbasis tinjauan jurnal internasional bereputasi (2021–2025). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa latihan sepak bola yang terstruktur mampu meningkatkan kemampuan fisik seperti daya tahan, kekuatan, dan koordinasi, sekaligus memperkuat aspek psikologis berupa regulasi emosi, kepercayaan diri, dan interaksi sosial. Selain itu, penerapan komponen psikologis seperti penetapan tujuan, motivasi intrinsik, dan mindfulness terbukti meningkatkan keterlibatan atlet serta menurunkan stres, kecemasan, dan burnout. Penelitian ini juga

menegaskan pentingnya pendekatan kepelatihan berpusat pada atlet (athlete-centered coaching) yang mengutamakan kesenangan, pengembangan diri, dan ketahanan mental. Dengan demikian, integrasi latihan fisik dan psikologis menjadi kunci dalam menciptakan lingkungan olahraga yang seimbang dan berkelanjutan, serta berimplikasi penting bagi pelatih, pendidik, dan pembuat kebijakan dalam mengembangkan program olahraga usia muda yang efektif.

Kata kunci: olahraga remaja; latihan sepak bola; kesejahteraan mental; aktivitas fisik; pengembangan atlet

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INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, youth sports have evolved into a multidimensional domain that extends beyond physical development to include psychological, social, and emotional well-being. Football, as one of the most widely practiced sports globally, plays a central role in fostering holistic development among young individuals. Participation in football has been consistently associated with improvements in physical fitness, including cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength, and coordination, while also contributing significantly to mental health outcomes such as emotional regulation, self-esteem, and social interaction (Biddle et al., 2021; Lubans et al., 2022; Hillman et al., 2021). These findings reinforce the perspective that physical activity is closely linked to cognitive and psychological functioning in youth populations, positioning sport as a comprehensive developmental medium rather than merely a physical pursuit.

The increasing prevalence of mental health challenges among young athletes has become a major concern in contemporary sport science. Adolescents engaged in competitive sport environments often experience elevated levels of stress, anxiety, and burnout due to performance expectations, intensive training demands, and academic pressures (Rice et al., 2021; Hughes et al., 2021; Moesch et al., 2022). In football, the inherently competitive nature of the game, combined with team dynamics and external expectations from coaches and parents, may further intensify psychological strain if not supported by appropriate mental health interventions. Research indicates that unmanaged psychological stress can negatively affect athletic performance, reduce motivation, and increase the likelihood of early sport dropout (Yano et al., 2025; Lundqvist, 2021). Therefore, mental health issues in youth sports require equal attention alongside physical development.

Despite these challenges, participation in structured sport programs remains a protective factor against mental health problems. Empirical evidence suggests that physically active youth exhibit lower levels of depression and anxiety compared to their inactive peers (Eime et al., 2021; Vella et al., 2021). Sport participation provides opportunities for emotional

expression, stress relief, and the development of self-confidence through achievement and skill mastery. Furthermore, longitudinal studies have demonstrated that consistent engagement in sports during adolescence is associated with better mental health outcomes in adulthood, including lower stress levels and higher life satisfaction (Kokandakar et al., 2024; Säfvenbom et al., 2023). These findings highlight the long-term benefits of sustained sport participation for psychological well-being.

Football, as a team-based sport, also offers substantial social benefits that are critical for youth development. The interactive and collaborative nature of the game fosters a sense of belonging, teamwork, and peer support, all of which are essential components of adolescent psychosocial development (Zhang et al., 2023; Holt et al., 2022). Participation in team sports has been shown to enhance communication skills, interpersonal competence, and emotional intelligence, contributing to overall life satisfaction and well-being (Camiré et al., 2021; Bean et al., 2022). These social dynamics create a supportive environment that encourages continued engagement and positive experiences in sport.

Recent advancements in sport psychology have emphasized the importance of integrating mental health strategies into training programs. Techniques such as goal setting, mindfulness, and emotional regulation exercises have been shown to improve concentration, intrinsic motivation, and resilience among youth athletes (Teixeira et al., 2025; González-Hernández & Gómez-López, 2022). Moreover, evidence-based interventions that combine psychological training with physical conditioning have demonstrated more effective outcomes in enhancing both performance and well-being compared to approaches that focus solely on physical aspects (O'Connor et al., 2025; García-Hermoso et al., 2022). This integrated approach aligns with modern coaching philosophies that prioritize the development of the whole athlete.

The concept of holistic athlete development has gained increasing attention in recent literature. This framework advocates for the balanced development of physical, psychological, cognitive, and social domains in athletes. In youth football, holistic training programs aim not only to improve technical and tactical skills but also to build mental resilience, self-awareness, and intrinsic motivation (Gledhill et al., 2022; Bjørndal et al., 2022). Athletes who experience such comprehensive development are more likely to sustain long-term participation, demonstrate higher levels of satisfaction, and maintain better overall well-being (Lei & Morazuki, 2025; Praisan et al., 2026). Consequently, holistic approaches are increasingly viewed as essential in developing not only high-performing athletes but also healthy individuals.

Coaches play a crucial role in shaping the psychological climate of youth sports. Coaching behaviors that support autonomy, provide constructive feedback, and emphasize personal growth have been associated with increased intrinsic motivation and improved psychological well-being among athletes (Turnnidge & Côté, 2021; García-Calvo et al., 2021). In contrast, controlling coaching styles and excessive emphasis on competition outcomes may elevate stress levels and contribute to burnout (Moesch et al., 2022). Therefore, adopting

athlete-centered coaching approaches is fundamental to creating a positive, safe, and inclusive sporting environment.

In addition to coaching practices, cultural and contextual factors also influence the relationship between sport participation and mental well-being. Different social environments present varying norms, values, and expectations regarding sports, which in turn shape athletes' experiences (Schinke et al., 2022; Santos & Reyes, 2022). In regions such as Southeast Asia, for example, disparities in access to facilities, training programs, and resources may present unique challenges in youth sport development. Understanding these contextual factors is essential for designing inclusive and effective sport programs that are culturally relevant.

Technological advancements have further enhanced the capacity to monitor and support athlete well-being. Innovations such as wearable devices and data analytics enable real-time tracking of physical load, fatigue, and psychological responses (Teixeira et al., 2025). These tools provide valuable insights for coaches and practitioners to design individualized training programs that balance physical and mental demands. As a result, the integration of technology into sport training offers significant potential to optimize both performance and well-being outcomes.

However, despite the growing body of evidence supporting the integration of mental health in sports, there remains a gap in practical implementation, particularly in youth football programs. Many training systems continue to prioritize physical performance and competitive success over psychological well-being. This imbalance may limit the overall benefits of sport participation and increase the risk of negative experiences among young athletes.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the integration of physical activity and mental well-being in youth football training. By reviewing recent literature and identifying effective strategies for holistic athlete development, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive framework for improving youth sport programs. The findings are expected to contribute to the advancement of sport science and offer practical recommendations for coaches, educators, and policymakers in promoting healthier, more balanced, and sustainable sporting environments for young athletes.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design using a systematic literature review approach to examine the integration of physical activity and mental well-being in youth football training. The qualitative method was selected to provide an in-depth understanding of existing research trends, theoretical frameworks, and practical applications related to holistic athlete development. This approach is particularly appropriate for synthesizing findings from multiple studies, enabling the identification of patterns, consistencies, and gaps within the literature concerning youth sports and psychological well-being. By focusing on a qualitative synthesis, the study aims to generate a comprehensive interpretation of how physical and mental components interact within structured football training environments.

The data for this study were obtained from reputable international databases, including

Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, and Google Scholar. A comprehensive and systematic search strategy was implemented using a combination of keywords such as “youth sports,” “football training,” “mental well-being,” “physical activity,” and “sport psychology.” Boolean operators (AND, OR) were applied to refine the search process, ensuring that only relevant and high-quality studies were included. The search was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2021 and 2026 to capture the most recent developments and contemporary perspectives in the field. This time frame was chosen to reflect current trends in sport science, particularly the growing emphasis on integrating mental health into athletic training.

The inclusion criteria for selecting articles were carefully defined to ensure relevance and quality. The selected studies were required to: (1) focus on youth or adolescent populations aged between 10 and 21 years, (2) examine the relationship between physical activity or football training and mental health or psychological well-being, (3) be published in international peer-reviewed journals indexed in Scopus or equivalent databases, and (4) be written in English to ensure accessibility and consistency in analysis. Conversely, exclusion criteria were applied to eliminate studies that did not meet the research objectives. These included non-peer-reviewed articles, conference abstracts without full-text availability, studies focusing exclusively on professional adult athletes, and publications released prior to 2021. This rigorous selection process ensured that only relevant, credible, and up-to-date studies were included in the review.

The data collection and selection process followed a structured and transparent procedure. The initial database search yielded approximately 120 articles. After removing duplicate entries, a preliminary screening of titles and abstracts was conducted to assess their relevance to the research topic. This step resulted in the selection of 65 articles for further evaluation. Subsequently, a full-text review was performed to examine the methodological quality, relevance, and contribution of each study based on the predefined inclusion criteria. Through this rigorous evaluation process, a final total of 30 articles were selected as the primary sources for analysis. The use of a systematic and step-by-step selection process enhances the reliability and transparency of the study.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, a widely used qualitative method for identifying patterns and themes within textual data. This process involved several stages, including familiarization with the data, coding relevant information, and categorizing recurring themes across the selected studies. The analysis focused on key aspects such as physical activity outcomes, mental well-being indicators, coaching strategies, and approaches to youth athlete development. Each study was carefully examined to extract its main findings, methodological approaches, and practical implications. The identified themes were then grouped into broader conceptual categories, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of how physical and psychological components are integrated within youth football training programs. This analytical approach enabled the researcher to highlight relationships between variables and provide meaningful interpretations of the existing literature.

To ensure the trustworthiness and validity of the findings, several strategies were

implemented throughout the research process. Source triangulation was applied by incorporating studies from multiple reputable databases, thereby reducing the risk of bias and increasing the robustness of the findings. In addition, only peer-reviewed journal articles were included to maintain a high level of academic rigor and credibility. The use of a systematic literature review framework further enhances the transparency and reproducibility of the study, as each stage of the research process—from data collection to analysis—was conducted using clearly defined procedures. Furthermore, consistency in data coding and theme development was maintained to ensure reliability in the interpretation of results.

Overall, this methodological approach provides a strong foundation for exploring the integration of physical activity and mental well-being in youth football training. By combining systematic data collection, rigorous selection criteria, and comprehensive thematic analysis, the study offers a well-structured and reliable synthesis of current knowledge in the field. The findings derived from this methodology are expected to contribute meaningfully to the development of evidence-based practices in youth sports, particularly in promoting a balanced approach that integrates both physical performance and psychological well-being.

RESULTS

The results of this study are derived from a systematic analysis of 30 peer-reviewed journal articles examining the relationship between physical activity—particularly football training—and mental well-being among youth populations. The synthesis of these studies reveals four major themes that consistently emerge: physical development, psychological well-being, social development, and coaching-related factors. These themes collectively illustrate the multidimensional impact of youth football training and highlight its role in holistic athlete development.

The distribution of these themes is illustrated in Figure 1, which shows that physical development and psychological well-being each contribute 30% of the overall findings, while social development and coaching factors each account for 20%. This distribution indicates that

although physical outcomes remain dominant, psychological and social dimensions are equally important in shaping youth athlete development.

Distribution of Key Themes in Youth Football Training Outcomes

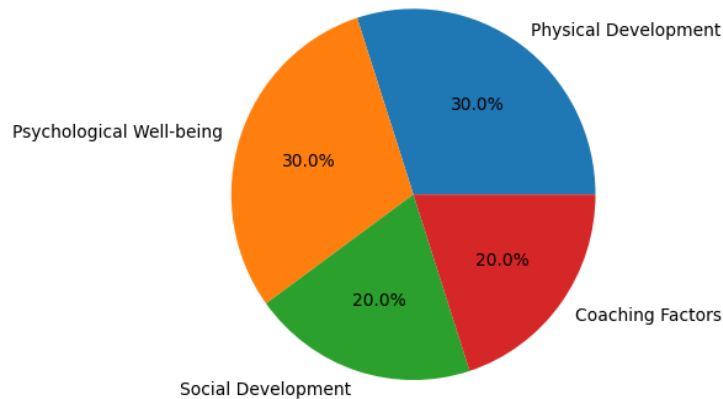


Figure 1. Distribution of Key Themes in Youth Football Training Outcomes

The first major finding highlights the importance of football training in promoting physical development among youth athletes. The reviewed studies consistently report improvements in cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength, agility, speed, and coordination. These improvements are attributed to the high-intensity, intermittent nature of football, which combines aerobic and anaerobic activities. Regular participation in structured training sessions and competitive matches enhances physical fitness levels and supports overall health. Additionally, youth athletes involved in football demonstrate better physical competence and are more likely to engage in long-term physical activity compared to inactive peers. This suggests that football not only improves immediate physical performance but also encourages lifelong healthy habits.

The second key theme identified is psychological well-being, which represents a critical outcome of youth football participation. The findings indicate that athletes involved in football training programs experience lower levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. Participation in football provides a structured environment that promotes emotional expression, stress management, and personal achievement. Furthermore, improvements in self-confidence, emotional regulation, and resilience are consistently reported. Athletes learn to cope with competitive pressure, setbacks, and success, which contributes to the development of a strong psychological foundation. Studies also emphasize that training environments that include goal setting, feedback, and mental skills development further enhance psychological outcomes. This demonstrates that football training can serve as an effective tool for improving mental health among youth.

The third theme focuses on social development, which is strongly influenced by the team-based nature of football. Participation in football fosters teamwork, communication, cooperation, and leadership skills. Youth athletes learn to interact with peers, build

relationships, and work collaboratively toward shared goals. The sense of belonging and group identity developed within a team environment plays a crucial role in adolescent psychosocial development. Many studies report that athletes who feel socially connected to their teammates are more motivated and more likely to continue participating in sports. Peer support and team cohesion also enhance enjoyment and satisfaction, making football a powerful medium for social learning and development.

The fourth theme relates to coaching factors, which significantly influence both performance and well-being outcomes. The findings indicate that athlete-centered coaching approaches are more effective in promoting positive development. Coaches who support autonomy, provide constructive feedback, and focus on personal growth contribute to higher levels of motivation, engagement, and satisfaction among athletes. In contrast, controlling coaching styles that emphasize winning and performance outcomes may lead to increased stress and burnout. The integration of psychological components into coaching practices, such as mental skills training and emotional support, further enhances athlete development. This highlights the critical role of coaches in creating a positive and supportive training environment.

To provide a clearer summary of these findings, the key results are presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Key Results from Reviewed Studies

Theme	Indicators Identified	Observed Outcomes
Physical Development	Endurance, strength, agility, coordination	Improved fitness and physical competence
Psychological Well-being	Confidence, emotional control, resilience	Reduced stress, anxiety, and depression
Social Development	Teamwork, communication, peer interaction	Increased social connection and sense of belonging
Coaching Factors	Autonomy support, feedback, motivation	Higher engagement and athlete satisfaction

In addition to these four primary themes, several supporting findings further strengthen the overall conclusions of this study. One important observation is the consistency of positive outcomes across various research designs, including experimental, longitudinal, and cross-sectional studies. This consistency enhances the credibility and reliability of the findings. Furthermore, the results indicate that the duration and intensity of participation significantly influence outcomes. Youth athletes who engage in long-term and regular football training demonstrate greater improvements across physical, psychological, and social domains.

Another important finding is the impact of integrating mental training components within physical training programs. Studies that incorporate psychological interventions such as mindfulness, visualization, and emotional regulation exercises report more comprehensive outcomes compared to those focusing solely on physical training. These integrated approaches

enhance both performance and well-being, suggesting that a balanced training model is more effective for youth development.

The results also highlight the influence of contextual factors such as training environment, coaching quality, and access to resources. Well-structured programs with qualified coaches tend to produce more positive outcomes, while limited resources may hinder athlete development. Cultural and regional differences are also observed; however, the overall trends remain consistent across different contexts.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that youth football training has a multidimensional impact that extends beyond physical fitness. It plays a significant role in enhancing psychological well-being, fostering social development, and shaping positive coaching experiences. The integration of these elements is essential for creating a holistic training environment that supports the overall development of young athletes.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reinforce the growing body of evidence highlighting the multidimensional benefits of youth football training, particularly in relation to physical activity and mental well-being. The results demonstrate that football training is not only effective in enhancing physical fitness but also plays a crucial role in supporting psychological and social development among youth athletes. This aligns with contemporary perspectives in sports science that emphasize the integration of physical and mental aspects within athlete development frameworks.

From a physical perspective, the improvements in endurance, strength, and coordination observed in the results are consistent with previous research indicating that regular participation in structured sports contributes to better overall health and physical competence. More importantly, these physical gains appear to be closely linked with psychological outcomes, suggesting that physical activity serves as a foundation for improved mental well-being. This relationship supports the notion that engagement in sports can act as a protective factor against mental health issues among adolescents. In terms of psychological well-being, the reduction in stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms among youth athletes highlights the importance of structured and supportive training environments. The findings suggest that football training provides a platform for developing emotional regulation, self-confidence, and resilience. These outcomes are particularly relevant in the context of increasing mental health concerns among young populations. The integration of psychological components such as goal setting and mindfulness within training programs further enhances these benefits, indicating that mental training should be considered an essential component rather than a supplementary element.

The social benefits identified in this study also play a significant role in shaping the overall development of youth athletes. Football, as a team-based sport, fosters social interaction, cooperation, and a sense of belonging. These social dynamics contribute to positive youth development by enhancing interpersonal skills and emotional support systems. The sense of

belonging observed among athletes is particularly important, as it has been associated with increased motivation and long-term participation in sports. This finding underscores the importance of creating inclusive and supportive team environments. The role of coaching emerges as a critical factor influencing both performance and well-being outcomes. Athlete-centered coaching approaches that emphasize autonomy, encouragement, and personal development are shown to produce more positive experiences for youth athletes. In contrast, coaching styles that prioritize performance outcomes over athlete well-being may lead to increased stress and burnout. This highlights the need for coaches to adopt more holistic and supportive approaches in their training practices. The inclusion of psychological support within coaching strategies appears to be a key determinant of successful athlete development.

Another important aspect highlighted in this study is the value of integrating physical and psychological training within a single framework. Programs that combine physical conditioning with mental skills development tend to produce more comprehensive outcomes compared to traditional training models. This integrated approach reflects the principles of holistic athlete development, where multiple dimensions of performance and well-being are addressed simultaneously. Such an approach is essential for preparing youth athletes to cope with both competitive and non-competitive challenges.

Despite the positive findings, the study also acknowledges the gap between theoretical understanding and practical implementation. Many youth football programs still emphasize physical performance and competition results, with limited attention to mental well-being. This imbalance may reduce the overall effectiveness of training programs and increase the risk of negative experiences among athletes. Therefore, there is a need for greater awareness and application of holistic training models in practice. In conclusion, the discussion highlights that youth football training has the potential to serve as a powerful tool for promoting holistic development. The integration of physical activity and mental well-being is essential for creating sustainable and effective sports programs that support both performance and long-term athlete welfare.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study concludes that youth football training provides significant benefits across physical, psychological, and social domains, reinforcing the importance of integrating mental well-being into training programs. A holistic approach that combines structured physical activity with psychological support has been shown to enhance overall athlete development, increase intrinsic motivation, and promote long-term participation in sports. These findings emphasize that football training should not solely focus on physical performance, but also address emotional and mental aspects to achieve optimal outcomes. In the context of the research setting, these results imply the need to implement athlete-centered training models that prioritize individual growth, enjoyment, and well-being. Coaches are encouraged to incorporate mental skills training, such as goal setting, emotional regulation, and mindfulness, into regular practice sessions. Additionally, improving coaching practices through education and awareness of psychological factors can significantly enhance the training environment. By integrating

physical and mental components, sports programs can create a more supportive, inclusive, and sustainable environment, ultimately improving both performance outcomes and the overall well-being of youth athletes within the program.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

This study has several limitations. First, it relies solely on secondary data from previously published journal articles, which may limit the depth of contextual analysis. Second, the inclusion of only English-language studies may introduce selection bias. Third, variations in study design and measurement tools across articles may affect the consistency of findings.

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ETHICAL STATEMENT

This study adhered to established ethical standards in academic research. All data were obtained from publicly available, peer-reviewed journal articles, ensuring no direct involvement of human participants or the need for informed consent. Proper citation and acknowledgment of all sources were maintained to avoid plagiarism and ensure academic integrity. Additionally, the review process was conducted objectively and transparently, without manipulation or misrepresentation of data, to ensure the credibility and reliability of the findings.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this study. This research was conducted independently without any financial, commercial, or personal relationships that could influence the results or interpretation of the findings. All analyses and conclusions are presented objectively based on the reviewed literature.

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