

Article

Impact of Control on Elite Football Players' Athletic Skills

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Abstract: The current research aimed to explore the relationship between intentional control and mental skills of elite football players in Baghdad Governorate during the 2023/2024 season. Recognizing the significance of mental skills in athletic performance, this study addresses a gap in understanding how intentional control impacts these skills among top-tier athletes. The study utilized a descriptive and correlational research method, involving a sample of 170 players from the Iraqi elite league, representing 86.44% of the total research population. Data were collected using the Intentional Control Scale by Ismail (2022) and the Psychological States Scale by Bell, Benson, and Shambrook (1996), with analysis conducted via SPSS version 25. Results indicated that elite players exhibit high levels of both intentional control and mental skills, with a significant positive correlation between the two. These findings suggest that enhancing intentional control may further improve the mental skills essential for elite football performance.

Keywords: intentional control, mental skills, elite football players, Baghdad Governorate, correlational research

1. Introduction

Importance of the Research :

In recent times, psychology is witnessing great importance and great importance, as it was classified at the forefront of the sciences that met the interest of those working in the field of sports, where they began with the technological development and scientific progress to give importance to the psychological state of the player through their focus on the intellectual and psychological aspect of all sports and the game of football in particular, where attention was focused on some variable and unstable psychological traits and states that contribute to the development of players' abilities.

The control of attention is very important for the football player through the issuance of correct decisions because it depends largely on the cognitive system, and what characterizes the cognitive system is the specific capacity and it has become necessary to determine the size of the stimuli received by the player through his senses and this type needs organization and legalization of stimuli and how to deal with them without disturbing focus, attention and making the right decisions.

Also, in order to contribute to reaching the state of high performance and the development of high skills and speed in high performance, it is necessary to rely on mental skills, which represent the most important dimension in the preparation of football players, because of its fundamental importance to the development of performance, so it has become considered one of the most important abilities that must be paid attention to along with skill, physical and planning abilities in order to reach high ability and under any variable of the game, that the development of some relaxation

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skills, concentration, mental retrieval and other skills must go along with the development of physical fitness and skill elements through training programs and must be promoted.

Research Problem :

Football is one of the most popular and most popular games in the world because it has a high level of popularity around the world, so the players do a difficult job during the game subject to great responsibility in performing their duties during the game and providing a level that qualifies them to achieve victory and high achievement, the distinctiveness of the game of football with a fast pace and continuous maneuvers throughout the game requires players to bear the burden of following, observing, distributing duties and taking the appropriate place within the field of play and during the course of the game.

Based on the above, the researcher identified the importance of her research in her attempt to explain the relationship between intentional control and its relationship with mental skills of elite soccer players.

Which requires the player to possess psychological and mental characteristics, including his attention control and mental skills, which qualifies him to perform the game with the best performance and image.

The player's ability to control his attention and his sound mental ability is the most important base for the game of football and without it, the player cannot fully implement his plans and duties, as it depends on the extent of the player's psychological preparation, and from here there must be some specific levels of attention and mental skills that help the player to behave properly, and in fact we see that most of our players suffer from poor psychological preparation and lack of interest in scientific knowledge by their coaches and supervisors because most of their coaches focus on the physical and skill aspect without any consideration and importance for that aspect, and because the researcher is an academic specialized in learning methods and wedge.

Research Objectives :

1. Identify the intentional control and its relationship with the mental skills of the players of the elite clubs provided elite teams in Baghdad Governorate for the football season (2023/2024).
2. Identify the correlation relationships between intentional control and mental skills of players of elite clubs in the city of Baghdad (2023/2024).

Fields of Research:

1. Human domain: Elite soccer clubs in the city of Baghdad.
2. Temporal domain: The period from 20/3/2024 to 20/5/2024.
3. Spatial domain: Stadiums of elite clubs in the city of Baghdad.

Defining the Terms of the Study:

1. Attention Control:

Posnor defines it as "a highly organized and planned mental process designed to help the individual select meaningful stimuli and avoid and neglect disorganized and interrelated stimuli" [1].

2. Mental Skills :

It is defined (Mental Skills) "are processes for organizing and arranging chains and adaptations of cognitive processes and for developing them through continuous training on them and the goal of obtaining optimal results for high performance" [2].

2. Materials and Methods

Research Methodology:

The current research issue required the researcher to adopt the descriptive research method, which is defined as “a method that describes a specific phenomenon according to research plans that include accurately describing the phenomenon, collecting facts and information about it, conducting an evaluation of the phenomenon to be studied for what it should be, and in light of the criteria, and proposing principles and steps that it should be” [3].

Also, achieving the objectives of this study imposed on the researcher to adopt the correlational method, and this method is defined as “a type of research that can discover the existence of correlational relationships between two or more variables, and then know the strength and direction of that relationship” [4].

Research population and sample:

The current research population included players of the Iraqi Premier League from the city of Baghdad for the year (2023/2024), and the total research population amounted to (202) players who were deliberately selected, and the researcher selected her sample consisting of (170) players randomly selected to represent the main research sample, so that the percentage of the research sample is (86, 44%), which is within the percentage of the total representation of the research community, after excluding (15) players from the players of the teams (Al-Zawraa, Talaba, Oil) because they represented the exploratory research sample, as well as (17) players were excluded for lack of readiness and attendance as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Shows the Clubs of the Middle Euphrates Region, the Number of Players and the Percentages.

| Percentage | Excluded players | Trial Players | Basic Trial Players | Total number of players | club | t |
|------------|------------------|---------------|---------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|---|
| %78,26 | 3 | - | 24 | 27 | Air Force | 1 |
| %79,16 | 3 | - | 24 | 27 | Police | 2 |
| %87,5 | 1 | 5 | 20 | 26 | Alzora | 3 |
| %91,66 | 2 | 5 | 17 | 24 | Students | 4 |
| %78,26 | 2 | 5 | 16 | 23 | oil | 5 |
| %79,16 | 2 | - | 22 | 24 | Border | 6 |
| %87,5 | 2 | - | 24 | 26 | Karkh | 7 |
| %91,66 | 2 | - | 23 | 25 | Baghdad Municipality | 8 |
| %86,44 | 17 | 15 | 170 | 202 | Total | |

Instruments and tools used in the current research:

((Psychological resources - psychological measurements and tests - questionnaires - ballpoint pens - hb computer - electronic stopwatches (4) - data dump forms - electronic calculator)

Psychometric measures and tests used :

1. Determination of research measures:

1.1 Attention Control Scale:

The researcher used the scale prepared by (Ismail, 2022) and applied to athletes (Appendix 1), consisting of (30) paragraphs and five alternatives to answer (always - often - sometimes - a little - never) and degrees (1 - 5 - 4 - 3 - 2) respectively, while the negative scores are calculated in reverse, and the highest score of the scale reached (170) and the lowest score (32), while the hypothetical mean of the scale reached (158).

1.2 Mental Skills Scale:

The researcher used the scale designed by (Bell, Benson, Shambrook, 1996) to measure some aspects (mental - psychological) important for sports performance

translated and modified by (Allawi). The questionnaire includes (24) statements (Appendix 2), and each of the six dimensions is represented by (4) statements, and the player answers the statements according to a six-degree scale (very much applies, very much applies, medium applies, little applies, very little applies, not at all applies).

- a. are positive statements in the dimensional direction, except for statement (13), which is negative in the opposite direction of the dimension and included the following statements:
- b. (20,14,8,2), which are positive in the dimension direction, except for statement (8), which is negative in the opposite direction of the dimension.
- c. Statements of the ability to cope with anxiety are: (22,16,10,4), which are positive in the dimension direction.
- d. Self-confidence statements are: (23,17,11,5) and statements (17,5) are positive in the direction of the dimension, while statements (23,11) are negative in the direction of the dimension.
- e. The achievement motivation statements are: (21,15,9,5) and all of them are negative in the direction of the dimension.

When correcting the scale, the scores in the direction of the dimension are given according to the score that the player set for himself in front of each positive statement, while with negative statements, the scores that the player set for himself are reversed.

2. Conducting an exploratory trial of the two scales:

To identify the clarity of the instructions, paragraphs and answer alternatives by the sample and to determine the necessary time to know the most important difficulties that the researcher may face during the application of the two scales in their final version, the researcher presented and applied her measures to a sample of (15) players that she chose randomly and by lottery and they are elite players from the clubs (Al-Zawraa, Talaba, Oil) at 3 pm on successive days (25 / 26 / 27 / 3 / 2024) in their stadiums (Al-Zawraa, Talaba, Oil), It was found that the instructions were clear by the sample and the time taken to apply them was between (15-20) d. Either the alternatives were very suitable for the level of the players as well as the paragraphs and thus the two scales with their instructions, paragraphs and answer alternatives were ready to be applied to the original sample of the research.

3. Final application of the two scales:

After completing all the necessary requirements for the two scales (attention control and mental skills), the final application was applied to the research sample of (170) players from eight clubs, namely ((Air Force - Police - Zawraa - Students - Oil - Border - Karkh - Amanat Baghdad)). On Monday (1/4/2024) until Tuesday (9/4/2024), the questionnaire was distributed to the players in their stadiums so that they sit within a specific distance from each other to avoid influencing the answers, and the time for players to answer the questionnaires for the two scales amounted to (15- 20) D and then collected the responses of all the testers))

Statistical Methods:

A statistical package (SPSS) version (25) was used to process the research results.

3. Results

The researcher used statistical methods to fill the results obtained through the application of the two scales, and for the purpose of achieving its objectives and verifying the validity of its hypothesis, the research results were presented, analyzed and discussed in order to identify the most important differences and statistical significance according to a precise and clear scientific perspective.

Presentation and Analysis of the Results of the Level of Attention Control and Mental Skills of the Research Sample :

Table 2. The Statistical Description of the Research Sample on the Attention Control and Mental Skills Scale.

| Torsion Coefficient | Standard Error | Standard Deviation | Calculation Center | Variable | t |
|---------------------|----------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|---|
| 0,774 | 0,889 | 6,885 | 137,44 | Attentional control | 1 |
| 0,470- | 0,744 | 4,448 | 48,890 | Mental skills | 2 |

Table 2, shows that the arithmetic mean, standard deviation and standard error of the research sample, where the arithmetic mean of attention control (137.44) with a standard deviation (6.885) and standard error (0.889), and the standard error (0.889), and the coefficient of skewness was (0.774), while the mental skills variable reached its arithmetic mean (48.890) and its standard deviation (4.448) and standard error (0.744), and the skewness factor was (-0.470).

Table 3. Arithmetic mean, Standard Deviation, Hypothesized mean, Calculated and Tabulated t-value for the Two Scales.

| Significance | T-Table | T-calculated | Calculation center | Standard deviation | Calculation center | Variable | t |
|--------------|---------|--------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|---|
| moral | 1,69 | 11,813 | 108 | 5,477 | 141,45 | Attentional control | 1 |
| moral | 1,69 | 23.255 | 40 | 4,133 | 48,890 | Mental skills | 2 |

Table 3, shows that the arithmetic mean of the attentional control scale for the research sample amounted to (141.45), which is greater than its hypothetical mean of (108), and when using a one-sample t-test between the two means, we found that the T value amounted to (11.813), which is greater than the tabular T value of (1.69) at the significant level (0.05) with a degree of freedom (168), which shows us that elite soccer players have a high level of attentional control.

The arithmetic mean of the mental skills scale for the research sample amounted to (48.890), which is greater than its hypothetical mean of (40), and when using a one-sample t-test between the two means, the t-value amounted to (23.255), which is higher than the tabular t-value of (1.69) at the significant level (0.05) and the degree of freedom (168), which shows us that players from elite football teams are characterized by a high level of mental skills.

Presentation of the Analysis of the Results of the Correlation Between Attentional Control and Mental Skills:

Table 4. The Correlation Coefficient, Calculated and Tabular Value of the Research Variables.

| Significance | T-Table | T-calculated | Standard Deviation | Calculation Center | Variable | t |
|--------------|---------|--------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|---|
| moral | 1,69 | 11,448 | 0,98 | 170 | Attentional control | 1 |
| | | | | | Mental skills | 2 |

at the 0.05 Significance Level and Degree of Freedom 168

From looking at table (4), the results showed us that the correlation coefficient amounted to (0.98), and when using the t-test for the significance of the correlation, we can see that the calculated t-value amounted to (11.448), which is greater than the tabular t-value, which amounted to (1.69) at the significant level (0.05) and the degree of freedom (168).

4. Discussion

From the results of Table 4, which included the arithmetic means, standard deviations and hypothesis means of the two research scales (attention control - mental skills), it is clear that the research sample possesses a high level of attention control and mental skills, which is reflected in the speed in making the most important decisions in a positive way in terms of minimizing playing errors and issuing important decisions during the performance of the game, as one of the tasks of the player inside the stadium to face the pressures of the game that affect their cognitive, psychological, motor, physical, skillful and physiological performance as well as how to deal with the proceedings in matches during the progress or loss of the result, "as it requires players to have high and multiple abilities in order to integrate performance and raise the high level because the game of football requires with modern development imposes many requirements and things from the players" [5]. Their efforts and performance are the key to achieving the required level during the match "and since sport in general requires motor, physical and skill activity, this activity leads to many emotional and cognitive responses of those who perform the game during play." [6].

The researcher attributes that the nature of the players' performance requires them to be alert and attentive to everything that happens around them and that continuing to perform matches at a high level requires possessing these qualities because a player who has attentional control has the ability to notice the weakness of the opposing team and notice the mistake before it happens.

The results of the research were logical and consistent with some sources that indicated that the specificity of the game of football as a team game characterized by many open skills as well as an example of team play, whether in offensive or defensive situations, and thus the practice of playing football requires the synergy of many skills of the mind that are involved in mental thinking as it indicates that "plans in the game of football that require more methods and means that require players to use their intelligence and thinking in their defense and attack plans and in all their actions inside the field" [7].

Emphasize that "the basic skills of the mind (mind visualization - relaxation - attention - control of tension - control of psychological energy) have interrelated relationships and correlations between them, as the development of one of them helps in developing the rest of the skills [8]. and this explains that all mental skills have obtained a high percentage of contribution to the player's overall performance.

Therefore, the researcher attributes these results to the fact that the current research sample are elite players, that is, players who have years of training and long playing practices so that these practices and continuous play in their clubs have gained them a long experience that undoubtedly worked to develop their mental abilities and then this will be reflected on their outstanding performance as "the acquisition of the ability to perform high and distinctive performance depends on what the player possesses and enjoys information and performance art in movements and motor experiences that the player acquired during the processes associated with continuous learning and training where the player used abilities and abilities in his attempt to provide enjoyable performance of what he enjoys.

5. Conclusion

Players from elite soccer teams possess a high degree of attentional control and mental skills, with a significant positive correlation between the two. These findings suggest that enhancing attentional control may further improve the mental skills essential for elite football performance. Further research is recommended to explore the underlying mechanisms of this relationship and to investigate the effectiveness of specific training interventions aimed at boosting attentional control to enhance overall athletic performance.

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