



**The management of professional football academies in Turkey:
The managers, coaches and players' perspectives**

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*Dedicated to my father who is my first
and permanent teacher in life,
Muzaffer Bozkurt*

*and to my beloved mother,
Emine İlhan Bozkurt*

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Resumo

A preocupação central da pesquisa em gestão é melhorar o desempenho das organizações (Covell et al., 2019), sendo a gestão eficaz reconhecida como um fator crucial para alcançar o sucesso (Cruickshank, 2019). No contexto do futebol, como a qualidade dos jogadores é o maior determinante do sucesso (Kuper & Szymanski, 2009), as academias de futebol tornam-se um determinante crítico para o futuro do desenvolvimento do futebol nos clubes e no país. Essa premissa foi a motivação fundamental para a realização da presente investigação, uma vez que há um claro déficit no desenvolvimento de jogadores de futebol de elite de nível internacional na Turquia (Sunay & Kaya, 2018). O presente estudo examinou as perspectivas de três partes essenciais no sistema de futebol de elite turco: gestores de academias, treinadores e jogadores de futebol de elite criados nas academias – reunindo informações valiosas, a partir de suas experiências pessoais, sobre a gestão de academias de futebol. O principal objetivo era compreender os desafios e oportunidades, dentro do sistema de academias de futebol, visando melhorar a produtividade das práticas de gestão de academias de futebol profissional na Turquia. Os dados foram analisados com recurso à análise de conteúdo, utilizando entrevistas semi-estruturadas como meio de recolha de dados. Os resultados destacam que o sucesso na gestão de academias de futebol vai além da própria academia. É necessária uma abordagem mais abrangente e sistemática entre a academia, o clube, a liga ou federação que governa o futebol do país e o ministério responsável pela política esportiva. Com base nestes resultados, o estudo apresenta recomendações práticas com o propósito de alcançar esse objetivo.

Palavras-chave: GESTÃO DE ACADEMIAS DE FUTEBOL, DESENVOLVIMENTO DE TALENTOS, GESTORES, TREINADORES, JOGADORES.

Abstract

A central concern of management research is the enhancement of organizational performance (Covell et al., 2019). Effective management is widely recognized as a crucial factor in achieving success within organizations (Cruickshank, 2019). In the context of football, where the quality of players is the greatest determinant of success (Kuper & Szymanski, 2009), football academies become a critical determinant for the future of the clubs' and country's football development. These premises were the fundamental motivation for conducting the present investigation as there is a notable deficit in the development of elite-level football players with international standards in Turkey (Sunay & Kaya, 2018). More specifically, this study examined the perspectives of three essential internal stakeholders in the Turkish elite football system, namely academy managers, coaches, and academy-raised elite football players, to gather valuable insights from their personal experiences in football academies, reaching a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities within the management of Turkish football academy system. Ultimately, our goal was to propose effective managerial strategies to enhance the management practices of professional football academies within the club system in Turkey. The data were collected utilizing semi-structured interviews and analyzed using qualitative content analysis. The findings highlighted that success in football academy management extends beyond the academy itself. A more comprehensive and systematic approach is required among the academy, the club, the league or federation that is governing the country's football, and the ministry responsible for sports policy. Based on these findings, the study puts forth a comprehensive set of practical recommendations aimed at achieving this goal.

Keywords: Keywords: FOOTBALL ACADEMY MANAGEMENT, TALENT DEVELOPMENT; MANAGERS; COACHES; PLAYERS.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CEO: Chief Executive Officer

ECA: European Club Association

DFB: Deutscher Fussball-Bund (German Football Federation)

EPPP: Elite Player Performance Plan

FIFA: Fédération Internationale de Football Association

HR: Human Resources

KPI: Key Performance Indicator

MOOC: Massive Open Online Course

PE: Physical Education

PR: Public Relations

TFF: Turkish Football Federation

TID: Talent Identification and Development

RAE: Relative Age Effect

RD: Research and Development

SRSA: Department of Sport and Recreation South Africa

UEFA: Union of European Football Associations

UK: United Kingdom

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Research context

Football is played in more than 200 countries (Bundesliga, 2023) and globally it is the most popular spectator sport for live and mediated audiences (Hughson et al., 2017). Because of this, football has gone through a period of rapid professional and commercial development in the last decades (Bridgewater, 2010; Rohde & Breuer, 2017). This emergence of commercialism and professionalism in football (Gammelsæter, 2010; Slack, 2014; Winand et al., 2016) made it a big, profitable business with a significant increase in broadcasting rights and sponsorships deals (Girginov, 2008). Top professional football leagues, European club competitions, or FIFA World Cup finals are top media events which attract billions of people (Beech & Chadwick, 2013). Consequently, in today's world, football is not just a sport anymore but also a billion-dollar TV show and a complex global business in an economic sector (Güneş, 2010; Hamil & Chadwick, 2010; Hoye et al., 2012; Morrow & Howieson, 2014; Samur, 2018a).

Chelladurai (2014) argues that professional sport clubs produce entertainment in the form of sports excellence for the public. Similarly, there are economic models that locates football clubs in the sports entertainment and recreation sector. (Kaser & Oelkers, 2008; Van Uden, 2005). Chelladurai (2014) also argues that the entertainment value of professional sports comes from the competitiveness of the teams involved. Therefore, sports clubs nowadays need to entertain the crowd to attract more attention to their games, and football fans demand better performance from football players in exchange for spending their time and money.

Great performances are only given by great performers, and naturally, a team's competitiveness and entertainment levels depend on the quality of the players. Confirming the assumption, research done by Kuper and Szymanski (2009) showed that the quality of players is the greatest determinant of success in a

football. This makes great performers even more valuable than ever in modern sports (Colvin, 2008). Consequently, the demand for sports talent increases (Xiang et al., 2023). Given the significant cost of recruiting elite footballers in the transfer market, investment in youth academies is also increasing in strategic importance for many football clubs around the world (Ford et al., 2020). Because an academy player may turn into the next superstar and, for a relatively small cost, the club will benefit both on (performance) and off (financially) the pitch (Sweeney et al., 2021). Because of this, football clubs are focused heavily on recruiting or developing the best players to have the best chances at victory (Hoye et al., 2012).

Because of those reasons, youth player development programs have become an important component in the pursuit of success in top-level football (Nesti & Sulley, 2015) and in today's football practice, many professional football clubs have set up special training programs with the objective of developing young talented players for their professional A teams. These development facilities are named as *football academies*. In other words, for developing football players, the notion of professionalism is often introduced to football clubs through the football academy system (Mitchell et al., 2014).

Most of the contemporary football academies are made up of similar infrastructure and practices (ECA Report, 2012) because it's believed that providing similar resources and services is perceived to be the explanation to elite athlete development. This is, in fact, not always true, because although most of the clubs have similar services, some clubs are notably more successful in producing elite athletes while others are not. This shows that the actual design of these systems can no longer explain differences in success (Böhlke & Robinson, 2009).

So, why do some teams succeed and so many don't?

Erdemli (2008) stated that sporting success has a causal relation. This causal relation seems to be in the effectiveness of the management of those sports organizations. Approving this presumption, Pedersen and Thibault (2014) proposed that the success of sports organizations ultimately depends on how effectively the management and leadership inside the organization are applied. Bridgewater (2010) also agreed that the decisions and choices of the management staff are critical for the success of football operations in a club. Similarly, it's also claimed that in Turkey, the unsuccessful outcomes of sports organizations are often caused by managerial issues (Talimciler, 2014). It appears that the critical success factor in organizations is the way how they are managed (Hackman, 2002; Hall & Tolbert, 2009; Hall et al., 2010; Samur, 2018a).

In the light of these initial indications, it becomes clearer that in a complex, business-like football sector (Morrow & Howieson, 2014) in where sports organizations invest considerable financial resources in the talent development of youth players (Johnston et al., 2018), the management expertise in youth football is a must (Haugaasen et al., 2014). Because there is a critical interaction between nature and nurture for successful talent development (Williams & MacNamara, 2020) and thus, evidence-informed decision-making, and management is vital for sport's governing bodies (Cahill & MacNamara, 2023). Consequently, the management of professional sports, including the academies, cannot be left for common sense anymore; it must be studied because only a good combination of vision, academic knowledge, and practical experience can lead to the effective management of sports organizations (D'Amico, 2014). These affirmations naturally include football clubs and the academies, and this was the starting point of the present research.

1.2. Research rationale and justification

The management side of talent development programs across the globe is not firmly grounded on scientific rationale and it is partly a neglected field of research (De Bosscher et al., 2009). The research literature is generally more humanistic and developmentally orientated (Côté & Lidor, 2013). The subject has been

considered mostly as a technical issue in the educational domain and the focus was often on exercise and training methodologies (Cherubini & Santini, 2010; Cushion et al., 2012; Mills et al., 2012; Sagar et al., 2010). This could have been a logical approach in the past when there used to be a lack of skilled coaches and scientific training knowledge, but today, sports science is accessible with a single click on the internet. Moreover, there are many educational institutions and sports faculties, all around the world, of whose graduates are equipped with very similar technical and scientific football training knowledge.

Additionally, although the last 25 years has seen a concentration of research in Talent Identification and Development (TID), relatively little has changed in the TID landscape at a systems level compared to what we know based on empirical evidence (Collins et al., 2018). Therefore, there is a need for future research to specifically address the limitations identified in talent development schemes (Baker et al., 2003).

Moreover, nowadays, financial capital is more abundant in sports than it was in the past (Colvin, 2008). With the abundant available money in the football sector, building an academy is the easy part of the job. Almost all top professional football clubs have similar facilities, the same kind of pitches and alike physical conditions (ECA Report, 2012). It's seen that those wishing to emulate the success within a football academy have attempted to copy successful examples of other teams. Those who wish to copy successful examples, either benchmark the proven academy systems with lesson drawing (Covell et al., 2019) or make a complete policy transfer (Green, 2007). However, although having a role model may be useful, copying someone's approach may lead to failure too (McGrath & Bates, 2017). There is a need to consider specific contextual factors that may impact the policy and practice (Cahill & MacNamara, 2023). Moreover, simply imitating other organizations may lead to mimetic isomorphism in sports clubs (Chelladurai, 2014). Therefore, it seems that the management and delivery of an elite sport system is a more important factor for success than the mere existence of such a sports development facility (Böhlke & Robinson, 2009), because the success or

failure would eventually depend on how well this complex process is executed (Cruickshank, 2019).

Although growing evidence suggests that success in any sporting enterprise depends on a good understanding of management (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012; Parks & Quarterman, 2003), there is still limited knowledge on how a football academy should manage the delivery of its developmental services (Böhlke & Robinson, 2009). Talent development is fundamentally and traditionally concerned predominantly with practices aimed at the maximization of athletic performance in the field (Morley et al., 2014). This makes the management of professional football academies still a relatively under-conceptualized field, which means that one of the important factors in a football academy's overall success has been neglected; in other words, there is a lack of research to guide the optimization of this management process (Martindale et al., 2005). Especially, research into management processes associated with youth football transitioning to first team football is generally scarce (McGuigan et al., 2023). Confirming this, Bado Menze, the director of FC Schalke 04 Football Academy, underlines that due to a lack of scientific guidance, there is still no blueprint for 100% success in this field (ECA Report, 2012). It is impossible to separate improving and enhancing the sports talent development environment from its managing quality (Xiang et al., 2023). This implies that the management of football academies is still not scientifically and profoundly explained and thus a scientific approach with pieces of evidence should guide the management operations in elite football academies (Nesti & Sulley, 2015). The key question of management research is how to improve the performance of organizations (Covell et al., 2019) and one of the most impactful factors for the success of elite sport development systems is the management behind those systems (Cruickshank, 2019). This constitutes the ultimate rationale of the present research as there is an evident unproductivity in elite athlete development in Turkey at an international scale.

1.3. Turkish reality in elite athlete development

Turkey is one of the countries in Europe that has the largest population (83.614.362) but also the youngest population at the same time. %23 of the total population is under 14 years old (TUIK, 2023). This constitutes great potential for developing elite athletes, but this potential hasn't been translated into any reality. As of 2020, in the Olympic Games history, this country with great potential had won gold medals only in four different Olympic sports categories during the last 125 years of the Games. The total number of medals is 91, won in wrestling, weightlifting, boxing, taekwondo, judo and athletics (TMOK, 2019). If we make an international comparison, the United States of America won 121 medals only in one Olympic Games, in Rio 2016, which is more medals than everything that Turkey won during its whole Olympic history.

This unrealized potential of Turkey continues to be the destiny of football as well. Turkey is among the biggest 20 economies in the world and the government has been heavily investing money in football and football facilities for two decades. The Turkish Football Federation (TFF) is one of the richest federations in Europe with constant backup from the government and big sponsors. There are 57 sports faculties at Turkish Universities all around the country with 72.880 students, thousands of them are coaches graduating each year (Koç, 2020). This indicates that the country does not lack financial, infrastructure or human resources (Taştan, 2021) yet there is not even a single championship in any international football competition in the last 100 years of the country. Far from doing so, the national football team did not even attend the FIFA World Cup in 2006, 2010, 2014, 2018, 2022 and the EURO in 2004, 2012 and didn't show any significant performance in 2016, and 2020. For a nation to compete and be successful at an international level, high-standard talent development programs are assumed to be prerequisites (De Bosscher et al., 2009). It has been observed that a significant factor contributing to the lack of success of the Turkish national football team is the insufficient quantity and quality of players produced by Turkish football academies (Sunay & Kaya, 2018).

The same pattern applies to club competitions as well. Even though the Turkish league is the 7th richest league in Europe (Deloitte, 2020), none of the Turkish clubs has ever won anything in any of the UEFA club competitions in the last 24 years. Far from doing so, they did not even reach to semi-finals of any international football club competition for over two decades.

Moreover, each year nearly 20.000 professional football players are transferred around the world to benefit from the lucrative global market (FIFA, 2022). Nonetheless, as of 2022, only a few Turkish players were playing outside of Turkey. Besides not producing any international talent for European football, Turkish League also heavily recruits foreign players for its local football league and teams. Turkish League was one of the leagues in the world that made the most transfers from abroad in the 2020/2021 season (FIFA, 2022) without producing its own talent. Moreover, Turkish Super League is constantly among the football leagues with the highest financial losses (Taştan, 2021).

When we look at the league games, the percentage of academy-raised players who played in the Turkish Super League is only 6% (Çevik & Onağ, 2019). In a recent UEFA report, it was noted that Turkish football clubs have the lowest rate in Europe, at 4%, for providing playing time to players developed through youth academies (UEFA, 2022). This shows that Turkish football is not producing enough elite players (Akkoyun, 2014) and this shortage of academy-raised players was identified as one of the impediments to the growth of Turkish football (Şenel & Saygın, 2021). Additional research also indicated that one of the reasons of the failure of Turkish football is linked due to insufficiency and inadequacy of football academies, as this is widely acknowledged by football executives within the sector (Taştan, 2021). Research also showed that among European football leagues, Turkey ranks the last out of 31 countries in terms of club-trained players from the academies (Poli et al., 2016). This indicates that the management of football clubs remains problematic in Turkey (Biçer et al., 2022).

Successful elite performance in any Olympic sport, including football, is an outcome of an athlete development system in the country (Shilbury & Ferkins, 2011; Taylor et al., 2008). In football, one of the factors in international success is the investment in youth academies (Sunay & Kaya, 2018). A notable example illustrating the success of football academies can be seen in Portugal's victory in the 2016 European Football Championship. During the final game, 10 out of the 14 players who actively participated and contributed to the victory had been developed in Portuguese football academies (Fieldsend, 2017). Similarly, when Germany won the FIFA World Cup in 2014, the winner roster was composed of 21 out of 23 players educated in German football academies (Grossmann & Lames, 2015). This implies that talent development in football academies is a determinant of national team success (Balliauw et al., 2022). In other words, it can be observed that one of the reasons for the lack of success in Turkish football is the inadequacies of the academies in the country (Sunay & Kaya, 2018).

As a natural result of these circumstances, recently there has been criticism of the quantity and quality of Turkish players that have been developed by Turkish football academies. Since elite football players are not born but made (Mills et al. 2014; Topkaya, 2015), there is something that is not working in the Turkish football development system. This brings us to the main question: How are the great performers in Turkish football made? The future of the game depends on how well this issue is addressed (Nesti & Sulley, 2015) and there is a lack of knowledge to guide the optimization of this management process (Martindale et al., 2007). Therefore, this issue should be investigated by the academic researchers of the country in question.

1.4. Theoretical Framework: The systems approach

In management literature, the systems approach can be conceptualized as a system of input, treatment, process, feedback and output (Lyle, 1997; Von Bertalanffy, 2015). Moreover, it's also known that open management systems are always in interaction with their environment (Saruhan & Yıldız, 2009; Şenaras & Sezen, 2017). They receive inputs; for example, young players, and then

provides outputs back to its operating environment; for example, professional footballers. In this sense, sports organizations, including football academies, are open systems and shaped and influenced by the environment in which the organization is located (Senge, 2020; Taylor et al., 2008). Because of this, in addition to these four initial components of the system, the operating environment of the academy should be taken into consideration as well.

Similarly, there are some common features of systems in the literature (Demirdöğen & Küçük, 2013; Mele et al., 2010; Şenaras & Sezen, 2017):

- Systems have connected parts.
- There is an inter-relationship between all these parts, functioning together.
- The input of the system affects the output of the system.
- There should be a common purpose and direction for all those parts.

Recognizing the relationships and interactions between the parts of the system is vitally important to comprehend the behavior and the output quality of the system (Samur, 2018b; Şenaras & Sezen, 2017), mainly because in a system the whole is a sum of its parts (Von Bertalanffy, 2015) and the interaction between components of the system affects the productivity of the system (Mele et al., 2010). Hence, each of the components of any talent management system should be operating harmonizingly and in an effective way to achieve the overall success. A system can be defined as a set of interrelated and interdependent parts arranged in a manner that produces a unified whole (Robbins et al., 2006). All the components of the system, inside it or in the environment, influence general performance (Akkuş & Alevok İzci, 2018). In the systems approach, communication is crucial, and there are mutual obligations. These obligations must be fulfilled by all parts for an effective communication in the system (Yüksel, 2016). In other words, if some of the components or subsystems do not function well, the general outcome will not come out as initially aimed and expected (Eryılmaz, 2006; Samur, 2018b). Therefore, it is important to ensure that subsystems and their processes are consistent with each other and with the task

requirements (Chelladurai, 2014). This means that organizations are no longer expected to be able to function and thrive in isolation. This interdependence of elements is the defining characteristic of a system (Morecroft et al., 2002). Because of this, Mingers and White (2010) proposed that the management activity should be done as a holistic approach. In this regard, the systems theory approach in management provides a unity to understand the problematic parts by studying the diversity of the system (Hofkirchner & Rousseau, 2015). In this context, Aydın (2018) stated that one of the most common problems of ineffective management in Turkey is often related to the fact that the system is broken or not functioning harmonizingly. Thus, the impact of management on organizational performance can only be understood with a complete systems approach (Lin & Li, 2004). It is proven that a strong organizational system and its sub-systems would improve the overall achievements of sports organizations (Cucui & Cuicui, 2016).

Professional football clubs are part of the country's professional football system and this football system, more broadly, is also a part of the country's sports environment. Football academies are fully financed by professional football clubs (Richardson et al., 2004) and thus they are contingent on the clubs' policies. This makes the academies, in fact, a subsystem inside a football club system. The systems approach in sport takes management activity as an interdependent and connected set of actions in a shared system and the real management challenge is to make sure that all components, subsystems and processes of the football management system are constantly well-maintained (Samur, 2018b). If a club wishes to improve success in elite sports academies, it should focus on improving the way the system is operated to enhance the output (Böhlke & Robinson, 2009). Because sports organizations do not exist as separate units, they are interconnected (Covell et al., 2019). Similarly, Rycroft-Malone (2008) argued that to realize the potential of evidence-informed practice in management, there needs to be a shift in focus away from individual factors alone to recognizing the involvement of a multitude and multiple of factors that shape the context of practice. In the context of sports, talent development of high-performance

athletes cannot be reduced to single factors (Williams et al., 2020). Moreover, other research suggested complementary and holistic views for sports development (Coutinho et al., 2016; Larsen et al., 2020).

Bordage (2009) states that the theoretical framework of research represents a way of thinking about the phenomenon being studied and it guides the interpretation of data. The systems approach can serve as a useful theoretical framework to elucidate management issues within investigated systems (Şenaras & Sezen, 2017) and thus the systems view of organizations is extremely useful for portraying various forces that impinge upon the management of sports organizations (Chelladurai, 2014). In this context, the present research envisions that developing elite footballers in the academies inevitably takes place in an interconnected system. Any factor impacting this system, would also automatically influence the ultimate performance of the football academy management. Consequently, the present research needed to look at the football academy management phenomenon holistically from the systems approach.

1.5. Research question and aims

The scientific method typically begins by identifying the problem through a research question and, when necessary, formulating a hypothesis (Lapan et al., 2012). Given that the research question format is commonly used and suitable in the social sciences (Veal & Dacry, 2014) the main research question for this study was formulated as follows;

“What should be done to enhance the success of the football academy management within a club system in Turkey?”

With this question, the study aims to investigate the managerial ways to improve the productivity and efficiency of the academies within the club system in Turkey.

As the systems approach in sport takes management activity as an interdependent and connected set of actions, the investigation centered on

enhancing this connected set of actions within the domains affecting the system. The domains of a system generally include input, process, feedback, output, and the environmental aspects (Von Bertalanffy, 2015; Lyle, 1997; Şenaras & Sezen, 2017). Hence, three objectives were established to amplify the main research question mentioned above and facilitate a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. These objectives are:

- To explore the factors that affect the efficiency of the football academy system in Turkey from a managerial perspective;
- To examine the essential requisites and services encompassing input (resources and talent acquisition), process (training and development), feedback (communication and evaluation), output (player and organizational performance), and environmental (external influences) aspects of a football academy system in Turkey.
- To offer recommendations for improvement, as proposed by influential internal stakeholders, aiming to enhance successful academy management within a club system in Turkey.

1.6. Contribution

The aim of this research was not only to generate theoretical knowledge but also to provide practical solutions to real-world problems faced by football clubs. There is a drive for evidence-informed practice to underpin approaches and process in sports talent development environment (Taylor et al., 2023) and thus, the research also had a practical intention to diminish the gap between science and practice (Haugen, 2019; Sandbakk, 2018) in Turkish football management environment. In this regard, this study takes a pragmatic approach (Veal & Darcy, 2014), aligning with the objective of closing the research gap regarding the management of Turkish football academies.

First and foremost, this study aimed to make a clear theoretical contribution to the academic field of sports management, with a focus on football club management, and more specifically on the management of football academies.

The study specifically examined professional football academies operating within the complex football club system in Turkey. In contrast to existing studies that primarily focus on the technical aspects of football development, this research uniquely concentrated solely on the management aspect of football academies. It examined the management phenomenon as an interconnected and interdependent system, providing valuable insights into the intricate dynamics of football academy management. This research also aimed to look at the football academy management phenomenon holistically, from the systems theory lens. The conceptual construct of the study is based on the systems approach theory of management. The systems approach is now ubiquitous in many specialized disciplines including management, but it is not still fully developed in most of these disciplines (Hofkirchner & Rousseau, 2015). Although the systems approach is one of the contemporary management theories (Tortop et al., 2007), there have been only a few attempts to apply it directly to sports management (cf. Chelladurai, 2014; Lebed, 2013; Samur, 2018b). Football management is one of those fields in which there is still room for the development of systems theory approaches. Therefore, the findings of the study are expected to contribute theoretically to the system perspective view of sports management as well.

Secondly, this study also aimed to optimize the management processes of football academies and increase their productivity by providing an evidence-informed, multi-dimensional, practical management guide for practitioners in the Turkish football sector. As a solid contribution to the field, the administrators of football clubs and academy managers may apply the suggestions mentioned in the conclusion section to cope with the challenges to management practices in the football club's environment.

1.7. Thesis structure

This dissertation comprises three articles about football academy management from the perspectives of the manager, the coach and the elite player. It is structured into nice main chapters: Introduction; Literature review; Methods;

Empirical study I; Empirical study II; Empirical study II; Discussion; Conclusion and finally references.

Chapter one: The introduction provides some background knowledge to the research and outlines the scope of the study, as well as describes the research rationale and the main purpose of the work. This chapter also provides introductory information on the applied theoretical framework and presents the expected contribution of the research to the academic and practical football world.

Chapter two: The literature review section introduces the theoretical perspectives and concepts used to address the research question. These are namely the concepts related to sports management, the football academy and the stakeholders in the system. Firstly, previous academic thoughts on the relevant topics are reviewed. For this aim, PubMed, SCOPUS, B-ON, Web of Knowledge, and EBSCO +SPORTDISCUS databases have been intensely used for articles related with the following keywords: “*sports management, football management, youth development, talent development management, football academy, academy management.*” Similarly, many physical books have been read and consulted as well. In addition to this, the reference lists of the consulted resources were scanned in order not to miss any other relevant articles for a complete literature review. This chapter includes some knowledge from the general management literature, since the sport management discipline was born out of the general management science (Chelladurai, 2014; Donuk, 2016a; Yetim, 2019). In addition to management subjects, sport development literature was also closely examined. Lastly, three important internal stakeholders of academy management were underlined and examined concerning the football clubs and academies in Turkey.

Chapter three: This chapter presents the research methodology, providing readers with (a) the identification of the techniques and/or methods and the instruments employed; (b) a comprehensive description and characterization of

the participants and samples; and (c) a detailed overview of the analysis procedures applied to the collected data.

Chapter four, five and six: These sections comprise three academic articles derived from the findings of the thesis's scientific research. In these articles, the examined phenomenon is discussed through the lenses of three internal stakeholders of the academy management process:

- (1) Management of football academies in Turkey: The managers' perspective
- (2) Management of football academies In Turkey: The coaches' perspective
- (3) Management of football academies In Turkey: The players' perspective

The manager's perspective permits to understand the initial and internal problems concerning the actual management processes inside the academies and learning about the influential external stakeholders of the system. The coach's perspective provides access to the desired outcomes of the academy process and the related technical issues of the management process. Lastly, the players' perspective provides valuable insights into the opinions and expectations of the main actors of the academy development process.

Chapter seven: This chapter discusses the key findings of the research and shows a combined discussion of the findings from all the articles. Thus, this research presents a holistic and meaningful approach to interpreting the results.

Chapter eight: The conclusion of the research is shared in this final section of the thesis with an original and genuine chart summarizing the key findings and practical recommendations to practitioners in the football sector.

The last section of the thesis presents all the references.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Football academy as a sport organization

To understand the concept of a football academy in a systems theory approach, we need to understand first the concept of a football club in the context of modern sport organizations and then clarify what we mean by a football academy in a sports organization context. This prior knowledge may be useful to define the borders of the study as well as to shed light on the context of the research in the literature.

The term organization has been defined in many ways by a variety of organizational science theorists for almost a century now (Parks & Quarterman, 2003). Therefore, instead of giving a single definition, it is much more meaningful to underline the common features that are seen in most of the definitions in the literature.

No matter the type of organization, there is always a deliberate structure and purpose set by the people within deliberate coordination. Naturally, we may define sports organizations as goal-seeking entities in the sports industry, structured and coordinated by a group of people to achieve a common sporting purpose and linked to their internal and external environment (Covell et al., 2019; Daft, 2021).

Inside the sport-specific context, there are plenty of sports organizations operating within many sport types in their sports industries (Pedersen & Thibault 2014). However, this research does not aim to investigate all kinds of sports organizations in the literature. In fact, to make the research more meaningful and targeted, we should narrow down the scope of the sports organization relevant to this study. In this manner, it is possible to define the real position of a football academy within a professional football club, in the context of sports organizations.

From an organizational point of view, we may classify sports into three sectors (Hoye et al., 2012; Pedersen & Thibault, 2014; Sunay, 2016):

- public sector
- non-profit sector
- professional sector

The increasing influence of capitalism on modern football made it a big, profitable business (Banks, 2002; Girginov, 2008; Hamil & Chadwick, 2010). In fact, the characteristics of modern football have been getting closer to the characteristics of entertainment business and profit-seeking corporations (Akşar & Kutlu, 2008; Talimciler, 2008). Hence, one of the explicit aims of professional football clubs has been to make profit (Beech, 2010) through the sports services they give.

Real Madrid, FC Barcelona or English Premier League clubs can be good examples of such organizations. They aim to make a profit through the sports services and products they provide to the public. Confirming this, Daniel Levy, the former chairman of Tottenham Hotspur Football Club had once stated that the main strategic aim of a football club should be making a profit that can be re-invested in the club (Beech, 2010). This clearly shows that football clubs, and naturally their football academies, are situated in the professional sports sector. This type of sports organization uses sport as a vehicle to earn profit through its operations.

Apart from this initial classification, there is another possible way to classify sports into three general types of sports organization (Chelladurai, 2014).

- sport governing organization
- sport event organization
- sport service providing/producing organization

Gilmore (2001) claims that professional football has been re-oriented as an object of consumption, as people worldwide may choose whether to go to the cinema or to a concert or to the stadium to spend their free time and money (Dolles et al., 2010; Soriano, 2012). So, football clubs fall into sport service providing/producing organization category as well.

Under the light that the sports organization literature sheds upon us, we can position professional football clubs into a clear category. Football clubs are for-profit organizations (Andrews, 2015; Morrow & Howieson 2014) whose aim is to produce and provide sport service in the professional sector (Breuer & Nowy, 2015; Bridgewater, 2010; Hoye et al., 2012).

It's worth reminding at this point that football academies are subsystems of professional football clubs. Therefore, the scope of this research is clearly defined now: to investigate the management of football academies as sports organizations that operate in professional for-profit sector as a sports service providing entity.

2.2. Management of football

Managing a football club is a complex process (Cherubini & Santini, 2010) in which various stakeholders are involved. Especially at this point, it's worth making a distinction between two interrelated concepts of the system: management and governance. These two concepts in football are generally used as synonyms but, in fact, there is a fine line between them in the context of football academy management. We would like to ensure that the difference is well-understood in the context of this research since clarifying these two confusing concepts is also important for the understanding of the systems approach in football academy management.

When the ownership of the club is separated from its practical management, corporate governance issues arise (Aguilera & Crespí-Cladera, 2016; Tricker, 2000). Corporate governance is defined as an overall system by which a sports

organization is directed and controlled to produce the right results (Dimitropoulos, 2011). It deals with the high-level issues of strategy and policy making (Lussier & Kimball, 2014) and is not concerned with daily or weekly management operations (Camy & Robinson, 2007).

According to Tricker (2000), governance in organizations is about the exercise of power over the professional management staff via the board of directors. Similarly, Donaldson (2003) defines corporate governance as a structure whereby managers are controlled by the board of directors of the organizations. In other words, governance is about seeing whether the business is, or not, run properly by the professional managers. Therefore, it is the club's governance task to oversee the activities of the management system and judge authoritatively whether it operates in the best interests of the organization or not. In this sense, governance represents the top management level of the clubs. Mintzberg calls this top level in management literature as *the strategic apex* of the organization (Lunenburg, 2012)

As the strategic apex of the organization, the governance of a football club sets the direction (Ferkins et al., 2009; Hoye et al., 2012) and defines the overall aims (Kalfa, 2019). After setting the overall aim, they are supposed to define the vision and then the mission of the sport organization (Saruhan & Yıldız, 2009). The mission is the reason for being, it reflects the fundamental purpose of the existence of the football club. Vision is a directional and motivational guidance for the entire organization (Covell et al., 2019; Lussier & Kimball, 2014). Both concepts are important because they eventually influence the organization's structure and strategy (Cunningham & Rivera, 2001; Cunningham et al., 2009). Therefore, the aims of the academy are closely related to the concepts of vision and mission, which is provided by the corporate governance of the club (McDonald & Westphal, 2011).

These concepts must be known and embraced by the academy manager and the staff because the plans of the academy should be clear and in line with the vision

and mission of the club (Basım & Argan, 2009; Heerden, 2010). It is seen that previous research also highlighted the importance of an identifiable, coherent, and shared philosophy and culture within the player development environments (Henriksen, 2010; Henriksen et al., 2010; Larsen et al., 2013), because the objectives can only be achieved if the business strategy of the club is linked with the operational plans of the academy (Martinelli et al., 2014). Potter (2007) and Kalfa (2019) also emphasized this notion and indicate that the management objectives must be in line with the overall strategy of the club. If there is a gap or mismatch between the aims of the club governors and the managers of the academies, an internal management crisis may arise easily.

As we can see, the governance and the management of a football club are not the same thing, but they interact with each other. Both governance and operational management are interdependent and crucially important for the overall performance and success of the sports organization (Double Pass, 2020; Robinson & Minikin, 2011). As a result, the calibre and quality of the board of directors would eventually affect the performance of the sports organization (Papadimitriou, 2007). Because of this, besides good management, good governance is also getting more and more important for the successful management of football clubs (Michie & Oughton, 2005).

On the other hand, the management is responsible for the club's operations in the field. Management is a process of using the scarce resources of the organization effectively (Donuk, 2016) to satisfy the aims set by the corporate governors of the club who are, in exchange, supposed to provide the management staff with the required resources. For example, a typical top-category academy in England has a reported annual spend of at least between £2.3 and 4.9 million (Larkin & Reeves, 2018). This amount must be provided by the club's governance to the managers, otherwise, the management functions would be severely limited in the field. With the provided resources, it is the management's task to coordinate human, material, technological and financial resources needed to achieve the previously defined goals by corporate governors

(Covell et al., 2019). Donuk (2016) also underlined that the management functions must be performed by professional and expert managerial staff while the corporate governors generally hold honorary and voluntary positions (Digel, 2005).

In football clubs, sometimes corporate governance and management may be performed by the same person (e.g., the president performing as the executive director), but these two terms are still different from each other and there is a fine line between the governance and the management in football clubs. If a president or an owner of a football club wants to run the club himself, he must first step down from the governance position and go ahead as a managing director. Otherwise, if there is already another assigned managing director or a CEO within the same club organization, this kind of attempt may create potential monitoring problems and organizational chaos (Klein, 2002). Research on this matter shows that only 43% of the clubs have set out the division of responsibilities between the board and managing managers in writing (Hamil et al., 2004; Oughton & Michie, 2005). Similarly, it's argued that most sports clubs still use a traditional governance model in which the board members often intervene in managerial tasks to ensure that their ego is satisfied, and they have a say in important decision-making (Hoye et al., 2012). This type of centralized corporate governance model of management is called as concentrated ownership system (Wilson et al., 2013). In this approach, corporate governors show strong and strict intervention on managerial decisions.

While this might be one of the problems behind the poor management of clubs, there is another type of corporate governance model which might be the root of the academy management problems. That type of model is named as dispersed ownership system (Aguilera & Crespí-Cladera, 2016). Contrariwise to the first approach, this type of governance does not show any direct interest towards the staff and is often less motivated to monitor the management process in the club, including the academy. While this may initially appear favorable in terms of granting expert staff the freedom to demonstrate their knowledge within academy

management, it is essential to consider the potential negative consequences. The lack of interest in this approach carries the inherent risk of insufficient allocation of resources and financial support from the club's governance, ultimately jeopardizing the effective functioning of the academy as a subsystem within the club. In other words, if the corporate strategy of the club does not show any support to the academy, the management staff cannot change much in the structure. Accordingly, considering that the governance always sets the priorities of the organization, then corporate governor's perspectives and choices would influence the capability of the managers (Robinson & Minikin, 2011). As a result, the organization's strategy prepared by corporate governors would eventually determine the tasks to be done at the operational management level (Lunenborg, 2012). Additionally, it has already been proposed that problems with the management are likely to be at the strategic level and related to the inefficacy of policy, resourcing, planning and direction of governance in the sports organization (Topkaya, 2015). Other research found that the lack of institutional support, respect, and recognition is the biggest problem that sports directors face in their management terms (Ross & Schurger, 2007). All these findings mean that sooner or later the governance of the club would affect the overall direction of the clubs' youth development programs (Solomon, 2008).

Although scholars underline the importance of a clear policy and strategic planning as the factors that define the football club's organizational capacity (Misener & Doherty, 2009; Sweeney et al., 2021; Wicker & Breuer, 2013) towards academy management, strategic planning still does not seem to be a priority of sports clubs in general and only a few clubs seem to have such concrete plans and policies for long-term future (Hallmann et al., 2015). This may be seen as the core reason for failure stories in many football academies. In other words, if the corporate governors of a football club don't understand the role of the academy in developing future talents for the professional team, there won't be any deliberate strategy and enough effort to power the academy inside the club system.

Confirming this situation, Topkaya (2015) claims that in Turkey the problem with football academies is generally linked to the problems at the club's corporate governance level. The system starts with the governance of the club and continues with the management of the club which eventually affects the capabilities of the professional managers of the academy. Thus, the success is not only limited to the professional management of football academies, but it also depends on the quality of the governance of the club.

In terms of the management of the academy, two important aspects of the literature deserve special attention: professionalism and structure.

2.2.1. Professionalism

One of the most common features that was found in sports management literature is professionalism (Taylor et al., 2008). Professionalization has changed the way of management of sporting organizations including football clubs (Carvalho, 2009; Carvalho et al., 2013; Girginov, 2008; Gomez et al., 2008, Hoye et al., 2006; Rial, 2015; Rohde & Breuer, 2017; Shilbury & Ferkins, 2011). Professional sports services have been largely based on the knowledge, expertise, and special competencies of the employees (Chelladurai, 2014). The absence of competencies largely originated from the fact that many of the employees are not professionals (Agnew & Pill, 2016). So, many football clubs are naturally forced to become more professional (Hoye et al., 2006) and this made elite sport development a highly professional full-time job (Breivik, 2000). Hence, the manner of implementation has become a crucial factor for the final success of the academy (Wilkesmann & Blutner, 2002) and the management of this process must be taken care of professionally by the expert staff (Erdemli, 2008; Smith & Waddington, 2004). Similarly, youth academies have taken actions in recent years to professionalise their training environment to create better developmental opportunities (Edwards & Brannagan, 2023).

As a result, it is apparent from the literature that professionalization is the first indispensable step towards effective management of football academies (Böhlke

& Robinson, 2009; Gomez et al., 2008; Kelly, 2008; Parkhouse, 2005; Penn, 2002; Santomier & Costabiei, 2010; Soriano, 2012). Some previous research on this subject clearly shows that the youth academies which are managed professionally have improved their performance positively (Hoecke et al., 2007 and Hoecke et al., 2009) and had more satisfying results for the organizational demands (Carlsson & Ring, 2012). Naturally, although there is still some lack of professionalization in the area (Agnew & Pill, 2016), many football clubs have already begun to invest in youth development programs more professionally (Edwards & Brannagan, 2023; Green & Oakley, 2001; Slack & Parent, 2006; Vaeyens et al., 2005) and it is very common nowadays that top football clubs try to get teams of highly talented professional experts in the clubs' structures (Bridgewater, 2010).

2.2.2. Structures

The emphasis on professionalism in sports has led many football clubs to redefine their structures (Biçer, 2016; Hoye et al., 2006). The literature review makes it clear that identifying the most appropriate structure to align with the professional for-profit sports sector is a crucial milestone in achieving effective management of a sports organizations (Hamil & Chadwick, 2010; O'Brien & Slack, 2004). Hence, football academy management needs to ensure that the academy has its own clearly defined structure (Larsen et al., 2013; Topkapı, 2015). In this sense, the structure is one of the dimensions of the quality of the talent development systems (Relvas et al., 2010; Röger et al., 2010).

While some authors state that well-structured sports development programs increase the likelihood of producing high-calibre players (Solomon, 2008). Some studies show that the organizational structure explains the effectiveness of sports organizations and has a direct relationship to the organizational performance (De Knop et al., 2004; Martindale et al., 2005; Oughton & Michie, 2005; Relvas et al., 2010; Shilbury & Moore, 2006; Hoecke et al., 2006; Wolfe et al., 2005). Moreover, considering that the structure shows a general picture of all the interconnected components of the system, a well-defined organizational structure

serves as a basis for understanding an organization's ability or inability to achieve results (Hambrick, 2004). In this sense, effective structures help sports organizations grow sensibly and systematically (McCormack, 2003).

2.3. Components of an effective sports organization

In the relevant literature, we come across some common terms that are components of well-organized sports organizations (Covell et al., 2019; Daft, 2021; Hoye et al., 2012; Pedersen & Thibault, 2014). These terms may be useful to understand the components of the most suitable structure for the academies:

- Unity of objectives
- Chain of command
- Span of Control
- Centralization
- Formalization
- Coordination
- Flexibility
- Specialization
- Departmentalization

Unity of objectives means that organizational goals, departmental goals, and individual goals inside an organization must be clearly defined and there should not be any contradiction among them (Bateman & Snell, 2015). If the president of a football club only aims for short-term success, such as league championships and trophies, probably the club will not invest enough time and money in the academy system, which can only give results in the long-term. This would be a clear sign that there is not a unity of objectives inside such a club system, especially concerning the aims of the academy. Unity of objectives inside the club is vitally important to provide an adequate budget and patience for the academy system.

The chain of command explains who reports to whom (Lussier & Kimball, 2014). It concerns a clear definition of superior-subordinate relationships, from the highest position in the sports organization to the lowest (Ivancevich et al., 2013). Well-structured professional clubs have clearer reporting and communication lines (Mills et al., 2014), reducing all unnecessary and costly layers of management (Hoye et al., 2012). Moreover, well-defined organizational structures ensure that there is effective communication between employees, and this simplifies the general administration process and relieves the burden on managerial processes (Green & Oakley, 2001). Frequent and open communication (Misener & Doherty, 2009) is needed for clearance (Larsen et al., 2013) to gain clarity concerning roles and responsibilities within the club. If employees have more than one boss to report, this may be a source of confusion and may create ineffectiveness inside the sport organization (Donuk, 2016a). Thus, the academy manager should report directly either to the board or to the CEO of the club, and not to the first team manager or anybody else at the same time (Nesti & Sulley, 2015).

The span of control refers to the number of people who report to one manager or supervisor within the organization (Ivancevich et al., 2013; Lussier & Kimball, 2014; Sunay, 2016). No formula exists for ideally determining the best span of control for all sports organizations. It depends on a variety of factors and on the size of the work of the organization (Hann, 2012). The best span of control can be defined as the number of staff that an academy manager can directly supervise without becoming inefficient or ineffective in his own managing job (Hoye et al., 2012; Yetim, 2019).

Centralization is the process of retaining authority in the hands of top-level managers (Aydin, 2018), who make most of the decisions, if not all, with very little input from the employees at lower levels (Hoye et al., 2012). As per the literature, sports organizations commonly exhibit a greater degree of centralization rather than decentralization, primarily due to their longstanding internal structures (Hoye et al., 2012). This is evident in football clubs where highly centralized structures

prevail, with presidents exerting substantial control over numerous decisions within the club system. This causes problems with bureaucracy in European football clubs at all levels (Breuer et al., 2019), resulting in highly centralized and authoritarian sport development programs (Breuer & Nowy, 2015; Houlihan & Green, 2008). The more important the decision is, the higher up the hierarchy that decision is made (Wilkesmann & Blunter, 2002). The hierarchical (top-down) decision-making processes observed in centralized organizations often contribute to the issue of slow decision-making, which is not ideal in the context of a highly competitive, youthful, and dynamic football sector. The academies are also found to be centralized and formalized (De Knop et al., 2004; Gregson et al., 2022).

In contrast with centralization, decentralization is the process of distributing authority throughout the organization. There is a clear shift in the location and nature of power between centralized and decentralized organizations (McKenna & Beech, 2002). In a decentralized organization, any relevant member of the organization can join the decision-making process in their immediate work environment. This operational efficiency is associated with better management, and it is often accepted as a strategic asset (Grant, 2019), therefore, it seems that the new generation of informed employees and players would want a partnership relationship rather than the outdated superior-subordinate relationships in dynamic sectors like football (Cospers, 2010). In accordance, recent studies have shown a growing trend in sports industry management towards the implementation of self-managing teams (Covell et al., 2019). It seems that decisions taken together with all relevant staff are more accepted and trendier in sports organizations (Erdal, 2017). Some recent research shows that the best practice is found where the staff of the academy have more autonomy and are more included in the decision process, as they will be held accountable for their decision and the work they undertake (Nesti & Sulley, 2015). This kind of employee involvement also fosters the commitment of the staff to the organization's objectives (Lewis et al., 2003). Additionally, this empowerment may increase the performance and job satisfaction of the staff (Ivancevich et al.,

2013, Mills et. al., 2014). This is important because we know that organizational goals cannot be reached without a sufficient commitment from the employees (Wilkesmann & Blunter, 2002).

Formalization refers to the extent to which an organization's communication and procedures are explicitly defined, documented, and recorded. (Daft, 2021; Ivancevich et al., 2013). Larger organizations tend to be more formalized, as employee behaviour is guided by rules and procedures (Hoye et al., 2012). Most football clubs, and naturally their academies, tend to have some degree of formalization (Kelly, 2008; Kirk, 2004; Relvas et al., 2010; Hoecke et al., 2007; Wilkesman & Blunter, 2002). This dimension is also called standardization. Standardization makes the content of the work specified and programmed (Lunenborg, 2012). The standardization of athlete development is determined by guidelines, policies, and procedures, mainly for the operations related to trainings, talent identification and competition (Cunningham & Rivera, 2001).

Chelladurai (2014) labels coordination as the essence of management since it coordinates all the other management functions. Coordination is the process of integrating all the tasks and available resources to meet the objectives (Lussier & Kimball, 2014). As previously discussed, sports organizations do not exist as separate units; they are interconnected (Covell et al., 2019) in a system. Consequently, especially in the systems approach theory in management, the coordination function of the management becomes vitally important for the overall success of the sports organization (Sunay, 2016) and it's accepted as one of the most important tasks of the manager (Whisenant & Pedersen, 2004; Tripolitsioti, 2005). It's also observed that due to a weak link between the youth and the first team, transitioning between the youth and the first team has been difficult (Balliauw et al., 2022), therefore, especially for a successful football academy management, clubs need a good organizational structure with a strong link between the academy and the first team (Relvas et al., 2010).

Flexibility suggests that the organizational structure must be flexible in considering the environmental dynamism and needs. A bureaucratic organization generally lacks flexibility, and this often becomes disadvantageous in competitive environments (Aydın, 2018) In this sense; speed and flexibility are considered as important dimensions of successful sports organizations (Covell et al., 2019).

Specialization is making sure that the division of labour is done correctly inside the sport organization (Pedersen & Thibault, 2014). This division of labor occurs when jobs are organized by speciality. The managers gain benefits if the division of labour is done effectively (Papadimitriou & Taylor, 2000). In this context, the separation of roles is one of the most important characteristics of professionalism in modern football club structures (Wilkesmann & Blutner, 2010). Similarly, Chelladurai (2014) also suggested that the division of labour is an important attribute of effective sports organizations. Understanding of different roles inside the same system is vitally important to achieve common goals (Gomez et al., 2008; Green & Oakley, 2001; Hoye et al., 2012). Furthermore, clearly defining the roles of the academy staff would also enhance the quality of communication and, consequently, improve the overall performance of the staff (Relvas et al., 2009). Instead, role conflict, role ambiguity or role uncertainty usually led to staff dissatisfaction and, ultimately, to a breakdown of the organizational system (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009). Many sport organizations, including football clubs, do not have many employees and thus the staff are often required to perform a diversity of tasks inside the club structure. As a result, we often see a low level of work specialization in sports organizations (Hoye et al., 2012). Accordingly, to provide a better specialization, a clear job description is vitally important because it specifies the tasks and duties needed to complete a job successfully and determines the skills and knowledge necessary to perform the tasks (Ivancevich et al., 2013; Taylor et al., 2008). Job descriptions include the activities, tasks, responsibilities, conditions, and equipment required to perform the job (Lussier & Kimball, 2014). Donuk (2016) argues that job description and job specification are fundamental elements for achieving plans in sports organizations because even the best plans can be ruined in the wrong hands.

Specialization and job descriptions bring us to another important feature of organization which is departmentalization. Departmentalization refers to the process of grouping jobs and activities into work units according to some logical arrangement (Lussier & Kimball, 2014). This logical arrangement may be based on functions, products, services, processes, or geography (Hoye et al., 2012).

In the sports management literature, there are differences in structures and models (Digel et al., 2006; Relvas et al., 2010). The structures vary according to the needs of the club and there is no single best structure for all sports organizations (Parent et al., 2012; De Bosscher et al., 2009). Bridgewater (2010) states that the models in sports clubs vary case by case so there is not any specific “one-size-fits-all” structure. Sunay (2016) also argues that the best structure is the one that will serve the aims of the organization, so, there is not a monotype organization that fits for all football clubs.

In today’s factual and practical football environment, the structure of the academy depends on the size, strategy, philosophy, mission, and objectives of the football club (Hoye et al., 2012). There is not a perfect model, each academy must create a unique model that is consistent with institutional philosophy (Lapiano & Zotos, 2023). However, regardless of the model employed, it remains a challenge for management staff to intentionally cultivate the most effective structure tailored to their specific organization within the sports environment (Ivancevich et al., 2013).

In European football, the link between the executive board and football departments of both youth and professional teams, is generally made by sports managers (Morrow & Howieson, 2014; Relvas et al., 2010). According to Bridgewater (2010) with the increasing professionalism in the football sector, the clubs have begun to develop typical business structures and now may have positions such as CEO, marketing director, finance manager, sport director and so on. Because of this, in some modern organizational charts of football clubs, it is possible to see a CEO or a general managing director between the sports

director and the board. In European football as well as in Turkey, most of the clubs have similar chart designs as figured in the next page (Figure 1).

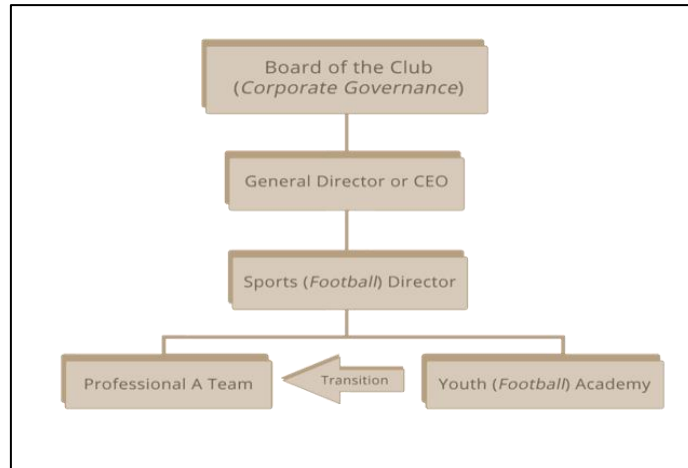


Figure 1: Sports director model: An organizational chart in clubs.

(Relvas et al., 2010)

In addition to the above chart, in European football, there is another typical organizational chart that is often adopted by clubs and is much simpler and connects the academy directly with the board members as shown in Figure 2.

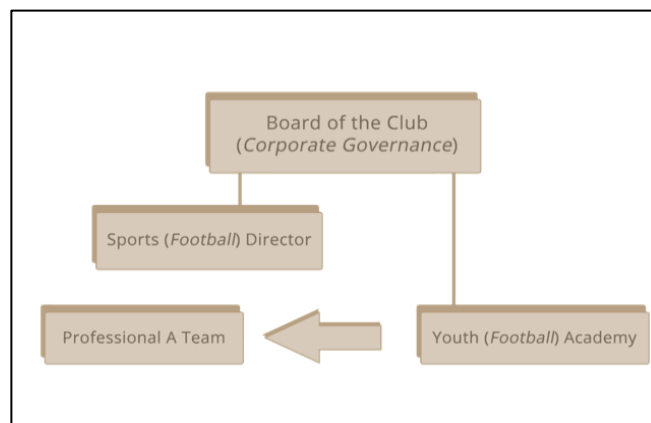


Figure 2: Board involvement model: An organizational chart in clubs.

(Nesti & Sulley, 2015)

Lastly, especially in European football and in bigger teams, the academy manager model is also used in most countries as shown in Figure 3.

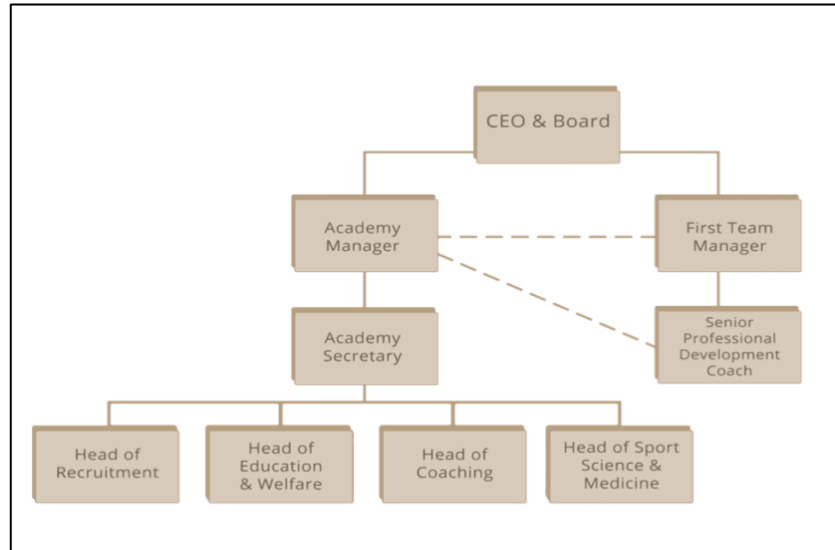


Figure 3: Academy manager model: The organizational chart in clubs.

(Nesti & Sulley, 2015)

In this last structural model, there is a functional relationship between the academy manager and the A team manager but, ultimately, in most structures, the academy manager is in fact only accountable to the CEO and the board. This means that the academy manager is a strategically important key managerial staff for the club system concerning the academy. Hence, the person in this position should not be changed easily with impulsive decisions.

2.4. What is a football academy?

The development of sports talent is a vital part of the process of becoming an elite professional athlete (Xiang et al., 2023) and football academies serve for this purpose. The relevant literature shows that football academies are regarded as the breeding ground for the next generation of top-level athletes in football (Holt, 2002). In other words, football academies are talent generators for the clubs (Pérez-González et al., 2023). According to Nesti and Sulley (2015), the fundamental aim of a football academy is to help the club develop more and better players for the first team. Similarly, Böhlke and Robinson (2009) describe the academy as the infrastructure and practices used to identify talents and then develop them for sporting success. In general, sports academies give young athletes support, guidance and the necessary coaching to realize their potential

(Fransen & Güllich, 2019). Along these lines, Pedro Mil-Homens, the director of Sporting CP Academy between 2001 and 2005, and then the director at Benfica Academy in Portugal, stated that a football academy is in fact a school inside the clubs with the primary objective of developing players for the professional team (Moita, 2008). Academy systems provide systematic training programmes for youth players with the aim of facilitating their transition to professionalism upon completion of the training process (Dugdale et al., 2021) in the academies.

Many others argue that academies are set up and funded by professional clubs with the primary objective of developing high-caliber home-grown players to professional teams (Mills et al., 2012; Solomon, 2008; Hoecke et al., 2006). Uwe Harttgen, the former director of the Werder Bremen's academy, explains the goal of the academy as promoting young talents as much as possible, both on and off the pitch (Bender, 2011). Likewise, Gilmore (2009) describes sport academies as assets and development tools for sport clubs. In a like manner, the former technical director of Sporting CP academy, Jean-Paul Castro, considers a football academy as a structure of excellence that focus on physical and human features to develop elite players that can capably exercise their activities in professional football (Moita, 2008).

In summary, all the aforementioned definitions in the literature indicate that football academies primarily have two main objectives (Mills et al., 2014; Relvas et al., 2010).

The foremost objective of a football academy is consistently focused on nurturing and developing high-quality players for the professional first team. In another word, the real intention of a football academy is to produce top performers who can achieve victories for the clubs and nations (Xiang et al., 2023). Two good examples are FC Barcelona and Bayern Munich, which won the UEFA Champions League with mostly home-grown players. In FC Barcelona's squad, there were seven home-grown players in the first team in the 2009 Champions League final game (Soriano, 2012). Could you imagine the money saved by

investing in the academy players instead of paying millions of euros for the transfers of seven top players from competitors? This example shows that a football academy may turn out to be a competitive advantage for the clubs (McIlroy, 2010). In other words, football academies should be seen as a strategic investment rather than an extra expenditure (Ford et al., 2020; Nesti & Sulley, 2015; Soriano, 2012) and they help clubs to increase the number of quality homegrown players in the first-team squad, while decreasing the costs of transferring new players.

The secondary aim is, as some scholars proposed, earning financial benefits by selling those home-grown players to other clubs (Beech, 2010; Houlihan & Green, 2008; Kuijer, 2007; Mills et al., 2014; Samur, 2018a; Solomon, 2008). This second aim should not be ignored because it's needed to ensure the organization's stability and long-term survival of the clubs in a sustainable way (Barros & Leach, 2006; Daft, 2021). Chelladurai (2014) argues that the primary purpose of professional sport clubs is to make a profit to sustain their activities. In today's professional football sector, sporting success is not the only way to measure a football club's overall performance (Van Uden, 2005). Consequently, the success of an academy is not only evaluated by sporting excellence but also by the financial contribution to the club (De Heij et al., 2006; Kuijer, 2007; Stratton et al., 2004).

At this point, it seems clear that the academy is a developmental training place inside the clubs, but to develop players, it must provide some services to achieve the determined aims. Even though it is generally agreed what services should be provided by a football academy, little is known about how an academy should manage these services (Böhlke & Robinson, 2009).

2.4.1 Services of a football academy

Firstly, the academies should accurately identify and confirm the ability of a player (McCarthy, 2019) and recognize the young players with the greatest potential to

excel in professional sports (Vaeyens et al., 2009). Talent identification have become increasingly relevant in the sport performance (Sarmiento et al., 2018) and thus, the quality of the incoming young players into the academy system is the first critical success factor in the development of players (Soriano, 2012). If the input is not gifted enough, the output will be consequently affected negatively (Donuk, 2008). Thus, talent selection has an undisputed influence on the talent development system's overall success (Houlihan & Green, 2008). In other words, talent identification and selection are referred to as important components of sport academies (ECA Report, 2012; Kaplan, 2016; McDonald & Westphal, 2011; Soriano, 2012) and this makes the talent selection an important service of the academy management.

Football clubs need a talent detection system (Balliauw et al., 2022; Oakley & Green, 2001) to take a promising child from mass participation to future development. Talent detection refers to the discovery of potential performers who are currently not involved in the sport yet. Here we are talking about finding children with giftedness. These detected gifted players at initial stages do not necessarily mean that they will surely make it into professional football. They are just detected because of their initial potential to become elite players.

At this point, a special issue worth mentioning is mass sport participation that plays an important role in detecting more children with giftedness in society. This issue is far beyond the responsibilities of the academy managers, but it seems highly influential in the overall success of the system. A strategic plan by South African Sports Ministry (SRSA, 2016) confirms the importance of mass sport participation to detect elite athletes for further sports development because, without mass sport participation in a society, the chance of detecting new players with the potential to be elite athletes would decrease dramatically. The New Zealand Sports Council (2020) published a report which concluded that a very active childhood, with around 25 hours of play and physical activity per week, was a common feature in all top-level elite athletes. This makes it obvious that grassroots activities are the foundation to have better chances at the

development of elite athletes (Farrow et al., 2013; Szymanski, 2012; UK Sport, 2006; Vos et al., 2012).

In relation specifically to grassroots sports activities, Ericsson et al., (1993) suggested a term called 'deliberate play' which was applied to grassroot activities later on by other researchers (Côté et al., 2007). These are the enjoyable sports activity done by children on streets or parks or in any available settings voluntarily, which involve the foundational development of the child towards a sport unconsciously. Other scholars also proposed that diversified sport experiences and deliberate plays at early ages could help achieve an elite level of performance in the future (Coutinho et al., 2016; Hayman et al., 2014; Memmert et al., 2010). Regarding long-term effects, the health of any professional sport league ultimately depends on the strength of the grassroots activities (Hassan & Hamil, 2012). If the grassroots are not cultivated, football at the elite level will eventually suffer (UEFA, 2005). As a result, we may conclude that grassroots football is the foundation of elite player detection and development (Peeters & Szymanski, 2014).

The next step is the identification phase which is identifying the better children from this pool of previously detected gifted players for further investment. In fact, a football academy can be considered a serious football training program where only mentally and physically tough young players can survive and progress (Littlewood, 2005). Thus, the identification of talent is considered the most cited ability that football managers would need for their role (Bridgewater, 2010).

The final step is the selection among all those identified players. This is a critical phase for the success of sports organizations at the elite level (Taylor et al., 2008). In practice, it's seen that elite youth footballers are usually recruited into professional academies between the ages of 6 and 10 years (Mitchell et al., 2020).

On the other hand, there are some increasing concerns about the practice of early talent identification and player selection (Côté & Lidor, 2013), mainly because, at early ages, talent detection and identification generally rely on the subjective and intuitive assessment of scouts or coaches (Lawrance, 2010; McCalman et al., 2023; Pankhurst & Collins, 2013). In subjective assessments, the selection is primarily based on variables related to physical and biological attributes such as morphological growth, maturation, adult stature, and appearance, rather than football skill or future potential (Côté et al., 2013; Cobley et al., 2008; Helsen et al., 2005).

Selecting those who are older biologically and bigger physically is known as the relative age effect (RAE) in football (Gürkan & Yıldırım, 2023; Helsen et al., 2005) and this is a common trap in Turkish football academies too (Köklü et al., 2017). To put it differently, if selections are based solely on premature assessments that primarily consider physical appearances, there is a constant risk of favoring early developers rather than identifying individuals with genuine potential (Abbott & Collins, 2002).

A study of Portuguese football players showed that only a third of international pre-junior athletes reappeared as seniors (Barreiros et al., 2014). Research also showed that many of the physical qualities that distinguished elite and sub-elite players may not be apparent until late adolescence (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; Vaeyens et al., 2009). It's also observed that selection to U-17 national football teams did not have any significant correlation to senior top-level football career (Sweeney et al., 2023). So, it is reasonable to assume that an early and rapid selection would be undermining the players' lifelong engagement in sport, constituting a risky trap for football academies (McCarthy, 2019) since early performance and physical markers may underestimate the players' potential. Early talent identification is seen as investing scarce resources on a 'gamble' (Collins et al., 2018). Because of this, talent identification programs worldwide may remain poor in their predictive efficacy and capability (Côté et al., 2013).

In sum, snapshot tests of early performance and physical capacities have not proved to be always reliable indicators of later expertise and success (Cobley et al., 2012). To have more realistic predictions and eliminate the risk of subjective decisions, talent identification process should not be overly biased towards the early maturing child and anthropometric measurements (Williams & Reilly, 2000; Williams et al., 2003). Especially while scouting a new young player, understanding the player's personality and soft skills could help predict future performance and capacity in the field (Lussier & Kimball, 2009; Stobbeleir et al., 2011).

Accordingly, professional sports academies should continue the identification process for a few years instead of making immediate decisions (Lawrence, 2010; Toohey et al., 2013), eventually appointing expert scouts to evaluate players on concrete pre-determined criteria (Balliau et al., 2022; Pankhurst & Collins, 2013). Another method is to run talent selection camps regularly based on multiple performance tests from several domains at different times (Saward et al., 2020; Schorer & Elferink-Gemser, 2013) or using bio-banding groupings (Cumming et al., 2017) in trial games. To provide the most accurate feedback, it is recommended to monitor the whole developmental progress of young talented players (Green & Oakley 2001) through the utilization of player profiling (Morley et al., 2014), aided by technology and match analysis software.

It should also be noted that finding talent and selecting the right players are also important for the quality of the training. The presence of skilled teammates significantly influences the skill development of each player within the team, underscoring the importance of careful player selection for overall training effectiveness (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2006; Maciel et al., 2021). If a player must train and play with better or the best available players of his age, he has no other choice than to try to be as good as they are. The concept revolves around retaining only the most promising prospects, allowing the best to train with the best (Richardson et al., 2013). In a team sport like football, the improvement of one player may lead to the improvement of the overall team (Reveberi et al.,

2020). Moreover, in competitive environments, having good teammates is also seen as 'social facilitation', whereby individual athletic activity is facilitated by the presence of other good athletes (Maciel et al., 2021; Moran & Toner, 2017).

Apart from the talent input, the importance of the environment in determining athletic success is heavily highlighted in the literature by various scholars (Barker et al., 2014; Cruickshank, 2019; Côté et al., 2013b; Gagne, 2009; Green & Houlihan, 2005; Henriksen et al., 2010; Mills et al., 2014; Kingston et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 2008; Williams & Reilly, 2000). Overall, they stated that talent is best nurtured by providing the youngsters with challenging, demanding yet supportive environments (Cook et al., 2014; Crust & Clough, 2011; Gucciardi & Mallett 2010). In other words, providing a suitable environment is another important service of the academy management.

Although the importance of a suitable environment is clear, it is still questionable what makes a suitable environment. Elite team sporting performance is delivered via multi-disciplinary support systems against wider organizational contexts; therefore, such a holistic and player-centered approach is needed to perceive the process (Cruickshank & Collins, 2013; Henriksen & Stambulova, 2017; Zuber et al., 2016).

Specifically, a suitable environment for player development consists of proper facilities (Akşar & Kutlu, 2008; Chelladurai, 2014; De Bosscher et al., 2008; Digel, 2005; Güzel et al., 2013; Oakley & Green, 2001; Stotlar & Wonders, 2006; Uhrich & Benkenstein, 2010; Wicker & Breuer, 2011;), pitches (ECA Report, 2012; Mills et al., 2014; Nesti & Sulley, 2015; New & Gil, 2010), tools, equipment and technology (Abrams, 2012; Açak et al., 2020; Chelladurai, 2014; Covell et al., 2019; Donuk 2016; Hoye et al., 2012; Wolsey et al., 2012; Woratschek, 2014), accommodation and full-board housing (Harwood, 2008; Sunay, 2016), transportation (MacPhail et. al., 2003; MacPhail, 2013; Sunay, 2016) and sports science support (Açak et al., 2020; Gulbin & Weissensteiner, 2013; Lussier & Kimball, 2014; Mills et al., 2014; Kula, 2019).

The first important component of creating a suitable environment is to build a proper facility for elite athletes (Akşar & Kutlu, 2008; Bayle & Madella, 2002; De Bosscher et al. 2008; Digel, 2002; Oakley & Green, 2001; Stotlar & Wonders, 2006, UK Sport, 2006). An appropriate facility is an important component of professional sports development (Allison, 2001; Bayle & Madella, 2002; Covell et al., 2019; Misener & Doherty, 2009; Wicker & Breuer, 2011). Without facilities, there is no organized professional sport (Uhrich & Benkenstein, 2010).

Chelladurai (2014) describes facilities as all the support units needed for successful sports management. It includes all physical space, technology, and buildings, as well as the staff and the atmosphere in the academy. A suitable sports environment that fully supports athletes across several areas leads to an increased likelihood of sporting success (Böhlke & Robinson, 2009; Green & Houlihan, 2005; Holt & Mitchell, 2006; Williams & Reilly, 2000). Hence, a proper sports facility constitutes a critical resource for the sport organization and would impact the organization's overall success (Covell et al., 2019).

Regarding the top European football clubs, the average number of pitches reserved for the academy is four (ECA Report, 2012). These pitches are not isolated from the A team location. Most of the best clubs in Europe have shared sites where the first team and youth teams share the facilities on the same premises (Fieldsend, 2017). There are advantages to this one-site facility practice. Primarily, young players get a first-hand experience of what is required to be a top professional player, and secondly, first-team players remind the youngsters about their responsibilities as role models (Lersen et al, 2012). This also helps to improve the cooperation, communication and understanding among players and between the first team and the academy staff (Morris et al., 2014; Nesti & Sulley, 2015). A study with English elite players, for example, showed that training with the senior team in a one-site facility helped young players improve key intrapersonal attributes associated with successful progression and

facilitated their transition from the academy to professional team football (Mills et al., 2014).

Considering that the training surface may cause unwanted injuries to academy players (New & Gil, 2010), good pitches are very important in the athlete development. In addition to proper football pitches, research also suggests that allowing players to experience playing on a variety of different surfaces, especially in early formative years, can improve their ball possession in tight, constricted areas and improve their decision-making ability under intense pressure (Ford & Williams, 2012; Nesti & Sulley, 2015). This approach mirrors the organic method through which football stars of the previous century enhanced their skills. However, in present times, recreating the essence of street football poses a challenge within academies. This is primarily due to the limited amount of time young players spend honing their abilities with a ball in street environments, reflecting the societal shifts that have taken place (Fieldsend, 2017) in the last a few decades.

In relation to tools, equipment and technology, Chelladurai (2014) proposes that having proper equipment would facilitate all the other services in sports organizations. Along the same lines, Woratschek (2014) claims that, in a workplace, effective tools and equipment are important aspects of creating a better internal quality service and productive work environment. Finally, Kaplan and Norton (2004) referred to the tools from the internal business and growth perspective which provide a competitive advantage to the organization on the final performance.

The growing technical sophistication of sport means that traditional administrative and coaching skills are no longer adequate to compete in contemporary sports environments. New technologies generate new solutions to old problems and are often characterized as valuable tools for achieving the objectives of sports organizations (Donuk, 2016), providing better ways to seize new opportunities (Lussier & Kimball, 2014; Mills et al., 2014). Effective sports organizations are the

ones that adapt themselves to technology at a rapid rate to advance organizational performance and improve effectiveness. Currently, organizations find themselves compelled to innovate to maintain competitiveness within their respective sports (Spektor et al., 2011). Hence, clubs should embrace new technologies (Hoye et al., 2012) and academies should be equipped with the necessary hardware and software. Accordingly, contemporary sports managers and the academy staff are expected to be highly skilled in new computer technology related to data storage and retrieval as well as web-based technology (Abrams, 2012; Parks & Quarterman, 2003). For example, today we use e-mails instead of snail mail, social media and WhatsApp messages instead of SMS, Skype or Zoom instead of organizing physical business meetings.

In modern sports, performance analysis is firmly positioned as an integral part of the coaching process (Groom et al., 2011). The training staff, the scouting department, and the medical staff should use integrated technology in their training regimens, injury diagnosis, practice, and game preparations (Covell et al., 2019). Especially, preventable injury risks may contribute the young players' football career (Johnson et al., 2019). In addition, football teams hire video and computer personnel to analyze and document every play (Abrahams, 2012; Lussier & Kimball, 2009). According to the research of the ECA (2012), 75% of the top European clubs use video analysis in their academies. This kind of technological support by sports scientists working together with coaches, scouts and administrators can provide useful insights into key elements of the talent development process (Beswick, 2016; Gulbin & Weissensteiner, 2013; Williams & Reilly, 2000). Talent development is a costly business, and accurate identification is critically important (Abbott & Collins, 2002). In this context, mobile technology performance analysis and scouting software may constitute important roles to create a competitive advantage over other youth academies.

In terms of accommodation and full-board housing, a football academy can be considered a highly organized and structured community of schoolboys (Harwood, 2008). So, providing suitable full-board accommodation in or near the

academy is essential (Sunay, 2016) for the holistic development of those boys. For example, it's an effective way to make sure that these young athletes take the necessary nutrition intake during their development years. Adequate nutrition is crucial for sports performance and physical development, as athletes must fulfil their energy requirements during training to enhance their skills and it is a critical factor influencing their performance at high-level competitions (Bonnici, 2017).

In terms of transportation service, a football academy is supposed to provide safe and trouble-free transport arrangements between the club, the accommodation site and the school of the young players (Sunay, 2016). Unfortunately, poor access to facilities and difficulties in transportation are some of the barriers to young players' participation in sport (MacPhail, 2013).

Today, science-based support systems form an integral part of the backup for practitioners in professional sport (Kula, 2019). Elite (young) players need the support of proficient and trusted experts in various relevant subjects (Houlihan & Green, 2008; Krsmanovic et al., 2014), including sports science and medicine (Houlihan & Green, 2008; Kula, 2019). Especially in terms of player development, sports science and medical supports may play important roles for better development (Sweeney et al., 2021) since supporting staff and networks have been shown to correlate positively athletes' health and a high-quality environment promotes higher-quality talent development (Thomas et al., 2021). Thus, sports scientists may play an important role in the development of young players, providing guidelines based on empirical research (Beswick, 2016; Williams et al., 2003).

About the suitable environment, a positive culture inside the organization fosters an attractiveness towards the sports organization, namely the athletes and the employees (Maitland et al., 2015; Taylor et al., 2008). In this regard, one of the important components of a successful talent development system is creating a culture of excellence within the organization (Oakley & Green, 2001). According to research, the more successful clubs in youth development are those that have

an overarching culture that extends from the first team to all youth levels (Nesti & Sulley, 2015); in addition, successful teams are often associated with having a strong team culture (Lussier & Kimball, 2009). Several authors agree that the manager is responsible for creating a mastery motivational climate and establishing a desirable organizational culture inside the club (Covell et al, 2019; Misener & Doherty, 2009).

According to the systems approach, a small change in a part may cause (*trigger*) a considerable change in the total system. Put differently, the behaviour of the system may be derived from the behaviour of the parts (Von Bertalanffy, 2015). Accordingly, the success of an academy lies in a positive environment and this positive environment is primarily based on fairly good communication and trust among all the staff working there (Chelladurai, 2014; Pedersen & Thibault, 2014; Relvas et al., 2010). On the other hand, a lack of communication may hinder the successful transition of many young talented players to the professional football level (Wylleman et al., 2004). Organizational issues such as this (i.e., communication problems) are often the most important stressors faced by athletes (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009; Cruickshank et al., 2014). Findings from a study about youth development structures in European football clubs showed that the communication between the first team and the youth team staff was not smooth and often presented difficulties (Relvas et al., 2010). In line with this, an investigation in an English football academy concluded that there was poor communication between the academy coaches, the first team coach and the first team's administrative managers. This was seen as the major concern and obstacle in the transition from the youth to professional environments (Littlewood, 2005).

According to Thomas Tuchel, regular communication is an essential mark for effective collaboration between youth and professional football (Bender, 2011). Similarly, Bayle and Madella (2002) identified communication as a key success factor in sports organizations. Thus, cooperation between the senior squad and the academy should not be left to chance or people's good intentions. There must

be clear standards of communication within the academy and club system, enabling strong links to the senior team (Mills et al., 2014).

In addition to internal communication, football academies should also promote external communication and cooperation with other relevant groups. Educational institutions in the form of private schools and universities, for example, have always played an important foundational role in the development of modern sports (Cherubini & Santini, 2010; Cronin, 2014). This was the case of FC Porto, whose former CEO, Antero Henrique, explained that the club actively promoted relations with the local university, the University of Porto. Similarly, SL Benfica used the advice and help of various professors from Lisbon Universities namely for the creation of the Benfica LAB (Fieldsend, 2017). From a systems perspective, clubs can be viewed as open systems that exist within a broader network of organizations. To thrive, they require the support of commercial, technical, educational, and media partners (Cherubini & Santini, 2010). This kind of support networks help to create a high-quality academy environment, and this promotes higher-quality talent development (Thomas et al., 2021). Therefore, it is strongly advised to establish such valuable external networks. Especially, in the view of systems approach, this kind of support networks and connections are useful for the improvement of the management of the sports organizations (Arnold & Wade, 2015; Manaf et al., 2022).

It is essential to recognize that the performance environment should not solely prioritize comfort but also emphasize the significance of hard work (Ankersen, 2012). Therefore, the key is providing a suitable but also challenging and demanding environment (Cook et al., 2014; Relvas et al., 2010). Some evidence suggests that many of the problems players face when transitioning from the academy to the elite level are a direct consequence of previous challenge-free experiences and artificially smooth experiences given during the formative years of development (Güllich, 2014). The challenges (circumstances, problems, experiences) encountered by players in the professional environment may differ from those they encountered during their youth development programs (Garces,

2006). This may negatively influence the performance of the player if he is not ready to cope with real-life challenges. It is important to clarify that striving to create a conducive and supportive environment should not be mistaken for fostering an atmosphere where young athletes are excessively indulged or spoiled. Nesti et al. (2012) even argued that the academy should ensure that young players are prepared for the harsh demands of the professional game by placing them in a few stressful real-life situations, which would also help develop their mental toughness (Crust & Clough, 2011; Gucciardi & Mallett, 2010). In other words, football academies should develop whole players, by providing them with challenge-filled experiences that could improve their soft skills as well (Collins et al., 2018). Therefore, academy management should not confuse providing an appropriate learning environment with offering players an easy and undisciplined environment. Otherwise, when players enter professional leagues, they often lack the psychological competence to cope with the challenges of life and elite football (Beswick, 2016).

In sum, the primary service of a football academy towards the players is their development in a suitable environment. This football development primarily includes technical and tactical development (Açak et al., 2020; Topkaya, 2015) but the fact is that football performance requires a multi-dimensional and multifaceted developmental process (Abarghoueinejad et al., 2021; Coutinho et al., 2016; Côtè et al., 2012).

According to the literature, in addition to football development, players' development should also include physical development (Açak et al., 2020; Littlewood, 2005), mental and psychological development (Abrahams, 2012; Coulter et al., 2010; Beswick, 2016; Durand-Bush & Salmela 2002; Gulbin & Weissensteiner, 2013; Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006; McCarthy, 2019; Mills et al., 2014; Moran & Toner, 2017), academic development (Bender, 2011; Biçer, 2016; Bourke, 2003; Christensen & Sorensen, 2009; Donuk, 2008; Houlihan & Green, 2008; Mills et al., 2014; Monk & Olsson, 2006), personal development (Bender, 2011; Erdemli, 2008; Kaser & Oelkers, 2008; Taylor et al., 2008; Trikalis

et al., 2014; Williams & Rielly, 2000), and marketing (Donuk, 2008; Taylor et al., 2008; Yetim, 2019) as important complementary components of their integral development process.

Regarding football training, the selected talents need to be nurtured to reach top elite levels (Abrahams, 2012; Woodward, 2012). In fact, even if a child possesses natural talent and is effectively identified through grassroots activities, it is not feasible to nurture world-class talent solely based on innate giftedness (Epstein, 2014). The development of such talent necessitates a long, well-planned systematic process, (Sweeney et al., 2021) including a structured training program within a suitable environment (Bloom, 1985; Böhlke & Robinson, 2009; Gagne, 2009). Creating an appropriate environment that nurtures talent may play a more significant role than heredity or genetic makeup in the development of expertise (Brown, 2001; Ericsson et al., 1993; Henriksen et al., 2010; Mills et al., 2014; Orlick, 2000).

In this context, the training period in an academy can be seen as a progressive transformation process of inborn giftedness into functional talents (Gagne, 2009; Mills et al., 2012; Williams, 2014). In competitive sports, nobody gets to the top without an extensive period of quality training (Chelladurai, 2014; Farrow et al., 2013). In this sense, it becomes obvious that young football players should receive, in the academy, a long, systematically planned, and controlled and coherent training (Bloom, 1985; Güllich & Emrich, 2014; Oakley & Green, 2001; Sweeney et al., 2021). Lewontin (2000) employs the metaphor of an empty bucket to emphasize the significance of training quality and environment in cultivating elite athletes. According to this analogy, while the genes of a player may determine the size of the bucket, it is the quality of training and the surrounding environment that determine the extent to which the bucket will be filled and its contents. Many other scholars confirm that training is the major feature of the development of football expertise and success (Bompa & Haff, 2019; Gladwell, 2008; Helsen et al., 2000).

This is precisely where a football academy plays a crucial role in the realm of professional football. Research shows that the amount, type, volume and quality of training activity in developing phases will help predict young players' later performance levels (Bloom, 1985, Ericsson et al., 1993; Güllich & Emrich, 2014; Ward et al., 2004). Young players provided with a suitable learning environment and resources in this long-term training process will have better chances to achieve their potential (Williams & Reilly, 2000). Hence, in terms of organizational solutions, football academies should establish the specific type and quantity of football practice required to cultivate elite athletes (Güllich & Emrich, 2006).

At the high elite level, the differentiating factors between competitors with similar technical ability and physical fitness levels are often minimal (Moran & Toner, 2017). Thus, the psychological development of the players may also determine successful elite level performances, especially among elite athletes of equal ability (Mack & Casstevens, 2001). Since mental toughness seems to be a common trait in all the champions (Clough et al., 2002; Coulter et al., 2010; Weinberg & Gould, 2015), researchers have become increasingly interested in the psychological characteristic of elite footballers (Coulter et al., 2010; Holt & Dunn, 2004; Toering et al., 2012; Weinberg et al., 2011). Nowadays, psychological development is widely considered one of the most important factors that differentiate elite players who succeed from those who do not "make the grade" (Gulbin & Weissensteiner, 2013; Richardson et al., 2004). Thus, psychological growth and mental development are considered an integral part of talent development programs (Cook et al., 2014; Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006; McCarthy, 2019; Mills et al., 2014; Van Yperen, 2009).

In terms of academic development, school education may help foster and improve a positive change in players' attitudes, behaviors and interpersonal and social capabilities (Dworkin et al., 2003; Gould et al., 2007; Taylor et al., 2008). Several studies have demonstrated the significant influence of education on young elite football players, as it contributes to the development of social competence and emotional maturity, which is reflected on the pitch (Armour,

2013). This includes showing respect towards rivals, enhanced problem-solving skills, greater emotional control and improved adaptability to new situations (Bailey & Morley, 2006; Christensen & Sorensen, 2009). Similarly, a survey carried out by the University of Bremen together with the German Football Association revealed that the development of a player's personality takes an important role in the promotion of talent on the football field (Bender, 2011; Williams & Reilly, 2000).

In sum, it is widely acknowledged that a player's long-term development on the pitch is directly correlated to their personal and academic growth outside of it. A proper school education during the players' early years can improve their soft skills, including creative thinking, intelligence and problem-solving. Perceptual-cognitive skills are especially needed to understand declarative tactical knowledge (Sánchez-López et al., 2023). Indeed, skilled top-level players often possess high game intelligence and understanding that allows them to analyze their opponent's play (Price et al., 2020) and this ability to 'read the game' distinguishes skilled from less skilled players (Höner et al., 2021; Williams, 2000).

On the other hand, young players aged 15-19 years often struggle to balance the competing demands of school and sport (Christensen & Sorensen, 2009). Hence, the educational part of talent development should be carefully planned and controlled by experts in a balanced way that prevents children from squeezing between school-club systems (Bourke, 2003). For instance, Elbe and Beckmann (2015) argued that young elite players often face immense pressure due to demanding schedules involving school, daily training, and weekly competitions. Additionally, a study conducted by Christensen and Sorensen (2009) highlighted that young elite athletes commonly encounter difficulties in meeting the requirements of both academic and sporting pursuits simultaneously. Considering this, football academies should ensure that young players are placed in appropriate schools that align with their academic abilities and capacities. This approach aims to prevent them from feeling inadequate, demotivated, and

overwhelmed within the school environment, which can ultimately impact their social and football lives (Nesti & Sulley, 2015).

To conclude, education is highly important for the future life of a player, and, from an educational and pedagogical point of view, academy football should primarily focus on gaining the players, instead of winning games (Biçer, 2016). Particularly up to age 12, the emphasis should always be on prioritizing the well-being of the child rather than solely focusing on football (Samur, 2018a). With younger athletes, worrying about winning means putting the emphasis in the wrong place. Coaches should teach skills, ensure that the activity is fun, and provide guidance and instruction (Abrams, 2012). In addition, authors such as Kerr and Stirling (2008) claim that sport development should be athlete-centered, emphasizing the holistic development of the athlete. Even considering that professional football academies provide young players with football training for their future football jobs (Monk & Olsson, 2006), the integration of academic and vocational training is constantly recommended by renowned football institutions such as the German Football Federation to all academies (DFB Report, 2010).

Closely related to the development of academic and soft skills, personal or character development is achieved when players transition from childish behaviour to a more mature demeanor, and this transformation is nurtured through proper education (Kaser & Oelkers, 2008). Most of the character development and learning period occurs during the academy years (Trihalis et al., 2014), underscoring the importance of initiating character development activities within the academy and maintaining them throughout the school years (Baltaş, 2014; Beswick, 2016). This represents a crucial facet of academy education as it has been observed that the character traits of young players significantly influence the talent development process in later stages (Kula, 2019).

In terms of marketing, Yetim (2019) argues that this service is an essential component of management, to increase the visibility of the sports organization.

Public relations are also considered one of the key responsibilities of effective managers (Horch & Schütte, 2003), given that a sports organization's reputation and image are valuable assets (Taylor et al., 2008). A well-marketed football academy gains greater attention and interest, along with the potential to attract more and better employees and players for recruitment. Therefore, marketing also helps to asset management strategies by aiding in the identifying, attracting and retaining strategically valuable staff, as well as skilled players (Gilmore, 2009). Talented players or staff, once identified, would likely prefer to enroll in an academy with a superior image and stronger brand name (Donuk, 2008).

Hence, the value of the academy and its players should be backed by constant and consistent marketing activities. This provides a great competitive advantage over other football academies, especially in the same region. In the sports sector, this phenomenon is commonly referred to as the "first-pick advantage." When an academy can recruit superior young players (input), it naturally increases its likelihood of producing better professional players as the output. This creates a self-reinforcing cycle within the academy. Corroborating these affirmations, a study in UK academies (Meek, 2010) showed that when the players were asked about the strengths of an academy, the respondents regularly referred to the brand and fame of the institution (e.g., the jersey of a famous club; training in the facilities of prestigious clubs).

In conclusion, based on the literature review, it is evident that a football academy should offer a comprehensive range of developmental services to facilitate the holistic growth of its players (Kerr & Stirling, 2008). Considering the aforementioned studies, the services provided by a football academy can be collectively defined as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Services of football academies

Talent Selection	Providing Suitable Environment	Developing
Detection	Proper facilities	Football development
Identification	Sufficient number of pitches	Personal development
Selection	Tools & equipment	Physical development
	Accommodation	Mental development
	Transportation	Academic development
	Scientific support	Marketing
	Competent staff	
	Motivational atmosphere	
	Internal & external communication	

2.5. Key internal stakeholders

Hylton (2013) argues that sports development should be understood more broadly as a process that includes and involves a widespread collection of stakeholders. One of the important components of an effective management in the sports organization lies in gaining a clear understanding of these relevant stakeholders' perceptions and preferences (Chelladurai, 2014) since their involvement may directly influence the performance of the general management practice (Freeman, 2010). Some scholars even provide an exploration of football management as a stakeholder analysis (Chadwick et al., 2017). In terms of sports development, a lack of coherence between stakeholders' perceptions can generate a potential failure for athletes to progress (Taylor & Collins, 2021) and multiple stakeholder perspectives must be taken into consideration to improve the conditions for athlete development (Poucher et al., 2021). Because internal stakeholders of the system may provide a guide to be effectively translated to daily practice in sports (Leite et al., 2022). In any case, the combined efforts of all relevant stakeholders may impact the ability of clubs to achieve their strategic objectives (De Knoop et al., 2004; Slack & Parent, 2006).

If we look at the issue from a systems theory lens, there are always important stakeholders that assume a critical role inside the system (Mills et. al., 2014). Their names can vary depending on each specific case, but in general, stakeholders can be classified as internal and external to the organization (Pedersen & Thibault, 2014). Another categorisation might be as primary and secondary stakeholders in organizations. In this regard; the players, the coaches and the managerial staff represent the internal and primary stakeholders of a football academy in a club system.

2.5.1. Manager

The literature shows that the manager bears the primary responsibility for the performance and success of a sports organization (Batista et al., 2016; Carvalho et al., 2013; Covell et al., 2019; Santos et al., 2022). Managerial policies and practices also play a significant role towards home-grown players' development (Amenta et al., 2012). A study by ECA (2012) revealed that both the academy manager and the managing director of the club were recognized as key success factors for effective club and academy management. Similarly, in a study regarding the certification process of a Swedish elite football club - Gefle IF -, the quality of the manager was identified as one of the main variables that affected the overall effectiveness of the club (Carlsson & Ring, 2012). Along the same lines, Wagg (2007) claims that a team's performance can be explained by a single factor: the stewardship of the manager. Finally, an investigation by Koustelios (2001) clearly showed that the poor effectiveness of sports development centers was mainly due to a lack of specialized and well-trained managers. Consequently, the impact of management succession on sports organizations' overall performance is found critically important (Carlsson & Ring, 2012; Lin & Li, 2004; Masteralexis et al., 2019).

In conclusion, in a complex and dynamic sector such as the football industry (Cruickshank, 2019), there is a clear necessity to develop better managerial competence within football organizations (Wagg, 2007; Hamil & Chadwick, 2010). Indeed, managers can shape how their sport organization operates

through their perceptions, behaviors, intentions, decisions, and actions (Cruickshank, 2019). Managers are also crucial in terms of securing the long-term competitive future of the organization (Gilmore, 2009) and the organizations cannot succeed without effective managerial decisions (Boudreau & Rmestad, 2005).

On the other hand, although the manager's central role is claimed to be known by everybody, Perry (2000) affirms that this central position is often organizationally vague, lacking in many cases a definitive job description and clear delineation of responsibilities. Some authors even claim that the management phenomenon in football clubs is still not fully comprehended, even by those actively involved in practicing it (Nesti & Sulley, 2015). This suggests that the important role played by managers in football clubs remains underdeveloped (Morrow & Howieson, 2014).

At this point, we may derive some common definitions from the literature review.

Hughes et al. (2010) describe football managers as senior operating officers who are accountable for various tasks, including planning, player development, player acquisition (e.g., transfers), media relations, competitor analysis, and managing marketplace and environmental demands. Other authors also highlighted that a sports manager is entrusted with responsibilities such as strategic planning, resource allocation, organization, providing guidance, implementing plans, overseeing operations, evaluating performance, sharing information, and upholding ethical standards (d'Addona & Kind, 2014; Chelladurai, 2014; Hoye et al., 2012; Joaquim et al., 2011; Robinson & Minikin, 2011). Additionally, to reach success both on and off the field, a sports manager's task should also, ideally, include leading, coordinating and decision-making (Parks & Quarterman, 2003), setting objectives, organizing resources, motivating staff, monitoring performance and developing people, including himself (McGrath & Bates, 2013). Lastly, especially in football academies, sports managers perform the dynamic

interaction between the objective, the process, and the practice of the sports development program (Girginov, 2008).

When we look at football academies, we often see that academy managers are former professional footballers who have played for the club at some point in their careers (Nesti & Sulley, 2015). Having a former elite player as an academy director can be advantageous primarily due to their first-hand experience, since having gone through similar paths as young players, they can be good counsellors and guides throughout the process. On the other hand, this type of managers is often lacking on administrative knowledge and skills. This could be a handicap since the competencies and skills of the managers are decisive for the success and failure of the sport organization (Quarterman & Li, 2003).

According to the literature, sports management encompasses a range of management styles, spanning from highly planned approaches to entirely ad-hoc and reactionary methods (De Knop et al., 2004; Taylor & Ho, 2005; Taylor & McGraw, 2006). Ultimately, the role of the football manager varies significantly depending on the structure of the clubs in which they are carrying out their work (Bridgewater, 2010).

Manager's skills and attributes

In addition to the manager's role, some specific skills and attributes closely influence the success of a manager. These skills and attributes, identified through an analysis of the sports management literature (Aydın, 2018; Carvalho et al., 2013; Case & Branch, 2003; Chelladurai, 2014; Çiftçi & Mirzeoğlu, 2014; Donuk, 2016; Horch & Schütte, 2003; Hoye et al., 2012; Joaquim et al., 2011; Kelly, 2008; Lussier & Kimball, 2014; Masteralexis et al., 2019; McCormack, 2003; Morrison, 2010; Nanu, 2008; Santos et. al., 2022; Seyedinejat et al., 2014; Taylor et al., 2008; Zec, 2011) are:

- education level
- experience

- managerial skills
- communication skills
- people skills
- conceptual skills
- decision-making skills

Education level

The dominant academic education level among sports managers is a degree in physical education (Batista et al., 2016; Cárdenas et al., 2017). While a degree in physical education can provide a favorable foundation, it is important to note that managerial knowledge and skills must be acquired through specific education and training in sports management as well (Jovanova-Simeva, 2015; Çiftçi & Mirzeoğlu, 2014; Retar et al., 2013).

Experience and managerial skills

Managerial skills, often referred to as technical skills, encompass the ability to use methods and techniques to effectively perform a management task. The manager in the sport organization must be adequately trained to cope with the changing organizational environment of football (Zec, 2011). No matter how good the plans are, the more important step into effective management is the implementation of the plan (Taylor et al., 2008), and the quality of the execution depends greatly on the managerial skills of the manager. Put differently, to be able to perform the relevant management tasks, the managers must be properly educated and knowledgeable and this requires a combination of academic education and practical experience in the relevant field. As a minimal prerequisite, an effective sports manager is expected to have a solid knowledge of sports economy, sports psychology, sports law, sports sociology, and management (Breuer & Thiel, 2011). In line with this, many studies confirm that effective managers need specialized education and knowledge tailored to the demands of contemporary sport management (Çiftçi & Mirzeoğlu, 2014; Horch & Schutte, 2003; Joaquim et al., 2011; Retar et al., 2013; Santos et al., 2022).

The ability to delegate is another important managerial skill (Case & Branch, 2003; Retar et al., 2013; Seyedinejat et al., 2014). This skill separates good managers from bad ones (McCormack, 2003). Managers should delegate certain tasks to others mainly because one person alone cannot get all the work done at the same time. In connection with this, prioritizing is also an important managerial skill (Case & Branch, 2003). Some objectives and tasks are more important than others and delegating effectively improves managerial performance, since this is the most effective way to get all the work done on time (Lussier & Kimball, 2014; Yetim, 2019).

Similarly, to delegation skills, managers in sports organizations may use empowerment as a part of their management processes (Mills et al., 2014). Empowerment is slightly different from delegation. It consists in giving employees responsibility for hands-on service activities and allowing decisions without prior and superior approval. While delegation typically involves higher-level managers assigning tasks and authority to lower-level managers, empowerment can be extended to employees at all levels within an organization.

Communication skills

At the organizational level, an effective flow of information and power between the manager, his employees and all relevant stakeholders is essential (Cruickshank, 2019). The manager's effective communication skills play a vital role in maintaining an open flow of communication and fostering a collaborative approach within football academies. This encourages joined-up thinking and promotes cooperation among the various stakeholders involved (Nesti & Sulley, 2015). Aydın (2018) states that exchanging information and notifying the staff of important decisions is one of the key components of successful managers, contributing to the athletic department's efficiency (McCormack, 2003) and, ultimately, to the in-field success (Basim & Argan, 2009; Cunningham, 2007; Lussier & Kimball, 2009). In this context, the act of disseminating information within the organization is considered one of the top-rated tasks of an effective manager (Horch & Schütte, 2003). Summing up, communication skills assume

great importance in management practice (Rasool & Zahra, 2015) and in maintaining the quality of the management process (Başaran, 1998; Watt, 2004; Mills et al., 2014). More broadly, effective communication has a significant effect on the sports talent development environment (Xiang et al., 2023).

Closely related to communication, giving feedback is also a central concept within the systems approach to management (Chelladurai, 2014). Specifically, the ability to provide appropriate feedback is considered an important managerial competency and a skillful manager knows how to blend positive and corrective feedback (Taylor et al., 2008). This skill increases trust among players and co-workers within the academy, leading to positive effects on the overall performance of the sport organization. It is particularly crucial for the success of winning teams (Colvin, 2008; Hoye & Cuskelly, 2003).

Effective communication skills are also useful for creating and maintaining the managers' professional network (Belen, 2012). Especially while recruiting new talent and negotiating player transfers, being a liaison to the external world is considered one of the primary managerial skills (Horch & Schütte, 2003). Hence, this network can be a very important competitive advantage. In fact, within today's sports organizations, managers who excel as good communicators distinguish themselves from their peers, subsequently enhancing the reputation of their respective sports organizations (Hur et al., 2011). Notably, networking plays a crucial role in promoting players to the football market, making it a critical managerial skill for success in the sports industry (Babiak, 2007; Parks & Quarterman, 2003).

People Skills

The manager's people skills encompass their ability to collaborate effectively and build positive relationships with others. The founder of the sports management field, Mark McCormack, once stated that every aspect of the sports management process comes back to people – managing them, selling to them, working with them, and getting them to do what is needed to be done. All of this requires

effective people skills (McCormack, 2003). In other words, management is the process of working with people to accomplish the goals of the organization (Bateman & Snell, 2015). In this sense, effective academy management is considered a people business (Mills et al., 2012). People skills are not only important for the management activity but also the internal harmony inside the academy. If managers have effective people skills, athletes and coaches will want to work with them and for them more eagerly (Lussier & Kimball, 2014). Thus, managers' people skills may eventually affect the performance of the staff and the players (Pedersen & Thibault, 2014), who have a direct influence on the overall success of the sport organization (Donuk, 2016; Hoye et al., 2012). Subsequently, because the performance of the academy staff is a competitive advantage for the sport organization, the manager's people skills can be considered an important soft power (Lussier & Kimball, 2014).

Conceptual Skills

Conceptual skills are the ability to understand abstract ideas, such as the organizational links and relations between departments as a whole system (Lussier & Kimball, 2014; Quarterman & Li, 2003). Understanding interconnected organizational structures, abstract relations and processes requires conceptual skills to identify the root cause of the problems rather than just stating the symptoms (Pedersen & Thibault, 2014). For example, translating an abstract concept such as the vision of the academy into actions depends on the conceptual capability of the manager (Hoye et al., 2012). Hence, especially in the systems view of sport management, conceptual skills are a highly important prerequisite to being an effective academy manager. The manager should be capable of perceiving the organization as a whole and be aware of the effects of every managerial decision on the total organization (Chelladurai, 2014). Specifically, regarding elite sport, Cruickshank (2019) underlines that it often navigates through various shades of grey, which means there are not always definitive answers when the challenge is complex, integrated and evolving. Thus, elite sport needs managers with excellent conceptual and intellectual skills to cope with the problems.

Decision-making skills

Decision-making skills also play an important role in the managers' careers and constitute an important measure of their effectiveness (Aydın, 2018; Ivancevich et al., 2013). In Turkey, deciding who gets the organization's limited resources during the implementation phase is important; in fact, the efficient use of resources is the most referenced decision-making qualification of Turkish managers (Çiftçi & Mirzeoğlu, 2014). Ultimately, making the right decision is one of the biggest challenges that affect the ultimate success of sports organizations (Martel et al., 2011; Murray, 2010). Research shows that many failures in sport stem from actions that are not complying with the defined goals (Lussier & Kimball, 2009). A manager should make effective decisions, weighing them up against other alternatives and be flexible to modify them, if necessary, before the final decision. In this sense, the decisions made in a football academy about the current players, the staff, and the resources, are critically important for the general performance of the academy (Kaplan, 2016; McDonald & Westphal, 2011)

In addition to the aforementioned skills, there are also some attributes associated with successful managers in the sports environment. In general, passion, motivation, integrity, confidence are the attributes valued in managers or leaders (Arnold et al., 2012; Çiftçi & Mirzeoğlu, 2014; Joaquim et al., 2011; Retar et al., 2013). Moreover, being hardworking, supportive, tolerant, loving, sharing, diligent, and dignity are considered as key values for sports managers (Balci & Erdeveciler, 2017).

Management functions

Apart from these skills and attributes, there are commonly agreed management functions that the manager needs to perform within a sports organization. These functions include planning, organizing, staffing, leading, and controlling (Aydın, 2018; Basım & Argan, 2009; Case & Branch, 2003; Çalışkan, 2009; Donuk, 2016; Jones & George, 2009; Lussier & Kimball, 2014; Sawyer et al., 2008; Sunay,

2016; Vesna, 2009; Williams, 2007; Yetim, 2019; Zec, 2011). The ability to perform these functions effectively and efficiently determine the organizational capacity of the clubs (Breuer & Nowy, 2015; Kalfa, 2019; McGrath & Bates, 2013) and merits further examination within the realm of football academy management.

Planning

The planning function of the manager is typically the starting point in the management process in any sports organization (Baker & Esherick, 2013; Farmer et al., 2011). Planning starts with the process of determining in advance what are the aims and how they will be met (Sunay, 2016). Essentially, it involves documenting the established strategy of the club's governance in a step-by-step manner, specifying what must be done, how, by whom, with what resources and when (Basim & Argan, 2009; Chelladurai, 2014).

Planning also provides speedier decision-making and clearer identification of the steps needed to reach the expected goals (Lussier & Kimball, 2014), while reducing the ambiguity in the system for better management of resources (Donuk, 2016). Especially in competitive sectors such as professional sports, planning gives the advantage to react proactively to reach the expected results (Sunay, 2016). Papadimitriou (2007) identified that long-term planning is vital for sports development. Having clear aims for the football academy is important because goals provide a blueprint for performance and a basis for feedback (Covell et al., 2019). So, planning permits to set of performance standards (Ivancevich et al., 2013; Watt, 2004).

There are three levels of planning: strategic, intermediate, and operational (Chelladurai, 2014; Kreitner, 2008). As previously discussed, strategic planning is primarily the responsibility of corporate governors, but it significantly influences intermediate and operational planning, which are generally carried out by professional managers within the sports organization (Aydın, 2018; Hoye et al., 2012). Jovanova-Simeva (2015) argues that, for a club to achieve success, it is

crucial to have a well-defined strategic planning process in place. Subsequently, a functional manager is needed to effectively translate the strategy into plans. A study by De Knop et al. (2004) on the management of sports clubs revealed that one of the main weaknesses of football clubs, in general, was the lack of long-term planning. Another study done specifically in Turkey showed that inadequacy of long-term planning in football academies is one of the barriers to reach successful outcomes (Şenel & Saygın, 2021). Other studies have also shown that many football clubs are utilizing an ad-hoc approach rather than following a formulated strategy powered by clear planning (Nesti & Sulley, 2015). However, research also shows that this is slowly changing with the help of increasing professionalism in the football business environment. The focus on just winning matches at all costs is shifting to a new focus on strategic planning, to improve the long-term performance of the sport organization (Bridgewater, 2010; Gladden et al., 2001).

Organizing

Organizing is a framework that outlines how tasks are divided, grouped, and coordinated within the sports organization to accomplish its purpose (Lussier & Kimball, 2014; Robbins et al., 2004). Specifically, organizing defines the placement of staff within each task, outlines decision-making procedures and levels of formality, emphasizes the importance of collaboration, and determines levels of responsibility and reporting mechanism (Aydın 2018; Greenberg, 2011; Hoye et al., 2012; Jacobides, 2007). Hence, the organizing function of a manager involves detailing who should do what, as defined during the planning phase (Chelladurai, 2014) and it is the manager who creates a structure of tasks, departments, and clear relationships between them (Ivancevich et al., 2013). In effect, the absence of clear role definitions inside a sports organization is often indicative that managers are not fulfilling their organizing function properly (Basım & Argan, 2009). Since chaos and confusion may cause enormous stress on the staff, this shortcoming can negatively affect the performance of the academy (Donuk, 2016). Thus, good organizing should remove all confusion and uncertainty (Koontz & Weihrich, 2010). In this sense, the separation of roles and

responsibilities is a hallmark of a well-organized professional sports club (McCormack, 2003; Wilkesman & Blunter, 2010). Moreover, several research corroborated that, within football academies, an effective organizational structure is the foundation for better athletic achievement and successful performance (Cunningham & Rivera, 2001; Hoye & Cuskely, 2003; Papadimitriou & Taylor, 2000; Relvas et al., 2010).

Staffing

The staffing function of the manager directly affects the quality and effectiveness of the football academy. Because football academies are human-centered sport organizations and human resources is a central feature and a key driver to achieve success (Aguinis, 2015; Bourke, 2003; Hoye et al., 2012; Lussier & Kimball, 2009). In this sense, considering that the hiring strategy is an important element affecting the competitive balance among teams (Lussier & Kimball, 2014), the management should control the process of finding the right skills at the right time (Batt & Colving, 2011). Indeed, in today's professional sport, the truly scarce resource is no longer simply money but rather revolves around highly skilled human abilities (Colvin, 2008). The performance of a football club depends on the performance of its people, regardless of the club's size and purpose (Aguinis, 2005) and getting the right people can mean the difference between success and failure (Böhlke, 2006; Maguire & Pearton, 2000; Taylor et al., 2008).

Moreover, according to the systems approach, systems are divided into open and closed categories. Open systems are in constant interaction with their environment (Scott, 2002; Saruhan & Yıldız, 2009). Sports organizations, including football academies, are open systems, and the human resources within these organizations are shaped by the surrounding environment in which the sports organization operates (Taylor et al., 2008). In this regard, according to systems theory, the staff of the academy is a valuable input that enters the system and significantly affects the transformation process and output (Chelladurai, 2014) in the academy.

To keep pace with the development of new information technologies and the new demands of sports business (Zec, 2011), the football academy management should, in addition to selecting skilled staff, provide them with internal education opportunities (Böhlke, 2006; Covell, 2007; Higgs, 2003;) and adequate training (Zec, 2011). Several studies showed that internal education and constant development of the staff can have a positive impact on their organizational performance (Boselie et al., 2001). In today's competitive football sector, various technological software, such as Sportscode, Prozone, Focus X2, AMISCO Pro, Wyscout and InStat are extensively used by football clubs. The manager must ensure that the staff is appropriately equipped and constantly trained with the technological demands of the football sector (Hoye et al., 2012). On the other hand, this internal training must be practical, relevant, and useful to the staff's daily work; otherwise, the employees may become disillusioned with these courses (Jones & Wallace, 2005; Nelson et al., 2006). Well-planned orientation and induction programs for carefully selected staff members contribute to the overall performance within sports organizations (Hoye et al., 2012; Trenberth, 2003).

Another important issue with staffing is that the staff working in sports organization must be motivated and satisfied (Hoye et al., 2012) to reach the peak performance. The necessary staff for a football academy mainly includes coaches, administrative staff, doctors, physiotherapists, nutritionists, psychologists, pedagogues, academic tutors, strength and conditioning coaches, personal fitness trainers and performance analysts (Beswick, 2016; Nesti & Sulley, 2015; Şenel & Saygın, 2021; Topkaya, 2015; Trikalis et al., 2014). According to Chelladurai (2014), athlete and staff satisfaction levels can be a measure of organizational effectiveness. So, the manager should be aware of these needs and provide appropriate ways to satisfy them. When basic psychological needs are not met, satisfaction decreases, potentially leading to athlete burnout and turnover among skilled staff (Kent et al., 2018). Research also shows that coaches' attitudes and behaviors impact the motivational climate and environment in the sport organizations (Moran & Toner, 2017). For example,

Roderick (2006) underlined the sense of lacking long-term job security in football clubs. If the club fails to provide job security or competitive salaries to the academy staff, it cannot expect an elite performance from them. Herzberg's motivation theory sustains that these drawbacks and unfavorable work conditions negatively affect people's motivation (Deniz, 2005). Thus, academy managers and staff must have job security and optimal working conditions that allow them to plan their future confidently (Nesti & Sulley, 2005). This sense of security and favorable working conditions foster dedication to the job, which is needed to achieve the desired performance (Balyi, 2002). Therefore, treating employees as valuable investment assets and implementing organizational practices that cultivate a strong psychological commitment to the organization are key elements in academy management. This unique way of working together eventually delivers superior performance levels (Taylor et al., 2008).

Leading

The leading function of the manager is often underlined in the literature (Baltaş, 2014; Capstone, 2011; Hoyer et al., 2012; Robbins et al., 2004; Schermerhorn et al., 2004). Leading is needed in organizations to energize people to give their best efforts both individually and in cooperation with others (Chelladurai, 2014; Hackman, 2002). Sport is completely dependent on human performance and that explains why good leadership a vital element in any sports organization is (Lussier & Kimball, 2009; Nesti & Sulley, 2015; Türksoy, 2010). Especially in Turkish culture, leadership skills of the managers increase the employees' trust in the organization (Burmaoğlu, 2018). Moreover, Bridgewater (2010) underlines that, for a football manager, success does not only depend upon his performance, but upon getting the best out of others; thus, leadership can be considered an interactive process (Pedersen & Thibault 2014). Hence, sports organizations such as football academies require managers with effective leadership skills (Sunay, 2016), including a solid understanding of group dynamics (Basım & Argan, 2009). A good manager must be aware of how certain actions can affect performance (Lussier & Kimball, 2014) of the group and guide these actions towards the common goals of the sport organization (Certo & Certo, 2006). It is

typically the responsibility of the leader to impart meaning and purpose to the sports organization to foster progress (Bateman & Snell, 2015; Sunay, 2016).

Controlling

The controlling function of the manager is fundamental in managing discipline (Rubin & Dierdorff, 2009) and separates good management from bad management (Carson, 2013; Covell et al., 2019). Controlling is closely related to the initial planning and organizing processes (Aydın, 2018; Ivancevich et al., 2013), measuring the performance of the sport organization and comparing it with previously determined standards and key performance indicators to apply necessary corrective actions (Basim & Argan, 2009; Chelladurai, 2014; Shilbury & Moore, 2006; Hoecke et al., 2009). In this sense, the establishment of a good control system is crucial for the success of a club (Jovanova-Simeva, 2015).

The controlling duty of the academy manager involves overseeing and monitoring activities, staff, and players within the organization (Carlsson & Ring, 2012). At the best football academies, there is typically a clear policy that establishes the specific metrics to be measured and outlines the methodology for carrying out these measurements (Nesti & Sulley, 2015). It is important to know the key performance indicators for various dimensions and then measure them accordingly, against the initial objectives (Bayle & Robinson, 2007). A sports development program with no evaluation and control system will not have a chance to produce the expected results in a sustainable manner.

Most of the times, only sporting performance in the pitch is controlled as the indicator of success or failure. However, a football club must be also competitive at the business and financial levels (Slack & Parent, 2006). Lussier and Kimball (2014) suggest that better control methods should be developed during the planning phase, incorporating mid-checkpoints to assess progress. Performance indicators can be defined in various dimensions, such as sporting, financial, organizational, or social perspectives. In relation to this, there is a shift observed in sports organizations from result-oriented control systems towards process-

oriented management control systems (Samur, 2018b), driven by the recognition that continuous monitoring and improving the system would enable timely corrective actions to take place before they irretrievably affect the end results. This trending shift promotes the organization's work in a stable and sustainable way. Alternatively, there appears to be some external audit firms that offer controlling function to the clubs and facilitate the controlling and assessment tasks on the academy management (Double Pass, 2021). In overall there still seems to be a lack of adequate internal and external control mechanism in most football clubs (Hamil et al., 2004).

2.5.2. Coach

In the sports development literature, coaching is a central element of the talent development process and the coach's contribution is considered crucial to produce elite performance (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2001; Coyle, 2009; Cushion et al, 2012; Green & Houlihan, 2005; Hoye et al, 2006; Kaplan, 2016; Nesti & Sulley, 2015; Pazo et al., 2012; Ronald et al., 2007; Stotlar & Wonders, 2006; Szymanski, 2003). This is corroborated by empirical evidence showing that top-level coaching is necessary for elite athletes to develop their full potential and to acquire top skills to compete at the highest level (Côté et al., 2013; Gordon & Lavalley 2004; Green & Houlihan, 2005; Williams et al., 2003). The development of talent in sport lies greatly in the constructive relationship between the athlete and the coach (Côté et al., 2013; Poczwardowski et al., 2002; Reverberi et al., 2020). The establishment of a constructive relationship between the coach and the athlete requires a sense of trust in the coach's expertise (Driska et al., 2012). This relationship and mutual understanding between the athlete and the coach are crucial for both performance and development (Woodward, 2012). Better relationships are also linked with an easier recovery from injuries, positive sport participation, increased self-confidence and better performance outcomes in sports (Larson et al., 2019; Sheridan et al., 2014). In addition to top-level coaching, expert coaching with a specially defined and tailored curriculum for specific age groups becomes an important factor during the developmental years (Bompa & Haff, 2018).

Although the importance of coaching is understood and accepted in the literature on youth development programs, it is worth clarifying the two types of coaching that play vital roles in the context of player development, both of which are equally important components for the holistic development of a player from a systems point of view. The two types are the youth coach in an academy, working with young players, and the coach training a professional senior A team composed of young adults. Although the core task seems similar in both cases, in fact, there are some important distinctions.

When we talk about academy football, we are talking about children and young players. Hence, the coaches working inside the academy system should have solid pedagogical skills (Kaplan, 2016; Kirk, 2010) and a deep understanding of the young players' learning processes (Armour, 2013; Brown, 2001; Williams et al., 2003). The pedagogical attributes of a coach, including their enjoyment of working with children, teaching skills, and a cheerful and adaptable nature, play highly important roles in the process of player development (Armour, 2013; Jones, 2006). Particularly at early ages, some attributes are often more important than the technical competence or solid football knowledge of the coach (Côté & Hay, 2002; Topkaya, 2015). During the early years, learning should be playful, fun and rewarding, and the best coaches at these early stages are those who excel as teachers rather than those with the most extensive football knowledge. The focus should be on freedom, allowing the child to see and act for themselves while having fun. Underlying the importance of this idea, Chambers (2011) states that sports teachers and coaches first need to be experts in learning and teaching. In other words, having coaches with the right attitude during the early development phases is critical to success in the academy management process (Taylor et al., 2008).

This clearly emphasizes the importance of expert coaching as a crucial component of the talent development process. Knowledge-driven factors can account significantly for differences between expert and novice performers

(Starkes & Ericsson, 2003). The development of an athlete from a basic level to the elite level is a long and complicated process (Farrow et al., 2013), and the difference in skill acquisition between a street-game player and a would-be superstar at the elite level is considerably high (Masters, 2013). Moreover, ineffective or poor coaching may have a detrimental impact on player's development and may cause stress, burnout, and even drop-out (Alexander et al., 2011; Armour, 2013, Kula, 2019).

Côté et al. (2007) suggested that, especially at young ages, deliberate play should prevail ahead of any kind of rigid training. Other authors even recommended that young players should not participate in official result-oriented competitions until the age of 12 (Biçer, 2016). Because performance and process goals must be prioritized rather than the result-goals in development years (Kremer et al., 2012). Hence, playing sports as a child should be an enjoyable, positive, and rewarding experience, as it lays the foundation for further development and growth (Green, 2008; Marck & Casstevens, 2001). Therefore, some coaching abilities such as giving encouragement, positive feedback, and reinforcement (Coutinho et al., 2021; MacPhail, 2013) are as important as football knowledge in the development of young players.

Many authors agree with the importance of longitudinal long-term athlete development pathways in elite sports development (Appelbaum et al., 2000; Balyi, 2002; Balyi & Hamilton, 2004; Böhlke & Robinson, 2009; Bramham et al., 2007; de Bosscher et al., 2008). Along these lines, designing specialized curriculum programs for athletes is often seen as a critical task in coaching expertise. Because football academies can only produce elite-level players through specialized training (Johnson et al., 2023). Accordingly, many scholars suggested age-staged approaches in which the content and the intensity of training differ according to players' ages and growth rates (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2006; Holt & Dunn, 2004; McCarthy, 2019; Stafford, 2005). In sport pedagogy this is called 'knowledge in context' (Armour, 2013), which basically defines what is needed to be taught at what age. In sports, the main idea remains similar, and

there have been many different attempts and approaches to describe talent development through several stage-based models with specially designed curricula adapted to specific age groups (Abbot & Collins, 2004; Bloom, 1985; Bailey & Morley, 2006; Balyi & Hamilton, 2004; Côté et al., 2007; Gagne, 2009; Gulbin et. al., 2013; Henriksen et al., 2010; Hylton & Bramham, 2008).

Football academies generally divide young players into different age groups and skill stages as part of a long-term training and developmental process. This structured and coherent approach to development is considered essential for the optimal progress of young players (Heerden, 2010), since working with athletes at different developmental stages and ages requires knowledge tailored to that specific age and context (Armour, 2013; Beswick, 2016; Côté et. al., 2013; Erdemli, 2008; Topkaya, 2015). Because the acquisition of new knowledge is affected and shaped by prior knowledge and interactions (Green, 2008; Malone, 2003; Smith & Waddington, 2004) and this is best achieved at the hands of expert academy coaches who possess the domain-specific knowledge essential for fostering improvement in young athlete development (Baker et al., 2003). In this context, coaching in academies requires more than just sport-specific content knowledge (Armour, 2004; Jones, 2006) and being an experienced coach in the A team or a high-level former player does not necessarily guarantee that someone will be a good coach for the development of young players (Herold, 2013; Reilly & Williams, 2003).

Fully aware of this fact, some top European football clubs choose academy coaches more carefully than ever. According to the ECA Report (2012), Ajax Football Club, for example, never hires former players as academy coaches for under-10 age categories. Similarly, Sporting Clube de Portugal academy requests that former players who wish to work with young players possess a suitable academic background. Along the same lines, La Massia, FC Barcelona's academy, does not require that the coaches have any experience as former professional players.

Despite this, Kelly (2008) found that the main prerequisite for being a coach in most football clubs is still previous playing experience. "Learning by doing" still seems to be considered a preferable method over formal education and academic qualifications (Bridgewater, 2010). In this context, coach development and coaching education is an important issue to be addressed to ensure the presence of expert coaching within the system (Cushion et al., 2012). Coaches should be provided with an extensive and compulsory education scheme to equip themselves with relevant up-to-date skills and knowledge (De Bosscher et al., 2008; Nesti & Sulley, 2015).

In connection with coaching, one of the developmental training theories often seen in the literature, considered crucial to reach top level, is deliberate practice (Ericsson et al., 1993), alternatively named as deep practice (Coyle, 2009). According to this approach, ordinary training cannot produce an extraordinary player (Biçer, 2016). In fact, the main rule of deliberate practice is that if the task is too easy, boring and useless, or too complicated and too difficult for a given age, then it can become frustrating and demotivating for the players. Training must take place in the proximal development zone (Kuusisaari, 2014), a training zone where new learning occurs in a productive yet challenging environment, located just beyond the current abilities of the players. There must be a balance between the challenge and the skills of the player; if this balance is not assured, learning and improving won't take place.

This type of practice is specifically designed to address the areas in need of improvement and the skills that the player aims to acquire. Practice should often take place at the edges of the athletes' ability, where they make mistakes, slow down, get feedback, make corrections, exert more effort and, eventually, be better players (Coyle, 2009). Overall, more deliberate practice equals better performance, and tons of deliberate practice equals great performance (Colvin, 2008). Put differently, this type of training focus on refining technique and skills while seeking constant feedback to address weaknesses. Naturally, this developmental training approach requires a great deal of discipline and

commitment from the players (Young & Medic, 2008; Tedesqui & Young, 2017). This long-term commitment is also needed to endure the academy years (Houlian & Green, 2008). In accordance, several investigations showed that expert elite athletes are the ones who accumulated more deliberate practice than less-expert athletes over their careers (Baker & Young, 2014).

In addition to the content of the training, the underlying philosophy of the training is also important. Soriano (2012) suggests that the academy model must be built upon a specific club philosophy, rather than relying on the ideas of “temporary” individuals. The question of why and how to play should be clear to all academy players and staff. This is important for the performance of academy management because it can guide the management style and the delivery of the services within the sports organization (Chelladurai, 2014). Research shows that the importance of an identifiable, coherent, and shared philosophy within the A team and the academy has a positive impact on performance (Henriksen, 2010; Henriksen et al., 2010; Larsen et al., 2013). This philosophical aspiration must be clearly articulated in the club’s expectations in terms of mentality, technical skills, tactical skills, and physical attributes from the academy players (Nesti & Sulley, 2015). In FC Barcelona’s La Massia, for instance, the academy develops elite players according to the club’s playing philosophy and style. This model is not easily replaced (Soriano, 2012), and it is even considered that the A team should play as the youth team, not the other way around (ECA Report, 2012). Most players also find *‘I train like I play’* approach more productive and highly ranked (Morley, 2014). On the other hand, clubs also should look to provide young players with variety of playing formats and styles to prepare them to broader and diverse football environment (Sieghartsleitner et al., 2018; Sweeney et al., 2021). Exposure to various playing styles may help players to easier transition to elite level football (Lundqvist et al., 2022).

In addition to expert coaching within the academy, it is now worth reminding that the research using the systems approach recognizes the inclusion of senior team coaching in the developmental process of football academies, since, apparently,

this developmental process of an elite football player does not end when they finally complete the transition into the senior team of the club. As a result, the senior coach of the A team also plays a crucial role in shaping the athlete's development throughout their professional career (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004).

Some researchers confirmed that the support of the senior team towards the pro-youth policy of the club is important for the ultimate outcomes and success of the academy (Mills et al., 2014). Dendir (2016) showed that a player reaches his top performance at the age of 25 to 27 years. This implies that a holistic player development cannot be complete without the presence of supporting senior-team coaches. If the first team coach promotes a more supportive environment, then he allows more time for development to occur (Richardson et al., 2013). Furthermore, other studies showed that the presence of the right coaching personnel in the senior team, encouraging the adjustment of young incomers, is a crucial organizational factor influencing the successful progression of the players to the first team (Roynesdal, 2015). Of course, senior coaches need supportive learning environment (Walsh, 2013) in the clubs to give more space to academy players in their squads, and the establishment of such an environment hinge on the trust between the coach and the manager (Kelly & Harris, 2010). This is particularly important as coaches with a “win at all costs” mentality may hinder young talented footballers’ opportunities to be called for official A team matches (Bullough & Mills, 2014). Therefore, the coach of the professional A team still plays a critical role in the development of the end-product of a football academy and thus they are important stakeholders in the development process of the players (O’Connor et al., 2018).

2.5.3. Player

Football academies primarily aim to “produce” elite football players competing at a senior level (Gulbin & Weissensteiner, 2013; Nesti & Sulley, 2015). Hence, in professional football clubs, the player is the main component of the game and represents the internal and primary stakeholder within the football academy management in the club system. The literature highlights the players’ importance

as key stakeholders in the football industry, examining their direct influence on the management process (Beech & Chadwick, 2013) and addressing their relationship with clubs, agents, and other key actors (Hamil et al., 2018) of the football sector.

Furthermore, as great performances and results are only achieved by great performers, football clubs focus heavily on recruiting or developing the best players to increase their chances of success (Hoye et al., 2012; Maguire & Pearton, 2000). Supporting this notion, a study by Kuper and Szymanski (2009) showed that the quality of players was the most influential factor in determining success within a football club. This makes great performers more valuable than ever in today's sport (Colvin, 2008).

In terms of the player, the literature highlights three significant aspects that warrant further attention concerning the academy: their input quality, their transition period to the A team, and their permanence in professional football.

Input and output quality

In order to maintain the quality of input into an academy, players undergo several tests such as TIPS (Technique, Intelligence, Personality, Speed), or alternatively TABS (Technique, Attitude, Balance, Speed), or alternatively, SUPS (Speed, Understanding of the game, Personality, Skill) (Brown 2001, Reilly et al., 2003; Stratton et al., 2004). Moreover, some multidisciplinary approaches to talent identification (Pienaar et al., 1998; Reilly et al., 2000; Vandendriessche et al., 2012; Veale et al., 2008) include, for instance, anthropometric measurements such as body size, fat, bone diameter, somatotype, physiological measurements, maximal oxygen intake, aerobic capacity, endurance, agility, and jumping (Höner et al., 2021; Pérusse et al., 2001; Wilmore et al., 2001).

In European football, football clubs seem to detect talented players at increasingly earlier ages (Roderick, 2006). The most common starting age for the football foundation education phase seems to be 5 (Nesti & Suley, 2015) or 6

years old (Haugaasen et al., 2014). Hodges and Baker (2011) also stated that early engagement in sports generally occurs at about 5 years of age. But still, there is no globally accepted definite starting age for exclusive football training. The entry age in football academies in Europe varies depending on the policy of the academy and the country. Especially in Europe, many clubs start to recruit previously detected local players at the age of 9 (Read et al, 2016) or from 10 to 12 and then start selection countrywide or internationally at 16 (Nesti & Sulley, 2015). In Turkey, the selection age for football academies generally falls within these age ranges and the typical starting age in academies is around the U12 teams (Çevik & Onağ, 2019). According to the literature, the most critical period for motor development in children is between the ages of 9 and 12 (Balyi, 2001). Therefore, football academies should begin incorporating talented children in the system around this age range for their initial training schemes.

In addition to football skills and talent, high-level success in elite sport is also determined by psychological factors (Moran & Toner, 2017). Mental toughness, confidence, and the ability to concentrate are among the factors that distinguish top elite athletes from less successful athletes (Beswick, 2016; Gould et al., 2002; Jackson et al., 2008). Mentally tough and ready athletes have a higher level of self-belief and more faith that they can control their performance and remain relatively unaffected by competition and adversity (Clough et al., 2002; Crust & Clough, 2011).

Furthermore, at the elite level, the role of motivation is also seen as crucial in the achievement of athletic success (Moran & Toner, 2017; Dias et al., 2018). Being an elite player requires deliberate practice and this demands long-term commitment, energy, and passion to keep going in difficult situations (Farrow et al, 2013). In a study conducted by Van Yperen (2009), young players who successfully progressed into professional football and those who did not were differentiated by commitment and engagement factors. Becoming an elite player requires constant motivational fuel to keep going (Coyle, 2009). Elite players will eventually need an inner desire to keep going, the motivation to keep themselves

going under all circumstances (Mitchell & Daniels, 2003). Otherwise, without passion and motivation, it is highly unlikely that a player perseveres through the arduous and demanding process of deliberate practice over many years (Colvin, 2008; Orlick, 2000). Hence, the main task of football academy management is to make sure that these young players remain consistently motivated to continue with the demanding and long-term development program (Silva Dias et al., 2018).

Research has also found that the awareness level (Mills et al., 2012; Xiang et al., 2023), goal-setting (Beswick, 2016) and self-regulation skills of players enable individuals to control their thoughts, desires, and actions to proceed without external forces (Abrahams, 2012; Allom et al., 2016; Baumeister & Vohs, 2004; Morley et al., 2014; Zimmerman, 2006). Moreover, a significant number of English elite footballers agree that taking responsibility for their own development improved their development (Mills et al., 2014). Many authors agree that what sets the best players apart from other elites is their capacity to take ownership and responsibility for success and failure (Carson, 2013; Epstein, 2014; Farrow, 2013; Toering et al., 2009), which can be facilitated by the development of the players self-control skills (Allom et al., 2016; Tedesqui & Young, 2017).

Additionally, Holt and Dunn's (2004) research with English and Canadian young football players showed that factors such as discipline and commitment contribute positively to talent development and may facilitate a successful transition to the professional level. Together with discipline, determination seems to be a remarkable component throughout the personal development of the player (Earle et al., 2008; Morley, 2014; Young & Medic, 2008). Indeed, persistence and true commitment to excellence (Cook et al., 2014) might be the reason why the best players in the world are the ones who always invest more time in their training while already playing at the top level.

Other important psychological and perceptual skills which are just as important as football skills for succeeding in competitive elite games include focus, concentration, resilience, emotional control, confidence, self-belief, motivation,

perseverance, consistency, visualization, goal setting, and game intelligence (Abrahams, 2012; Baker & Farrow, 2015; Baker & Horton, 2004; Coulter et al., 2010; de Joode et al., 2021; Earle et al., 2008; Gucciardi et al., 2009; Harwood, 2005; Houlian & Green, 2008; Höner et al., 2021; Mack & Casstevens, 2001; MacNamara et al., 2010; McGuigan et al., 2023; Morley et al., 2014; Sarkar & Fletcher, 2016; Stewart & Meyers, 2004; Roca et al., 2012; Weinberg et al., 2011; Xiang et al., 2023). All these soft skills can be learned and supported with expert support (Moran & Toner, 2017) and football academies must focus on the holistic development of players, encompassing tactical, physiological, and socio-psychological aspects, to attain the desired performance outcomes (Raya-Castellano & Uriondo, 2015).

To sum up, the presence of these soft skills generally differentiates successful elite players from other players at the highest level of football (Abrahams, 2012; Gilbourne & Richardson 2006; Nesti & Sulley, 2015). This highlights the fact that elite football is not only played and won by inborn football skills. Player development is a multi-dimensional construct (Côté et al., 2012; Coutinho et al., 2016; Davids & Baker, 2007; Philips et al., 2010). Football players with more conceptual, cognitive, and social skills (Barcellos et al., 2022; Holt & Dunn, 2004; Machado et al., 2023), as well as psychomotor ability and psychological skills, (Forsman et al., 2016; Kelly et al., 2020) are more likely to experience long-term success in their football careers (Goldstein & Ford, 2002; Harttgen et al., 2011).

Players' personalities and soft skills are also important in players' ability to navigate the positive and negative influences of some significant others in the development process, namely parents (Abrams, 2012; Alfermann et. al., 2004; Bull et al., 2005, Connaughton et al., 2008; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2013; Xiang et al., 2023), and peers and friends (Beswick, 2016; Bruner et al., 2013; Rubin et al., 2006; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004; Xiang et al., 2023). Since these external influences can have a severe impact on the player's life and sports career (Epstein, 2014; Greenberg, 2009; Larsen & Alfermann, 2017), they must be taken into consideration by academy managers.

Transition to the A team and real match experiences

Regarding players' transition to the elite level, scientific research suggests that athletes need to accumulate a minimum of 10,000 hours of practice before they can reach an international elite level of performance (Ericsson et al., 1996; Ericsson, 2003; Levitin, 2006; Starkes, 2000; Williams & Hodge, 2005). Scaling this to football players, it becomes evident that meeting the 10,000-hour rule is challenging within the timeframe of approximately 9-10 years of football academy education. The daily practice duration of around 3 hours is insufficient to accumulate the required hours in the academy for reaching an elite level of performance. Research indicates that even the academies of top European football clubs fall significantly short of the 10,000-hour rule (Nesti & Sulley, 2015). Moreover, the age at which most athletes attain peak levels of performance in team sports, like football, occurs usually in the mid-to-late twenties (Côté et al., 2012; Dendir, 2016; Hugaasen et al., 2014; Moran & Toner, 2017). Previous research on football players showed that they generally reach top elite levels after 13 years of formal/informal football education and training (Helsen et al., 2000). In Turkey, it's also observed that the peak athletic performance typically begins 10-12 years after starting organized trainings in an academy, which corresponds to the athlete's age of 22-23 (Kula, 2019). This is more than the time they spent in a football academy. Unless the starting ages are lowered, it would be unjust to anticipate Turkish academies to raise players fully prepared for senior-level play. All this information shows that the time spent by young players on professional level within the A team during their final formative years is highly important for their further development and final evaluation.

According to Samur (2018a), academy coaches and managers believe that young football players aged 18 and over should already be participating in professional leagues and that the transition should be facilitated by playing in real matches. Otherwise, all the efforts of the club's football academy can be in vain. In other words, real match experiences with the A team during the late development years are relevant to the player's development (Balyi, 2001; Côté

at al., 2003; Houlihan & Green, 2008; Kaplan, 2016; Oakley & Green, 2001; UK Sport, 2006; Stotlar & Wonders, 2006). Specifically, practice and competition experience at the elite level will facilitate the development of technical skills and natural game intelligence (Böhlke, 2009; Côté et al., 2013; Green & Houlihan, 2005; Green & Oakley, 2001; Helsen et al., 2000).

In addition, young players' chances of success will be boosted by the presence of a performance-supporting environment (Barker et. al., 2014; Cruickshank, 2019; Gagné, 2009). Gilmore (2009) explains that the players are assets of the teams, and the team must invest in improving their capabilities and capacities to enable better player utilization in the squad. This is only possible by letting them play competitive matches in the league, as it is through competition that players can maximize their higher capabilities. If this is not feasible within the home club, exploring loan-out options to gain playing experience should be considered (Çevik & Onağ, 2019). In fact, top football academies all over the world ensure that their players can engage in competitions, leagues, and tournaments which allow them to gain real match experience, a deeper understanding of the game, and refine their skills in demanding and competitive situations (Gulbin et al., 2013; Nesti & Sulley, 2015).

Considering the aforementioned statements, it can be inferred that the final phase of the academy training is the progression to the senior team. This transition period from the academy to the first team is a complex process (Hollings et al., 2014; McGuigan et al., 2023) and constitutes one of the most difficult periods of the players' development (Finn & McKenna, 2010). Football academies should carefully plan to facilitate this transition into top level professional football (Gulbin et al., 2013). Some specific studies also explored this theme analyzing different sociocultural aspects of sports (Jones et al., 2014; Richardson et al., 2013; Roynesdal, 2015; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1. Study design and methodology

In the present research, a qualitative approach, utilizing an exploratory study design (Hastie & Glotova, 2012), was adopted to study football academy management practice in Turkey. There were several concrete reasons to apply this kind of study design. First, the present research investigated the complex reality of football academies in Turkey. In this sense, qualitative research provides meanings (Morrow & Smith, 2000) and explanations about a phenomenon constructed by the social, historical, and cultural contexts (Kuper et al., 2008; Veal & Darcy, 2014). This type of design is also appropriate when the existing theory or research literature on a phenomenon is limited (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), facilitating the development of models or theories that help explain “*how*” and “*why*” the systems work (Saunders et. al., 2009). In addition to this initial benefit, a qualitative exploratory investigation was also found suitable to gain a deeper understanding of the participants’ needs, expectations (Begay et al., 2004; Given, 2006), personal paradigms, perspectives and experiences (Jones et al., 2002). As previously stated, this was one of the objectives of the research. As it was also explained in the introduction section, there is still limited knowledge in the management of football academies (Böhlke & Robinson, 2009; ECA Report, 2012), and a qualitative design would permit to explore the unexplored side of football academies in Turkey, as well as give new practical insights, providing better context-specific understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

3.2. Participants

Systems theory approach to management emphasizes the importance of certain stakeholders that assume a critical role in the system (Mills et. al., 2014). There is a need to understand the obligations and needs of practitioners, to bridge the gap between science and practice (Collins et al., 2018) and multiple stakeholder perspectives must be taken into consideration to improve the conditions for athlete development (Poucher et al., 2021). Because internal stakeholders of the

system may provide a helpful guide to be effectively translated to daily practice in sports (Leite et al., 2022). In this regard, players, head coaches and managerial staff represent the critical internal and primary stakeholders of a football academy in a club system. Therefore, we chose to interview three types of internal stakeholders namely elite football players, managers of the academies and head coaches of senior football teams with previous coaching experience at academies. Hence, there were three groups, each consisting of 15 participants, making it a total of 45 participants. The characteristics of the participants will be described in greater detail in each individual empirical research.

3.2.1 Sampling method

We employed purposive sampling as our sampling methodology, which involves selecting participants whose perspectives or experiences are relevant to the research question (Patton, 2015). To expedite the sampling process, we used the criterion sampling method, wherein we exclusively selected the participants meeting the predetermined criterion. In addition, we leveraged snowball sampling alongside criterion sampling, allowing us to draw upon the referrals of the selected participants or persons with access to potential participants that met the defined criteria.

Academy managers

According to a study by the ECA (2012), 80% of the top European clubs consider the academy manager as the most vital person responsible for the preparation of academy players for the elite level. Hence, the academy managers (or in some cases they are called as academy directors) were conducted for the interviews as they are the true representatives of clubs concerning the football academies. There are 36 professional football clubs competing in Turkey's top two professional leagues and the academies were chosen among those top clubs that have demonstrated successful performance in player development over the past 20 years. The criterion for establishing "successful performance" was defined as having produced at least one player from the academy who had represented the Turkish National A Team, the most elite national football team of

the country. This criterion was based on the idea that participation in a national squad team constitutes a mark of excellence in any sport (Lyle, 1997) and that players who compete at the highest international level in their sport are proved expert elite athletes (Coutinho et al., 2016; Swann et al., 2015).

Coaches

The participants for the coaching group were selected among active coaches who were working in the top division of Turkey (Süper Lig) within a senior team during the data collection period. We specifically required that they possessed either the UEFA Pro license or, at least, the UEFA-A license, (in this case, they would have to be enrolled in an ongoing UEFA Pro license training program). Moreover, to ensure they were familiar with the specific subjects related to the academy, the coaches were required to have a minimum of one year of coaching experience in a football academy. The selection of A teams coaches was purposeful because they are the key stakeholders within the club system who ultimately receive the players as the final outcomes of the academy. Moreover, as it is explained in the previous section, a senior team coach has a significant influence on the athlete's development throughout their professional career (Wylleman & Lavalley, 2004) and their support of the pro-youth policy of the club is important for the success of the academy management (Mills et al., 2014). In effect, having the right senior team coach that cherishes the integration of young incomers is a critical organizational factor regarding the player's successful progression to the first team (Roynesdal, 2015). Therefore, the opinion and thoughts of the coaches in the A teams are considered highly valuable and insightful to identify optimal approaches to football academy management as initially stated in the research question and aims.

Football players

Finally, the football players were selected exclusively among active players who played in the top division of Turkey (Süper Lig) with one exception who was playing in French top division (Ligue 1) during the data collection period. The success criterion was defined as having participated in at least one official game

in the Turkish National teams beyond the U18 teams during their careers. Considering this criterion, to reach a purposeful sample, we analyzed all the archives of the Turkish Football Federation to determine the players who received national team invitation calls and contacted them accordingly. In effect, as mentioned earlier, an expert elite athlete is commonly recognized as someone who has competed at an international level (Gulbin & Weissenteiner, 2013; Starkes, 2001). Hence, defining the success criterion as the representation of the country at the international level proved their elite status. It is important to note that one of the participants held dual citizenship and, after representing Turkish youth national teams, he preferred to play for the Swiss National A-Team. The remaining participants were players from the Turkish National teams. Therefore, the selected players were the most successful examples among Turkish players.

3.2.2. Size of the sample

The first sampling plan specified a minimum of 10 participants to ensure the richness of the data, but the final sample size was left open-ended. The determination of that final number was based on the saturation technique, which is achieved when the analysis of newly collected data no longer provides additional insights into the data analysis process (Kuper at al., 2008). The principle guiding the determination of the final number of participants was to continue until data saturation was reached (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Data saturation was reached after the 14th or 15th interview when no new analytical information emerged and thus the final sample consisted of 15 participants for each of the internal stakeholder groups. It should be also noted that content analysis generally recommends around 15-20 interviews to ensure meaningful results (Moser & Korstjens, 2018), and this requirement was readily fulfilled in this research for each sample group.

3.3. Data collection

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with open-ended questions (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Marshall & Rossman 2006; Veal & Darcy, 2014). A pre-designed interview guide was specifically developed for this

study, based on key questions highly relevant to the aims of the study (Arksey & Knight, 1999). This interview guide was developed deductively drawing from previous sport management and talent development literature. A detailed description of this process will be provided later. Before the actual interviews, a pilot interview was conducted with experimental subjects involved in football sector to test the effectiveness of the interview guide. Based on the pilot interview, minor amendments and updates were made to the interview guide.

All participants were initially contacted via phone to provide them with details on the purpose and nature of the study. Upon their agreement to participate, convenient interview times were scheduled based on their availability. Most of the interviews were conducted face-to-face at the participants' respective football clubs, ensuring their comfort and safety throughout the interview process. These club visits also allowed the main researcher to immerse himself in the organizations, gain first-hand observations of the academies and, ultimately, compare the participants' responses with the actual reality. In two cases, alternative meeting locations were arranged according to the participants' preferences. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their answers. They were informed that their voice recording would strictly be kept private and used solely for the academic purposes of the specific research and that their answers would never be shared with any third parties such as other academicians, journalists, media outlets, or social media platforms. The interviewer also explained that, if requested, a written and signed statement acknowledging all these terms can be provided. However, none of the participants requested such documentation; instead, all agreed to participate orally and voluntarily. Furthermore, participants were informed that, to ensure the privacy of their identities, their answers would be transcribed anonymously. All the participants were also given the option to decline participation or choose not to answer specific questions if they felt uncomfortable. These measures were implemented to facilitate and encourage the full participation of the respondents. None of the participants choose to opt, and all questions were answered by each

participant, indicating their willingness and effective collaboration throughout the interview process.

All participants were asked the questions in the interview guides, but the order of questioning was free to vary within the natural flow of the conversation. The researcher also asked additional questions for further clarification whenever it was needed. The interviews were recorded using a digital audio recording device and lasted from 40 minutes to over 1 hour; the longest was 1h20'. All the interviews were conducted in Turkish, the native language of the participants. Considering that the main researcher, who conducted the interviews, was also a native Turkish speaker, there were no communication barriers in the implementation and evaluation of the interviews. The data collection for this research began in 2018 and spanned over a period of approximately three years. This delay was mainly due to challenges in the planning and implementation phases.

One major challenge was identifying and recruiting suitable participants who possessed the required experiences and knowledge related to the phenomenon under study. Establishing connections with these individuals and gaining their trust and willingness to participate took considerable time, extending to the overall duration of the data collection process. Moreover, because of the closed nature of the professional football sector, characterized by a sense of suspicion towards outsiders (Kelly & Harris, 2010), gaining access to key individuals involved in the world of professional football was highly difficult (Roderick, 2006; Cushion & Smith, 2006). Moreover, some previously scheduled meetings had to be postponed due to the participants' busy match schedule, and it took a long time to determine new dates. Lastly, the academies, the coaches and the players were in more than 10 different cities in Turkey. This geographical dispersion posed logistic challenges (e.g., transportation, accommodation, financial burden). As the investigation was self-financed by the main researcher, it was necessary to secure sufficient financial resources to cover these expenses to realize the necessary trips for the interviews. More importantly, the unforeseen

outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic further delayed the data collection process, namely for the last a few interviews. The pandemic's impact on travel restrictions and safety concerns imposed additional waiting time to ensure the safety and well-being of participants and the researcher. Overall, these various challenges and circumstances contributed to the prolonged duration of the data collection process, extending the timeline beyond initial expectations.

3.3.1 Interview guide overview

The interview guide was carefully designed to encourage the interviewees to share their genuine thoughts, personal feelings (Whiting, 2008), and narratives (Rabionet, 2011). Three distinct interview guides were developed for each participant group: one for managers, one for coaches, and one for players. Initially, a general set of questions was created as the foundational base for each specific interview guide. Extensive preliminary research in the field was conducted to ensure the questions were based in existing academic knowledge. During the literature review process, the concepts relevant to the systems approach of management were meticulously selected. This attentive preparation period spanned over two years, with each question in the interview guide planned and aligned with the relevant concepts identified in the literature (Mason, 2004, Rubin & Rubin, 2005). This meticulous process was undertaken to ensure the overall quality and trustworthiness of the study (Gibbs et al., 2007; Kitto et al., 2008). The questions were formulated to be clear (Turner, 2010), single-faceted (Baumbusch 2010) and open-ended (Whiting, 2008; Turner, 2010; Chenail, 2011). As a result, the interview guide and questions effectively covered the main topics of the study. A sample of the preparation of questions for the interview guides is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Sample of the questions guide

Themes	Category	Sub-Category	Objectives	Relevant Questions	References
Services of the Academy	Facilities	Main Building & Training ground	To understand the services that are available to coaches and players and their benefits.	What is the importance of physical conditions and resources of an academy? What is your opinion on one shared training site facility with academy?	Uhrich, 2010; Allison, 2001; Bayle & Mandella, 2002; Williams & Reilly, 2000; Misener & Doherty, 2009; Lussier & Kimball, 2014; Wicker & Breuer, 2011; Spektor et al., 2011; Hopwood, 2010; Chelladurai, 2014; Hall, 2009; Brown, 2005; Basim & Argan 2009; Woratschek et al., 2014; De Bosscher et al., 2008; Houlihan & Green 2008; Stotlar & Wonders 2006; Pedersen et al., 2014; Bateman & Snell, 2015; Taylor et al., 2015
			To understand the level of technology use and equipment	Could you please explain the accommodation service provided to the players?	
			To understand the effects of quality of facilities on development	How are the physical/technological conditions of your academy?	
			To understand the ideally needed facilities to raise elite player	What is your description of an ideal academy in terms of facilities to achieve the best results?	

Three main themes merged, encompassing the services, management, and governance of the academy. These main themes were further categorized into six distinct groups and 25 sub-categories. Initial internal testing of the questions was conducted by the academic advisors overseeing the dissertation to form the preliminary interview guide (Chenail, 2011). Subsequently, a field pilot-testing phase involved interviewing a Turkish-speaking academy director, a coach, and a player from lower divisions. This pilot testing allowed for informed changes and adjustments to the interview questions (Chenail, 2011). The final interview guide for the academy managers consisted of 46 questions, the guide for coaches featured 27 questions, and the guide for players included 30 questions.

Before the beginning of each interview, the participants were provided with introductory information aiming to “break the ice” and create a warm, comfortable, and inclusive environment (Rabionet, 2011; Whiting, 2008). The printed introduction and instruction text was read aloud to the participants. This initial conversation included statements such as: *“This is not an exam and there is not a single right answer; the only right answer is your own opinion and experience”*. The beginning and ending of each recording were explicitly communicated to the participants to ensure awareness of which parts of their conversation with the researcher were recorded for the study. In unforeseen circumstances, such as receiving a phone call, recordings were paused, providing participants the freedom to converse privately. Following each interview, a deliberate follow-up section was allocated to capture any additional feedback on topics that may not have been covered in the formal questions. This approach allowed participants to share their final thoughts and opinions on relevant issues not addressed during the structured questioning.

3.4. Data analysis

Once the interviews were completed, transcripts were prepared in the participants' native language and subsequently translated into English for evaluation by the academic advisors overseeing the dissertation. Content analysis was conducted to examine and analyse the transcribed data, aiming to identify patterns, themes, and significant insights.

The transcribed texts from the individual interviews were thoroughly examined through a process of multiple readings to immerse fully. After reviewing the *corpus*, a final and updated categorization process took place (Bardin, 2004) and meaningful units were condensed and coded manually. While qualitative data analysis software could have been employed, it is not always a compulsory rule, as manual data coding can be used (Lee, 2021).

In line with the recommendations of Neuendorf (2017), two independent coding

processes were subsequently conducted. First, the manually coded data was colour-coded in categories. Afterwards, all transcripts were shared and analysed by one of the academic supervisors, possessing extensive experience in scientific research, including analysing qualitative data, with several published articles on indexed scientific journals. This academic supervisor reviewed and checked the initial codes of the main researcher to ensure consistency and reliability.

More specifically, in the review process of each participant's transcript, the meaningful units (i.e., words and sentences that conveyed similar meanings) were identified and labelled with codes (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). A tagging system was employed within the data analysis process (e.g., M for academy manager, C for coach; P for player) and each tag was numbered (e.g., P1 for player 1), so that the other researcher could easily find the codes in the participants' transcribed and coloured interview.

Following principles of both deductive and inductive coding, the existing literature served as a basis to define predefined categories, while new emerging categories were identified and included in the analysis (Patton, 2015; Schreier, 2014). The final codes and categories were interpreted based on the knowledge and experience of the researchers and compared for differences and similarities. In the end, due to the vast amount of data collected, the data were grouped into four main themes: services, management, governance, and sports policy. Within these themes, new emerging domains (e.g., input domain in management theme) have been found and presented elaborately in the results.

3.5. Validity and trustworthiness

According to Veal and Dacry (2014), a profound and detailed reporting of the process and results of qualitative data collection and analysis is the key to justifying and assuring trustworthiness in a study. Trustworthiness criteria include credibility (confidence in the truth of the findings), transferability (the extent to which findings can be applied to other contexts), dependability (the stability of the data over time and under similar conditions), and confirmability (objectivity and

neutrality in the data collection and analysis process) (Stahl & King, 2020).

One of the key criteria to ensure trustworthiness is credibility (confidence in the truth of the findings), which was safeguarded, as mentioned in the data analysis section, by engaging two independent coders. Specifically, the analysis code underwent scrutiny and revision by a second coder, who independently coded a portion of the data at various times, contributing to ensure accuracy and credibility. To address transferability, we provided a thorough description of the research context, methodology, and participant characteristics in our study. This detailed information allows other researchers to assess the applicability of our findings to their specific contexts. Dependability was assured through careful documentation of the research procedures. All steps, from data collection to analysis, were systematically recorded, providing a transparent trail for subsequent researchers to follow. Confirmability was maintained by emphasizing objectivity and neutrality throughout the research process. The interview guide was designed to minimize bias, and the coding process involved, as mentioned earlier, multiple coders who discussed and reconciled any discrepancies.

Validity, on the other hand, refers to the extent to which the data collected truly reflects the phenomenon under study. To ensure validity, as explained in the interview guide section, the questions were based on previous studies in the research topic area, with each question being supported by a rich set of references from the relevant literature review (Kelly, 2010; Wengra, 2001). Ultimately, the research employed a comprehensive interview guide with well-designed questions, allowing for extensive coverage of the main topics in the study field (Taylor, 2005). Each piece of information collected was meticulously aligned with the research aims and served a specific purpose in the study's results. This rigorous preparation and analysis phase played a pivotal role in reinforcing the validity of the research.

Furthermore, as stated earlier, the interview guide underwent internal testing, overseen by the academic advisors of the dissertation. This internal testing

phase involved thorough assessment of the initial interview guide, following the guidelines outlined by Chenail (2011). After the first internal testing, a pilot test was conducted with an academy director, a coach, and a player to further refine the interview guide. This pilot testing permitted some informed changes and adjustments to the interview questions, ensuring the content validity of the research (Chenail, 2011).

CHAPTER 4: EMPIRICAL STUDY 1.

4. Management of football academies: The manager's perspective

Abstract

The central question in management research is how to enhance organizational performance (Covell et al., 2019). In the case of football academies, managers wield substantial influence by overseeing and guiding various facets of the academy. As key stakeholders, they play a pivotal role in determining and contributing to the academy's overall success (Cruickshank et al., 2019). In light of the evident challenges and difficulties encountered by elite football development in Turkey (Sunay & Kaya, 2018), this study aimed to understand the factors influencing the overall efficiency of Turkish football academies, specifically from the viewpoint of football academy managers. Guided by the systems approach to management, the study specifically aimed to outline the essential prerequisites and services within the input, process, feedback, output, and environmental dimensions of the football academy system. The participants were the official managing directors of 15 different professional football academies in the clubs competing in the top two leagues of Turkey. Qualitative content analysis was used to analyse the data collected through semi-structured interviews. The results revealed that the effectiveness of football academies in Turkey was significantly influenced by the quality of operation management and corporate governance within the clubs, alongside key environmental factors. The article concludes by underlining the importance of adopting a systems approach in the management process of football academies to ensure long-term success. Furthermore, practical recommendations, viewed from the managers' perspective, are proposed to achieve sustainable football academy management in Turkey.

Keywords: Manager, Football academy management, Systems approach

4.1 Introduction

The systems theory approach in management provides a unity to understand the problematic parts by studying the diversity of the system (Hofkirchner & Rousseau, 2015). In the context of sports management discipline, the systems theory suggests that management success is a result of various responsive parts that function together in a well-defined system (Chelladurai, 2014; Aydın, 2018). This means that the overall success of a sports organization eventually depends on inter-connected parts of the overall system and thus the management activity and sports development should be understood more broadly, as a holistic approach (Mingers & White, 2010), a process that includes and involves a widespread collection of stakeholders in the system (Hylton, 2013). In other words, recognizing the relationships and interactions between the parts of the system is vitally important to comprehend the behaviour and the output quality of the system (Samur, 2018b).

Along these lines, elite sport development programs, such as football academies, have little chance to produce consistent and sustainable success without a clear systematic and holistic approach (Böhlke & Robinson, 2009). Several scholars provided an exploration of football management activity as a stakeholder analysis (Beech & Chadwick, 2013; Hamil et al., 2018). In this framework, effective management in the sport organization depends on gaining a clear understanding of the relevant stakeholder's perceptions and preferences (Chelladurai, 2014), because their involvement directly influences the performance of the general management practice in the organizations (Freeman, 2010). Considering this perspective, the present research approached the football academy management phenomenon holistically from a systems theory lens, recognizing the academy managers as important internal stakeholders who directly influence the overall performance of the academy management.

The academy manager as a stakeholder in the academy management

The literature supports the notion that the primary responsible for the performance and success of a sports organization is the manager (Amenta et al.,

2012; Covell et al., 2019). It is widely acknowledged that effective sports management can only be delivered by expert managerial staff in a specific field (Erdal, 2017). According to a study by ECA (2012), the academy manager and the managing director of the club are the key success factors for effective club and academy management. This study further revealed that 80% of the top European clubs consider the club's academy manager as the most important employee responsible for facilitating the transition of academy players to the elite level. Similarly, in a study regarding the certification process of a Swedish elite football club, Gefle IF, Carlsson (2012) pinpointed the quality of the manager as one of the variables affecting the overall effectiveness of the club. Concomitantly, an investigation conducted by Koustelios (2001) concluded that the inadequate effectiveness of sports development centers was mainly due to a lack of specialized and well-trained managers.

In sum, the competence of the manager in the club seems to be essential for the success and failure of the sports organization (Quarterman & Li, 2003). This emphasizes the significant impact of management succession on the overall performance of sports organizations (Carlsson & Ring, 2012; Lin & Li, 2004) as effective organizations cannot succeed without effective managerial decisions (Boudreau, 2005).

Management of football academies

In football management literature, a football academy is regarded as the breeding ground for the next generation of top-level athletes (Holt, 2002). According to Nesti and Sulley (2015), the fundamental aim of a football academy is to help the club develop more and better players for the first team. A secondary aim is, as some researchers proposed, earning financial benefits by selling those home-grown players to other clubs (Beech 2010; Houlihan & Green, 2008; Kuijer, 2007; Solomon, 2008;).

The football academy is considered a developmental training place inside the clubs, but to achieve the determined aims and develop players, it must provide

some services. Firstly, academies should accurately identify and confirm the ability of an athlete (McCarthy, 2019). Therefore, the first responsibility of the academy management is to select talented individuals into the academy (ECA Report, 2012; McDonald & Westphal, 2011; Soriano, 2012).

In addition to talent, the importance of a suitable environment in determining athletic success is widely emphasized in the literature (Barker et al., 2014; Cruickshank, 2019; Duffy et al., 2006; Gagne, 2009; Green & Houlihan, 2005; Henriksen et al., 2010; Kingston et al., 2018; Masters, 2013; Mills et al., 2014; Taylor et al., 2008; Williams & Reilly, 2000). The academy management plays a crucial role in nurturing talent by providing young athletes with challenging, demanding yet supportive environments (Cook et al., 2014; Crust & Clough, 2011; Gucciardi & Mallett, 2010).

The literature indicates that a suitable environment for player development consists of proper facilities (Chelladurai, 2014; De Bosscher et al., 2008; Digel, 2002; Stotlar & Wonders, 2006; Uhrich & Benkenstein, 2010; Wicker & Breuer, 2011), pitches (ECA Report, 2012; Mills et al., 2014; Nesti & Sulley, 2015; New & Gil, 2010), tools, equipment and technology (Açak et al., 2020; Covell et al., 2019; Chelladurai, 2014; Donuk, 2016; Hoye et al., 2012; Morgan & McPherson, 2013; Treem & Leonardi, 2012; Woratschek, 2014), full-board housing (EPLP, 2011; Harwood, 2008; Sunay, 2016), transportation (MacPhail et. al., 2003; Sunay, 2016) and sports science support (Açak et al., 2020; Kula, 2019; Lussier & Kimball, 2014; Mills et al., 2014).

Additionally, a football academy should offer comprehensive developmental services to ensure the holistic development of players (Kerr & Stirling, 2008). Along these lines, some vital components include physical development (Açak et al., 2020; Littlewood, 2005; İnal, 2013), mental and psychological development (Abrahams, 2012; Beswick, 2016; Coulter et al., 2010; Durand-Bush & Salmela 2002; Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006; Gulbin & Weissensteiner, 2013; McCarthy, 2019; Mills et al., 2014; Moran & Toner, 2017; Richardson et al., 2004; Stewart

& Meyers, 2004; Weinberg et al., 2011), academic development (Bender, 2011; Biçer, 2016; Bourke, 2003; Christensen & Sorensen, 2009; Donuk, 2008; Houlihan & Green, 2008; Monk & Olsson, 2006; Mills et al., 2014), personal development (Erdemli, 2008; Kaser & Oelkers, 2008; Trikalis et al., 2014; Williams & Rielly, 2000), and marketing of developed players (Taylor et al., 2008; Yetim, 2019).

Considering the literature presented before, the present research aimed to explore, from the standpoint of football academy managers, the factors that may influence the overall efficiency of the management of a football academy system, focusing on the essential requirements and services within the input (resources and talent acquisition), process (training and development), feedback (communication evaluation mechanisms), output (player and organizational performance), and environmental (external influences) aspects of Turkish football academies. The ultimate goal was to propose practical recommendations aimed at improving various domains of the football academy management system in Turkey. To achieve this objective, a qualitative approach was used, specifically adopting an exploratory study design (Hastie & Glotova, 2012). This approach was deemed most suitable, as it allows for the development of models or theories that help to explain “how” and “why” systems work (Saunders et. al., 2009).

4.2.Method

Participants

Purposive sampling was employed as the sampling method in this study, aiming to select participants whose perspectives and experiences were relevant to the research question (Patton, 2015). The sampling process was further refined using criterion sampling, focusing on participants who met specific predetermined criteria. Specifically, participants were exclusively chosen from academies that had successfully produced at least one player featured in the Turkish A National Football Team within the past 20 years. Among the top 36 professional football clubs competing in the highest two professional leagues in Turkey, a total of 15 football academies were selected. These academies were considered

representative of successful institutions in the field.

The interviews were conducted with 15 football academy managers, aged between 38 to 67 years, all holding director positions within their respective clubs. All participants were male and possessed a minimum of 10 years of experience in the football sector. The duration in their current job position varied, ranging from one to seven year. The final sample size of 15 participants was determined based on data saturation (Moser & Korstjens, 2018), which occurs when newly collected data no longer yield additional insights for the data analysis process (Kuper et al., 2008).

Interview design

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with open-ended questions (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Veal & Darcy, 2014). A pre-designed interview guide based on key questions relevant to the study was specifically developed for this study and used as a framework (Arksey & Knight, 1999). During the interviews, the participants were asked questions related to four main themes: (a) personal background and identification; (b) the services of the academy c) current managerial issues and implementations within the academy environment; (d) the club's responsibility on the process. The interview was designed to elicit genuine thoughts, personal feelings, and narratives from the participants, creating a space for them to express their opinions and corrective proposals on the problems.

All the managers were asked the same questions in the same way, but the order of questioning was free to vary within the natural flow of the conversation. To establish a comfortable and relaxed environment, an introductory conversation was conducted to break the ice and create a welcoming atmosphere, following the recommendations of Whiting (2008) and Rabionet (2011). The introduction and instruction text were delivered in a detailed format to facilitate participation, ensuring that participants understood the nature of the interview. For instance, phrases such as "This is not an exam and there is not a single right answer, the

only right answer is your own opinion and experience" were included to emphasize the openness of the discussion. Towards the end of the interview, participants were given the opportunity to add or clarify anything that they felt was necessary but not covered on the topics discussed.

Data collection

Prior to the actual data collection, a pilot interview was conducted by the primary researcher with a retired academy manager. Based on the feedback from the pilot interview, minor small amendments and updates were done. All potential participants were initially contacted via phone calls to detail the purpose and nature of the study. For those who agreed to participate, convenient interview times were scheduled based on their availability. All the interviews were conducted in person taking place at the participants' respective clubs. This was also beneficial for the researcher to immerse himself in the realities of the clubs, allowing for comparisons between the participants' expressions and the actual conditions (e.g., observing the available pitches for the academy to corroborate participant responses).

The interviews were conducted in the participant's native language by the primary researcher to create a comfortable and safe environment for the respondents. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their answers, and upon granting their consent, the interviews were recorded using a digital audio recording device. Participants were given the opportunity to withdraw from the research or choose not to answer specific questions if they felt uncomfortable, although no participants chose to exercise this option. All participants actively engaged in the interviews and provided responses to all the questions, demonstrating effective collaboration. The duration of the interviews ranged from a minimum of 40 minutes to slightly over 1 hour.

Data analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim in their original language and subsequently translated into English. This translation process was undertaken to

facilitate the evaluation of the data by one additional researcher. The transcribed data were then subjected to content analysis, which aimed to examine the content and themes present in the data. Content analysis typically requires a sample size of approximately 15-20 interviews to generate meaningful results, and this research successfully met this recommended criterion (Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

The data analysis process employed a combination of deductive and inductive approaches. Deductive analysis involved the application of pre-existing categories and concepts derived from existing literature or theoretical frameworks (Schreier, 2014). On the other hand, inductive analysis was used to identify new categories and themes that emerged directly from the collected data (Patton, 2015). Once the data *corpus* was reviewed, the final categorization process was conducted, refining, and updating the identified categories (Bardin, 2004).

In total, five main themes were established as: input, process, feedback output, and environmental domains of a football management system. These initial themes were divided into eight main categories: facilities, player development, manager, management issues, communication, club governance issues, federation issues, sports policy of the country. These main categories were divided into specific sub-categories to facilitate the understanding of analysed data.

The data coding was performed manually, with the primary researcher assigning codes to the relevant segments of the transcripts (Lee, 2021). Coding was also used to anonymize the responses of the participants. To ensure reliability, all the coded and coloured transcripts were shared with a senior researcher, allowing for collaborative verification and consensus on the assigned codes for more credibility. This collaborative approach is done to help increase the trustworthiness of the coding process and reduce interpretive bias (Patton, 2015). Additionally, the participants' characteristics and research context explained to increase the transferability. Careful documentation of the research procedures, from data collection to analysis, was done to ensure dependability of the research

and to provide a transparent trail for researchers to follow.

4.3 Results

Table 3 presents the answers of the academy managers concerning the essential requisites and services within the input, process, feedback, output, and environmental aspects of a football academy system in Turkey.

Table 3: Domains that affect the management of the football academies.

Input Domain	Process Domain
Players	Management Quality
Coaches	Club governance Quality
Staff	Structure Quality
Resources	Service Quality
Feedback Domain	Output Domain
Communication inside the academy	Player
Communication with the A-team	Staff
Communication with Externals	Revenue
Environment Domain	
External Influencers + Football Federation + Sports Policy	

Input domain

Player

Academy managers considered the selection of talented players as a crucial component of academy management ($n = 7$), emphasizing that the primary goal of an academy should be to identify the most promising talents within the region. According to them, to achieve this objective, academies should have a designated scouting system for the recruitment of academy players ($n = 8$). Ten managers admitted that their primary method was using their personal network to select new players for the academy. The other three methods were defined as observing national youth teams ($n = 4$), following players who are enrolled in the licensed football-schools of the club ($n = 6$), and organizing a few trial weeks throughout the year ($n = 5$). Ten managers acknowledged that the selection process in academies is conducted subjectively, rendering it susceptible to

nepotism, wherein influential or acquainted individuals' children may be preferentially chosen ($n = 4$). Furthermore, five managers recognized the necessity for clear detection and more informed selection procedures and policies within the academies, free from individual preferences.

Coach

In addition to the players' quality, the quality of coaching was also disclosed as having a direct impact on the overall development of the selected players in later stages ($n = 7$). Consequently, it was emphasized that academies should prioritize the secondary objective of identifying and selecting the best available coaches with diverse expertise areas. This approach would ensure comprehensive development services are provided to the young players selected. In addition to expertise, the most frequently cited attribute for an ideal academy coach was their openness to personal growth and development.

Staff

Five academy managers emphasized the crucial role of other staff members in the development process and eight managers emphasized that academy work requires expertise and professionalism from staff. Therefore, the selection of competent and skilled staff was considered a third responsibility of the academy management. However, eight managers expressed concerns about the lack of competent staff in Turkish academies. In effect, only four academies reported working with expert full-time staff, while others acknowledged relying on part-time workers, including coaches. Concerning this, three managers voiced reservations about nepotism within the clubs, particularly in the selection process of academy staff.

To address this issue, it was suggested that all job openings within the academy should have proper job-descriptions and be publicly advertised on the academy's website, allowing individuals with suitable backgrounds to apply for the positions. Furthermore, to ensure the competency of the selected staff, recommendations were made to implement a series of interview processes involving the academy

manager, the human resources department, and eventually, the relevant board member or executive group of the club. Recurrent internship and volunteering opportunities were also regarded as mechanisms that reinforced the proper selection of employees. The managers further emphasized the importance of conducting a needs assessment within the academies to guarantee continuous staff development after the selection. All 15 academy managers recommended providing internal educational lessons and external courses tailored to the identified needs of the staff. Additionally, they highlighted the significance of delegation and job enrichment techniques, as well as international training programs and internship opportunities, to enhance staff efficiency and effectiveness.

Resources

The physical conditions of the academy were considered a significant factor in determining the overall performance of the academy. Moreover, adequate facilities were identified as an essential aspect of effective management, enhancing both training performance ($n = 3$) and player motivation ($n = 5$), ultimately providing a competitive advantage. Full-board housing opportunities, well-maintained and enough pitches, reliable transportation, and nutrition and fitness services were additionally deemed essential for the effectiveness of an academy.

The results also revealed that there was a significant lack of sufficient training fields in most of the academies ($n = 10$). Four managers admitted to having only one football pitch for all age groups, while six managers reported only two pitches for the entire academy. This shortage of pitches posed challenges in terms of accommodating training sessions for different age groups, and it prevented the players from accessing adequate practice opportunities. Furthermore, the absence of indoor pitches for use during severe weather conditions and lack of illuminated fields for evening training sessions were identified as other limitations in Turkish academies. Finally, the fact that academy pitches were not consistently located in the same area created coordination and transportation issues for the

managers. Managers proposed that, ideally, there should be a minimum of four pitches exclusively allocated to academy to facilitate effective management.

According to most of the academy managers, having academy facilities located on the same site as the senior team was considered advantageous. However, there were three managers who expressed opposition to this idea, while four managers remained neutral on the subject. The participants also pointed out that the benefits of a same-site facility became more logical and evident after a certain age group. Table 4 provides a comprehensive overview of the advantages and disadvantages associated with the same-site provision.

Table 4: Advantages & disadvantages of shared-facility sites in a club

Advantages of the same-site facility	Disadvantages of the same-site facility
Young players take seniors as role-models (M1)	It's a distraction for players and the staff (M3,M5)
Improves communication between all players (M2,M14)	A team may lose its charm easily (M3,M5)
Improves relations between the academy and the A team (M2,M9,M11,M12,M14,M15)	A team premises should be a place for those who deserve it. (M3,M5,M10)
Facilitates transition to the A team (M6,M12)	
Gives extra motivation to young players (M9,M11,M12,M14)	
Creates more sense of belonging to the club (M12)	
Senior players behave more responsibly (M1,M11)	

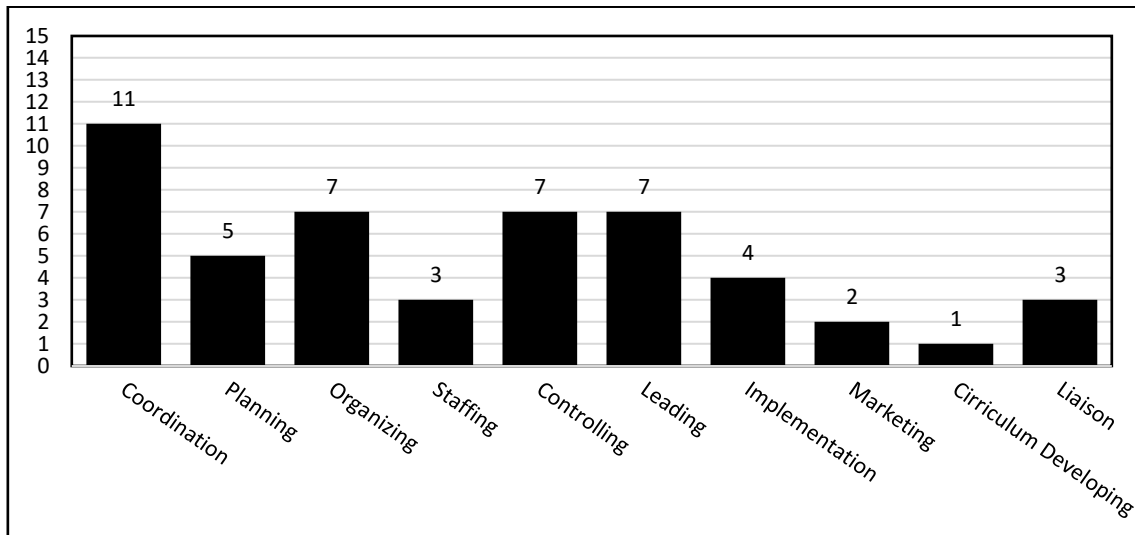
In terms of tools and equipment, eight academy managers highlighted the importance of having a comprehensive gym facility for fitness and endurance trainings to ensure the complete physical development of the players. They also underlined the significance of technological resources, particularly software programs, for performance tracking and measurement purposes within the academies. These tools and equipment play a vital role in monitoring and enhancing the performance of the players.

Process domain

Management quality

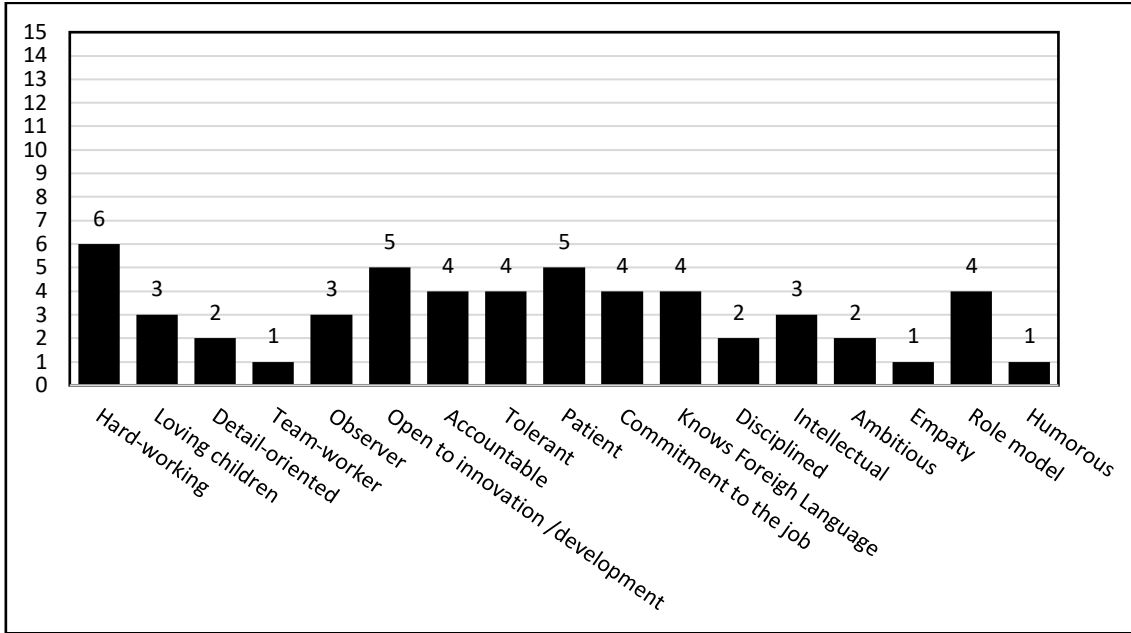
According to eight managers, the management quality directly affected the effectiveness of the academy, making the quality and competences of the

academy managers decisive factors in the academy’s overall performance. The participants defined the ideal roles of an academy director. The most common roles revolved around classical management functions as depicted in Graphic 1.



Graphic 1: Roles of a football academy manager for effective management

In addition to these roles, the respondents also identified some required skills for the effective execution of these managerial tasks in the academy. The most mentioned skill was communication, emphasized by ten managers. Six managers highlighted the importance of human relations and leadership skills. Ten participants explicitly stated that solid managerial knowledge and skills were important to execute the tasks successfully. Active listening and prioritization of tasks were also mentioned as essential skills by the participants. Additionally, knowledge on child development, sports medicine, and nutrition were considered useful to enhance the effectiveness of the management tasks. Furthermore, the respondents identified some other attributes of an ideal academy manager, as shown in Graphic 2.



Graphic 2: Attributes of an ideal academy manager

Eleven academy managers identified a former playing career as an advantage for assuming management tasks in the academy, while four did not perceive any significant advantage of being a former player in the role of an academy manager. The reasons behind the perceived advantages and disadvantages of a former-playing career can be found in Table 5.

Table 5: Advantages & disadvantages of former player career in academy management

Advantages and Disadvantages of former playing career in management roles	
Advantages	Disadvantages
Facilitates the adaptation to the managerial job (M1,M10,M14)	Lack of Management knowledge (M2,M3,M5,M13)
Brings sectoral knowledge (M1,M8,M9,M11,M14)	
Empathy skills with players (M6,M7,M8,M9,M15)	
Extensive football network (M11,M14)	
Knowledge on trainings (M12)	

According to seven managers, the age of the academy manager was also considered an important factor for the successful execution of the management tasks, while the other eight managers did not find age to be a meaningful variable in successful management. Six managers believed that age would automatically

bring more management experience, enhancing management practices. Six managers noted that age culturally brings more respect to the position in Turkey, facilitating the execution of tasks. Moreover, it was stated that age would bring better leadership skills and an extended knowledge base, enhancing management implementations in the academy. It is worth noting that all academy managers participating in the study had a minimum of 10 years of experience in the football sector, indicating that sectoral experience was a *de facto* requirement to be academy manager in Turkish clubs.

Regarding the education level, most academy managers had completed a university degree. When asked about the type of education that would be beneficial for managers to effectively carry out their management tasks in the academies, the most common responses were sports management ($n = 10$) and physical education degrees with pedagogic foundation ($n = 7$). Other suggested courses were communication ($n = 5$), psychology ($n = 4$), human resources ($n = 3$), and sports law ($n = 2$).

Club governance quality

Eleven managers brought up reservations regarding the absence of long-term planning and strategy within clubs in relation to their football academies. Nine managers also expressed their concerns about the high turnover of club executives in Turkish clubs. They observed that the frequent turnover in leadership resulted in shifts in the goals and priorities about the academy, which varied according to the inclinations of the newly elected club executives. Additionally, eight managers observed that the focus of the new club governance often shifted towards short-term gains, adopting a win-maximizing approach. This approach created pressure on the A team coaches, leading them to prioritize immediate success and be reluctant to utilize academy players in the A team match-squads. This situation directly impacted the overall performance of the academy management.

Relating to long-term planning issue, out of the 15 clubs surveyed, only five had a clearly defined vision and merely four articulated a defined mission statement for their academies. The remaining clubs either did not have any vision or mission statements, or their managers were unaware of them. Furthermore, only four academy managers were able to enunciate a strategy of the club regarding the football academy. The visions and missions of the academies that were supported by the club's governance are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Vision and mission statements of the academies

Visions	Mission
To be a global model academy (M1,M11,M13)	Introduce Turkish children with sports (M1)
To be champion only with Academy players (M1)	Make Turkish children love sport (M1,M4)
To raise internationally known star players (M2,M4,M9,M13)	Raise good citizens before players (M1,M6)
To be the leading top academy of Turkey (M10,M11)	Contribute the Turkish sport culture (M1,M4,M6,M13)
	Provide good education to the children (M1,M6,M13)

The most cited issue raised by the academy managers ($n = 12$) was the lack of investment in the academies. Similarly, twelve managers expressed dissatisfaction with the current level of interest and attention offered by the board. According to five managers, the main task of the club's governance was to remove any unnecessary burden on the academy management and provide necessary working conditions. Six managers also strongly objected to the low salaries in the academies. Interestingly, the managers also noted that the lack of investment in the academies was due to the availability of abundant and easily accessible funding at the senior level.

Regarding governance quality, seven academy managers expressed their dissatisfaction with club executives who lacked football and sectoral knowledge. Six managers asserted the presence of political nepotism within the governance structures of the clubs. As a potential solution, they underscored the importance of two key factors: firstly, the selection of competent staff for the academy; and secondly, the need for the club's governance to refrain from interfering in the professional management of the academy. Additionally, the managers identified

four requests from the club governance: (a) the establishment of an academy-friendly philosophy and mindset within the club, (b) greater attention, encouragement, and trust to the academy, (c) a clear definition of expectations and key performance indicators (KPI) for the academy, (d) concurrent investments in the academy to achieve defined expectations.

Structure quality

Six academy managers highlighted the lack of effective organization within academies in Turkey. One of the main issues identified was the lack of autonomy in terms of organization. Thirteen managers indicated that the presence of a strict vertical hierarchy within the club organization could impede more rapid and effective management. In practice, academy managers often reported directly to an uninterested president or an unknowledgeable board member. In one case, it was even the head coach of the senior team. Eight managers indicated that either the president or a board member participates in evaluating the outcomes of the academy without possessing any knowledge on football development. The same number of managers reported that the presidents made the decisions regarding dismissals of academy staff.

In terms of financial aspects, 14 out of 15 academies were fully dependent on the club's budget. Only one academy had its own independent budget and source of income. In this respect, football schools and brand licensing were identified as valuable sources of income for academies. Budget decisions for 14 academies were made by the club presidents, with only four academy managers had a say in the budget allocation process.

Three managers proposed that academies should be privately incorporated and structured independently, allowing them to have their own professional executive boards. Four managers suggested that, as a primary step, traditional club structures in Turkey needed to undergo transformation to foster more effective management frameworks within the academies.

Six managers conveyed that although departmentalization was beneficial for effective management, a significant challenge arises in determining which departments to establish. The managers employed diverse methodologies to determine the structure of departments within the academy. These methods included assessing organizational needs, copying or benchmarking with similar organizations, upholding traditional practices inherited from the past, following federation's templates, and utilizing a trial-and-error approach. Remarkably, only one academy utilized scientific counsel from a university in the establishment of its departments. However, academy managers had advocated for the establishment of various specialized departments to enhance the overall functionality and efficiency of the academies. These departments included administrative, facilities maintenance, media relations, international relations, medical, scouting, goalkeeping, athletic performance, individual trainings, academic/school, psychology, player career development, research and development (R&D), technology & analysis, and football schools' departments. Interestingly, three of the academies also operated their own in-house agencies for the players enrolled in their academies.

Service quality

Housing

Managers highlighted the importance of full-board accommodation service as it provides better nutrition ($n = 4$), better resting ($n = 4$), effective planning on trainings ($n = 5$), active protection from externals ($n = 8$), better team building ($n = 5$), more motivation to keep going ($n = 2$), an introduction to professional football ($n = 3$).

Football development

In terms of training, only four managers stated that they were following a defined teaching curriculum in the academies, and only three had planned their trainings based on scientific foundations. Fourteen managers considered participating in actual matches a critical component of player development. In accordance, ten participants emphasized that the A team should play an integral and

indispensable role in the development of academy players. Managers also claimed that in academy-based games, the priority was not placed on winning, but rather on the developmental aspect of the players, naturally lacking competitiveness. In fact, the managers viewed competitiveness as a service that should be provided by the senior team. In line with this, two academies had implemented an internal rule to ensure that incoming academy players were allocated mandatory spots in the A team, further emphasizing the integration between the academy and senior team. Additional methods to gain match experience included participating in international tournaments, arranging preparation matches with senior teams, and establishing pilot team agreements for graduated players.

The transition of academy players to the A team was identified as the most critical period in their development. Thirteen managers emphasized that the head coach of the A team played a crucial role during this period and proactive support from the head coach was essential for the holistic development of the players. These managers also highlighted that the transition to the A team was largely beyond the control of the academy management, as it solely depended on the decision of the A team's head coach ($n = 11$), or a collective decision made by a group consisting of the academy manager, general manager, and the senior coach of the club ($n = 4$). Seven managers asserted that this significant decision was often made subjectively, therefore, was prone to inaccuracies. Eight managers expressed the view that the transition period should be well-planned and prepared as an institutional club rule and strategy, rather than being based solely on individual decisions of the A team's coach. For older age groups, particularly during transitional periods, thirteen managers emphasized the significance of providing psychological services and mental support to academy players.

Academic development

In terms of the academic development of the players, seven academies provided academic support to their players by offering school lessons within the academy. However, one academy had a policy of not allowing its players to attend high

school after the age of 14 to allocate more time for training. This academy claimed to compensate for this by offering distance learning options for high school education. The remaining academies sent their players to regular public schools. Eight of these academies had agreements with specific schools, enrolling all their players in the same school to facilitate the coordination and transportation, and thus allowing more time for trainings.

The academy managers emphasized that school education was an essential aspect of a player's holistic development, and they firmly stated that providing academy players with quality education should be one of the key success criteria for a successful academy. Five managers specifically mentioned that character development was an integral part of player development, and therefore, education service was a social responsibility of the academy towards the players and society. It was also emphasized that proper education instilled discipline, self-control, and self-awareness in players, helping to improve their cognitive and perceptual skills. One manager also highlighted that attending school contributed to the socialization of players, enabling them to develop socially outside the football pitch. Other participants underlined the importance of school education in providing players with alternative options (Plan-Bs) in case they were unable to achieve their aspirations in elite football.

Feedback domain

In the research context, the feedback domain refers to the constructive and corrective communication activities among the parts of the system.

Communication inside the academy

There was a unanimous consensus among academy managers that they should actively conduct corrective mid-term feedback of the academy's operations, rather than maintaining a stance of disengagement throughout the season and deferring these assessments until the end of the season. Managers recommended that communication inside the academy should be frequent and organized on a weekly basis. The ideal internal communication within the

academy, as stated by fourteen participants, should be direct and friendly. However, ten managers recommended having written and detailed job descriptions for significant task allocations. According to participants, to foster a better atmosphere, the opinions of players and staff should be valued in the operations of the academy. Only one academy director expressed a preference for a more authoritarian and formal approach. Furthermore, nine academies suggested the implementation of a code of ethics to guide the behaviors of staff and players within the academy borders.

All 15 academies stated that they organized social events and activities to promote social development among the children and to keep the staff motivated. Other suggested activities to enhance staff motivation were to give them and their families free match tickets, offer health insurance, provide better equipment, and pay their salaries on time. Furthermore, among the surveyed academy managers, twelve asserted that the introduction of premium payments or financial incentives within the academy could be crucial for motivating staff, thereby cultivating a sense of belonging and commitment. Contrarily, only three academy managers reported the implementation of financial rewards for superior performance while the other twelve academies reported the absence of financial incentives for their academy staff.

Communication with the A-team

Communication between the academy and the senior team was typically facilitated through regular meetings. In practice, the responsibility for communication was often relegated to the discretion of the club's director or the senior coach of the A team, however, academy managers believed that this relationship should be established as a club policy and enforced by the club's governance as an institutional rule. The most effective approach was considered to be frequent and conducted in a friendly manner, based on club's youth policy.

External communication

The external communication in the academies followed a mixed approach, with twelve academies primarily relying on their club's communication department for institutional communication. The participants also expressed that they were institutionally in contact with local universities ($n = 11$) for consultation purposes. Nevertheless, eight academy managers also mentioned using their personal contacts and network for external problem-solving. Moreover, while only one academy director mentioned having a clear marketing strategy, others admitted to using improvised methods. The marketing and public relations (PR) activities that are used by investigated Turkish academies for the visibility of the organization and its players are presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Marketing & PR activities applied in the academies.

Marketing & PR Activities in the Academies
Using Academy Social-Media Channels (M1,M2,M3,M5,M5,M6,M7,M9,M10,M12,M13,M15)
Specifically Designed Academy website (M1,M12)
Opening Football Schools in the cities (M5,M8,M11,M13,M15)
Joining International Tournaments (M1,M2,M5,M7,M8,M9)
Organizing International Tournaments (M1,M9)
Visiting other clubs in Turkey (M1)
Visiting foreign clubs in Europe (M1,M2,M7,M9)
Printed and online catalog of academy players (M2,M9)
Inviting scouts to follow academy players (M3,M7,M10)
Using Media/News Agencies (M10)

Output domain

All fifteen academy managers unanimously agreed that the primary objective of an academy within a club system should be the development of elite football players for the club's A team. Twelve of the participants explicitly stated that this should be the primary measure of success for the academy as a whole. Additionally, seven of the academies also aimed to produce players for the broader football sector, regardless of which club ultimately benefited from the player's development. Three managers stated that the development of elite players for the Turkish national teams also constituted a criterion for success. In addition to developing elite players, it was also emphasized that the academy

bore a social responsibility to provide proper school education to these raised players.

While most academy managers emphasized the primary objective of developing elite players for the A team, two managers also acknowledged the importance of developing coaches and administrative staff for the football sector as an additional expected outcome of the academies. Furthermore, four managers highlighted the aim of generating income through the sale of academy-raised players. They viewed the academies as a potential source of revenue for the club system. Similarly, six managers expressed the belief that a truly successful academy management should operate in a profitable manner. Regardless of the specific outcome, the managers emphasized the importance of clearly defining key performance indicators in advance to accurately measure the real success of the academy.

Environment domain

External influencers

Ten academy managers expressed that the parents of the academy players were highly influential and dominant during the development years. Thus, five academies stated that, as a rule, they banned parents from directly contacting coaches or any other academy staff, limiting their communication to the academy manager only. The managers identified several key external distractions for academy players, including close friends, girlfriends, media exposure, fan interactions, and agents. Nevertheless, none of the academies implemented any deliberate protective measures against these external distractions. Seven academy managers stated that they simply advised their young players to avoid engaging with agents at young ages.

Football federation

Many of the participants highlighted the significant influence of the football federation on academy management. They mainly pointed out the problems arising from the lack of a defined system and organization in Turkish football,

which directly impacted the management practices of the clubs and consequently the academies. The managers emphasized the inadequacy of coaching education, which, in turn, lead to issues of quality within the workforce in the football sector. The issues with the football federation and suggested potential solutions to address these problems are presented in Table 8.

Table 8: Problems originated from the federation and proposed solutions.

Turkish Football Federation's (TFF) Role in Academy Management	
Noticed Problems	Direct Responsibilities
There is nepotism in TFF (M10,M15)	Education courses for all academy staff (M3,M8,M10,M11,M14,M15)
Lack of quality coaching education (M3,M5,M8,M10,M11,M14)	Define national curriculum program (M1,M4,M5,M7,M14)
Lack of competent staff in TFF (M10,M11,M13)	Reward Systems as incentives to clubs (M3)
Lack of a defined system/methodology (M5,M8,M10,M13,M14,M15)	Sanctions for poor facilities (M12,M14,M15)
Lack of competitive league system (M12)	Impose compulsory academy player rule (M3,M12,M13)
Lack of national talent detection system (M8,M9,M11)	Educate expert coaches for specific age-groups (M10,M11,M14)
TFF neglects the controlling function (M7,M11,M12,M14,M15)	Competitive league system for youth football (M12)
TFF is not aware of the real problems of Turkish football, jus saving the day (M11,M13,M15)	More effective controlling function (M7,M11,M12,M14,M15)
	May assume payments for academy players (M8,M10)
	Define long-term national strategy – system (M13,M14)
	Invest more in youth football and facilities (M14,M15)
	TFF Football Library, easy access to knowledge (M14)

Sports policy

Apart from the responsibility of the federation, the participants consistently emphasized the significance of the government's role and highlighted that sports policy issues in the country indirectly affect their academy management practices. The most frequently mentioned concerns were schooling issues of elite athletes, as noted by ten academy managers. Schooling was seen as problematic because it left limited time for proper training during weekdays, as

emphasized by seven managers. Relatedly, three managers mentioned that long hours spent in school made it challenging to control players' daily nutrition intake and resting times, limiting the time available for productive planning due to hours spent in school. Three managers suggested having schools within the academies as a potential solution, while other three proposed a half-day schooling system for elite athletes, allowing them to attend school only in the morning and dedicate the rest of the day to football development. Furthermore, managers also observed that grassroots activities and amateur football in Turkey were not in a satisfactory state, suggesting that grassroot activities should be more encouraged. The comprehensive list of government-related problems raised by the participants, along with the proposed actions to be taken by the government in relation to football academies, can be found in Table 9.

Table 9: Problems originated from the sports policy and proposed solutions

Country's Sports Policy Role in Academy Management	
Noticed Problems	Responsibilities
Schooling of Elite Athlete (M1,M2,M4,M5,M6,M7,M8,M11,M12,M13,M14,M15)	Solve schooling problem of elite athletes (M1,M4,M5,M6,M7,M13) Half-day schooling (M7,M13,M14) School inside the Academy (M5,M6,M12)
A general national education quality is low (M14)	Improve grassroot and amateur football (M9,M12,M14)
Lack of investment in grassroot football (M9,M13)	Build more public football fields (M14,M15)
Sports policy based on political populism (M9,M14)	University degree programs for the needs of football sector (M10,M11)
Too much politics involved in football (M10,M14)	Finance more scientific research in football (M11)
Public Universities do not solve sectoral problems (M2,M9,M11,M14)	Change the public opinion with campaigns towards academy football (M8,M14)

4.4 Discussion and conclusions

This study aimed to explore the underlying factors influencing the overall effectiveness of the football academy system, with a specific emphasis on management. Utilizing the systems approach to management as its theoretical underpinning, it focused on essential requirements and services within the input,

process, feedback, output, and the environmental aspects of Turkish football academies.

Input domain

The study revealed that within a football academy system, the quality of initial inputs significantly affected the calibre of subsequent processes, as well as the final outcomes. In other words, for the efficient operation and management of a football academy, it was imperative to carefully select these three initial inputs - players, coaches, and staff – which can be categorized within the human resources domain of management. Specifically, the managers underscored that the initial step towards successful football academy management involved identifying talented children as prospective players, selecting qualified coaches as expert educators, and recruiting experienced staff knowledgeable in youth football as supportive personnel. These results are consistent with the opinion of several authors asserting that, in order to achieve its organizational goals, the essence of sports management lies in working with and through competent people (Bateman & Snell, 2015), including the selection of talented athletes suitable for the sport discipline (Kula, 2019). This makes people one of the most important assets of a sport organization (Bourke, 2003). The quality and qualifications of these individuals are seen as fundamental for bringing vitality to the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

In this context, Turkish academies especially need more fair, transparent and informed processes in talent identification and selection of academy payers (Sunay & Kaya, 2018). Having a specifically designated scouting department for the youth academy could be beneficial. Because the organizational ability to identify talented players in team sports is both financially rewarding and a key component of long-term success in the field (Larkin & Reeves, 2018).

Trenberth (2003) also argues for the implementation of more stringent selection policies and comprehensive induction programs for employees at all levels. Alongside selecting the right staff, it is also crucial to assess their educational

needs and provide them with appropriate internal and external education programs. This approach aligns with the practices of top football clubs worldwide who prioritize appointing staff members to their academies based on suitable personalities, tacit knowledge (Desouza, 2003), and desired skills and experiences, to effectively manage their youth programs (Nesti & Sulley, 2015). Supporting staff have been shown to correlate positively athletes' health and promotes higher-quality talent development (Thomas et al., 2021).

Once the quality of human resources is ensured, the fourth input, physical resources, can play a significant role in achieving the expected results. It becomes the co-responsibility of the management and the club's governance to provide optimal working conditions and a suitable working environment for both the academy players and the staff (Williams, 2014). Talented individuals need the right equipment to succeed, making the provision of necessary resources key for a sports organization's growth, success and gaining a competitive advantage (Taylor et al., 2008). In this context, an adequate number of pitches, suitable housing, a fully equipped gym, and nutrition support (Beswick, 2016) are crucial components for the player's development in football academies. For instance, it was disappointing to observe that even in Turkey's top clubs, only one or two pitches were allocated for all academies' activities.

In Turkey, it seems that the challenge with system arises from difficulties in maintaining harmony among these four inputs in clubs. Merely constructing luxury facilities is not a solution if they are not accompanied by talented players, qualified coaches, and skilled staff. Conversely, as stated by many participants, even a highly qualified coach or skilled staff cannot make a significant impact without proper facilities and suitable working conditions. In practice, only a handful of academies in Turkey had full-time expert staff, with the majority still depending on part-time workers (Sunay & Kaya, 2018). This shortfall in professionalism and expertise among the academy coaches and staff fosters an amateur atmosphere within so-called professional football clubs. In this context,

Donuk (2016) acknowledges that professionalism is one of the most important missing elements in modern sports management in Turkey.

Process domain

Management quality

The effectiveness of the process domain was largely affected by the club's governance support and the quality of the services provided in the academy, and, in turn, this service quality was largely shaped by the competence of the academy manager. In other words, for the ultimate success of a football academy, both club governance and operational management share responsibility. Club management must be consistent and coherent in policy, strategy and practice regarding the academy (Double Pass, 2021). In terms of management quality, the quality of the manager plays a crucial role. Findings suggest that the academy manager must be somebody who is well-educated, knowledgeable in coordination, planning, organizing, staffing, controlling, leading, marketing, and possesses the attributes indicated in the findings. Therefore, the improvement of management and managerial leadership quality are imperative for the success of the implemented practices in the clubs (Amenta et al., 201; Samur, 2018a).

Club governance quality and support

It is also recognized that the overall quality of the services within the academies is significantly influenced by the provided conditions. This underscores the necessity for continuous support from the club's governance to eliminate obstacles and establish a conducive environment for both the academy staff and players (Koontz & Weihrich, 2010). In this context, the club governance plays a vital role to enhance the performance of the management team (Barros et al., 2007). Strategic planning at the higher level serves as the driving force behind organizational effectiveness at the lower levels (Wicker & Breuer, 2013). Hence, it is evident that the performance of the academy management is directly influenced by the corporate governance of the club.

At this point, it is worth emphasizing that in Turkish clubs, due to the traditional constitution of the clubs, the turnover of club executives is significantly high, leading to a lack of consistent strategy and long-term planning in academy management. This has a direct impact on the focus of academy management, as frequent changes in leadership, namely board elections every three years, lead to easily changeable aims and plans for the academies. The frequent occurrence of such situations in Turkey automatically gives rise to a lack of clarity and consistency inside the club, leading to a diminished sense of trust and commitment among both academy staff and players (Gilmore & Gibson, 2007). A climate of trust is essential for the success of teams (Güzel et al., 2013). As a result, when the trust is broken, the staff, including the manager, tend to prioritize short-term gains to address immediate challenges and secure their current employment within the club.

In line with this, Senge (2020) affirms that executives are generally pragmatic and in football they often run the risk of ignoring the long-term benefits. Instead, they may focus on the short-term objectives of the A-team, potentially sacrificing longer-term investments in the academies. As a result, board members of the clubs are inclined to allocate substantial funds towards new transfers worth millions of dollars, aimed at meeting the immediate requirements of the senior teams. Recent research showed that spend millions of pounds for player transfers is one of the barriers to successful youth player transition in the clubs (McGuigan et al., 2023). Similarly, in Turkey, there is a tendency among club executives to spend club's budget on transfers (Peçenek, 2020). This often occurs at the expense of investing in the long-term development of young players within the academies. This indicates that instead of an abundance of money, at least in the Turkish case, a lack of funds may be a more effective leverage for raising more academy players in Turkish football. The core issue in Turkish football is not the availability of financial resources, but rather the priorities set and the way these funds are allocated and utilized. Topkaya (2015) claims that in Turkey the main problem with football academies often lies in the governance practices at the

higher levels. Addressing this challenge requires a cultural shift in the football paradigm of the country.

The first step towards this cultural transformation is to adopt an academy-friendly philosophy and mentality within the clubs since having a shared philosophy in sports can guide the management style and the delivery of services (Chelladurai, 2014). Clubs who greatly value their academies place talent development at the forefront of their club philosophy (Larking & Reeves, 2018). Talent development requires a different mindset, approach, community and overall organizational structure (Collins et al., 2018). Within the structural dimension of management, this concept is called unity of objectives, as it constitutes one of the main components of a well-organized sport organization (Hoye et al., 2012; Pedersen & Thibault, 2014). If the club's board of directors fails to demonstrate enough attention and interest towards the club's football academy, it might suggest a lack of unity of objectives in the organization, concerning the aims of the academy. For instance, the widespread complaint, by most participants, about a shortage of training pitches and facilities for daily activities in the academies is a clear indication of the board's negligence towards youth development. Because they simply do not see it as a crucial problem for the short-term success of the club. Especially at the systems view of management, identifying the problem is not sufficient for its resolution. It is important to determine for whom the problem exists (Şenaras & Sezen, 2017). Likewise, the misalignment between the mission and objectives of the academies and the absence of clear visions and strategies on football academies are further examples of the inattention that exists at the club's governance level.

Furthermore, the evaluation of the seasonal results is often completed by board members who lack interest and knowledge in youth football. Club executives are often without sufficient football and sector-specific knowledge (Kubat & Yıldız, 2022) and thus they should refrain from intervening in the professional and practical operations of the academy. Instead, it is even advisable to establish expert groups for making important decisions (Kalfa, 2019). Alternatively, the

academy managers may be promoted to a higher-level position within the club system so that they would have more autonomy and effectiveness in their decision-making. In this regard, more autonomous football academies may prove to be more effective in their management and performance evaluations. Specifically, numerous athletic department practices may necessitate additional financial and administrative freedom (Lapiano & Zotos, 2014). However, this would require implementing greater decentralization within the old-fashioned club's structures. Another innovative idea derived from the findings is the potential utilization of expert external sports management companies for the evaluation and monitoring of the academies. Development systems should adopt a long-term approach (Côté et al., 2007; Lundqvist et al., 2022), which entails assessing academy performance based on long-term evaluations rather than relying on the subjective opinions of temporary people that work in the club at a given time by chance. In Turkey, there currently isn't a specialized football management company focused on evaluating sports performance and football academies management. However, this suggestion may serve as a practical recommendation for decision-makers in the field.

From a financial perspective, a study conducted by ECA (2012) confirmed that one of the most critical constraints for successful academy management is limited academy budgets. Talent development is expensive (Abbott et al., 2002), and an effective talent development program requires direct financial support from the club governance (De Bosscher et al., 2008; Digel, 2002; Green & Oakley 2001; Houlihan & Green, 2008). The current structure in Turkish football poses a potential risk for academies since major financial decisions regarding the academies are subject to the approval of the club president. If the club's corporate leadership does not recognize the value of the academy in the club system, as discussed earlier, they are unlikely to allocate the necessary budget to the academy's management staff. Unfortunately, this is what happens in Turkish football. In effect, the financial resources allocated to academies by Turkish football clubs are notably low (Topkaya, 2015). This scarcity of financial resources is one of the most common organizational problems faced by sports

organizations when implementing their plans (Lamprecht et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2009). This suggests that adequate funding is a crucial infrastructural element in effectively managing a football academy (Stotlar & Wonders, 2006). Therefore, academy management should explore money-generating projects that enable them to independently establish their own financial sources for sustainability. In this context, the implementation of football schools under the club licensing system seems to be practical solutions to address this immediate need.

Service quality: Transition to professional football

A service of critical importance to the players was identified as the transition from the academy to the first team. This is a complex and dynamic process (Hollings et al., 2014; Jones et al., 2014; McGuigan et al., 2023), recognized as one of the most difficult periods of football development (Finn & McKenna, 2010). Chelladurai (2014) confirms that a dominant attribute in any effective sport organization is the presence of explicit rules and procedures that direct and control the behaviour of the staff. Accordingly, football academies should plan and develop strategies and implement solid measures that facilitate a smooth transition into professional football at the highest level (EPPP, 2011; Gulbin & Weissensteiner, 2013; Relvas et al., 2010). However, in Turkey, there appears to be a lack of sufficient planning for the transition periods, resulting in challenges for the players nurtured within academies. There is a misconception that academy players should only be promoted to the A team when they are fully prepared. However, the fact is that an academy player will never be fully ready without the opportunity to play in the A team. Because of this, transition period should be governed by institutionally established rules based on the club's overall youth strategy, rather than relying on subjective decisions made by temporary figures in the club's management or by the head coaches of the A teams during that period.

Furthermore, this study indicates that the involvement of the A team in the academy's development process is often overlooked. However, it is, in fact, essential for the development of academy players. Because interaction of both

practice and play is essential for developing elite athletes (Machado et al., 2020). Hence, playing real matches is a crucial aspect of the player developmental process (Houlihan & Green, 2008; Kaplan, 2016; Stotlar & Wonders, 2006). On the contrary, a commonly cited challenge in Turkish football is the dearth of opportunities for players developed in academies to engage in actual match experiences with their clubs. Therefore, it seems that a significant barrier to transition to senior team is lack of opportunity given to academy players (McGuigan et al., 2023). Especially in Turkey, the likelihood of academy-raised young players finding opportunities within their own senior teams is very minimal (Polat et al., 2020). Hence, a vital component of the player development process is that football academies should facilitate real-match experiences for homegrown players in challenging and competitive environments. Because only high levels of challenge in competition may contribute to the young athlete's elite level development (McCarthy et al., 2016).

Feedback domain

In terms of the communication between the academy and the senior team, it is important to define the quantity and quality of the communication with institutionally established rules based on the club's policy. Especially in the systems approach to management, communication between the parts of the system, understanding what the components of the system need, and what is expected from them are crucial for success (Akkuş & Alevok İzci, 2018). In this regard, it's important that clubs must be systematic and deliberate in designing player development policies (Sweeney et al., 2021). The key to effective academy management lies in the coordination of a regular flow of information and consistent consultation between all the parts of the system. In Turkey, communication with the academy is frequently neglected unless there is an immediate need for a young player in the senior team due to injury or card suspension.

It's also important that the manager constantly gives feedback on employee's performance during the season. Because corrective employee evaluation is an

essential element of a strong management systems in athletic departments (Lapiano & Zotos, 2014).

Reward systems are considered useful for increasing the motivation and dedication of the staff in the academy, and clubs are encouraged to implement premium bonus payments to recognize successful performances. For instance, when an academy player is transferred to another team, a fixed percentage of the transfer fee could be allocated to the academy staff who contributed to the development of that player. This approach can incentivize staff to fully commit to their work, spur their personal and professional growth, and encourage them to put forth additional effort, as they know their success will directly benefit them. Because increased job satisfaction correlates with higher levels of organizational commitment and success (Mohammadi & Dehkordi, 2013). Moreover, a good talent development environment in sports should promote the desired behavior of both athletes and staff (Rothwell et al., 2020). In this sense, a code of conduct can be introduced in the academies to guide the behavior of staff and players, encouraging them to work harder.

Output domain

To effectively measure the outcomes of the academy, the club must first clearly articulate its expectations from the academy. Based on these expectations, key performance indicators (KPI) should be established by the club's directors and the academy managers should be informed about those KPI and deadlines. An effective evaluation can only occur once there is a clear and explicit consensus on the objectives. In Turkey, it appears that many clubs view having academies more as an obligation than a priority, leading to a general lack of concern about the activities and objectives within these academies. As long as the senior team performs well, the academies often receive little attention, and the outcomes are often overlooked. Therefore, to reach more effective outcomes in the academy system, a cultural shift in the football paradigm is needed, especially in talent development circles (Collins et al., 2018). Only club governances that share academy-friendly philosophy and mission can provide the necessary investment

to achieve the desired outcomes from their academies. In this regard, before seeking outcomes, clubs must ask themselves if they have fulfilled their duties towards academy management first.

The explicit expectation from a successful academy is the development of high-level players for the A team. In addition to player development, the research finds that academies can also function as vocational schools for newly graduated players who do not progress to the professional level. Typically, these young athletes end their football careers in the beginning of their twenties, implying that the last 8 to 10 years dedicated to football were ultimately in vain. However, the academy has the potential to redirect these individuals into administrative or supporting staff roles within the sector. The research indicates that providing career development is a crucial service that should be offered by academy management. Young players in their early twenties should not be left without alternative plans in case their football careers do not progress as anticipated. Therefore, the success of an academy's outcomes is not solely measured by the number of elite players it produces, but also by how effectively the player input is utilized in the end. Additionally, academies can develop administrative staff for the club and football sector, serving as providers of the internal workforce, thus representing an additional expected outcome.

Environment domain

External influencers

Regarding external influences, it would be advisable to assign a liaison officer, to facilitate efficient yet distant communication with the parents. The parents of the players are main significant others (Reverberi et al., 2020) therefore academy managers cannot ignore their presence but, their involvement into training sessions and academy education process may be controlled in a constructive way. Moreover, a parent code of conduct may be introduced as an institutional rule (Abrams, 2012). Additionally, organizing educational sessions for parents by the academy management would be beneficial. From an organizational perspective, a new department dedicated to managing parent relationships within

the academy structure would be recommended (Samur, 2018a). In this way, parents' support and encouragement are directed to young players in a conscious and informed way (Abrams, 2012). Positive parental motivation climate promotes learning and development (Reverberi et al., 2020) and informed parents would treat anxiety and increase self-esteem of the players (O'Rourke et al., 2014).

Moreover, to mitigate the influence of agents on players at a young age, clubs could consider establishing a club-owned agency to assume the agent duties for academy players. According to FIFA rules, this innovative idea may not be officially allowed or possible, but, in practice, it could be easily implemented if the agents working exclusively for the clubs were not officially affiliated within the club's structure. Hiring a third-party agent, controlled by the club, could be instrumental in fulfilling this requirement.

Football federation

From a systems approach view, Turkish Football Federation has direct and indirect responsibilities for the overall success of football academies. Firstly, it must ensure that academy-raised young players have access to competitive league systems that would enhance their development. Lack of a competitive league system that leads the successful progression of young players into professional football represents a significant obstacle in Turkey. For instance, a player who graduates from an academy at the age of 19 is no longer eligible to play in U18 teams but may struggle to find a place in the A team, leaving him in a frustrating limbo. Recognizing this challenge, some football leagues, such as the Portuguese, allow football clubs to establish B-teams that can participate in professional leagues with their academy players. This approach provides a valuable opportunity for young players to continue their progress in a more competitive environment.

Secondly, there is a need for standardized education quality in academies. In this matter, the supervision and the coordination of academies by the Turkish Football Federation seems to face challenges in terms of effectiveness and sufficiency

(Şenel & Saygın, 2021). Most of the academies do not adhere to any defined specific curriculum, which means that the time, content and quality of the training are left to coaches' preferences. This lack of standardization contributes to the lack of tactical maturity and positional knowledge among young Turkish players at the beginning of their careers. In relation to this standardization problem, the federation should also enhance coaching education to improve the quality of coaching in youth football. Additionally, the results also showed a need to increase the quality of managers and management both within the federation and in the clubs.

Sports policy

It is frequently overlooked that the sports policy of a country ultimately influences the productivity of sports academies (Aslan et al., 2015; Sunay & Kaya, 2018). Firstly, a national talent detection system must be established to ensure that potential young talents from all regions of Turkey are not overlooked. Additionally, it is important to remember that talent detection is closely related to the extent of grassroots football activities in the country. The health of any professional sports league is ultimately dependent on the strength of its grassroots programs within the country, as it is at the grassroots level where future players are nurtured (Hassan & Hamil, 2010). Regardless of how well an academy is managed, it is an open system and will receive players from its operating environment. Because of this, amateur sports play a crucial role in creating a pool of potential talents, and the larger the talent pool, the better the selection opportunities for academies.

In this context, the sport policy of the government should not be based on populism, such as the establishment of so-called professional teams in every town to win local elections. Because of such populism, in Turkey, the primary objective of amateur football clubs is to ascend through the leagues to achieve professional status. Consequently, their focus is predominantly on winning games to secure promotion, rather than on attracting new children to the sport and nurturing future players. There is a critical interaction between nature and

nurture for better talent identification and development (Williams and MacNamara, 2020). Focusing primarily on immediate success on amateur level generally results in the neglect of youth development programs and subsequently a lack of home-grown talent. Therefore, the boards of city clubs should maintain political independence and their real aim must be to strengthen amateur sports and athlete development in their cities. In relation to this issue, state aid must be canalized into amateur football and grassroots activities, instead of politically motivated populist approaches such as financing the transfer fees of city clubs, building new stadiums or training facilities for professional football clubs that already generate millions in income.

As part of the sport policy, the government should also consider establishing relevant football-related university degree courses to foster the development of competent staff for the sector and encourage greater collaboration between academic institutions and football clubs. Presently, Turkish universities do not provide practical and pragmatic solutions to the management challenges faced by Turkish football clubs. Sports ministry should encourage partnerships among researchers, coaches, and athletes (Ericsson, 2003), as it can lead to a more comprehensive understanding of key issues within the field.

In conclusion, football academy management is a complex endeavour that requires more than the efforts of individual managers. The primary responsibility for the academy's success or failure lies with the academy management, but ultimately, the performance of the academy management highly depends on the club's top corporate governance. Academy management necessitates competent staff, investment and support from club governance, as well as structural reforms and environmental advocacy, to improve academy systems within Turkish clubs. The service and the effectiveness of football academies in Turkey is significantly influenced by the quality of management and club governance, alongside key environmental factors. Clubs must adopt a coherent systems theory approach to achieve a long-term success. In this context, club executives at the strategic apex play a crucial role in advocating for structural and policy reforms in the governing

bodies of football and sport within their respective countries. It appears that the Turkish Football Federation is not able to implement these reforms from a top-down approach unless there is a sustained and consistent demand from stakeholders at lower levels of the football hierarchy. By actively engaging with governing bodies and advocating for reforms, club executives can contribute to the creation of a more transparent, equitable, and efficient football management ecosystem. Their voices and efforts can help shape policies and regulations that not only benefit their academies but also foster the growth and sustainability of the sport on a broader scale.

CHAPTER 5: EMPIRICAL STUDY 2.

5. Management of football academies: The coach's perspective

Abstract

The management of football academies is a multifaceted process that involves different influential stakeholders. Coaches, as key stakeholders, contribute significantly to shaping the academy environment and play a crucial role in the overall success and effectiveness of the academy system. Recognizing coaches' pivotal role in the developmental journey of young football players, the current study employed the systems approach to explore the management practices of football academies in Turkey, with a particular emphasis on the perspective of coaches. The primary objective was to comprehend the challenges and obstacles confronted by Turkish football academies in terms of management and their implications for the overall efficiency of the academies. Furthermore, the study aimed to delineate the fundamental requirements and services encompassing the input, process, feedback, output, and environmental aspects of the football academy system, ultimately proposing suggestions for improvement based on the findings and insights. Fifteen official head coaches of senior teams in the top two divisions in Turkey with previous coaching experience in football academies were interviewed using a semi-structured interview. The results were analysed using qualitative content analysis. The findings indicated that management should prioritize specialized coaching approaches tailored to football academies. Training young football players in academies requires coaches specifically trained for this purpose, distinct from those coaching senior teams. The study proposes a recommendation for the federation to improve coaching education programs, addressing specific challenges in Turkish football academies. The article ultimately emphasizes the importance of adopting a systems theory approach for successful football academy management to achieve sustainable practices in Turkey's football academies.

Key Words: Coach, Academy coach, Football academy, Management

5.1 Introduction

Effective management in the sport organization depends on gaining a clear understanding of the relevant stakeholder's perceptions and preferences (Chelladurai, 2014) since their involvement would directly influence the performance of the general management practice in the organizations (Freeman, 2010). Coaches are important stakeholders who influence football player development (O'Connor et al., 2018). In this regard, recognizing coaches as influential internal stakeholders in the academy management process, the present study examined the football academy management phenomenon holistically from the systems theory lenses, delving into the perceptions of the coaches in terms of management.

The literature consistently highlights the significant role of coaching and the constructive relationship between the athlete and the coach (Côté et al., 2013; Mesquita et al., 2015) in the talent development process. Coaching is seen as a crucial prerequisite for attaining elite performance, allowing athletes to acquire the top-level skills necessary to compete at the highest level and reach their full potential (Cushion et al, 2012; Gordon & Lavalley, 2004; Green & Houlihan, 2005; Nesti & Sulley, 2015, Kaplan, 2016; Williams et al., 2003).

They play a pivotal role in providing instruction, feedback, and motivation to the athletes, aiding in their skills and knowledge development. Indeed, the skills and knowledge of the academy coaches can be critical factors influencing the quality of instruction provided (Côté, & Gilbert, 2014). Furthermore, coaches are responsible for creating a positive environment that fosters learning and growth within the academies (Amorose & Anderson, 2007). Athletes who are supported and encouraged by their coaches are more likely to be motivated to improve their skills and knowledge than athletes whose coaches are not as supportive (Smith & Smoll, 2007).

At this point, it is important to clarify why the present study focused on senior team coaches rather than academy coaches. Coaching young players in a

football academy requires specialized knowledge and expertise due to the specific age and developmental stages of the athletes involved (Armour, 2013; Côté et al., 2013). However, players trained by academy coaches eventually switch to senior team coaches when they join professional teams. These senior team coaches then become the main responsible for evaluating their performance at the elite level. In other words, the destiny of young academy players is determined by the senior team coaches. Several studies showed that the presence of appropriate coaching personnel, within the senior team, who encourage the adjustment of young newcomers, has a significant impact on their progression to the first team (Roynesdal, 2015).

In addition, it should also be noted that real-match experiences in senior teams (Houlihan & Green, 2008; Kaplan, 2016; Stotlar & Wonders, 2006), along with the senior team coach's support to the pro-youth policy of the club (Mills et al., 2014) are highly critical components of the young players' development process. Moreover, the age at which most athletes reach peak levels of performance in team sports, like football, occurs usually in the mid-to-late twenties (Côté et al., 2012; Ford et al., 2009; Haugaasen et al., 2014; Moran & Toner, 2017). In other words, football players generally reach top elite levels after the academy education years (Helsen et al., 2000), which makes senior team coaches substantially influential on the development of athletes throughout their professional elite careers (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). As a result, the perspectives and approaches adopted by senior team coaches towards young players play a crucial role in shaping the outcomes of the academy management process. Therefore, given the utilization of systems theory in this investigation to explore the understudied field of football academy management, it is imperative to incorporate the viewpoint of senior team coaches. Their pivotal role within the system ultimately determines the development and success of the players who are raised by a football academy.

Based on previous information, the present study was conducted to examine, from the viewpoint of football coaches, the challenges and difficulties faced by

Turkish football academies, particularly focusing on managerial aspects, and their influence on the overall efficiency of the academies. More specifically, applying the systems approach to management, we aimed to identify the essential requirements and services within the input (resources and talent selection), process (daily operations and services), feedback (evaluative information and communication), output (player development and achievements), and environmental (external influences) dimensions of the football academy system in Turkey, leading, ultimately, to practical proposals that could enhance the management processes of these academies. For this aim, an exploratory study design was employed, utilizing a qualitative approach (Hastie & Glotova, 2012) to explain the mechanisms and underlying reasons for how systems operate (Saunders et. al., 2009).

5.2 Method

Participants

The selection of participants for this study employed purposive sampling, a method focused on choosing individuals whose perspectives or experiences align with the study question (Patton, 2015). The criterion sampling method was utilized to simplify the process, ensuring participants met specific predetermined criteria. Specifically, we focused on active coaches working in the top division of Turkey (*Süper Lig*) within a senior team during the data collection period. Participants were required to have either a UEFA Pro license or a UEFA-A license; in this second case, coaches would also have to be, at the moment of the interview, enrolled in the UEFA Pro license training, with the expectation of soon graduating. Moreover, coaches were required to have a minimum of one year of academy coaching experience to have familiarity with the subject matter. The final number of 15 was determined by the saturation technique (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). The ages of the coaches varied between 42 to 70 years old and 13 of them were former professional football players. Their education level varied from high school ($n = 6$) to university degree ($n = 9$). One of them had a master's degree and one of them had a Ph.D. in sports science.

Interview design

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured, in-depth interviews using open-ended questions (Veal & Darcy, 2014). An interview guide specifically designed for this study served as a framework, consisting of key questions relevant to the research (Arksey & Knight, 1999). The interview format was designed to elicit genuine thoughts, personal feelings (Whiting, 2008), and individual stories (Rabionet, 2011) from the interviewees. During the interviews, the participants were asked questions related to four main themes that was defined in interview design: (a) personal background; (b) the ideal services of the academy c) current issues faced by the coaches within the club concerning the academy management; (d) the club's responsibility on the process.

An introductory conversation was employed as a warm-up (cf. Rabionet, 2011; Whiting, 2008), establishing a comfortable and relaxed atmosphere. The presentation of the introduction and instructions was detailed to encourage participation. For example, we explicitly communicated that the interview wasn't an examination, and participants were encouraged to share their genuine opinions and experiences. Consistency was maintained by asking all coaches the same set of questions, but flexibility in the order was allowed to align with the conversation's natural flow. At the interview's conclusion, participants were given the chance to complement or clarify any discussed and undiscussed points, ensuring that their final thoughts or insights were heard.

Data collection

Before the actual data collection, a pilot interview was carried out by the main researcher with an academy coach. The insights gained from the pilot interview led to several minor adjustments and updates to the interview process. To initiate data collection, potential participants were contacted via phone calls to provide them with detailed information about the study's purpose and nature. Those expressing interest were then scheduled for interviews at times convenient for both parties, taking into consideration the participants' availability.

All interviews were conducted in person at the participants' respective clubs, with the primary researcher conversing in the participants' native language. This approach aimed to create a safe and comfortable environment for the respondents, ensuring their ease and well-being throughout the interview process. The participants were explicitly informed about the confidentiality of their answers, ensuring the privacy and protection of their responses. All participants were given the option to opt out of the research or choose not to answer specific questions if they felt uncomfortable. However, it is important to note that none of the participants chose to exercise this option. Instead, they actively and effectively collaborated by providing responses to all the questions posed during the interviews. With their consent, the interviews were recorded using a digital audio recording device. The duration of the interviews varied, ranging from a minimum of 40 minutes to slightly over an hour, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of the research topics.

Data analysis

Upon completion of the interviews, they were first transcribed verbatim in their native language and then translated into English, ensuring that the transcribed data could be evaluated by an additional researcher. Content analysis was performed to explore the content of the transcribed data. It is generally recommended to have around 15- 20 interviews for meaningful results in content analysis (Moser & Korstjens, 2018) and the research readily met this requirement.

The data analysis process involved a combination of inductive and deductive approaches. Inductive analysis was employed to identify new categories that emerged from the collected data (Patton, 2015), while deductive analysis utilized pre-defined categories derived from existing literature (Schreier, 2014). After reviewing the *corpus*, the final categorization process was conducted (Bardin, 2004). In total, seven main categories emerged from the data analysis: important facilities, player development, coaching issues, management issues, club governance issues, federation issues, sports policy issues. These main categories also divided into specific sub-categories to facilitate the interpretation

of analysed data.

Manual coding was utilized to assign codes to the data (Lee, 2021), and the coded and color-coded transcripts were shared with the other researcher to ensure reliability. This collaborative approach aimed to enhance trustworthiness in the code checks and minimize interpretive bias (Patton, 2015)

5.3 Results

The requisites and services within the input, process, feedback, output, and environmental aspects of a football academy system, as perceived by Turkish football coaches, are presented in Table 10.

Table 10: Domains that affect the overall performance of the football academies.

Input Domain		Process Domain	
Players Coaches Staff Resources		Management Quality Club governance Quality Service Quality	
Feedback Domain		Output Domain	
Communication inside the academy Communication with the A-team Communication with Externals		Elite Player	
External Domain			
External Influencer + Football Federation + Sport Policy			

Input Domain

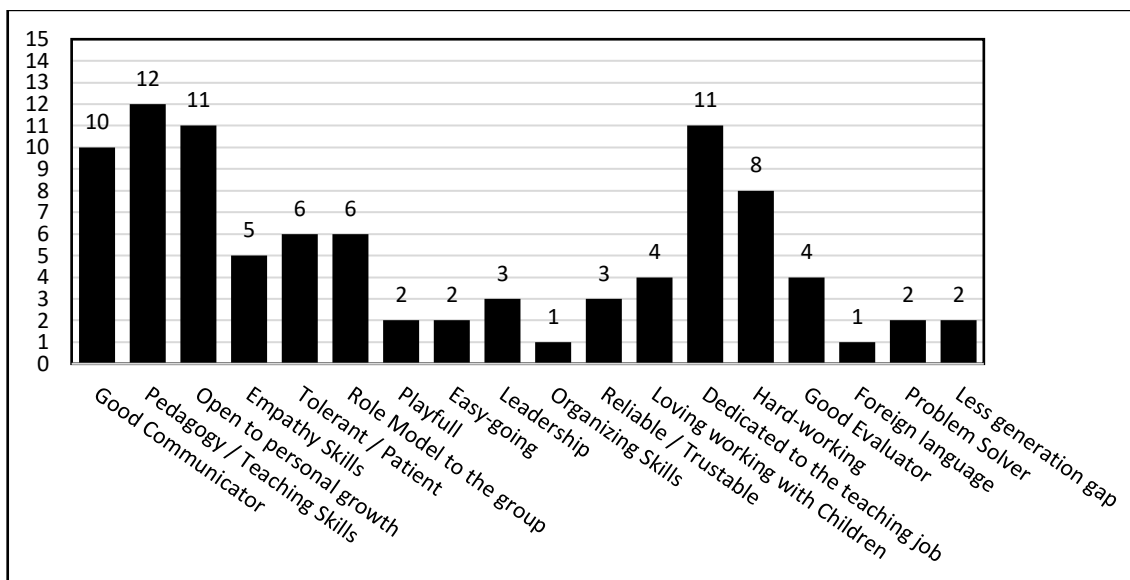
Player

Ten of the coaches claimed that talent was a prerequisite for nurturing exceptional players within the academy, as the quality of incoming players would influence their subsequent development in the academy years. Hence, nine coaches stated that finding the best talent should be the primary aim of football academy management. On the other hand, three coaches expressed concerns regarding the inadequate scouting practices within Turkish academies. Two

participants draw attention to the relative age effect in the selection process, noting that players born earlier in the selection year may have an unfair advantage. Additionally, two coaches recommended focusing on targeted regions to enhance scouting outcomes.

Coach

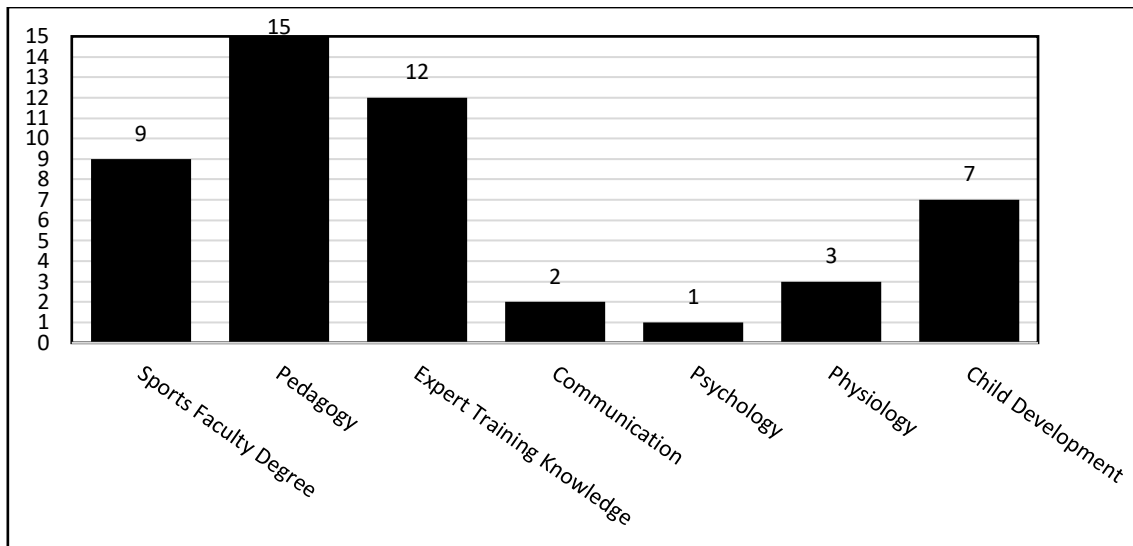
Thirteen participants acknowledged that coaching quality directly impacted the quality of player development within football academies. They emphasized the importance of academy coaches possessing specific knowledge and skills that could positively impact the academy management process. These proposed skills that the academy coaches should possess to enhance the development process are shown in Graphic 3 below.



Graphic 3: Ideal coaching skills/attributes to enhance academy performance.

Still regarding coaching, eleven coaches expressed their concerns regarding the low coaching quality in the academies. For instance, four coaches expressed concerns that the coaches were not proficient in integrating technological software into their training programs. According to coaches, this quality issue primarily stems from the inadequate and insufficient coaching education opportunities provided by the Turkish Football Federation for coaches who

wished to work in academies. To enhance coaching quality, the coaches ($n=11$) advised on the implementation of additional educational courses specifically designed with strong content for those interested in working in academies. The educational subjects that were proposed to enhance the coaching quality in the academies are shown in Graphic 4.



Graphic 4: Necessary education for academy coaches to enhance the performance.

A significant majority of the coaches, specifically 14 out of 15, agreed that academy coaching should be treated as a distinct area of expertise separated from senior team coaching. Seven coaches went even further, asserting that academy coaching should be divided and specialized based on specific age groups.

In addition, only one coach thought that a former playing career should be a mandatory requirement to work in the academies. The other fourteen believed that having a former playing career should not be a prerequisite for becoming a coach in the academies. One of those fourteen coaches thought that having been a former player might even have negative implications for the younger age groups. However, the other thirteen coaches acknowledged that it could provide certain advantages in the general management process. For seven participants, the ideal academy coach would be someone who possess both an academic

background in coaching and former playing experience. The advantages associated with being a former player in academy coaching are presented in Table 11.

Table 11: Advantages & disadvantages of former playing career in academy coaching.

Advantages and Disadvantages of former playing career in Academy Coaching	
Advantages	Disadvantages
Facilitates the adaptation to the coaching job (C1,C5,C9,C11,C13,C15)	Lack of pedagogic knowledge (C14)
Brings sectoral experience (C2,C3,C6,C7,C8,C11,C15)	
Empathy with players (C7,C8,C11)	
Better observation skills (C8,C15)	
Practical knowledge on trainings (C1,C2,C3,C6,C7,C8)	
Brings more respect to the coach (C6,C7)	
Practical problem-solving (C8,C11,C13)	

Furthermore, eight coaches pointed out that football academies served as a learning ground, an unofficial vocational school, for new coaches to enhance their coaching skills. Along the same lines, nine subjects believed that football academies were often seen as internships for coaches aspiring to work at the senior level. In their opinion, this mindset could be attributed to various factors. Economic reasons were identified as the primary motive by seven coaches, while six coaches highlighted better physical working conditions at the senior level. Additionally, three coaches suggested that the preference to work at the senior level in the later stages of a coach's career could be influenced by their personal character, with more competitive individuals eventually gravitating towards senior positions.

In addition to academy coaching, four coaches also highlighted that the head coach of the senior team also played a crucial role in the final development phase of the academy players.

Staff

Eight coaches acknowledged that the quality of the other staff members in the academy had a direct impact on the development of quality players. In fact, six

coaches specifically emphasized that the quality of the supportive staff in the academy would significantly influence the academy's overall management performance. Thirteen coaches stated that the selection of expert and competent staff for the academy should be one of the responsibilities of the management team. Moreover, seven coaches remarked on the importance of clubs making longer contractual commitments, on a full-time basis, with expert academy staff to effectively pursue long-term objectives in a more professional environment.

On the other hand, all fifteen participants agreed that there was a lack of competent and expert staff in the academies. Confirming this, thirteen subjects acknowledged the absence of professionalism in Turkish football academies. Four participants conveyed doubts about the lack of academic knowledge among most academy staff, while six coaches observed a lack of pedagogical approach in their work with young players. In addition to pedagogical issues, four coaches raised concerns regarding the academy staff's inability to engage in ongoing professional development. In relation to this, eight coaches stated that there must be constant internal education courses to equip the staff with the necessary knowledge and skills.

Resources

Overall, thirteen coaches underlined the importance of having adequate physical resources for a better developmental process and eleven emphasized that facilities enhanced the effectiveness of coaching and training in the development process. Similarly, eight coaches stated the physical conditions of the academy were an important success criterion for the academy's overall management performance. In addition, coaches specifically stated that proper academy facilities were a critical component of a successful academy management process ($n = 10$), positively impacting the motivation and performance of players ($n = 5$) and providing a competitive advantage over rival academies ($n = 7$). On the other hand, ten coaches expressed their apprehensions about the lack of proper facilities in Turkish academies and three of them explicitly referred the immediate need for improved infrastructure to support the development process.

Still regarding the academy facilities, eight coaches expressed their dissatisfaction with the severe lack of football pitches in the clubs. Relatedly, six subjects emphasized that having adequate and high-quality pitches was essential for effective academy management and it was a sign of respect towards the youth. Furthermore, eleven coaches believed that good pitches were crucial for conducting high-quality training sessions during the academy years. Two coaches also pointed out that having good pitches was also important because it helps prevent the risk of player injuries.

Concerning the facility's location, eight coaches considered it advantageous to have the academy facilities located on the same site as the senior team. The reasons to advocate same-site provision included: creating inspiration and motivation ($n = 8$), having role models ($n = 2$), promoting better relations between the two sides ($n = 4$), fostering better communication ($n = 5$), facilitating adaptation to professional football ($n = 2$), facilitating the transition periods to the A team ($n = 3$), concentrating on goal-setting ($n = 7$) and mentorship opportunities ($n = 2$). Four coaches stated that these benefits could be secured if the same site provision was implemented after a certain age group. In contrast, five participants were against the same site provision because they thought that these two institutions have different agendas, and it could be misleading to youngster who had not become professional footballer yet. Two remained neutral and did not express a preference.

Process domain

Management quality

Regarding management quality, twelve coaches stated that management's primary task was to provide suitable working environment for the coaches and the players. In relation to this, six coaches stated that the managers should have noticeable problem-solving skills for a smooth-running academy. Additionally, effective communication ($n = 2$), organizing ($n = 4$), planning ($n = 3$), providing necessary internal educations both to staff and players ($n = 8$) were the other

components addressed for an effective academy management. Ten coaches noticed a lack of effective organization inside their academies. Additionally, ten more raised concerns about the lack of long-term strategic planning with respect to the operations of the academy. According to eight coaches, role confusion was prevalent in the club system concerning the academy due to a lack of clear job descriptions. Four of the coaches stated that clear job descriptions and expectations were the hallmark of improved performance in the academies. Six of the coaches underlined the utmost importance of effective coordination inside and between the academy and the club to increase the management quality.

In terms of the controlling function of the academy management, eight coaches emphasized that evaluations concerning the academy's performance should be objective and based on long-term data and measurements, rather than relying on short-term subjective opinions. One coach even proposed that the evaluation of the academies should be conducted by an external expert or a neutral audit company.

Club governance quality

Regarding club governance, the most mentioned problem, refereed by thirteen subjects, was the lack of interest in the academy by the club's governance. Relatedly; twelve coaches proposed that the strategic apex of the club should show more confidence and encouragement for the work of the academy staff. In relation to this problem, seven coaches stated that there is evident lack of investment in the academy by the club's governance. Thirteen coaches even raised objections to the very low salaries in the academies. They believed that clubs should increase the salaries to enhance the motivation and effectiveness of the academy staff. Additionally, two coaches emphasized the importance of paying the salaries on time to ensure dedicated employees, stating that delayed salaries were a common problem in Turkish clubs. Four coaches also expressed concerns about nepotism within the clubs, particularly regarding the hiring of coaches.

Interestingly, five coaches mentioned that the lack of investment in the academies was due to the abundance of money available at the senior level. Thus, as underlined by eight coaches, clubs often prioritized short-term gains and adopted a win-maximizing approach. This pressure to win was identified by thirteen coaches as a barrier that hindered the transition of academy-raised players into the senior team. To address this issue, six of them suggested that the club's governance should adopt an academy-friendly philosophy and mentality. In line with this thinking, ten coaches stressed that the club's mentality towards the academy played a crucial role in the transition of academy players into senior team. Still in relation to this issue, thirteen coaches highlighted the lack of long-term planning and strategic approach in Turkish clubs. Thus, as nine coaches stated, the club's governance should define clear expectations for the academy and set a vision to follow.

Following a similar line of reasoning, five coaches also stated that the club's governance lacked patience to see the long-term results of the academy, resulting in frequent changes in academy staff. This created high employee turnover and job insecurity in the academies, as mentioned by ten coaches. The coaches also highlighted the neglect of the controlling function by the club's governance over the academies. Six coaches suggested that the academies should be more autonomous to operate more effectively and, in line with this, seven coaches declared that football was a professional job, and honorary or voluntary board members should not interfere with the professional work of the academy. Ultimately, the club's governance was seen as the main responsible party for the success or failure of the academies in the club system, as stated by 11 coaches.

Service quality

Football development

Regarding football development services in academies, three coaches expressed their dissatisfaction with the late start age for organized football in Turkey. Additionally, seven coaches emphasized the importance of physical

development of academy players to cope with the physical demands of professional football at the highest level. On the other hand, six coaches highlighted the noticeable absence of fitness training in the academies. Consequently, they expressed concerns about the academy-raised players' lack of dynamism and tempo, which are crucial for competing at an elite level. The coaches also pointed out that the overall training programs in the academies lack challenging and developmental elements. Specifically, five coaches emphasized the insufficient provision of individualized training tailored to the specific needs of each player. Furthermore, seven coaches emphasized the necessity of integrating psychological and mental preparations into the academy training programs. Two coaches mentioned the absence of a nationwide defined curriculum and teaching program within the academies, leaving the training solely reliant on the abilities and preferences of the coaches.

In terms of the well-being of the young players before, during and after the trainings, eight coaches underlined the importance of proper nutrition, but this component was often missing in most academies. Additionally, three coaches expressed concerns about the lack of safe and hassle-free transportation services for young players, which also negatively affected the management of trainings sessions.

Most of the coaches, 13 out of the 15, emphasized the significant role of playing real matches in the player development process. Among them, eight coaches believed that competitive league matches should serve as the final development and evaluation phase for an academy player. Hence, providing players with competitive match experiences was considered as an important service of an ideal academy. The coaches expressed various reasons why playing competitive league matches was considered beneficial. For example, two participants highlighted that it fostered motivation among both players and coaches, encouraging them to work harder. It was also noted that playing games was crucial for developing the right attitudes and behaviour of a professional footballer. Similarly, playing games was also seen as an essential part of

adapting to professional football. Four coaches emphasized that playing contributed to improving game intelligence, while three stated that it played a vital role in building self-confidence on the pitch. The coaches underlined that regardless of what was taught in training sessions, tactical knowledge was truly acquired through game experience. Additional benefits of game experience, as expressed by the coaches, included the development of competitiveness and the enhancement of goal-setting skills. Finally, two coaches highlighted that playing matches helped in the mental preparation of players for the upcoming challenges of senior football. Therefore, they stressed the importance of including more competitive matches in the player development program to foster tactical maturity. Two coaches presented an innovative idea, suggesting that academy football should be structured in a manner where youth teams participate in a minimum of two official games per week.

Concerning the transition from the academy to the senior team, while five coaches proposed that objective data and measurements should be utilized to make these important decisions, most of the coaches ($n = 11$), confessed that this transition was often conducted subjectively by the head coaches of the senior team. The most used method, reported by 11 coaches, was inviting potential players to train with the senior team and allowing them to spend some time within that environment. Additionally, eight coaches mentioned inviting potential players to pre-season camps with the senior team before the start of a new season. Two coaches relied on the use of pilot teams for the transition period, and four emphasized the importance of sending academy players on loan to other teams to gain valuable playing experience. One coach proposed the creation of a loan-out department in the academy to assist young players in finding suitable teams for playing opportunities. Additionally, to facilitate the transition period, seven coaches recommended aligning the playing style and format of the academy with that of the senior team.

Eight coaches expressed that the transition process should be planned and organized by the sports director of the club, while five coaches suggested it

should be the responsibility of the academy director. One coach even suggested the introduction of a transition coach to facilitate this process. Regardless of the specific approach, nine coaches emphasized the need for a well-prepared transition period with established institutional rules. Thirteen coaches stated that without established institutional regulations in force, they would be reluctant to utilize young players in league games due to winning pressure on them. It was also highlighted that transition process should be conducted patiently, gradually, and with a conscious approach. Six coaches also proposed the implementation of special mentorship and mental support sessions for academy players during their transition to the professional level.

Career development

Two coaches favored the establishment of a career management department inside the academy structure to facilitate this process. A loan-out department that constantly seeks playing opportunities for the players in the market was identified as another valuable service. Other two stated that career development was the responsibility of the academy management and proposed the inclusion of a career consultation service to the players.

Academic development

In terms of academic services, ten coaches emphasized that providing a quality education to academy children should be one of the aims of a football academy. Therefore, having tutors within the academy is deemed beneficial for the holistic development of the players. Character development of young players was also highlighted by nine coaches, stressing the academic and social education as a social responsibility of football club towards the families of those young players. The benefits of academic services to the players are expressed as improved self-esteem, social-skills, cognitive and perceptual skills and more self-awareness both on and off the field.

Psychological development

The coaches recognized the critical importance of mental and psychological preparation for players in the academy management process, with seven coaches strongly emphasizing the influence of this aspect on player's holistic development. Six coaches specifically advocated for the provision of sports psychologist support within academies to enhance players' mental preparation for professional football. Five coaches acknowledged that mental skills play a pivotal role in differentiating exceptional players from average ones throughout their elite careers. Additionally, five coaches highlighted the significance of developing mental toughness and intrinsic motivation techniques to foster elite player development. However, it is noteworthy that four coaches acknowledged the prevailing neglect of the mental aspect of player development within Turkish clubs. Two coaches expressed that psychological trainings must be a compulsory part of the football academy training schemes.

Feedback domain

Communication inside the academy

Three coaches underlined the importance of creating a sense of meaningfulness and belonging inside the club for both the employees and the players. They recommended organizing social events and activities to foster this sense. Additionally, five coaches believed that financial incentives, such as premium payments on the successful performance of academy, were important motivators that should be provided by the management to the academy staff.

Communication with A-team

The coaches stated that the level of cooperation between the academy and the senior team is crucial for the ultimate success of the academy management. Eleven coaches also underlined the utmost importance of information flow and feedback sharing between the academy and the senior team. Participants viewed the academy and senior team as equally important components of the club system and emphasized the need for well-planned institutional communication and support from the club's management, as stated by eight coaches. Otherwise, if there is not any institutional communication policy in the club, this task was left

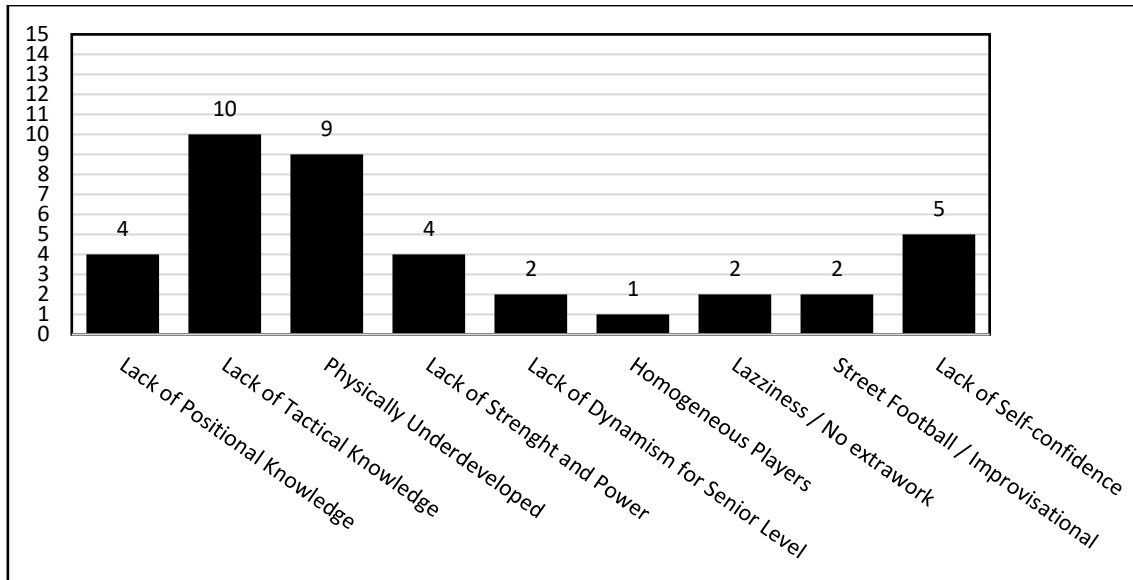
to senior coach's preference and the communication gaps occurred often, as stated by four coaches. Furthermore, four coaches suggested that even though a friendly and informal communication was beneficial, clear boundaries and defined responsibilities between the academy and the A team should be officially established by the club. Despite the acknowledged benefits of mutual communication, five coaches expressed concerns about the lack of communication between the two entities in Turkish clubs.

External communication

Regarding external communication, five coaches mentioned the need for a clear marketing strategy for the academy. Three coaches saw marketing as a way to enhance player visibility in the market, while six subjects believed it was an effective means to attract new talents, both players and staff, to the academy. However, six coaches cautioned against excessive marketing and public relations activities, as they might distract young players from their focus on playing and development. Three coaches also suggested the involvement of influential agents to promote the players in the football market. Nevertheless, eight coaches asserted that the best marketing strategy was to provide playing opportunities for academy players and join them in the senior team.

Output domain

According to ten coaches, the main objective of a football academy within a club system should be the development of elite football players physically, technically, tactically and mentally for the senior A team. Moreover, eight coaches referred to a shift in modern football towards the need for versatile players who possess multiple skills. These skills include positional knowledge, game intelligence, anticipation skills, being a team player, speed and ball-control skills. On the other hand, the coaches also addressed certain issues commonly observed among young players transitioning from Turkish academies to senior teams. The biggest issues are found to be shortcomings in physical development and lack of tactical and positional knowledge. The complete list of most noticed problems among the academy-raised Turkish players are presented in Graphic 5.



Graphic 5: Noticed problems among academy-raised players in senior teams.

Additionally, the coaches expressed several soft skills they expected from academy-raised players for elite level senior football. Most desired skills were self-confidence ($n = 7$), intelligence ($n = 9$), self-regulation ($n = 10$), work discipline ($n = 9$), intrinsic motivation to play ($n = 5$), dedication to job ($n = 7$), being open to continuous development ($n = 7$), taking responsibility ($n = 5$), cognitive-perceptual skills ($n = 6$), communication skills ($n = 3$), adaptation skills ($n = 5$), resilience ($n = 3$), fair-play and ethics ($n = 2$).

Environment Domain

External Influencers

According to all the coaches, the external environment surrounding the players played a significant role in their holistic development. They emphasized the importance of closely monitoring this external environment and taking protective actions when necessary. Various factors were identified as influential in the management of the player development process, including parents, friends, agents, fans, media, girlfriends, other players, and school teachers. Among all, the parents of the player were the most critical factor that may affect the development process ($n = 12$). Hence, three coaches proposed an innovative

idea, strongly emphasizing the inevitable necessity of organizing formal education sessions for the parents of the academy players. Additionally, four coaches remarked that fans could have a negative impact on young players, due to unrealistic expectations, particularly during the transition period from academy to the senior team, therefore the management must protect the young players from the fans and the media if necessary.

Football federation

Twelve coaches expressed that there are problems caused by football federation in Turkey, which significantly affected the performance of academy management. Eight coaches stated that there was not any defined, nationwide football development system or curriculum in the country and thus the training methodologies are left to individuals' preferences. Six coaches also underlined the insufficient coaching education programs offered by the federation. According to them most of the '*training for trainers*' programs do not go beyond just issuing certificates. The complete lists of notable issues with the football federation and proposed potential solutions to address these problems are presented in Table 12 below.

Table 12: Federation's role for a successful academy management

Turkish Football Federation's (TFF) Role in Academy Management	
Noticed Problems	Direct Responsibilities
There is nepotism in TFF (C6,C10,C15)	Better education courses for all academy staff (C3,C4,C5,C8,C10,C11,C13)
Lack of quality coaching education (C3,C4,C8,C9,C10,C11)	Employ better and expert employees in TFF (C3,C6,C10)
Lack of a defined system/methodology (C1,C3,C7,C8,C9,C10,C11,C15)	Reward Systems as incentives to academy-friendly clubs (C10,C12,C13,C14)
Lack of competitive league system(C1,C9,C11,C14)	B Teams should be created in regular leagues (C1)
Lack of national talent detection system (C14,C15)	More effective controlling function and be coercive (C3,C9,C10,C11,C12,C15)
TFF neglects the controlling function (C3,C5,C7,C9,C10,C14)	Define long-term national football strategy/system (C1,C3,C5,C8,C9,C14,C15)
Too much political influence (C10, C15)	

Sports policy

The participants underlined the importance of the government's involvement and identified sports policy issues within the country as one of the external factors influencing the overall performance of academy management. Main issues were related to education and grassroots activities. Table 13 shows a comprehensive list of government-related problems along with proposed actions that can be taken by the government to address these issues.

Table 13: Country's sport policy role for a successful academy management

Country's Sports Policy Role in Academy Management	
Noticed Problems	Direct Responsibilities
Schooling of Elite Athlete (C2,C11,C14,C15)	Home schooling (C2,C14) schools inside the academies (C11,C14),
Public Universities do not solve practical problems of football (C3,C5,C7,C14)	Create online data/knowledge sharing platforms (C11)
Lack of investment in grassroots football (C2,C9,C11,C14)	Build more public football fields (C2,C11,C14)
General national education quality is low, and this affects footballers as well (C5,C9,C11,C12,C15)	Make solid sports policy on football (C2,C9,C11,C14,C15)
	Support more scientific research in football (C3,C5,C7)

5.4 Discussion and conclusions

The present study aimed to investigate the fundamental challenges and obstacles experienced by Turkish football academies in their management practices, from the standpoint of coaches, specifically exploring the vital prerequisites and services across the input, process, feedback, output, and the environmental facets of the football academy system in Turkey.

Input Domain

The coaches emphasized that academy management should primarily ensure that talent enters the academy system. Otherwise, the outcome of the system would be severely damaged. In football, talent is generally confined to players, but it is an equally important aspect for the staff, including the coaches and the manager.

In terms of player input, the current approach on the selection of incoming players relies on physical attributes, making it susceptible to the relative age effect trap. Alternative methods such as bio-banding (Cumming et al., 2017) for more fair observations at trial-games or longer-term observation based on data may be implemented in the selection process. The results showed that personal attributes and soft skills were often disregarded in Turkish academies, leading to detrimental effects on the development process and outcomes in the later stages. This means that football academies need to launch more rigorous scouting departments exclusively for the needs of the academy (Sarmiento et al., 2018). Results also suggested that more focused approaches, targeted at specific regions may yield better results in detection and identification.

The coaches assigned considerable importance to the competence and quality of the academy manager, recognizing his direct influence on the overall management process. This acknowledgement stems from the belief that effective sports management can only be delivered through the expertise of experienced managerial staff in their respective field (Erdal, 2017). In other words, the manager's quality and competence played a crucial role in shaping the outcomes and success of the coaches as well.

Regarding the coaching input, the participants underlined the competency of the coaches working with young players in the academies. Apparently, the quality of training provided in the academies directly depended on the abilities and expertise of the coaches (Farrow et al., 2007). According to several authors, access to quality coaching has a great effect on athlete's success (Lapiano & Zotos, 2014). Thus, coaching quality plays a pivotal role in shaping the development of players and, consequently, impacts the performance of academy management. A lack of development-specific expert coaching is identified as one of the significant barriers in youth player transition to professional first-team football (McGuigan et al., 2023). For instance, in another study, it was observed that football academy coaches in Germany were more qualified and had more expert knowledge compared to Turkish academy coaches (Sunay & Kaya, 2018).

Because of this, especially at developmental years, coaches are expected to be qualified, knowledgeable and specialist (Barreiros et al., 2013; Güzel et al., 2013; Coutinho et al., 2021).

In this context, a pedagogical approach and effective communication with young players were identified as valuable in academy coaching. It's evident that having specific training knowledge tailored to specific age groups and contexts is a pre-requisite for ideal coaching in the player development process (Armour, 2013; Côté et al., 2013). Therefore, academy coaching should be separate from senior football coaching. Academy coaches should specialize in youth coaching on specific age-groups, because it is necessary to have expert coaches who possess the domain-specific knowledge to foster improvement, particularly as athletes advances in elite level (Baker et al., 2003).

In this regard, we suggest that the term “academy coaching” should be redefined as “age-group specific academy coaching”, aligned with the targeted age groups of the academy. Instead of a general academy coach, academies should hire licensed expert coaches for each specific age groups. Football has become a sport where expertise is sought after (Haugaasen et al., 2014). For instance, the knowledge and ability required for an U12 coach would differ significantly from those needed for a U18 coach. Similarly, coaching U19 players would also demand different skills and attributes compared to working with U10 teams.

Therefore, providing a specialized education to coaches is important because what may be appropriate for some players may be excessive for others (New & Gill, 2010). This specialization can also be extended to fitness coaches who aspire to work in a football academy, as movement development varies across different age groups and, apparently, bone and muscle growth are different at different ages (Gallahue et al., 2012). The physical needs of a 12-year-old player, for example, differ significantly from those of 19-year-old adult athletes. Expertise in this area is crucial to prevent injuries and stress-related fractures caused by inappropriate training volume and intensity (New & Gill, 2010). Therefore, the

academy management must consider these attributes when selecting coaches and staff for the academy.

To bring more job dedication and professionalism, it's wise to have longer contractual commitments with all staff including the coaches. In Turkey, most clubs employ academy coaches on an annual basis. This causes a lack of job security, and it impedes coaches from fully dedicating themselves to their roles and institutions, as they remain uncertain about their employment status for the following season. In this context, coach commitment is highlighted as an important factor to create positive athlete-coach relationship (Reverberi et al., 2020) which ultimately determines the quality of the trainings.

In addition, it is worth highlighting that even though a former playing career may offer certain advantages in coaching, it does not make a significant difference, especially for very young age groups. In fact, it may even be detrimental if the former player and coach lack pedagogical knowledge and approach (Tinning, 2011). Ideally, an academy coach selected by the academy management would possess both academic knowledge in coaching and some former playing experience. A competent coach should possess a combination of theoretical and practical lessons in youth development and be able to teach skills within academies (Topkaya, 2015).

These findings suggest that there is potential for a strong relationship between the university and the football sector in Turkey. Universities can provide customized programs for former football players who aspire to work as coaches in academies. It may be unrealistic to expect a 35-year-old newly retired player to enroll in a four-year bachelor's degree program in a university to obtain an academic degree diploma, however, a specially designed academic training program in a university, supervised by professors, and spanning one full academic year, could be an effective solution to equip these experienced but less informed former players with the necessary academic and pedagogical knowledge.

The present study also revealed that coaches perceived football academies as informal training grounds to develop their coaching skills after their football career. According to Cushion and Jones (2006), coaches' practices often reflect past habits and unconscious processes. To address this issue, clubs should provide extensive and compulsory internal education programs that equip coaches with relevant and up-to-date skills and knowledge (De Bosscher et al., 2008; Nesti & Sulley, 2015). This would help them overcome unwanted old habits from their playing years in their coaching careers. To facilitate this process, the Turkish Football Federation could introduce a new regulation requiring a one-year university academic course as a prerequisite for working in football academies. Along with this one-year academic course, the federation could focus on implementing age-specific education courses for the final licensing purposes. In other words, universities could play an active role in providing fundamental scientific education to aspiring coaches, while the federation can concentrate on offering specialized age-specific courses for internal licensing. During this one-year academic coaching course, former players can simultaneously do the internship in the academies. This approach would transform football academies into structured, controlled, and academically informed internship platforms for newly retired footballers and improve the quality of the workforce in Turkish football.

In addition to coaching knowledge, coaches need be passionate about self-improvement to keep up with the latest developments in the sector. The upcoming academy players belong to Generation Z or even Generation Alpha, having grown up with the internet and iPads at their fingertips. Therefore, relying on outdated statements such as "It wasn't like this during my playing days" is no longer a valid argument for these new generations. New generation of footballers seek data, measurements, and facts to support the coaches' decisions and the staff's actions. They can easily access different training drills on YouTube, explore the facilities of other academies, and connect with footballers from all around the world online. As a result, coaches, and in general the academy staff,

must be prepared to meet the needs of this new generation. In today's football world, the academies require more than just experienced coaches; they require what we refer to as "updated-experienced coaches and staff." Merely having a playing or coaching background is no longer sufficient to effectively develop the next generation of players.

In terms of resources, the coaches emphasized that having modern and suitable facilities and training conditions is essential for the success of coaches. Access to competitive facilities has a great effect on athlete success (Lapiano & Zotos, 2014), contributing to create a positive motivational climate for both players and staff to develop (De Cieri et al., 2005; Moran & Toner, 2017). Contrariwise, lack of accessible sport facilities can be an important institutional barrier to sports participation and athlete development (Bramham et al., 2007) and most coaches on this study expressed dissatisfaction with the inadequate number of pitches available in their club's academies. This shortage was seen by the participants as a sign of disrespect and negligence towards youth football, which is consistent with the idea that working conditions that fall below acceptable standards can demotivate staff members in the workplace (McGrath & Bates, 2013) and eventually impact the psychological contract between coaches and players within the club. Additionally, it should be noted that one of the important factors determining the quality of learning and development is the motivation of the players (Sivrikaya, 2018). When coaches and players witness the club's negligence towards the academy, their motivation and dedication levels decrease, and this has a negative influence on the overall performance of academy management. Therefore, in addition to having an adequate number of pitches, ensuring access to high-quality training facilities and resources is essential for the comprehensive development of players in football academies (Larsen et al., 2020; Sweeney et al., 2021). The coaches also expressed that it could be advantageous to have academy facilities located on the same site or near the senior team. However, this arrangement was primarily beneficial for higher age groups. Therefore, it would be recommended that the oldest age group in the academy, which in the Turkish football system is U19, should share

facilities with the senior team to take advantage of the benefits identified in the findings section. Apparently, there is no point of putting U12 team next to senior team training facilities.

Process Domain

Supporting services

Ensuring safe and convenient transportation for players is an essential service of the academy management. Subjecting young players to long bus trips and making multiple stops throughout the city can result in a loss of energy and enthusiasm even before training begins. Similarly, inefficient transportation back home wastes valuable time that could be better utilized in developmental activities. By adequately arranging transportation, the academy management enables young football players to focus solely on their training, directing their total energy towards it. Another important service pertains to the daily nutrition intake of young players, which is vital for their physical development and the quality of their training sessions. If the academy management fails to organize this kind of supportive services, it will indirectly harm training quality, subsequently affecting the coaches' and players' performance and ultimately leads to a decline in the effectiveness of player development.

Football development

The results showed that the trainings conducted in academies lacked challenging and formative aspects. To address this issue, it is crucial to organize academy trainings in more challenging ways that incorporate more formative aspects, enabling players to learn new skills (Mills et al., 2014). This is vital because the importance of quality over quantity in practice and the development of expert-level skills are widely acknowledged in training science (Ericsson, 2001). However, particularly in traditional training approaches, individualized sessions are often overlooked in Turkish academies. Therefore, academies must implement individual assessments of the players in the beginning of the season (Beswick, 2016), to identify the specific needs of each player and design customized training programs to facilitate their individual development. In this

regard, Turkish academies currently lack visual classroom instructions, theoretical guidance, and individualized training and tailored sessions for each player. Incorporating visual feedback, such as having players review their performances, should be prioritized in academies (Abrahams, 2012).

Furthermore, to enhance the effectiveness of training sessions, the coaches advised that academy football should be organized in a manner where young players, after reaching a certain age group, participate in two games per week. Zibung and Conzelmann (2013) suggested that football requires large quantities of football-specific learning activities and game experiences during childhood to achieve high footballing performance levels at the ages of peak performance. Moreover, hours accumulated in football specific plays and practice during childhood and youth is a strong predictor for perceptual-cognitive expertise in football game (Roca et al., 2012). This insight holds significant implications for the future development of Turkish players, as it is commonly observed that Turkish teams and players struggle to adapt to the demands of two games per week during European club competitions, resulting in a notable decline in performance. This issue is closely linked to Turkish players' lower sporting age compared to their European counterparts, because of late start ages. Consequently, training ages of academy players are affected negatively (Arede et al., 2021). To address this issue, other suggestions such as competitive league games, international tournaments, pilot teams, and loan-out options have been frequently mentioned as valuable opportunities to increase the sporting age of academy players.

Transition to professional football

In terms of progression to professional football, providing smooth transition paths is considered one of the significant roles of academy management (Relvas et al., 2010). This phase is usually considered a multifaceted and evolving process (Hollings et al., 2014; Jones et al., 2014) and represents one of the most challenging stages in football development (Finn & McKenna, 2010). Hence, the academy management should strategically design and implement measures to

facilitate a smooth transition from the academy to the highest level of professional football (EPPP, 2011; Gulbin & Weissensteiner, 2013). Effective communication among all relevant parties is vital in successfully navigating the transition process (Mannix et al., 2023). Because of this, transitions should be based on clear and established institutional rules rather than relying on subjective decisions by the head coaches of the senior teams. Because the first-team coaches are evaluated on short-term results and thus their short-term inspired evaluation process on players blocks long-term thinking and reduces the opportunities for academy players (Balliauw et al., 2022). Chelladurai (2014) confirms that explicit rules and procedures are essential for any effective sports organization to guide and regulate staff behaviour. These important decisions should not be left to mere chance or dependent on the subjective decisions of coaches or staff (McCalman et al., 2023) who are in positions of power at the club during that period. In other words, decisions regarding academy-raised players should be explicit and aligned with the institutional strategy for youth players within the senior team squad. Hence, the management is responsible for the protection of the club's important assets, including the academy-raised players.

Concerning progression to professional level, the competence and quality of the head coaches of the A teams play a decisive role in the holistic development process of the young players, especially during their transition periods, significantly influencing their future success at the elite level (Coyle, 2009). Accordingly, the coaches in the A team bear a responsibility for the final stage of the development phase of academy-raised players. Additionally, the present study indicated that participating in actual matches was a critical aspect of player development (Houlihan & Green, 2008; Kaplan, 2016), which underscores the indispensable role of the A team in the academy's development process. To become professional footballers, academy players must compete in professional leagues within professional football teams. It is unrealistic to expect young players to develop the mindset and skills of professional footballers while they are exclusively participating in amateur or youth football. The literature further supports the notion that engaging in competition is highly developmental (North

et al., 2014), provided it is appropriately managed (Côté et al., 2013). Involvement in A team football is therefore crucial for players to attain tactical and mental maturity, improve game intelligence, boost confidence (Höner et al., 2021) and cultivate a competitive edge. In Turkey, the academy system is usually denounced for any failure in elite player development, and the responsibility of the A team is often overlooked. This current study suggested that the A team is, in fact, an integral part of the academy development chain and it is equally responsible, alongside the academy, for the development of players in a club system.

Psychological development

The coaches also underlined the importance of psychological preparation in distinguishing the best elite players from the ordinary ones, stating that the players' mental preparation was considered an essential aspect of academy services. While it's commonly stated that, especially during youth-to-senior transition period, players must be provided with the effective mental support (Mitchell et al., 2020), the reality in Turkey is that the assigned sports psychologists in academies are often young, inexperienced interns or part-time professionals from outside the football world. Sport psychologists need to move from academic conversations to meaningful interventions (Abrams, 2012). Therefore, even though the service is given, the efficacy of this service is highly questionable at the academies. Considering that the coaches spend a significant amount of time with the players and have a deeper understanding of their realities, it is highly recommended that academy coaches be equipped with the fundamentals of sports psychology as well. This concept should also guide future education programs designed for coaches by the Turkish Football Federation, as coaches are increasingly assuming a greater responsibility for the emotional management of players (Beswick, 2016).

Academic development

The participants emphasized the significance of school education in fostering soft skills, including social, cognitive, and conceptual abilities among players. They

consistently expressed their preference for working with intelligent and smart players during training sessions, as this enhances teachability and training efficiency. Furthermore, clever players were regarded as exceptional problem solvers on the pitch, thus highlighting the role of school education in further developing these skills. Coaches also stressed that promoting school education was a social responsibility for clubs. This is particularly relevant since only the top 1% of youth players typically progress to elite-level football clubs (Calvin, 2017; Toering et al., 2009). Hence, clubs must prepare these young players to become educated adults, ensuring they have alternative options in the event that their football careers do not unfold as planned.

Club Governance Support

Club governance bears joint responsibilities with academy management for the effective operation of the academy. For instance, to attract high-quality coaches to the academies, clubs must enhance the financial incentives and improve the working conditions provided to academy coaches. Skilled coaches represent a vital asset for the club, and maximizing this asset is the primary responsibility of management (Gilmore, 2009). Without such improvements, it is unlikely that skilled coaches would be willing to endure challenges associated with the academy environment. Currently, due to unfavorable conditions, academy coaching is often seen as a means to advance to senior team positions, rather than being considered a primary profession (Sunay & Kaya, 2018; Topkaya, 2013). Many coaches aspire to work only in senior football coaching roles, which offer better financial and physical conditions. Clubs cannot pay all academy coaches the same as they pay to A-team coaches but it's a fair expectation to have minimum requirements to work peacefully under the same club's name.

The presence of this kind of organizational injustice inside the club contributes to a lack of commitment and satisfaction (Mohammadi et al., 2016) among individuals working in football academies. This appears to be a significant factor contributing to the lack of full-time professionalism in the academies in Turkey. Naturally, it is commonly observed that most of the coaches work on a part-time

basis. It is rare to find expert coaches whose sole occupation is academy coaching (Sunay & Kaya, 2018). Most individuals engage in academy coaching as a hobby or part-time activity rather than a dedicated professional pursuit (Topkaya, 2013). This automatically decreases the level of professionalism and competence among staff members in Turkish academies, leading to amateurism inside the professional teams. In this context, Donuk (2016) acknowledges that the absence of professionalism is one of the most notable deficiencies in modern sports management in Turkey. This issue can be addressed by implementing longer and more satisfying contractual commitments, improving their working conditions, encouraging coaches to fully dedicate themselves to their roles and enhancing the overall professionalism within football academy system.

Regarding professionalism problem, some coaches also raised concerns about nepotism within the club's governance, whereby individuals with personal connections were appointed to important academy coaching positions. This is an important issue that requires a contemplating. Because, if the salaries and financial benefits of academy coaches and staff increase without implementing quality standards and academic requirements, as proposed earlier, it could potentially exacerbate the issue of nepotism within the clubs. In other words, simply raising salaries is not an efficient solution, but on the contrary, it would lead to increased nepotism and decreased coaching quality within the academies. Therefore, before considering salary increases, it is crucial to establish transparent and fair recruitment processes within the academies that prioritize merit and academic qualifications. This would ensure that coaching positions are filled based on deserving candidates rather than personal connections.

Feedback domain

From a systemic perspective, the lack of communication poses a severe problem that can disrupt the chain of the academy management process. Previous studies have also highlighted the consequences of poor communication between

academy and the professional team, leading to misunderstandings among players and staff (Larsen et al., 2013).

It was also manifested that the coaches viewed creating a sense of meaningfulness and belonging to the club as crucial for the performance improvement. Alongside social and motivational events, offering premium payments or direct financial incentives to the staff was considered essential for maintaining competent coaching within the academy framework. This is because job satisfaction is positively correlated with organizational commitment (Mohammadi & Dehkordi, 2013). Therefore, when tangible rewards are at stake, staff members are more motivated to fully dedicate themselves to their work in the academy and exert greater effort, because their personal success becomes directly linked to the rewards. This prompts their continuous self-improvement to nurture and develop more talented players, and in turn, fosters a stronger sense of belonging to the academy and the club. However, with that being said, managers at academies have little influence on compensation, benefits and employment agreements because normally institutional policies prescribe them. But still the manager must deal with the discontentment of the staff (Lapiano & Zotos, 2014).

Output domain

The results showed that coaches preferred having more complete and versatile players who excel in multiple aspects of the game, as successful outcome of the academies. In addition to technical, tactical and positional knowledge, game-intelligence, anticipation skills, speed, being a team-player, perceptual-cognitive skills are important factors for the development of elite football players in the academies (de Joode et al. 2021; Kannekens, et al., 2011; Machado et al., 2023). The players who are faster (Höner & Votteler, 2016; Höner et al., 2017), better at ball control, physically developed and who have self-confidence, commitment and mental toughness (Baláková, et al., 2015; Höner & Feichtinger, 2016) are expected from academy-raised players; therefore, management can adapt training plans to incorporate these concepts.

Environment domain

External Influencers

The parents of the players emerged as the most influential external factor in the player's development. To mitigate any potential negative impact they might have, the coaches recommended that the academy management organizes educational sessions for the parents. Parents can make a significant difference in the player's progression by providing proper support in every possible situation. The player and his parents embark on a very long journey together to be an elite professional footballer, but it is only the player who gets the necessary education in this demanding process. Hence, the parents should also receive relevant mentorship and preparation to navigate the challenges that come with being the parent of a professional footballer.

Football federation

The coaches in the present study have highlighted the issue of coaching quality and lack of coaching expertise in Turkey. They attributed it to the lack of sufficient and adequate coaching education available to those who aspire to work in academies as a career choice. The Turkish Football Federation is responsible for addressing this matter by organizing relevant education programs aimed at increasing coaching quality and ensuring standardization in coaching and teaching. To address the problem of low coaching quality, the TFF must increase the number of coaching education events. In addition to quantity of these events, the quality of those education events must also be increased. For this aim, the competence and quality of trainers working in the federation's education department should be scrutinized, as they play a crucial role in tuning the quality and effectiveness of those practical education courses. Above all things, providing quality training to coaches requires experienced and competent trainers. Therefore, the TFF should prioritize the employment of the best and most experienced expert coaches in Turkey for its education department. Thus, any kind of nepotism, let it be political or institutional must end inside the

federation and the recruitment processes must be announced publicly and organized in a transparent and fair way.

Finally, it is often suggested that the federation establishes a defined national curriculum and teaching program with the guidance of academic experts. Lack of access to scientifically developed training programs can be another important institutional barrier to successful athlete development (Bramham et al., 2007). This initiative would not only focus on the number of training sessions but also emphasize the type, time and content of training provided in academies.

In the context of educational matters, apart from the issues with coaching education, there appears to be a broader national education problem. The national quality of education may be an external factor that affects talent growth and development as a whole (Xiang et al., 2023). For instance, low level of English-speaking skills is not limited to Turkish coaches or players; this issue extends to graduates across various disciplines in Turkey and consequently our workforce in sports naturally remains local, thus, they are unable to utilize international opportunities. The responsibility for enhancing the nation's education lies with the relevant ministry. In this context, some influential factors effecting player development at international level in Turkey are beyond the control of the football academies.

In conclusion, the primary responsibility for the academy's success or failure lies with the academy management and, ultimately, with the club's top governance. Even though coaches are pivotal figures in player development in the academies, their capacities intrinsically tied to managerial decisions and preferences. The selection and appointment of coaches, as well as the support and resources provided to them, are pivotal determinants of their effectiveness and impact on player development in the academy. Managerial decisions related to hiring, training, and retaining coaches directly influence the level of expertise, coaching methodology, and developmental approach within football academies. In a similar way, the profiles and capacities of the academy managers will depend on the

club governance, and they are intrinsically tied to the environment in which the club operates. Coaching quality is closely linked to coaching education, and coaching expertise within academies can only be ensured through efficient and effective training programs. To achieve this, the training of trainers becomes a critical component of the system. All these aspects are shaped by the football federation's capacity and capability, as well as the sports policy and culture in the country.

CHAPTER 6: EMPIRICAL STUDY 3.

6. Management of football academies: The player's perspective

Abstract

The performance of football academies is contingent upon the collaboration of various internal and external stakeholders. In this context, considering football players as crucial internal stakeholders in club-based football academies, the current research employed the systems approach to management to explore, from the viewpoints of elite players, the factors impacting the efficiency of management in Turkish football academies. The specific focus was on describing the essential requisites and services within the input, process, feedback, output, and environmental aspects of the football academy system. Subsequently, the study aimed to propose practical solutions to enhance various facets of the football academy management system in Turkey. Fifteen participants, aged between 19 and 36 years old, were selected among players who had participated in the top division of Turkey (Süper Lig) and had represented the Turkish National Teams in at least one official game above the U18 level during their careers. The data was obtained through semi-structured interviews and analysed using qualitative content analysis. According to the participants the effective selection of talented players, often neglecting soft skills and high-quality coaching were critical for the success of football academies. The findings also highlighted key areas for improvement to elevate the overall performance of academies in Turkey. These areas included addressing late start ages for young players, providing more competitive game experience, and resolving transition challenges to senior teams.

Key Words: Player, Elite Footballer, Football Academy, Academy Management

6.1 Introduction

Football academies are primarily designed to nurture and develop elite football players who can compete at a senior level for professional football clubs (Gulbin & Weissensteiner, 2013; Nesti & Sulley, 2015). In this regard, players emerge as crucial stakeholders in the football industry. Several researchers have examined players' direct influence on the management process (Beech & Chadwick, 2013) while other studies delved into the significance of players as stakeholders within football management process, addressing their relationship with clubs and other key actors (Hamil et al., 2018). Recognizing that insights into key stakeholder perceptions can significantly impact the overall efficiency of management practices in the organization (Chelladurai, 2014; Freeman, 2010), the systems theory approach was chosen to gain a thorough understanding of the unique perspectives and preferences of players within the football academy system.

Since exceptional performance and results are tied to outstanding performers, clubs are focused heavily on recruiting or developing the best players to maximize their chances of success (Hoye et al., 2012; Maguire & Pearton, 2000). Along these lines, research by Kuper and Szymanski (2009) showed that the quality of players is the greatest determinant of success in a football clubs. In today's sport, great performers more valuable than ever (Colvin, 2008) and their opinions are important to enhance management process for talent development programs.

In terms of the player selection and retention, the academy management is primarily concerned with the input quality into academy system. Various assessment tests, such as TIPS (Technique, Intelligence, Personality and Speed), TABS (Technique, Attitude, Balance, Speed), SUPS (Speed, Understanding of game, Personality and Skill) are commonly employed for player evaluation (Brown, 2001; Reilly et al., 2003; Stratton et al., 2004). Additionally, a multidisciplinary approach is observed in talent identification processes (Pienaar et al., 1998; Reilly et al., 2000, Veale et al., 2008; Vandendriessche et al., 2012).

This approach includes anthropometric measurements such as body size, fat, bone diameter, somatotype as well as physiological measurements like maximal oxygen intake, aerobic capacity, endurance, agility and jumping ability (Péruce et al., 2001; Wilmore et al., 2001).

Beyond football skills and talent, high level success in elite sport is also determined by psychological factors (Moran & Toner, 2017). Consequently, mental toughness, confidence, motivation, discipline, commitment, and ability to concentrate are among the factors that distinguish top elite athletes from less successful athletes (Beswick, 2016; Dias et al., 2018; Gould et al., 2002; Holt & Dunn 2004; Jackson et al., 2008; Moran & Toner, 2017; Van Yperen, 2009). Mentally tough athletes demonstrate an elevated self-belief, possessing faith in their ability to control their sporting destiny and remaining relatively unaffected by competition and adversities (Clough et al., 2002; Crust & Clough, 2011). The presence of motivated and mentally prepared players is crucial for sustaining the demanding and long-term enduring development programs (Silva Dias et al., 2018). Literature findings suggest that football players with more conceptual - cognitive (de Joode et al., 2021; Ehmann et al., 2022; Machado et al., 2023; Roca et al., 2012) and social skills (Holt & Dunn, 2004), also known as soft skills, as well as psychomotor ability and mental skills, are more likely to achieve success in the long-term football career (Goldstein & Ford, 2002; Harttgen et al., 2011).

In sum, it's widely acknowledged that soft skills play a crucial role in distinguishing a successful elite player from others at the highest level of football (Gilbourne & Richardson 2006; Nesti & Sulley, 2015). This emphasizes the understanding that player development is a multi-dimensional construct (Coutinho et al., 2016; Côté et al., 2012; Davids & Baker, 2007; Philips et al., 2010). Thus, football player development cannot rely solely on the innate football talents at the elite level to sustain playing and achieving success.

Apart from the nurtured talent, the transition of the academy players into senior teams constitutes an important doorstep in the overall development process. The

literature suggests that the athletes should accumulate a minimum of 10,000 hours of practice to reach an international elite level of performance (Ericsson et al., 1996; Levitin, 2006; Starkes, 2000; Williams & Hodge, 2005). If we scale this guideline to football players, assuming an average daily practice duration of 3 hours over a 9-10 year football academy education period, the 10,000 hours rule is not easily met within the time spent in football academies. Research also indicates that most of the academies associated with top European football clubs fall considerably short of the 10,000 hours rule (Nesti & Sulley, 2015).

Moreover, in team sports, such as football, athletes typically achieve peak performance in their mid-to-late twenties (Côté et al., 2012; Ford et al., 2009; Haugaasen et al., 2014; Moran & Toner, 2017). Research specific to football players indicates that footballers generally reach their highest elite levels after around 13 years of formal and informal football education and practice (Helsen et al., 2000). This duration exceeds the time typically spent in a football academy. All this background information underscores the significance of the time players spend at professional level with the A team, emphasizing its importance for the holistic development of academy-raised players. In other words, football education of home-grown players is not only limited to the academy. This transition period from the academy to the A team is a complex process (Hollings et al., 2014) and constitutes one of the most difficult periods of football development (Finn & McKenna, 2010). Accordingly, football academies should plan and undertake various measures to facilitate the transition of players into top level professional football (EPPP, 2011; Gulbin & Weissensteiner, 2013).

Closely related to the transition period, another important relevant concept to player development revolves around real match experiences during the late development years (Balyi, 2001; Houlihan & Green, 2008; Oakley & Green, 2001; UK Sport, 2006; Stotlar & Wonders, 2006). Engaging in competitive play is an important component of the development process (Côté et al., 2003; Houlihan & Green 2008; Kaplan, 2016). Increased practice and competition experience at elite level are recognized as facilitators for the development of elite technical skills

and natural game intelligence (Böhlke, 2009; Côté et al., 2013; Green & Houlihan 2005; Green & Oakley, 2001; Helsen et al., 2000). Scholars underline that likelihoods of success in sport development will be boosted by the presence of a performance supporting environment (Barker et al., 2014; Cruickshank, 2019; Gagne, 2009). Gilmore (2009) describes players are valuable assets of teams and advocates investing in improving the capabilities and capacities by enabling better player utilization in the squads. This can be achieved by allowing players to participate in competitive matches in the league games. If this is not possible, then loan-out options to gain playing experience should be considered (Çevik & Onağ, 2019). The literature supports the notion that top football academies in the world ensure their players can engage in competitions, leagues and tournaments to acquire real match experiences, fostering game understanding and practicing skills in challenging situations (Gulbin & Weissensteiner, 2013; Nesti & Sulley, 2015).

The primary objective of the current study was to examine the factors influencing the effectiveness of management in Turkish football academies, from the perspectives of Turkish elite players, delineating the fundamental requirements and services across the input, process, feedback, output, and environmental dimensions of the football academy system. To achieve this goal, a qualitative approach was employed, adopting an exploratory study design (Hastie & Glotova, 2012). This methodology was chosen due to its effectiveness in elucidating models or theories that clarify the operational mechanisms of systems, making it particularly well-suited for addressing pivotal questions related to 'how' and 'why' these systems work (Saunders et. al., 2009).

6.2 Method

Participants

For the sampling approach, we employed purposive sampling to engage participants whose perspectives or experiences aligned with the study question (Patton, 2015). In this context, participants were exclusively selected from active elite players in the top professional division (Süper Lig) within a senior team

during the data collection period. Additionally, inclusion criteria specified that players must have been capped for the Turkish National Football Team at least once, with representation above U18 teams. In this regard, the participants were intended to represent successful examples of the Turkish academy system. The final number of the sample was determined as 15 participants by the saturation technique (Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

Interview design

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with open-ended questions (Veal & Darcy, 2014). The interview guide used as a framework (Arksey & Knight, 1999) was specifically developed for this study, encompassing questions related to four main themes: (a) desired services of the academy (b) player related issues; (c) management related issues, (d) club's responsibility in the process. Moreover, the interview structure was devised to extract authentic reflections, individual sentiments, and narratives from the participants. This format aimed to establish an environment conducive to the articulation of participants' viewpoints and constructive suggestions concerning the identified issues.

All the players were asked the same questions in the same way, but the order of questioning was free to vary within the natural flow of the conversation. To establish a comfortable and relaxed environment, an introductory conversation was conducted to break the ice and create a welcoming atmosphere. The instruction text was delivered in a detailed format to ensure the participants understood the nature of the interview. For instance, phrases such as "This is not an exam and there is not a single right answer, the only right answer is your own opinion and experience" were included to emphasize the openness of the discussion. Towards the end of the interview, participants were given the opportunity to add or clarify anything that they felt was necessary but not covered on the topics discussed in the questions.

Before the actual data collection, the primary researcher conducted a pilot

interview with a football player. Based on feedback from this pilot interview, minor amendments and updates were incorporated to the interview guide.

Data collection

All potential participants were initially contacted via phone calls to detail the purpose and nature of the study. For those who agreed to participate, convenient interview times and locations were scheduled based on their availability. All the interviews, with two exceptions, were conducted in person taking place at the participants' respective clubs. Two players didn't want to meet inside the club's premises, meetings were arranged accordingly. The interviews were conducted in the participant's native language by the primary researcher to create a comfortable and safe environment for the respondents. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their answers, and upon granting their consent, the interviews were recorded using a digital audio recording device. Participants were given the opportunity to withdraw from the research or choose not to answer specific questions if they felt uncomfortable, although no participants chose to exercise this option. All participants actively engaged in the interviews and provided responses to all the questions, demonstrating effective collaboration. The duration of the interviews ranged from a minimum of 40 minutes to slightly over 1 hour.

Data analysis

The interviews were first transcribed verbatim in their native language and then translated into English. Content analysis was performed to explore the content of the transcribed data. For meaningful results, it is generally advised that content analysis should have around 15-20 interviews (Moser & Korstjens, 2018) and the research readily met this requirement.

In the review process of each participant's transcript, the meaningful units (i.e., words and sentences that conveyed similar meanings) were identified and labelled with codes (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). A tagging system was employed within the data analysis process (P for player) and each tag was

numbered according to participant (P1 for player 1), so that the other researchers could easily find the codes in the participants' transcribed and code-coloured interview.

The existing literature served as a basis to define predefined categories, while new emerging categories were also identified and included in the analysis, following the principles of both deductive and inductive coding, respectively (Patton, 2015; Schreier, 2014). The final codes and categories were interpreted based on the knowledge and experience of the researchers and compared for differences and similarities. This collaborative approach is done to increase the trustworthiness in the code checks and to minimize interpretive bias (Patton, 2015).

6.3 Results

The answers of the respondents concerning the essential requisites and services within the input, process, feedback, output, and environmental aspects of a football academy system in Turkey are summarized in Table 14.

Table 14: Domains that affect the management of the football academies.

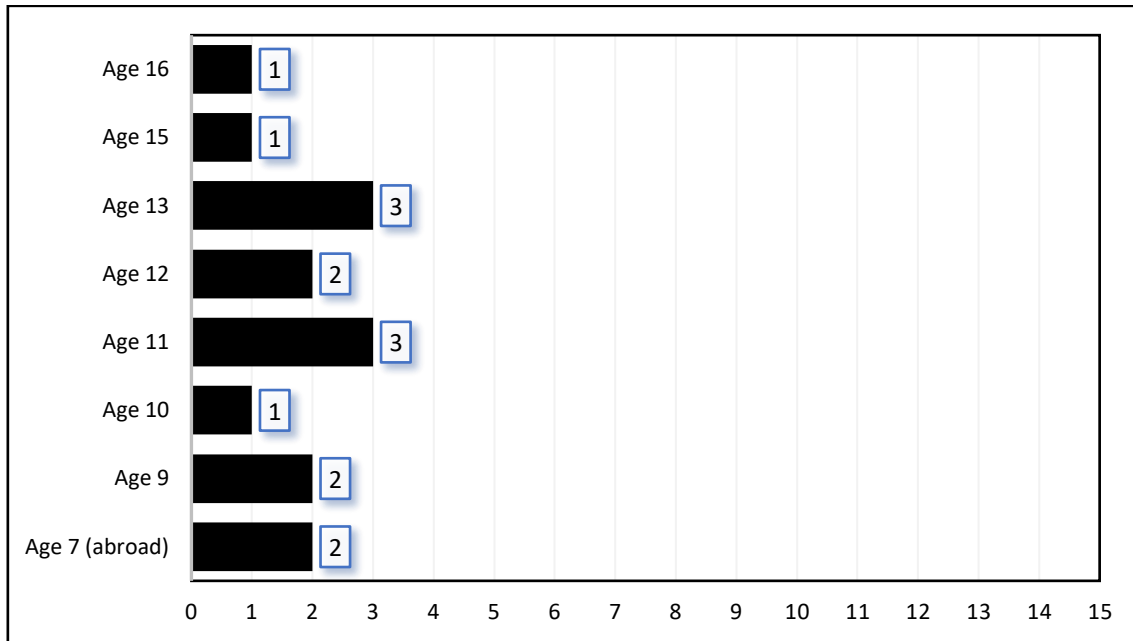
Input Domain	Process Domain
Talent selection Coaches Staff Facilities	Management quality Governance quality Service quality
Feedback Domain	Output Domain
Communication and motivation	Elite player
Other Stakeholders	
Influential Others + Governing body + Sports policy of the country	

Input domain

Talent selection

The players indicated talent as a crucial component of a successful academy management. In this respect, they underlined the importance of a solid plan for the selection of young players in the academies. Regarding their selection process, ten participants started playing organized football just because there was a local team in their neighborhood and four started training football in licensed football schools in their cities; in addition, five players were introduced to organized football by acquaintances, three by their parents and the other three by a school teacher. Regarding the selection procedures, nine players were selected into their first teams by test games during a trial week, whereas six players acknowledged that they were not selected through a formal process; instead, they just received invitations to join the clubs' youth teams and continued playing until reaching elite levels.

Within the framework of football development, a player voiced discontentment regarding the delayed starting age for organized football in Turkey. When inquired about the age at which they initially joined organized football training, responses ranged from varied from 7 to 16 years old among all the players. Those players who were born abroad in Europe and later relocated to Turkey constituted the earliest starters. Graphic 6 illustrates the starting ages of Turkish elite international players in organized football training within a youth academy.

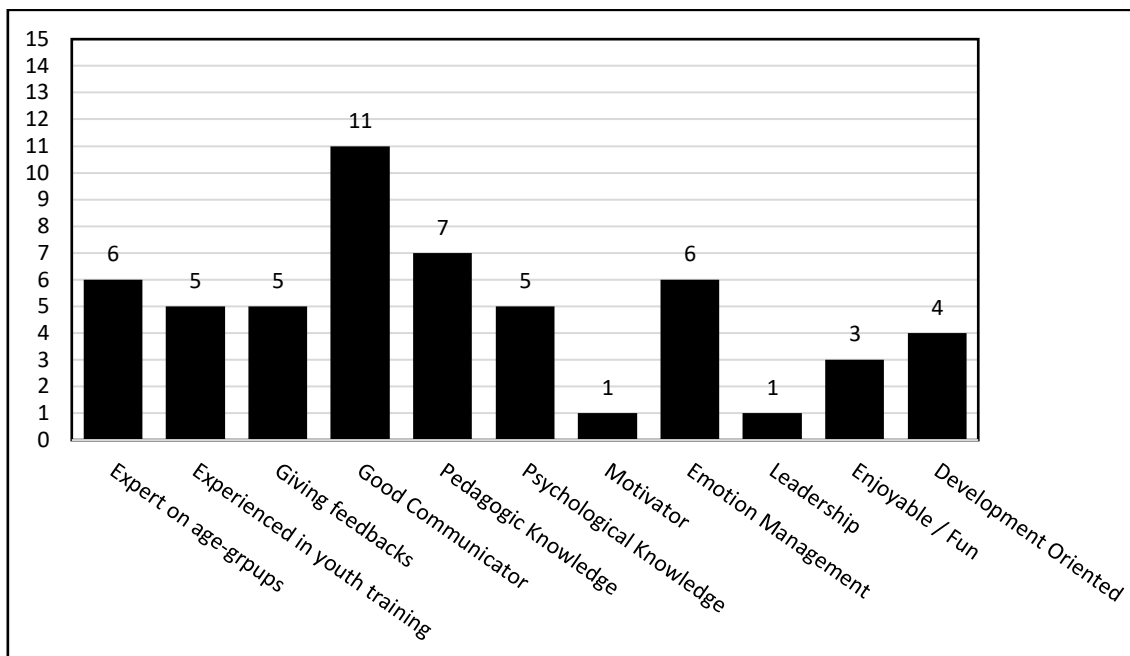


Graphic 6: Starting ages for organized football trainings of Turkish elite footballers.

Coaches

Eleven of the elite players involved in this study believed that coaching quality had a strong impact on the quality of the player, emphasizing the importance of ensuring high-quality coaching within the academy management system. Specifically, eight players highlighted the significance of competent coaches as a prerequisite for enhancing the overall performance of the academies in Turkey. The players also stated some specific knowledges and coaching skills they considered essential to positively influence the academy education process of young players.

In this regard, effective communication with young players was unanimously considered the most crucial aspect in academy coaching. Additionally, five players emphasized the importance of coaches being skillful at providing constructive feedback, which was regarded as a key feature for player's skill development. The attributes influential in developing elite players are represented in the Graphic 7.



Graphic 7: Coaching attributes to raise elite players in the academies.

Six players expressed dissatisfaction with the coaching quality in their academies. According to seven players, this was primarily attributed to the limited coaching education opportunities available for coaches aspiring to work in the academies. Three players disclosed instances of low-quality training sessions conducted by inexperienced coaches, seven admitted to encountering a lack in coaches' academic knowledge and three highlighted an evident shortage of a pedagogic approach towards young players during their academy years.

In addition to academy coaching, eight players emphasized that the head coach of the A team (senior team) also shared responsibility for the ultimate development phase of academy players. Corroborating this finding, seven players confessed that the best support they received in becoming professional footballers came from their initial head-coaches at the professional level.

Staff

Apart from the coaches, seven players acknowledged a lack of professionalism among the staff in Turkish football academies. Eight players emphasized that working in the academies must be a full-time, specialized, professional job,

irrespective of the position. Additionally, four players highlighted the low job security, leading to high employee turnover in the academies, and hindering professionalism. Eleven players asserted that the overall quality of the academy staff significantly influenced the general development environment of the players. In this context, players expressed substantial support for the idea of selecting better-qualified staff for the academy (n = 10).

According to players, the most essential member of the supporting staff in academies was an expert sport psychologist, as highlighted by seven respondents. Three players emphasized the importance of specialized fitness coaches tailored to age-specific groups and four players asserted the necessity of having full-time, in-house doctors available to provide a constant medical service and consultation for the academy players. Moreover, two players specifically pointed out the crucial role of expert physiotherapists in the academies while three players highlighted the need for expert nutritionists to contribute to the proper physical development of young players in the academy.

Facilities

Five players thought that proper academy facilities would directly influence the motivation and the dedication of young players, and eleven participants underlined that proper physical resources available to academy schemes were critical component of successful player development process. In addition, six players believed that the facilities and equipment were the leverage to enhance the effectiveness of trainings given in the academies. Two players even added that proper facilities and physical conditions of the academy constitute a competitive advantage for the academy players to outstrip the other players. Five players specified the necessity of a proper gym allocated to young players in academies, to promote physical development, while another five players highlighted that academies would benefit from using new technologies and innovative applications for enhanced training and development.

Nine players acknowledged experiencing a scarcity of pitches during their developmental years. Furthermore, they underscored that the provision of an adequate number of high-quality pitches specifically designated for the academy was not only a matter of respect ($n = 7$), but also pivotal in encouraging enhanced player development ($n = 10$).

Nine players expressed the view that having academy facilities on the same site as the senior team was advantageous. Among them, seven players specified that the benefits of a same-site facility were more pronounced for certain age groups and might not be necessary for very early age groups. On the other hand, five players remained neutral and did not express a preference, while one player opposed the idea. This player believed that access to senior-level opportunities should be earned and deserved rather than granted. The advantages of the same-site provision are outlined in Table 15.

Table 15: Advantages & disadvantages of shared-facility sites in a club

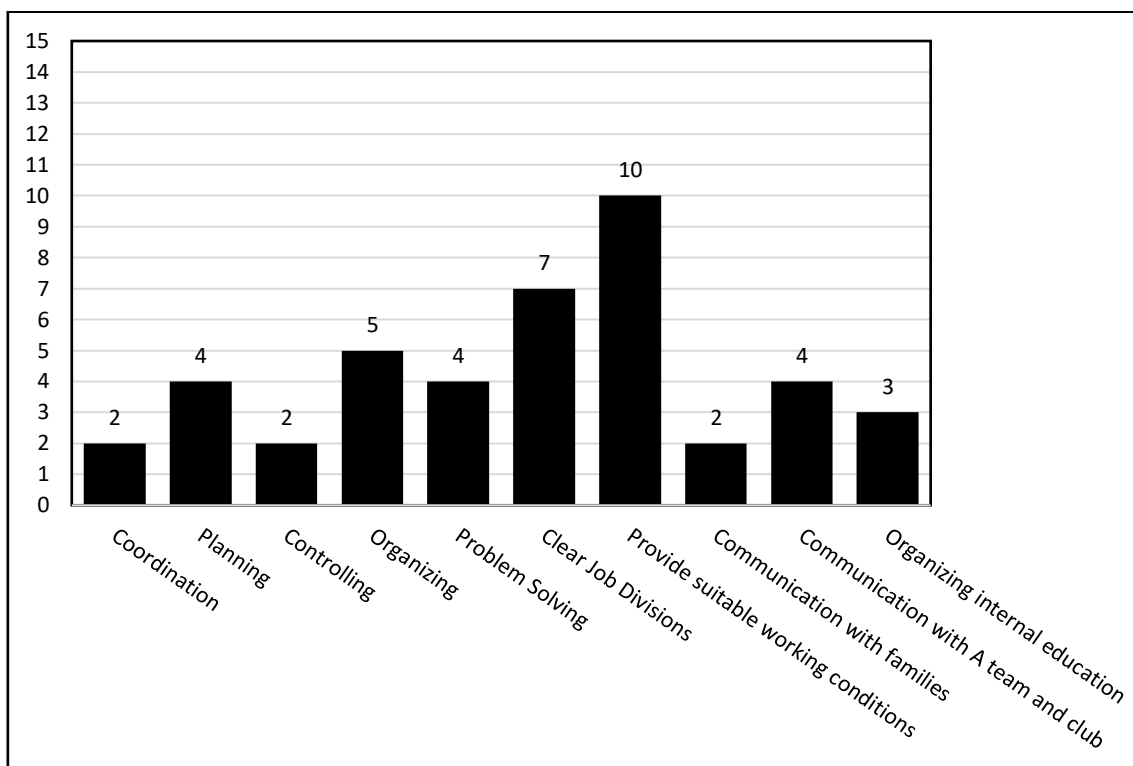
Advantages of the same-site facility	Disadvantages of the same-site facility
Young players take role-models from seniors (F3,F4,F6) Improves communication between players (F3,F5,F6,F13) Improves cooperation between the academy and A team (F5,F9,F13) Facilitates transition of the players to A team (F3,F5,F8,F13) Young players can compare themselves with seniors (F12) Helps for effective goal-settings (F4) It's an adaptation to professionalism (F3,F6)	Must be deserved with hard work (F10)

Process domain

Management quality

Three players observed a deficiency in organizational effectiveness within the clubs, which, in turn, had a direct impact on academy performance. Four participants addressed the senior team as the source of problems in academy management, asserting that the incompetence and lack of proficiency of the

senior team managers were reflected in the overall performance of the academies. According to elite players, the academy managers should assume some necessary roles inside the academy to enhance the effectiveness of the organizational management. The most anticipated role of a manager was to remove all obstacles hindering players from developing themselves ($n = 10$). Players expressed a desire to avoid hearing excuses and being burdened unnecessarily due to inefficient management. The complete list can be seen in Graphic 8.



Graphic 8: Roles of a football academy manager for effective management

Club governance quality

In terms of the club's management, the predominant concerns included inadequacies in facilities ($n = 8$), lack of interest in the work of the academy ($n = 5$), lack of investment in the academy ($n = 4$), and shortcomings in long-term strategic planning ($n = 6$). Additionally, four players observed that the board of directors in the clubs changed rapidly, preventing an institutionalized approach

towards the academy. Relatedly, two players ascribed the inefficacy of club management to nepotism, while three players pointed to issues of corruption within Turkish clubs. Moreover, football players identified a win-maximizing strategy ($n = 4$), impatience on young players ($n = 2$) and excessive financial resources allocated to senior football team as additional factors contributing to the perceived inefficiency of the overall academy management. The responsibility for the ultimate success or failure of the academy was attributed to the board of directors by eight players. According to the insights of five players, the club's approach to the academy was a crucial determinant of the academy management's future success. In this regard, the players recommended the implementation of training courses for the club's board members on academy football to enhance their football-specific knowledge and cultivate a more supportive mentality within the Turkish football sector.

In response to concerns raised by football players regarding the club's role on academy management, several key actions were proposed to address the areas of improvement. The recurring theme of salaries was emphasized by two players advocating for salary improvements, and five advocating for timely payment. Another prominent suggestion, supported by five players, involved the elimination of burdens on administrative and coaching staff. Clear assignment of main responsibilities and expectations within the club structure gained attention, with seven players expressing this sentiment. Additionally, calls for better control and supervision were articulated by four players. The importance of investing in academy facilities garnered substantial support from nine players, and demonstration of trust and interest toward the academy were advocated by five players. Establishing an academy-friendly mentality inside the club was supported by seven players. Providing a clear vision was suggested by two players, while protection from media interference and pressure was mentioned by one player. A long-term commitment with employees to achieve organizational sustainability was endorsed by four players. Two players stated that the board members generally did not have any football or sectoral knowledge, therefore supporting non-intervention with academy staff's daily work. Two players also

emphasized the need for board members to educate themselves on football business and management roles. Lastly, one player even proposed that clubs including football academies could potentially be sold to interested investors or transformed into private entities, thereby fostering improved management under the guidance of professional board members.

Service quality

Housing

In terms of service quality, the provision of accommodation services emerged as a multifaceted facilitator, contributing not only to environmental control, as emphasized by seven players, but also to the regulation of nutrition and resting times, a sentiment echoed by seven players as well. Furthermore, the accommodation services were perceived as instrumental in fostering better time management for all academy activities, as noted by four players. Another benefit, highlighted by a player, was the promotion of equality among all players. Recognizing the importance of social dynamics within the club, three players proposed the establishment of social areas in the academy buildings. Relatedly, the collective residence for young players was seen as a catalyst for enhancing teamwork and cooperation, a viewpoint supported by two players. However, challenges in this area were also acknowledged, as five players indicated insufficient housing in the academies and four players highlighted the problematic nature of transportation between the accommodation site to schools and back to training grounds as a prevalent issue. Closely related with the residential service, eight players emphasized the significance of appropriate nutrition as a crucial component in the developmental of players, particularly during their academy years.

Career development

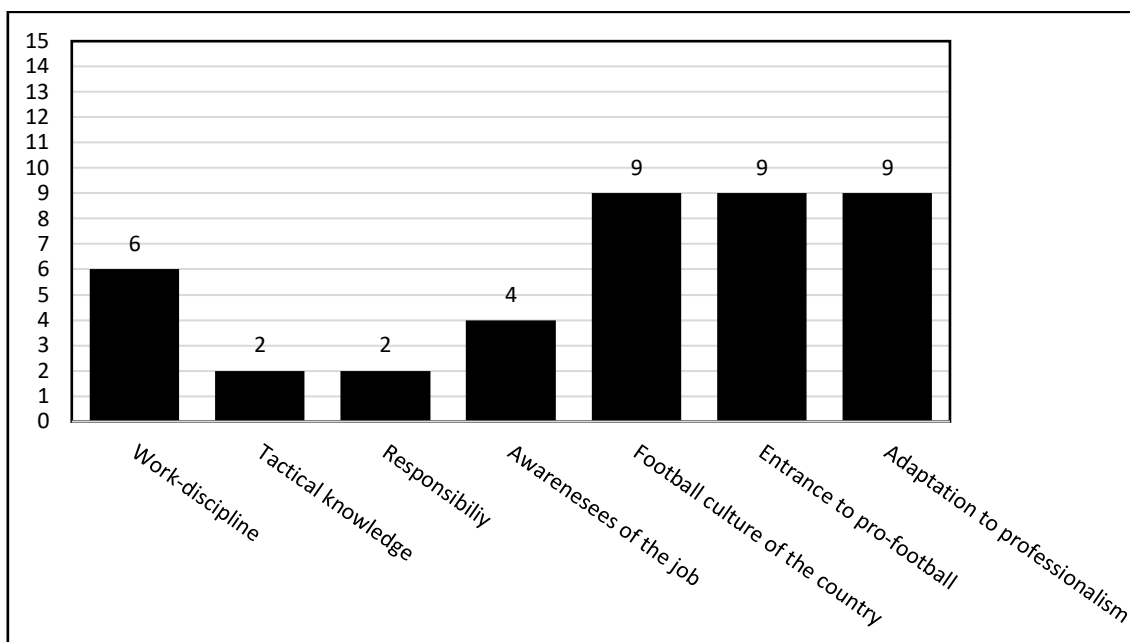
Concerning the services provided to the players, seven participants advocated for the establishment of a specialized career management department inside the academy or an agency within the control of the academy. According to five players, trusted agents could play a useful role in career planning, addressing off-

field issues on behalf of the players. However, ten players acknowledged having initiated their career plans independently, lacking specific knowledge, while the remaining five players admitted to never having engaged in career planning.

Football development

Seven players conveyed that the training programs in academies generally lacked challenging and formative aspects. Most participants expressed the absence of an individualized training designed for each player. Along the same lines, eight players underscored the inadequacy of specialized fitness training, and three players highlighted the insufficiency of visual and theoretical instructions in classroom settings within academies. Another aspect stressed by five players was the necessity for academies to implement a well-defined curriculum and teaching program tailored to specific age groups.

Regarding their academy education during youth, seven players acknowledged a lack of quality in trainings, confessing that the education received in the academy years did not contribute significantly to their development as elite footballers. Six players expressed specific concerns about the absence of a scientific foundation in the training they had received throughout their time in the academy. In contrast, eight elite players expressed satisfaction with their academy education, recognizing its substantial contribution to their status as players. When inquired about the specific potential contributions of academy years to professional careers, elite players outlined some benefits, as depicted in Graphic 9. The predominant contribution was that academies acted as a gateway to professional football, facilitating an effective adaptation to the country's professional football culture.



Graphic 9: Benefits of academy education on elite player development

In terms of football development, majority of the players, 11 out of the 15, mentioned that playing real matches was a crucial component of the player development process. For seven players, the A team (senior team) of the club was an extension of the academy education. Eight participants specifically acknowledged that engaging in competitive league matches was the most important phase for both the evolution and evaluation of an academy player. Five players proposed that academy players should play more than one official match per week and eleven subjects underlined the importance of engaging in international tournaments to raise their match experiences. Four players underscored the significance of playing in a team, advising recently-graduated academy players to choose teams based not solely on their reputation but on compatibility and on the potential for individual improvement.

In terms of the benefits of engaging in actual matches, young players cited various reasons: it motivated young players to exert greater effort ($n = 6$), increased visibility and value of young players in the football market ($n = 8$), instilled appropriate attitudes required for professional football ($n = 2$), enhanced game intelligence ($n = 3$) and tactical knowledge ($n = 4$), fostered self-confidence

($n = 5$) and competitiveness ($n = 5$) on the field, and promoted mental resilience in real-life football situations ($n = 2$).

Regarding the progression from the academy to the senior team, five players asserted that it was typically executed subjectively, contingent upon the decision of the A team's head coach. Accordingly, four players mentioned that winning pressure in the A team hindered the smooth transition of young players into senior teams. Four players advocated for an objective decision-making approach during this transition period, emphasizing the utilization of data and measurements. Furthermore, nine players emphasized the necessity for an institutionalized and organized planning of this transition by the club. Four players underscored the necessity of providing mentorship services to young players during this period. In addition to mentorship, two players advocated for the implementation of a well-planned orientation period and adaptation phase for new incoming players in the A team. Furthermore, in the perspective of two players, young players require continuity to establish themselves as elite players in senior teams; hence, patience and trust were identified as pivotal elements during the transition period. The role of parents and fans during this period was also emphasized. While one player highlighted the importance of safeguarding young players from parental influence during this phase, another player noted that fans could potentially exert a negative impact on the transition period if their expectations regarding young players were overly exaggerated.

Psychological development

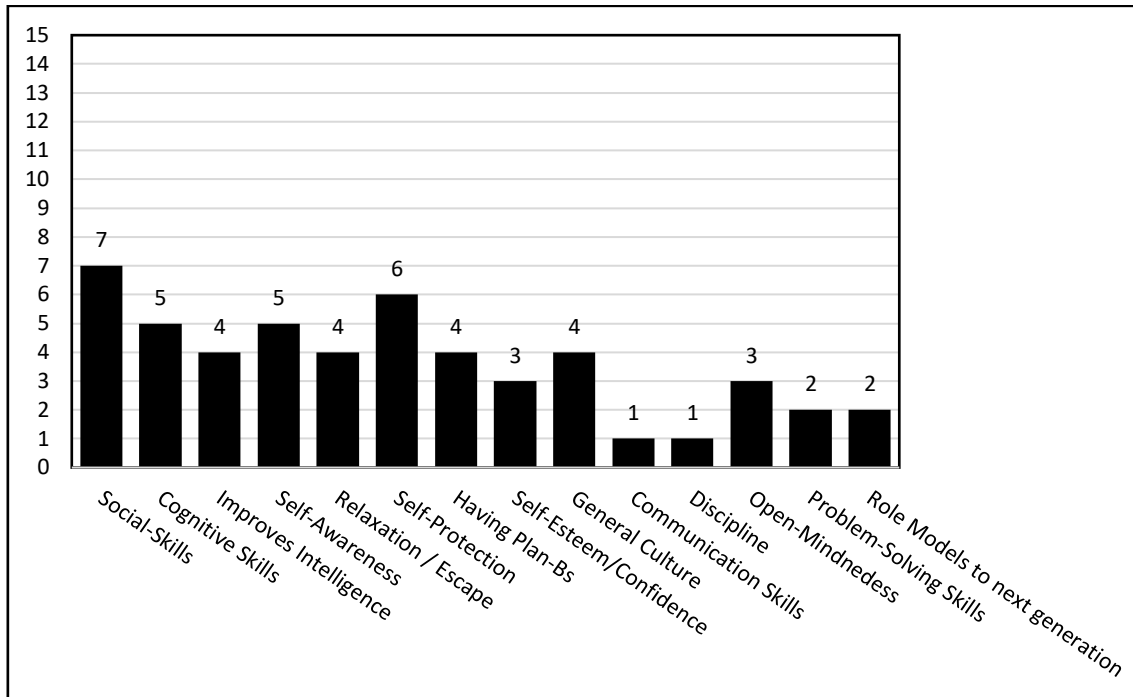
Concerning academy players psychological development, most participants ($n = 11$) strongly emphasized the vital importance of mental and psychological preparation in the player development process. This emphasis on mental skills was underscored by six players, who assertively argued that mental skills distinctly differentiated the best from the ordinary throughout a player's career in elite football. Relatedly, six players argued that Turkish players exhibited mental fragility, attributing it to the inadequate emphasis on this aspect in the trainings given by football academies. Accordingly, six players expressed the view that

academies should instruct players not only in football skills but also in the management of their emotions. Additionally, 11 players advocated for enhanced sports psychologist services within academies to facilitate effective mental preparation of young players for the professional level.

Academic development

Concerning academy players' academic development, six participants asserted that football academies bore responsibility not only for on-field football training, but also for off-field education on any subject potentially related to the footballers' professional life. On the other hand, only seven out of 15 players admitted that they had such off-field courses during their academy years. This implies that over half of the elite players who participated in our research did not receive any supplemental education for their careers during their time in the academy. To enhance the academic development of players, participants recommended that extracurricular lessons, such as English language ($n = 11$), communication with media ($n = 3$), financial education ($n = 4$), legal knowledge concerning contracts and regulations ($n = 2$), and insights into sponsorship deals ($n = 1$), be integrated into the academy curriculum. Four players supported the idea of providing academic tutors in the academy to assist with players' school lessons and academic improvement.

In addition to the academy's educational services, it was also stressed that regular school education offered several significant benefits for young footballers throughout their careers, as illustrated in Graphic 10. The most recurrent responses emphasized the importance of social development and self-protection skills. The players argued that, through a proper school education, they could enhance their self-awareness, intelligence, and ability to distinguish between what was good and bad for themselves.



Graphic 10: Benefits of school education on elite player development

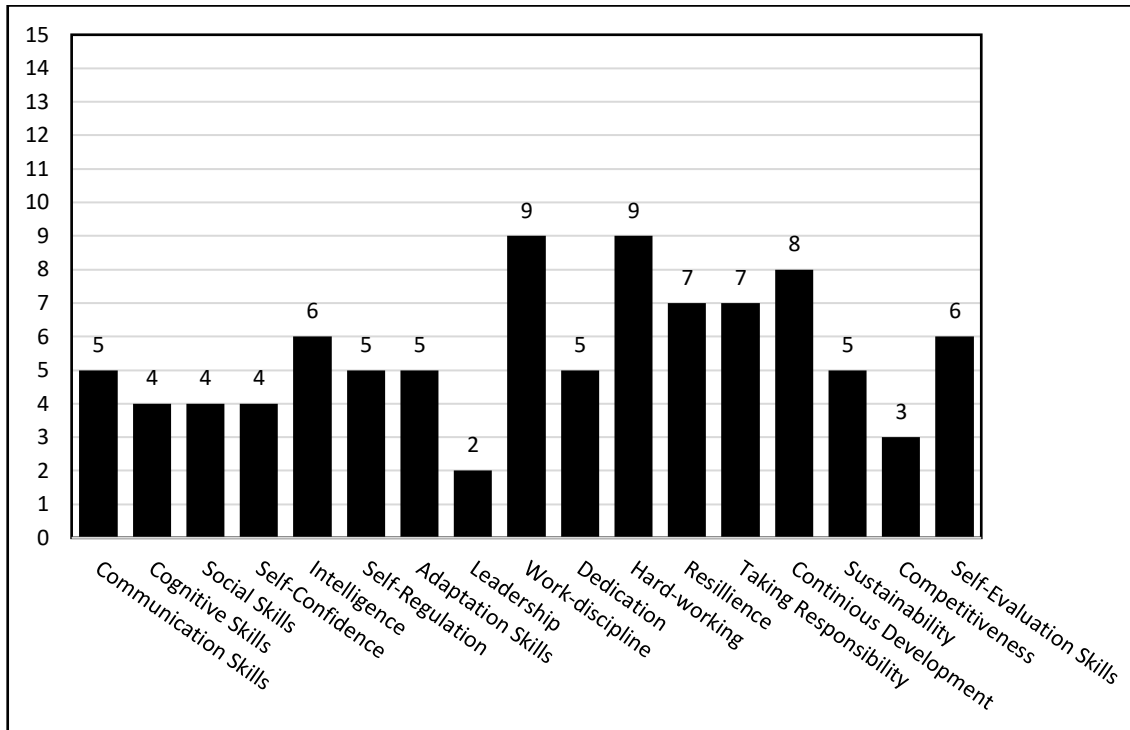
Financial support

The players' perspectives on financial support within football academies was unanimous since all players defended that a moderate financial allocation was deemed necessary for all players. According to seven players, money was, in fact, an integral component of professional football and should thus be regarded as inherent to the academy education process. However, nine players underscored the necessity for careful management of the allocated amount, warning against substantial financial rewards at early stages due to their potential to be detrimental and distracting to the developmental process.

Output domain

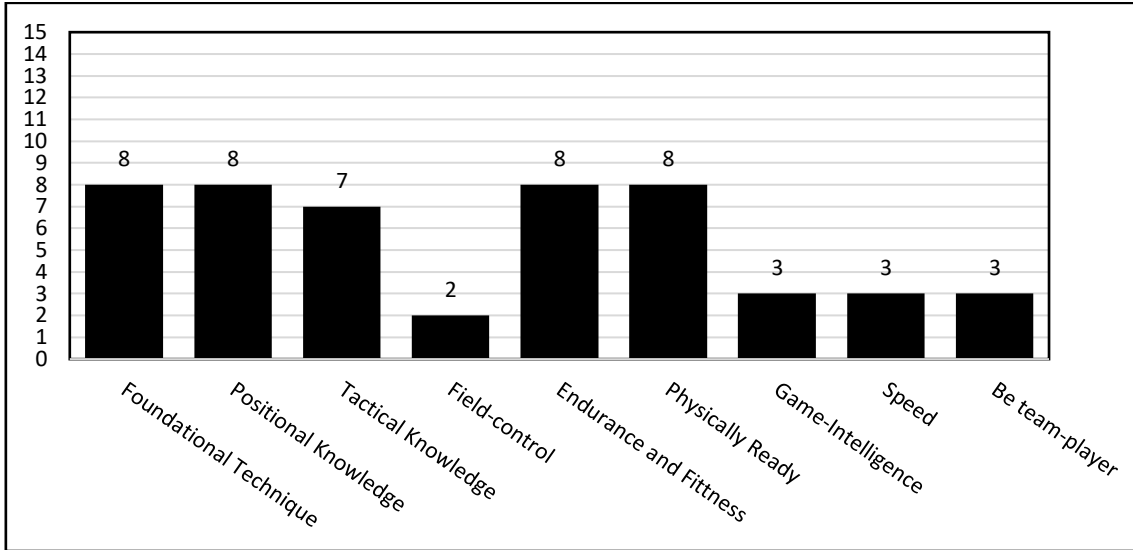
Within the output domain, participants delineated certain attributes and skills anticipated from players nurtured in academies as indicative of a successful outcome. These skills were presented as soft skills and football skills and are illustrated in Graphics 11 and 12. Regarding soft skills, work discipline, being hard-working, and a commitment to continuous development throughout one's career were identified as pivotal factors that contributed to the formation of a

successful football player at the elite level; self-evaluation skills were also deemed particularly valuable, especially in the context of self-development.



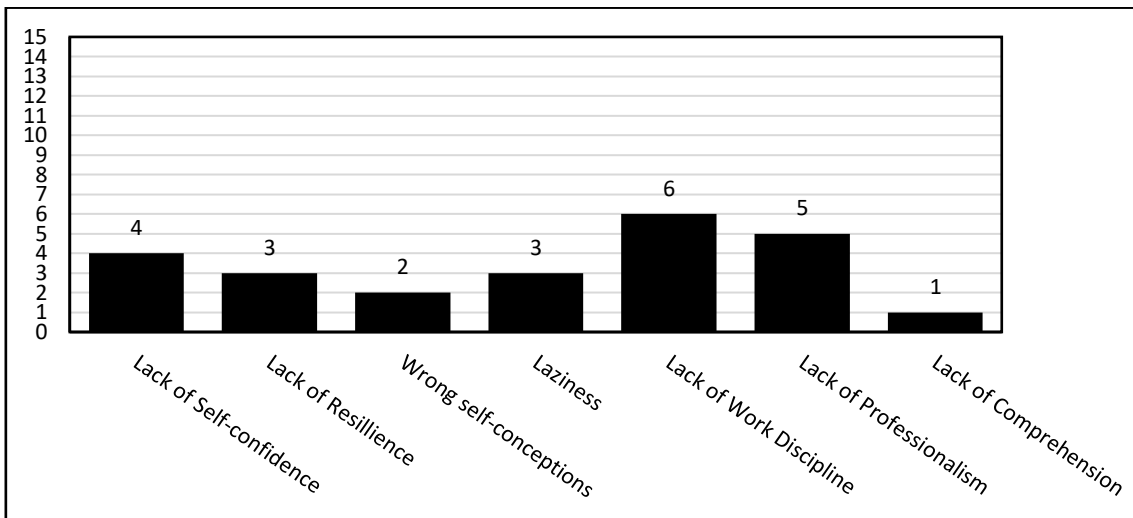
Graphic 11: Anticipated soft skills of graduated academy players.

Regarding football skills, eight players stressed the importance of young players being physically fit to handle the challenges posed by senior players during a match. Similarly, eight players pointed out that young players need to have strong endurance and strength to compete effectively for the entire 90 minutes at senior level. Foundational football technique including such skills like ball control, shooting, and dribbling as well as tactical and positional knowledge were deemed particularly useful to pursue a successful football career. Overall, elite players discussed various football skills they expect from young players developed in academies, as shown in Graphic 12.



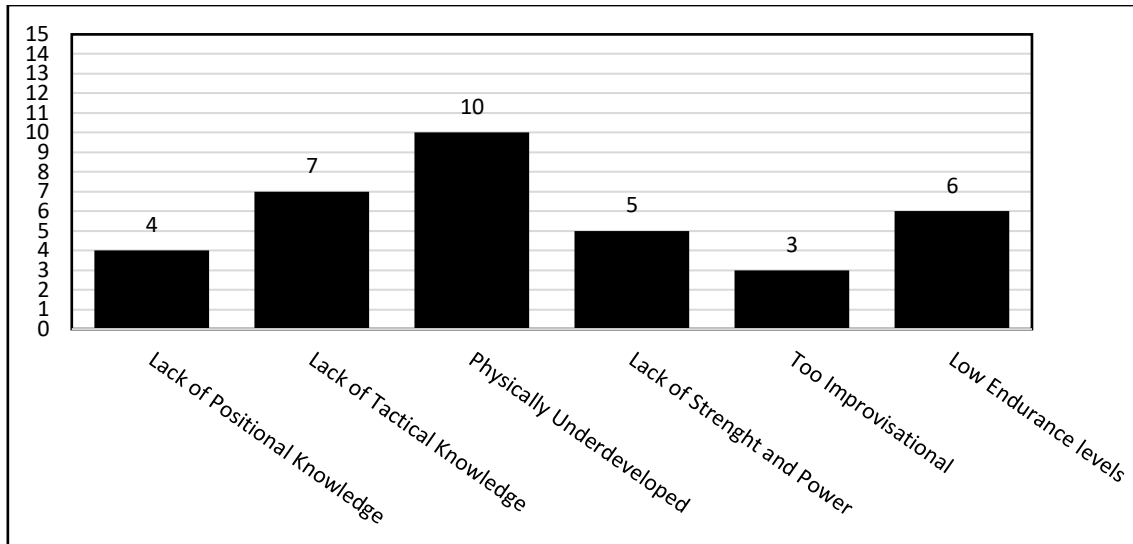
Graphic 12: Expected football skills of graduated academy players

On the other hand, the players also identified issues commonly observed regarding soft skills among academy-raised players in Turkey, as illustrated in Graphic 13.



Graphic 13: Noticed problems among academy-raised players.

Concerning football skills, the players explained some of the football related problems among young players who come from Turkish academies to the senior teams. These problems are depicted in the Graphic 14.



Graphic 14 Football-related problems among academy-raised players

Feedback domain

In the domain of feedback, the participants emphasized that the cultural barriers inherent in the country significantly shaped the effectiveness and quality of communication within football clubs. In line with this observation, five players indicated that the attitudes and behaviours of existing senior players and coaches in the country impacted the attitudes and behaviours of the next generation of Turkish players ($n = 5$). In addition, six players underscored the paramount importance of positive encouragement and constructive attitudes from senior players towards younger players.

Five players believed that providing premium payments or financial incentives to both academy staff and players was an important means of motivation, and management should consider it in the planning phase. Additionally, to enhance motivation and dedication, seven players recommended organizing social events and activities within the academy to foster a sense of belonging among players to the club.

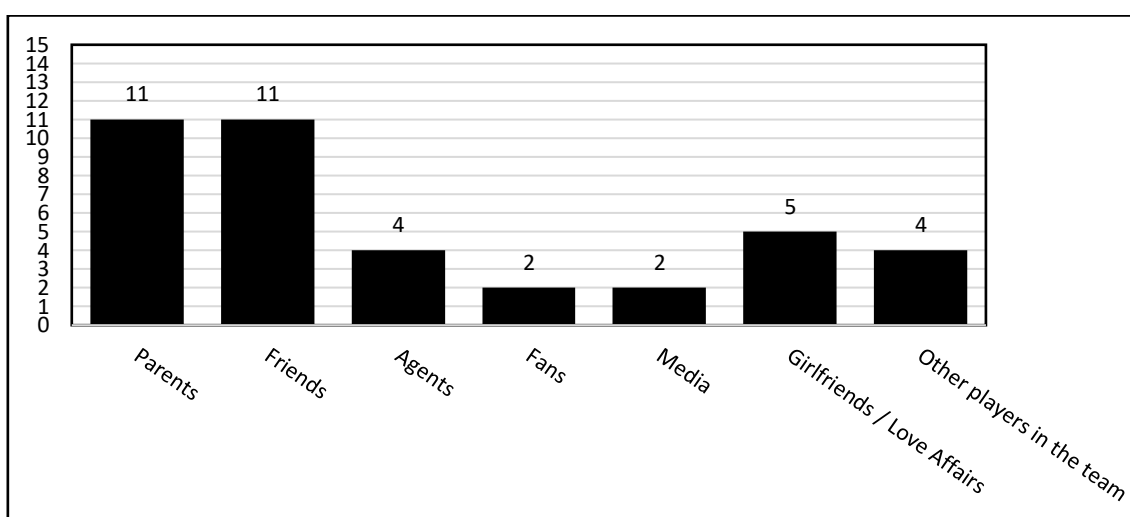
Concerning external communication, ten players recommended the

implementation of a well-defined marketing strategy for the academy, overseen by the academy management. This suggestion stemmed from the belief that marketing activities would be beneficial for enhancing the visibility of players in the market. Furthermore, eleven players emphasized the effectiveness of marketing as a means to attract new talented players to the academy and to allure more competent staff to the club. Two players also expressed concerns about the potential negative impact of excessive marketing and public relations activities. They believed that an abundance of such activities may confuse young players and divert their focus from playing and developmental endeavours. For eight players, the best marketing activity would be showcasing academy players in the senior team.

Environment domain

External Influencers

According to the participants in our study, there were notable influencers in the player development process, as depicted in Graphic 15. Parents and close friends of the player were regarded as the most influential individuals. Furthermore, particularly during adolescence, emotional attachments to the opposite sex and relationships with girlfriends were identified as influential factors in the player's developmental journey.



Graphic 15: Influential others on academy players

Moreover, nine players emphasized the crucial role their parents played in their journey to becoming professional elite players today. Interestingly, five players unequivocally stressed the imperative necessity of organizing educational sessions for the parents of players within the academies.

Football federation

About the football federation, the players highlighted significant issues, elucidating the responsibilities they believed the federation should assume to address those problems as illustrated in Table 16. The predominant issues primarily revolved around the absence of an effective controlling function and a well-defined national strategic vision for youth football.

Table 16: Federation’s influence on academy management

Turkish Football Federation’s (TFF) influence on academy management	
Noticed problems	Direct responsibilities
There is nepotism in TFF (F9)	Better Education courses for all academy staff (F3,F9)
Lack of quality coaching education (F9)	Academy TV for knowledge sharing (F10)
Lack of a defined football system/methodology (F5,F7,F9,F11)	Reward Systems as incentives to clubs (F4,F13)
Lack of competitive league system (F5,F7,F9,F11,F13)	B Teams should be created in regular leagues (F13)
Lack of national talent identification system (F9,F12)	More effective controlling function (F9,F11,F14)
TFF neglects the controlling function (F4,F5,F13,F14)	Define long-term national football strategy (F5,F7,F14)
	Set a license system for club’s top management and governance too (F3,F11)

Sports policy

The participants frequently emphasized the significance of the government's role and highlighted sports policy matters relevant to academy management in the country. These issues primarily revolved around the schooling of elite football players and shortages in the national education system. Additionally, there was a concern about the absence of robust sports policies, emphasizing the need for substantive measures rather than actions driven by political populism. The

comprehensive list of government-related problems, along with the proposed actions to be taken by the government concerning football academies is provided in Table 17.

Table 17: Influence of sports policy on academy management

Country's Sports Policy Role in Academy Management	
Noticed Problems	Direct Responsibilities
Schooling of Elite Athlete (F1,F2,F4,F8,F11,F14,F15)	Solve schooling problem of elite athletes (F2,F14,F8,F15), Schools in clubs (F14), Online/distant option (F8)
Public Universities don't solve problems of football (F8,F9)	Create online data/knowledge sharing platforms (F10)
Lack of investment in grassroots football (F10,F14)	Build more public football fields (F10,F13,F14)
A general national education quality is low (F14)	Make solid sports policy, not populism (F2,F14)
Inactive Society – National Physical Inactivity (F13)	Support more scientific research in football (F9,F10,F11)

6.4 Discussion and conclusion

The present study aimed to investigate the factors influencing the effectiveness of management of football academies in Turkey. Utilizing the systems theory to management as its theoretical underpinning, the study focused in five essential domains characteristic of an open system: input, process, feedback, output, and environmental aspects, from the viewpoint of elite football players.

Input domain

The main subject of a football academy is the player. Hence, the quality of the incoming player into the system becomes of utmost importance for successful academy management. However, the findings of the present study indicated that the selection procedures for the academy appeared to be done subjectively by simple short-term trial weeks or test games, or by the recommendations of acquaintances. Some players were not even selected but simply invited to train with the youth teams by some coaches and they just continued their career until today. It should be noted that, Göktepe (2013) claimed that nepotism often played a role in talent selections in sports academies in Turkey. In addition, it is significant to point out that talent selection is not a one-time event; it should be

carried out through a continuous and lengthy process of revision (Kula, 2019), to eliminate those who are not suitable to continue. Apparently, any kind of nepotism and unfairness in player selection must be prevented (Sunay & Kaya, 2018) and the detection, identification and selection processes in Turkish academies must be defined objectively, in a more organized and informed way (Açıkada & Hazır, 2016; Kula, 2019; Sarmiento et al., 2018; Sevimli, 2015). Moreover, consideration should be given to physical, cognitive and psychological attributes along with technical skill abilities, when making decisions regarding talent identification (Williams et al., 2020).

Some players stated that they were introduced to football by their schoolteachers. This finding offers important insights into talent detection practices. With 43,455 primary and secondary schools across Turkey (MEB, 2022), there exists a significant opportunity to leverage all physical education teachers in these schools as natural talent scouts for the nation. This could be achieved through effective coordination between the sports ministry and the federation. Recognizing that the timing of talent identification is as crucial as the identification itself, proper nurturing at the right time is essential for talent to reach its full potential to play at the highest elite level (Müniroğlu & Subak, 2018). Late starting ages for organized football training was one of the concerns identified by the players. Because of this, schools play an important role in national talent detection.

In addition to quality academy coaching, we must also underscore the vital role of A team head coaches in the player development process, especially during transition periods. The quality and quantity of available coaches at the senior team level for young academy-raised players can be determinant for their future success in elite levels (Coyle, 2009). Some players have highlighted that their first head coaches in senior teams played the most crucial role in their journey to becoming elite players. This underscores the significant influence head coaches of senior teams can have in the final development phase of elite players. If academy players are not trusted and given opportunities by senior team head

coaches, their education and development process could automatically and prematurely cease. Such an incident can be destructive for an academy player aspiring to become a professional footballer.

The staff working within the academy also plays a crucial role in the development of players. Players particularly emphasized the significance of supplementary staff, including expert sports psychologists, nutritionists, specialized fitness coaches, and physiotherapists, viewing them as integral contributors to the holistic development process in football academies. Nonetheless, while many academies had gyms, the absence of expert fitness coaches tailored to the physical needs of players at different ages was notable. This absence left players to engage in fitness training independently, without scientific guidance and proper nutritional support. Consequently, they could face challenges in achieving physical development comparable to their European counterparts.

In terms of facilities, academies should offer full-board accommodation to players, by transforming the facilities into a home for young players, an arrangement that would save time for training and coordination of the activities. Especially in Turkey, since most selected players come from disadvantaged socio-economic areas, academies should provide their players with full-board housing (Şenel & Saygın, 2021). Alternatively, school education could be organized within the academies or through distant online learning. These measures can save energy, time, and money on transportation between school, home, and training grounds. Moreover, providing full-board accommodation would ensure equality among all players, better nutrition, and improved rest control, while also protecting players from external factors. Players further suggested that, after a certain age, training facilities should be located on the same site as the senior team. Moving youth players into a new advanced learning environment may be associated with positive performance outcomes for high potential players (Kelly et al., 2020). Therefore, it is recommended that the oldest age group in the academy, typically U19 in the Turkish football system, shares the same site facilities with the senior team. This arrangement is proposed to

allow talented younger players to build relationships with professional players, fostering suitable handling of challenges at the professional level (Mills et al., 2014)

Process domain

Overall, players expressed dissatisfaction with the formative aspects of training, highlighting that academies often prioritize the development of youth teams for upcoming matches rather than focusing on the development of players for the long term. To address this, more challenging training sessions (Mills et al., 2014) should incorporate formative elements, to teach new skills. It is crucial to recognize that these young players are, first and foremost, students who come to learn football. Traditional training schemes often lack individualized training tailored to the specific needs of each player. Therefore, individual measurements should be implemented in academies to assess the unique needs of each player at the beginning of each season, enabling the design of tailor-made extra training for individual development. Furthermore, the lack of visual feedback and theoretical instructions in classrooms was evident in Turkish academies. Specifically, visual feedback can be enhanced by involving players in watching themselves play (Abrahams, 2012). Moreover, theoretical classroom lessons are necessary to enhance declarative tactical knowledge of Turkish players. Additionally, to improve the overall quality of education and achieve the desired standardization, it is necessary to develop curriculum tailored to different age groups.

Providing real-match experiences as an essential service provided by football clubs to their players is crucial. Match play performance gives young athletes a chance to combine their technical, tactical, physical and psychological components to effectively participate in the game (Bonney et al., 2020). It is imperious to recognize that a player is not fundamentally distinct as an academy player or a senior player but just undergoes a transition from youth to senior football. This transition becomes possible when the club offers opportunities for the player to compete in the senior football team. To address this, it is

recommended that football players who have recently completed their academy education undergo an obligatory internship period. Failure to complete this period would mean that the club cannot claim the players were not raised by the academy but rather not utilized by the senior team.

According to our research, there is a fine line between raising and developing a player. The academies are primarily responsible for the raising part, but the senior team share responsibility for the developing part. Confirming this, Hager and Hodgkinson (2009) argue that learning is an ongoing process rather than a series of fixed acquisition events. Research with Olympic medal winners has confirmed that training and competition must coexist harmoniously (Gambardella et al., 2000). In addition, Armour (2013) discusses that development has not a fixed direction nor a finished identity. Notably, engaging in competition, if appropriately managed, is seen as a highly developmental feature (Côté et al., 2013; North et al., 2014). Successful international elite soccer players have often accumulated enough practice hours after 13 years (Helsen et al., 2000), which is more than the time spent in a football academy, reinforcing the idea that the A team serves as an extension of academy education.

All these indicate that only a football academy training is not sufficient to reach and maintain an elite level. The player development process is a chain, and any negligence in its parts can lead to a breakdown in the outcome. We cannot expect young players to become professional footballers while keeping them playing in amateur or youth football. The academy games prioritize learning over winning (Topkaya, 2015), and playing against the same-level young players may limit challenging situations and competitiveness. Apparently, no system can produce top level players if they play only in trainings or constantly with low level rivals. Moreover, learning is most effective when active participation and connection to real-world contexts are present (Foreman et al., 2004; Roschelle et al., 2000). Worthy opponents are essential for attaining excellence in elite sport (Austin, 2009). In this regard, lack of opportunity in competitive league games is a significant barrier in youth player transition to professional first-team football

(McGuigan et al., 2023). This information is crucial for achieving tactical and mental maturity and improving game intelligence, confidence, and competitiveness. Therefore, providing academy-raised players with real-match opportunities is an indispensable service of a successful football academy. The primary challenge lies in persuading all clubs to give young players more match time in the first team (Poli et al., 2017), as otherwise, all efforts in the club's academy might be in vain.

Hence, it is advisable that if the player's current club does not offer playing chances in the senior team, the player should promptly explore alternative avenues to engage in senior football. Establishing a career department within the academy that assists graduates in finding internships or initial positions in the football sector would be a logical step. Previous research has underlined the importance of providing athletes with athletic and post-career support, highlighting the need for comprehensive assistance throughout their careers (De Bosscher et al., 2008; De Knop et al., 2004). Other authors claim that an academy should offer the players a pathway into professional career (Bramham et al., 2007; Williams, 2014). Consequently, academy management must organize career consultation services to find the optimal solutions for players raised in their club. Recognizing this need, many top European clubs have established satellite teams as platforms for promising academy players to gain valuable real-match experiences (ECA Report, 2012).

The present research also found that players proposed having two-games a week during their academy years to gain more experience. Additionally, it was found that Turkish players tended to engage in organized football much later than their European counterparts. For example, one player began organized training at the age of 15, while another elite player started at the age of 16. These starting ages are considerably late in modern football training, resulting in a lower sport age for Turkish players compared to their European counterparts. Consequently, Turkish players may lack playing experiences in their youth years. To address this gap, it is proposed that organizing more games during the academy years and involving

players in organized football at an earlier age could be beneficial approaches. The observed trend indicates that the age at which one starts engaging in organized sports training is a significant criterion for further developmental stages (Kula, 2019).

In most Turkish academies, the youngest age group is the U12 teams (Çevik & Onağ, 2019). This means that young players who generally start playing football before the age of 7 may experience at least a 5-year gap until they are selected to participate in organized football training. In the past, streets used to serve as informal football academies for preschool children, but in contemporary times, it's no longer feasible to rely on the streets to solve this issue. Children are unable to acquire the same amount of outdoor play than that of previous generations (Solomon-Moore et al., 2018). This situation suggests that the Turkish Football Federation may need to create special projects for early football education targeting preschool children. Early coaching is also crucial for shaping the character of youngsters (Beswick, 2016), and important themes such as fair play should be instilled in the hands of qualified pedagogue coaches during these formative years (Erdemli, 2008). Additionally, early engagement with sports not only brings enjoyment but is also fundamental for the development of sports expertise (Côté et al., 2003). A considerable body of evidence supports the idea that athletes who undergo a diversified early sport experience and engage in deliberate play during early childhood are more likely to achieve an elite level of performance in sports (Coutinho et al., 2016; Hayman et al., 2011). In other words, players at their childhood years need large quantities of football-specific activities in order to be elite level footballers in future years (Zibung & Conzelmann, 2013). As an alternative solution, licensed football schools affiliated with clubs in different cities seem to be a viable option, serving as a means for early education and talent detection for the youngest academy-age groups in academies.

Output domain

Regarding football skills, while tactical and positional development is deemed necessary, an excessive focus on these concepts may hinder individual talent and skill improvement. This overemphasis could potentially lead to the cultivation of homogeneous players within the academy. Therefore, academies are advised to place equal importance on nurturing individual talents and improving technical skills. This is often referred to as the "X factor," where the player possesses at least one exceptional attribute to make a difference in the game (McGuigan et al., 2023). The future of football will invariably require and demand star players who can dynamically influence the game. Recognizing this, clubs should anticipate future trends in playing and establish essential performance markers to guide development systems (Martindale et al., 2005). Players themselves emphasize that mental skills play an essential role in distinguishing the best from the ordinary throughout long career years. Consequently, the psychological development of players should be taken more seriously and integrated into the education programs of academies as a regular component of football training. Many players underscore the significance of intrinsic motivation and the power of emotion control, recognizing that mental states significantly impact player performance (Abrams, 2012). It seems clear that these services are no longer a luxury, but a necessity in modern football education.

Research shows that players who set goals, take responsibility, engage in self-evaluation, and exhibit self-regulation, along with a strong character (Beswick, 2016) stand higher chances of succeeding at the elite level and should be preferred by clubs. These attributes inevitably reflect on the player's private life, a crucial factor in maintaining a player's performance throughout their entire career. These qualities cannot be forcibly taught in academies; rather, the player must take personal responsibility and learn to act as a true professional to sustain success at the highest level. In connection to this topic, we have coined a new term, 'cultural barriers,' to describe a hindrance to the development of Turkish players. This term signifies that the cultural habits and attitudes of senior players can impact and influence the habits and attitudes of the new generation of young players. In other words, the next generation of footballers is shaped by the current

and past generations of footballers in Turkey. This form of learning, known as observational learning, is a process through which individuals learn by watching others (Abrams, 2012). It serves as an influential, albeit unofficial, means of learning, supplementing the formal education provided in academies. For instance, if senior footballers exhibit laziness, the next generation may adopt a similar approach, perceiving it as an accepted and valid way of being a footballer in the country. Similarly, if senior players neglect their academic education, the following generation may also devalue studying, assuming it's unnecessary to become an elite footballer. There is a motivation to replicate the modelled behaviour (Abrams, 2012) because players observe its effectiveness. From professionalism to fair-play ethics, investment preferences to dressing style, many aspects of today's realities are shaped by the former generation of players. This observation may offer insight into cultural differences, explaining why there are distinctions between highly dutiful, well-disciplined Danish or Japanese players and Turkish players. In addition to former players, teammates in the same academy may also shape the motivational and learning climate in the developmental paths (Reverberi et al., 2020). Hence, academy management should endeavor to maintain group dynamics and group quality at a desired level to enhance individual performances.

It is noteworthy that football development is, to some extent, influenced by factors beyond an individual's control, including initial luck in selection and injury history. For instance, being at the right club at the opportune moment can significantly enhance a player's career, while unfortunate injuries can have adverse effects on player development across technical, tactical, physical, and psychological domains (Johnson et al., 2009; Jones et al., 2019).

Environment domain

External influencers

In terms of influential others, parents and peers (Coutinho et al., 2021), agents, fans, and media may be influential in the development process (Beswick, 2016). Therefore, academy management should closely monitor their impact on players

and devise appropriate precautionary measures in case it is needed. For instance, the services of a sports psychologist specializing in relationships may be more beneficial than those of a general psychologist in case the young player's performance is affected by a girlfriend or a personal relationship. Or instead of just expecting parents to be more positive in the development phase, the club can organize specially designed courses for the parents of the athletes.

Football Federation

Players frequently emphasized that the federation should ensure that academy-raised young players had access to competitive league systems to facilitate their development. This appears to be a significant challenge in Turkey, hindering the progression of academy graduates into professional football. A player who has graduated from an academy at the age of 19 often faces the dilemma of being ineligible for U19 teams but struggling to find a place in the A team. Consequently, they end up waiting for opportunities, wasting precious time. Moreover, there is a call for the Turkish Football Federation to implement reward and incentive systems to encourage clubs to field academy-raised players (Açak et al., 2020). In this regard, the federation needs to create competitive league formats for young players and enforce its controlling function more rigorously and impose sanctions for poor facilities and conditions provided by the academies. This lack of supervision is a factor in the underdevelopment of football players in Turkish academy system (Çevik & Onağ, 2019).

It is also worth underlying that half of the elite Turkish National Team players who participated in this research admitted to not receiving any good education in their academy years, and even affirmed that their academy years did not directly contribute to their senior careers. This is a sad confession that warrants contemplation. Addressing this issue requires the intervention of the Turkish Football Federation, as it holds a direct responsibility to organize more relevant education programs to improve coaching quality in the country. Enhancing coaching quality in the sector is essential to ensure standardization in coaching and teaching quality across academies.

Sport policy

The results of this investigation showed that elite players frequently began their football journey with amateur clubs in their childhood neighbourhoods, underscoring the significance of grassroots football in elite player development. Regardless of the excellence of academies, they ultimately receive players from their operating environments. Grassroots and amateur football serve as the initial introduction to sports for children, keeping them engaged in the sport, particularly in football. In such environments, young players have the opportunity to regularly play football, receive their initial coaching, and participate in local competitions, all of which are crucial for their early development. Amateur sports create a pool of potential talents, and the larger the talent pool, the better the selection chances for academies. In essence, it is from grassroots that future players are born (Hassan & Hamil, 2010). This context implies that the health of any professional sports league is ultimately dependent on the strength of a particular sport's grassroots program in the country. For example, as of 2022, Turkey has 8257 amateur football clubs (Turkish Football Federation, 2022), most of which have only one senior football team without a youth football section. In comparison, Germany boasts nearly 25,000 amateur clubs (Breur et al., 2019) with youth football sections comprising a total of 160,000 football teams. As a result, Germany boasts 14 times more licensed football players than Turkey (Sunay & Kaya, 2018). This simple contrast may contribute to Germany's ability to detect and raise world-class football talents among its 4-million Turkish immigrants, while Turkey faces challenges in producing players of the same quality among its 83 million citizens. A more active nation with a robust amateur base is the foundation for cultivating elite professional athletes at the top of the pyramid. Specifically, grassroots clubs remain the basis of sports and characterize the successful European sports model (Vos et al., 2012). Therefore, if the government and the federation aim to improve professional football in Turkey, they must prioritize collaborative efforts to enhance amateur football clubs and grassroots activities in the country. Accordingly, the Turkish Football Federation

should consider re-designing the competition system and leagues in an effective and realistic manner, recognizing the significant influence of national and international competitions on elite athlete development (De Bosscher et al., 2008; Sevimli, 2015).

In conclusion, the present investigation suggests that the challenges faced by elite football development predominantly stem from managerial issues in the clubs, which significantly influence and shape the technical and training aspects associated with player development within football academies. Hence, considering that all processes, from detection to selection, from development to playing in a league, are heavily influenced by the quality of management activities, it becomes crucial that academy managers, followed by club executives and the federation, should adopt a coherent, balanced, and long-term approach to youth football development in Turkey.

CHAPTER 7: GENERAL DISCUSSION

The present work, based on the systems approach to management, aimed to understand the challenges and difficulties within the Turkish football academy system, from the perspective of three different stakeholders, namely managers, coaches and elite players. Specifically, the research outlined the essential requirements and services across the input, process, feedback, output, and environmental dimensions of the football academy system in Turkey. The concluding and integrated discussion of the dissertation will be presented within these domains, with both theoretical and practical insights aimed at improving the management of football academies in Turkey.

7.1 Input domain

7.1.1 People

The findings indicate that effective football academy management requires careful selection of four main inputs - players, coaches, staff, and resources - as they enter the system. Three of these inputs fall within the human resources domain. Therefore, the primary responsibility of academy management is to identify the most suitable human resources for the academy, including talented children as players, qualified coaches as educators, and other academy staff as supportive employees. This is commonly referred to as the organization's workforce, and when meticulously selected, it provides the essential force required for successful operations. The essence of sports management lies in working with and through competent people to achieve organizational goals (Bateman & Snell, 2015), making people one of the most important assets of a sports organization (Bourke, 2003). Regardless of the organizational structure or system, the quality and qualifications of the people involved are crucial in vitalizing that structure (Bolman & Deal, 2008). In this context, Trenberth (2003) argues that clubs should implement more rigorous selection policies and induction programs at all levels for employees. This is why the best football clubs in the world emphasize appointing the right staff to the academy, considering

suitable personality, necessary tacit knowledge (Desouza, 2003), as well as desired skills and experiences to manage their youth programs (Nesti & Sulley, 2015).

First of all, managers need to establish a clear talent detection and scouting system in their academies (Balliauw et al., 2022). This system should clearly define the target market and region, increasing focus and facilitating the coordination of scouting activities. Moreover, the scouting methodology and approach must be transparent, making the entrance procedure to the academy fairer for all promising children. In other words, formalization and standardization of selection procedures must be explicitly established. In Turkey, the selection procedures for academies still appear to be conducted subjectively, relying on recommendations from acquaintances or through simple short-term trial weeks or test games. Göktepe (2013) claimed that there had often been nepotism in talent selections in the academies. Some players were not even selected but simply invited to train with the youth teams by acquainted coaches, and they continued their careers until today. Thus, the detection, identification, and selection processes must be redefined objectively in a more organized, objective, and informed way (Açıkada & Hazır, 2016; Kula, 2019) in the academies. It's understood that in Turkish football, there are still issues to be addressed and solved on this matter (Sunay & Kaya, 2018).

In addition to selecting the right talent, retaining talented players is a crucial component of effective football academy management. While the selection part is more easily understandable, the real challenge lies in player retention. Keeping genuine talent in the academy is as important as the initial selection for the future success of academy management. Although it may sound harsh, leaving some young players behind needs to be done at the right time for the benefit of all parties involved. In Turkey, the prevailing approach is that a 12-year-old player is selected into the academy, and they continue in football until the age of 19, regardless of their talent. Unfortunately, there is often a lack of communication with the player until the last moment. When the time for this inevitable

conversation finally arrives, it's often too late for the player to build another life or career, leading to more destructive outcomes. In other words, the player is misled about their talent during the long academy years and is left behind helplessly. Moreover, it means that the football academy expends its effort, time, and resources on the wrong players in vain for many years. Therefore, the selection should not be a fixed event; rather, it must be an ongoing dynamic process (Machado et al., 2023), even for those who are already in the academies. For example, in England, professional academies are required to conduct tests on their players aged U9-U21, at least 3 times per year (Saward et al., 2020). In essence, talent confirmation within predetermined intervals and, when needed, deselection holds equal significance to the initial selection process for football academies (Sevimli, 2015; Williams et al., 2020).

After selecting the right talent, nurturing that talent should fall into the hands of the right coaches. The academy management plays a crucial role in selecting the best available coaches for the academy, as the quality of the coaches ultimately defines the quality of the players raised in the academy. This, in turn, directly influences the overall performance of the academy management. Particularly, a pedagogic approach towards young players, along with effective communication and teaching skills, is highly valued in academy coaching. Therefore, coaching education programs are observed to benefit from lessons on communication (Beswick, 2016) and on pedagogic aspects. Moreover, the academy management should take note of these attributes when selecting coaches and staff for the academy. Possessing specific training knowledge tailored to different age groups and contexts is a prerequisite for ideal coaching in the player development process (Armour, 2013; Côté et al., 2013; Erdemli, 2008).

In this context, academy coaching should be considered a separate expertise domain from senior football coaching. Training for children and teenagers is distinct from training for adults (Kula, 2019), making it crucial for academy coaches to specialize in child development (Beswick, 2016) and youth coaching for specific age groups. Expert coaches with domain-specific knowledge are

essential for fostering improvement, especially as athletes advance in skill level (Baker et al., 2003). Therefore, the term "academy coaching" should be redefined as "age-group-specific coaching" based on the targeted age groups of the academy. Instead of licensing a general academy coach, it is advisable to have licensed coaches for each specific age group. For example, the knowledge and ability requirements for a U12 coach would differ significantly from those for a U18 coach, and coaching U19 players would demand different skills and attributes than working with U10 teams. Specialized education for coaches is important as football has become a sport in which expertise is pursued (Haugaasen et al., 2014). This specialization can also be extended to fitness coaches working in the academy, considering that movement development varies for each age group (Gallahue et al., 2012). The physical and emotional needs of a 12-year-old player are distinct from those of an adult athlete, and expertise is crucial to address these differences. This is particularly important in preventing stress bone fractures and injuries related to the volume and intensity of training sessions (New & Gill, 2010). Therefore, a fitness coach effective with senior players may not be as efficient when working with children.

Furthermore, it is crucial to note that while a former playing career may bring some advantages in coaching or management, especially for older age groups, it might not make a significant difference, and it could even be detrimental for very young age groups if the former player lacks pedagogical knowledge and approach. The quality of training sessions primarily depends on the expertise and capabilities of the coaches conducting them in the academies (Farrow et al., 2007). Hence, the ideal academy coach selected by the academy management should possess academic and scientific knowledge with a pedagogical approach to youth coaching. Only after fulfilling these criteria should a former playing experience be considered an additional positive trait. A competent coach in academies should have both theoretical and practical knowledge of youth development and teaching skills (Topkaya, 2015).

Additionally, besides coaching, the other staff working within the academy also

represents a crucial asset for a sports organization (Bourke, 2003). Research conducted in a UK academy (Meek, 2010) highlights the expertise and commitment of the staff as a key strength of a football academy, and similar research on the development of elite athletes (Gould et al., 2002) indicates that a wide range of long-term individual influences can significantly impact the overall development of athletes. This underscores that the quality of the staff is not only vital for the organizational performance of the football academy but is also crucial for the performance and development of the players (Nesti & Sulley, 2015). Elite players will always require the support of proficient and trusted experts in various relevant subjects (Houlihan & Green, 2008; Krsmanovic, 2014).

In the Turkish context, a prevailing issue is that the hiring of academy staff, including coaches and managers, often relies on personal recommendations rather than evaluating written and proven career resumes. To enhance the quality of the internal workforce, it is essential to reorganize hiring systems and methods within academies transparently and make them publicly available, ensuring openness to all competitive candidates. It is observed that only a few academies engage expert staff on a full-time basis, while the majority still depend on part-time workers. In Turkish academies, coaches dedicated solely to academy coaching are rare (Sunay & Kaya, 2018), with many treating it more as a hobby or part-time activity than a professional job (Topkaya, 2013). This situation inherently diminishes the level of professionalism and competency among staff in Turkish academies, fostering an environment that leans toward amateurism even within so-called professional teams. In this context, Donuk (2016) recognizes that professionalism is one of the most critical missing elements in modern sports management in Turkey.

Likewise, it is evident that selecting suitable and skilled staff is not a conclusion but rather a favourable starting point. To continually enhance the workforce, academy management should conduct regular assessments of staff needs and provide necessary internal and external educational opportunities (Böhlke, 2006; Hoye et al., 2012). Investing in the internal education of staff should be viewed

as an investment rather than a cost, as the quality of the staff significantly influences the long-term survival of the club (Carson, 2013; Sunay, 2016). It is also recommended that academy management utilize delegation (Lussier & Kimball, 2014; Yetim, 2019) and job enrichment techniques to empower academy staff. A football academy should operate as an active educational institution for all individuals working within it.

The People section cannot be concluded without underscoring the crucial importance of the academy manager. From selection to retention of staff, from assessment to providing internal education, all these coordination and leadership tasks are managed by the academy manager. Therefore, the academy manager should be someone who is well-educated, possesses managerial skills and attributes as indicated in the empirical study I, and can effectively execute the management functions such coordination, planning, organizing, staffing, controlling, leading, implementation, marketing, curriculum developing and being liaison to external world. The quality of the manager is so influential in the academy's performances that some of the respondents in the study even asserted that the management quality in the A team (senior team) directly affects the quality of the manager and management in the academy. Therefore, the manager input should not be overlooked in football management.

7.1.2 Resources

Only after ensuring the quality of the workforce in the club system, the fourth input, which is resources, can be leveraged to achieve the expected results of the academy. As service quality is significantly influenced by the provided conditions, it is the responsibility of the management to create good working conditions and a suitable environment (Williams, 2014) for academy players and staff. This is because only talented individuals with the necessary resources and knowledge can contribute to the prosperity, growth, and competitive advantage of a sports organization (Taylor et al., 2008). There are still significant shortages in terms of fields, equipment, and facilities in Turkish football academies (Sunay & Kaya, 2018) and club governances are not prioritizing these issues amid their

daily hassles at professional level. In other words, the management must eliminate physical barriers that hinder the development and progression of players and staff (Raya-Castellano & Uriondo, 2015) to have successful academies. Access to competitive facilities has a significant impact on athlete success (Lapiano & Zotos, 2014).

Regarding physical resources, full-board accommodation services and the pitches within the academy are considered the most crucial, shielding children from external factors, facilitating control over rest and nutrition intake, and aiding in planning effective training sessions. Additionally, living with other potential players serves as an introduction to professionalism and enhances team building. In many Turkish academies, full-board accommodation is not always feasible, and in such cases, academy management should ensure safe and efficient transportation for the players. Long bus trips can significantly deplete a young player's energy and enthusiasm before training even begins. Properly arranged transportation allows young football players to focus more on football and channel their energy into training, avoiding wasteful and exhausting journeys. In addition to accommodation, a comprehensive gym is essential for organizing fitness and endurance training, contributing to the overall physical development of the players. Nutrition is often underestimated during the academy years, and the physical development of Turkish young footballers is a subject of criticism. However, it is crucial to question how many academies provide full-board accommodation with complete meal services to these children during their developmental years. Unfortunately, most academies do not offer three meals a day with sufficient daily nutrition intake to their youth teams. The lack of proper nutrition intake and expert fitness training contributes to academy players being physically less developed than their European counterparts. Especially in modern football, there is a demand for high endurance levels (Höner et al., 2021) and academies should not overlook the physical and fitness development aspects of the training programs. For example, Germany football academies have better physical conditions and equipment compared to those in Turkey (Sunay & Kaya,

2018). Therefore, before criticizing the end results of the system, it is necessary to improve the components of the developmental process.

The insufficient availability of football fields in Turkish club academies presents a significant paradox. Despite the professed aim of academies to nurture football players, the lack of even the most basic and vital component of the football game, the pitch, signals a lack of seriousness in youth development policies within the clubs. This disregard and negligence toward the needs of youth academies have been observed, indicating that clubs do not prioritize their youth development initiatives (Samur, 2018a). Such disrespect and negligence have repercussions on the psychological contract between coaches and players with the academy. Working conditions falling below acceptable levels can demotivate staff in the workplace (McGrath & Bates, 2013). Conversely, modern facilities and suitable training conditions create an adequate motivational climate for both players and staff (De Cieri et al., 2005; Güleç et al., 2022; Moran & Toner, 2017). Good facilities and suitable learning environment reduce the players stress levels (Andronikos et al., 2021) and athletes have a confident and positive mental state during training sessions (Soltani et al., 2011). Poor facilities have reverse affects. The coaches and players, observing the club's negligence towards the academy, experience declining motivation and dedication levels, adversely affecting their overall performance. When there is negligence towards the academy, it signals to players and staff that they will be ignored by the club's governance, leading to a decrease in their efforts within the academies. This results in lower motivation to work harder and less attention to private life among players. Consequently, the academy struggles to achieve its initial goals under such circumstances. In football, the academy cannot expect to receive without giving. Before criticizing young players in the academy, every responsible party in the system must first reflect on whether they have fulfilled their respective duties.

The optimum number of pitches required for conducting training comfortably in the academy is four. Additionally, it is recommended that these pitches should be illuminated, allowing their utilization for most of the day, even after sunset.

Depending on the climate, having at least one indoor football pitch is advisable, especially to shield very young age groups from severe weather conditions. Indoor football is also useful to gain technical on-the-ball skills as the engagement in futsal practice can contribute to talent development in football (Oppici et al., 2019; Travassos et al., 2018; Yiannaki et al., 2018)

Concerning the location of academy pitches, the oldest age group in the academy, typically U19 in the Turkish football system, should share facilities with the senior team. This approach is grounded in the idea that building relationships with professional players may enable talented younger players to gain exposure to the challenges at the professional level (Mills et al., 2014). It can also enhance communication with the senior team, easing the transition and adaptation periods to professionalism and boosting players' motivation to strive for elite levels in their football careers (Kelly et al., 2020). However, having U12 team players roam around senior team facilities might be distracting and lack meaningful interaction for both groups.

When all four inputs are ensured, they positively define the quality of the process and eventually influence the output of academy management. In Turkey, the unproductive system seems to stem from the inability to harmonize all four inputs in the clubs. In many cases, constructing a luxury facility building is considered a solution, but if these facilities are not filled with gifted players, qualified coaches, and skilled staff, they won't serve any purpose. Conversely, a qualified coach or skilled staff member can't make a significant difference if they are not provided with proper facilities and suitable working conditions. The coherent and successful existence of all the necessary inputs constitutes the development environment of sports talent and affects the output (Xiang et al., 2023).

7.2 Process domain

It is the development processes and the qualities that underpin elite athlete development and performance (Baker et al., 2020; Collins et al., 2019) and thus,

the current research highlights some significant insights into the process domain of football academy management.

7.2.1 Psychological development

In terms of the psychological development of players, most academies claimed to provide sports psychologist support for mental preparation. However, the participants often asserted that psychological training is neglected in Turkish academies. The issue appears to lie in the quality of the service rather than its mere existence. As many positions in academies are filled on a voluntary or part-time basis, those sports psychology roles are often taken up by senior university students or recent graduates seeking experience in the field. Alternatively, psychologists from outside the football world may lack an understanding of the dynamics and realities of sports, particularly football psychology. It was also noted that many football clubs tend to overlook sports psychology, assigning coaches the responsibility of covering the work of sports psychologists (Nesti & Suley, 2015). This is often due to a lack of awareness or understanding among football staff, including coaches and managers, about sports psychology (Pain & Harwood, 2007). Sport psychologists in academies should be experts in sports and youth development, and sessions should be consciously organized in a regular format rather than being seen as mere obligations. Sport psychology services should extend beyond academic conversations and provide meaningful interventions (Abrams, 2012). Because relevant psychological support is critical in talent development in football (Gledhill et al., 2017) and there are little differences in technical skills among elite players who reached the top level and thus distinguishing factors on that level might be in the mental aspect of the game (Woods et al., 2016). Furthermore, coaching education programs in the country should also incorporate mental education programs alongside technical and tactical aspects (Beswick, 2016).

7.2.2 Academic development

Regarding academic development, the academy management must acknowledge that they are nurturing young individuals before football players.

Consequently, school education and personal development should consistently be integral parts of the academy's development process. To cultivate elite athletes capable of competing at the highest level, it is essential to provide an optimal and holistic education (Kula, 2019). Proper school education is influential on the environment positively affecting the talent development process (Li et al., 2014; Xiang et al., 2023) and coaches particularly emphasized the significance of school education in fostering soft skills such as social, cognitive, and conceptual abilities in players. Enhancing intelligence and teachability levels was also considered also crucial, as intelligent players are often regarded as the best problem solvers on the pitch during games. School education was seen as a valuable tool to enhance these essential skills.

It is evident that players are highly pragmatic regarding their educational needs. Therefore, academies should prioritize assessing their players' requirements and tailor additional educational programs to align with the evolving demands of contemporary football. The responsibility lies with the academy to prepare young football players for the realities and necessities of professional football (Richardson et al., 2006). According to Topkaya (2015), the rationale behind football academy training is to equip players with the prerequisites needed in subsequent years. Nothing in life is guaranteed. Only 10% of the players in the academies can receive first professional contract (Groosmann & Lames, 2015) and it's generally the top 1% of youth those players who achieve to proceed with the elite-level big football clubs (Green, 2009; Toering et al., 2009). According to Williams (2009), elite youth football is highly competitive, with over 90% of those joining a football academy failing to transition into a professional career. For instance, in England, out of 1.5 million boys participating in organized youth football, only 180 will secure professional contracts with a Premier League club, resulting in a success rate of 0.012% (Calvin, 2017). Even the best performing young players at the academies are unlikely to maintain the expected progression and become elite senior players (Sæther, 2018; Taylor & Collins, 2019). Sports talent development programs have a high rate of elimination (Xiang et al., 2023). Therefore, the academy management cannot disregard the importance of

studying. Consequently, academies bear a social responsibility to provide youngsters with an academic education (Bender, 2011; Beswick, 2016; Donuk, 2008) and prepare them for life beyond football (Mills et al., 2014; Stratton et al., 2004; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Houlihan & Green (2008) term this as a dual-development process encompassing both athletic and academic aspects.

7.2.3 Football development

In terms of training management, it was emphasized that training sessions in the academies lack challenging and formative elements, particularly with players expressing dissatisfaction with the formative aspects of training. Recognizing that quality surpasses quantity in practice and skill development (Ericsson, 2001), the type of training conducted in academies becomes a crucial consideration. Focus is often put on the development of youth teams for upcoming matches rather than player growth and development over the years. Academy management should prioritize providing more challenging training sessions (Mills et al., 2014) with formative aspects that impart new skills to players. It is important to remember that these young players are, first and foremost, students coming to learn football. Current traditional training schemes often lack individualized training tailored to the specific needs of players. Designing player profiles for each academy player becomes crucial for formulating individual development and action plans for all players. Thus, alongside group training, academies must incorporate individual assessments to identify each player's needs at the beginning of each new season, enabling the creation of tailored extra training sessions for individual player development.

In this context, it's apparent that Turkish academies lack visual classrooms, theoretical instructions, individual trainings, and tailor-made sessions for each player. Especially in terms of visual feedback, players watching themselves play should be incorporated into the academy approach (Abrahams, 2012). It's also recognized that an excessive focus on tactical and positional development might impede individual talent and skill improvement, potentially resulting in the development of homogeneous players. Therefore, academies are advised to

prioritize the improvement of players' talent and skills, as the future of football will consistently require star players capable of changing the game.

The findings suggest that academy football may benefit young players if organized in a way that, after a certain age group, they play two games per week. Côté and Erickson (2016) emphasized that the variable distinguishing the most successful athletes is the hours dedicated to training and practising. Other research also supports the idea that expert performance is linked to the duration of engagement in the activity (Baker et al., 2009; North et al., 2014). Presently, in the Turkish academy system, an U17 team can play a maximum of 25 games per year if they advance to the national finals, or even fewer, typically a maximum of 20 games per season if they don't. The limited number of matches in the Turkish system may hinder the production of elite players. This insight is crucial for the future development of Turkish players, given the common complaint that Turkish teams and players struggle with the load of playing two games a week during the European club competitions period, leading to a notable decrease in performance. Therefore, there is a pressing need for a significant increase in the number of matches played by academy teams, necessitating structural reforms by the football federation.

It was also noted that Turkish players engage in organized football much later than their European counterparts. Some players even began organized training at the ages of 15 and 16 which are notably late starting ages in modern football. Early and prolonged engagement in sport-specific activities is related to senior performance (Sweeney et al., 2021). For example, football-specific team practice at an early age is associated with expert levels of achievement in professional football (Ford and Williams, 2012; Roca et al., 2012; Sieghartsleitner et al., 2018). As a result, Turkish young players lack playing experiences in their youth years, and they often exhibit a lower sporting age compared to their European counterparts of the same age. Consequently, it is beneficial to adopt an approach that involves organizing more games during the academy years to bridge this gap. This emphasizes the importance of addressing and resolving concerns

related to the starting age for organized football and the starting age for professional football. Due to this, the Turkish Football Federation should consider a comprehensive redesign of the competition system and leagues. The aim should be to implement an effective and practical approach that enhances player development at suitable ages.

In terms of holistic football development, certain soft skills such as self-confidence, self-regulation, cognitive skills, taking responsibility, adaptation skills, and work discipline were identified as important components leading to an elite career. This highlights that becoming a professional footballer is no longer solely a matter of skill and talent but involves a more intricate progression. It seems that these attributes eventually have an impact on the player's private life and constitute a crucial factor in reaching the elite level and maintaining the player's position throughout their entire career. Toner and Moran (2014) argue that athletes who successfully maintain elite positions are those engaging in a process of continuous improvement even after becoming experts. They are the ones who perceive it as a lifelong training process, even in the senior team (Kaplan, 2016). This kind of long-term development is only achievable with soft skills and intrinsic motivation, rather than just core football skills.

Regarding this matter, we have introduced a new term, "cultural barriers," to describe an obstacle to the development of Turkish players. Essentially, this term signifies that the cultural habits and attitudes of senior players can impact and shape the habits and attitudes of the new generation of players. In other words, the upcoming generation of footballers in Turkey is influenced and modelled by the current and past generation of players. This represents an unofficial form of learning through observation, complementing the formal education provided in academies. For instance, if senior footballers exhibit laziness, the next generation may adopt the same trait as they perceive it as an accepted and valid way of being a footballer in the country. Similarly, if senior players neglect academic education or their private lives, the succeeding generation may tend to prioritize football over studying, assuming that academic success is not essential for

becoming an elite footballer in Turkey. Various aspects, including professionalism, fair-play ethics, investment preferences, dressing style, training effort, and work discipline, are all influenced by the practices of players from the past. This might elucidate the significant cultural differences observed between highly dutiful, well-disciplined Scandinavian players and Turkish players. Consequently, football academies should aim to instil cultural and mindset transformations within the new generations of footballers.

7.2.4 Transition to professional football

Concerning the transition from academy to professional football, it is crucial to underline the vital role of A teams' head coaches in player development. The quality and quantity of available coaches in the senior team for young players were determined to be crucial for their future success at the elite level (Coyle, 2009). Players also highlighted the importance of support from their initial head coaches in senior teams for their career development as elite players. Club environment that supports the transition of young athletes to the elite level is essential for an effective talent development (Megicks et al., 2023). If academy players were not trusted and given opportunities by head coaches in senior teams, their education and development process would prematurely cease. This indicates a direct influence of senior team head coaches on the final development phase of academy-raised players. This issue needs to be addressed, as the winning pressure on the A team typically hinders the transition of academy players into senior team games in Turkey. It resembles a never-ending loop where everyone has a share in the wrongdoing, yet nobody is blamed for their actions. In the end, the victims and the guilty parties are always the young players and the academies. If the clubs do not shift from a rigid win-maximizing approach to a more moderate value-maximizing approach, this problem will continue to persist.

In this sense, it becomes clearer that clubs must formulate an institutional strategy for young players, and the fate of these players should not be solely determined by the decisions of senior team coaches. This can be reinforced

through the football club's business model by establishing clear player pathways to professional football. In other words, a comprehensive transition protocol should be defined. Chelladurai (2014) affirms that a dominant attribute in any effective sports organization is the presence of explicit rules and procedures to guide and control the behavior of the staff. Due to the absence of clear institutional procedures in Turkish clubs, academy-raised players have very limited opportunities to gain real-match experiences in their club's senior teams. (Çevik & Onağ, 2019; Şenel & Saygın, 2021). This poses a problem because, as clearly supported in the research findings, playing real matches is a crucial component of the player development process (Houlihan & Green, 2008; Kaplan, 2016; Stotlar & Wonders, 2006).

This situation underscores the A team (senior team) as an integral and indispensable part of the academy development process. The transition from the academy to the first team is a complex and dynamic process (Hollings et al., 2014; Jones et al., 2014) and constitutes one of the most challenging periods in football development (Finn & McKenna, 2010). Some studies even explored this theme from socio-cultural aspects in sports (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004; Richardson et al., 2013; Jones et al., 2014; Roynsdal, 2015). Evidently, football academies should plan and implement various strategies to facilitate this transition into top-level professional football (EPPP, 2011; Gulbin & Weissensteiner, 2013). Therefore, the club's governance should intervene to establish clear transition procedures, ensuring that pathways and transitions are smooth (Bramham et al., 2007; Relvas et al., 2010) for academy-raised players to integrate into the senior team within the club system.

In Turkey, there is a misconception about this issue. It's commonly believed that a player in the academy must move to the A team only when fully prepared, but, in fact, an academy player can never be fully ready without playing in the A team. A player can only learn to be a professional footballer by participating in professional football teams in competitive leagues. A previous study indicates that successful international soccer players generally accumulated the necessary

practice hours after 13 years (Helsen et al., 2000). This exceeds the time spent in a football academy, clearly confirming the idea that the A team is an extension of the academy education. The literature also supports the notion that engaging in competition itself is highly developmental (North et al., 2014), and competition is considered an important developmental feature if appropriately managed (Côté et al., 2013).

This highlights the shared responsibility of the academy and club management. Therefore, it should be recognized that there are not two distinct players, one as an academy player and one as a senior player. There is just one player transitioning from youth football to senior football, and this transition is only possible if the club provides opportunities to play in the senior football team. Because of this, there should be a mandatory internship period for football players who have recently completed their academy education. If this mandatory internship period is not completed, the club cannot complain that players are not developed by the academy. In essence, what occurs is that the player was raised by the academy but not utilized by the senior team. According to our research, there is a fine line between raising a player and developing a player. The academies are primarily responsible for the raising part, but the senior team is also responsible for the development part. Additionally, the Turkish Football Federation should also introduce appealing incentive systems to reward clubs that field academy-raised players in league games (Açak et al., 2020).

Confirming this, Hager and Hodkinson (2009) argue that learning is an ongoing process rather than a series of fixed acquisition events. Another study shows that Olympic medal winners have affirmed that training and competition must continue together in harmony at appropriate levels (Gambardella et al., 2000). It's also known that young players maintain their motivation to work hard when they find a suitable competition environment where they can showcase their talent (Özmutlu, 2018). Armour (2013) discusses that development does not have a fixed nor a finished identity. All these simply indicate that the efforts of academy management are not sufficient for academy players to reach and maintain the

elite level in senior teams. Academy management system forms a chain, and if one part does not fulfil its duty properly, the chain is broken in the player development process. We cannot expect young players to become professional footballers while keeping them playing in amateur or youth football. In academy games, the priority is not to win the game (Topkaya, 2015) but to learn the game, and the opponents would be young players of the same level, diminishing the challenging situations and competitiveness levels of the games. Moreover, due to challenges in transition, an academy-raised player aged 20 cannot play anymore in U19 teams but cannot find his place in the A team either, thus desperately wasting his developmental time waiting for his turn to come. Being aware of this fact, some football leagues, such as in Portugal, allow football clubs to create B-teams, and these teams can participate in professional leagues with their academy players. Because national and international competitions of the country would influence the elite athlete development eventually (De Bosscher et al., 2008). This indicates the important role of the federation in football academy management system. No system can produce top-level players if they constantly play with low-level rivals. Moreover, learning is most effective when active participation and connection to real-world contexts are present (Foreman et al., 2004; Roschelle et al., 2000). This is also an important aspect to reach both tactical and mental maturity and to improve game intelligence, confidence, and competitiveness (Beswick, 2016). Therefore, we can clearly say that providing academy-raised players with real-match opportunities is an indispensable service of a football academy, and this is only possible if the club backs up the academy management in this endeavour. The main challenge would be convincing all the clubs to give young players more match time in the first team (Poli et al., 2017); otherwise, all the efforts in the club's academy will be in vain. The top football academies in the world are the ones that ensure their players can engage in competitions, leagues, and tournaments to get real match experiences, acquire game understanding, and practice their skills in challenging situations (Gulbin & Weissensteiner, 2013; Nesti & Sulley, 2015).

7.2.5 Structure

In terms of organizational structure, the current research has generated an innovative idea: the establishment of career management departments within football academies. A football academy can be seen as a vocational school whose primary objective is to facilitate career opportunities for its students as professional football players. Therefore, it's logical to have a career department that would find internships or the first professional jobs for academy graduates in the football sector. Previous research has also underlined the need for athletic and post-career support for athletes (De Bosscher et al., 2008; De Knop et al., 2004). Similarly, Williams (2014) suggests that an academy should offer players a visionary pathway into a professional career. After nearly 10 years of investment in a player, the club should either allow the player to play in the senior team or provide alternative career paths for those who are not included in the squad anymore.

In Turkey, in most cases, the player is left alone and is asked to find a team for himself, which is not fair and ethical to ask of a 19-year-old who may not have the capacity and knowledge in this area. Therefore, the academy management must organize career consultation services to find the best solution for the players raised in their academy. Being aware of this fact, many top European clubs have started to have satellite teams as a platform for promising academy players to gain real match experiences (ECA Report, 2012). In this context, pilot teams or loan-out opportunities in other teams are proposed as the most suitable solutions. To facilitate the process, it's also recommended that academies must be involved in marketing and public relations activities for the branding and visibility of the academy and its players in the football market. The academy-raised young players may have economic value and be sold to other clubs in exchange for millions of euros. Therefore, their marketing should not be overlooked by the academy management since marketing is one of the components of good management (Scott, 2009; Yetim, 2019).

In relation to organizing, the participants frequently mentioned about the lack of effective organization inside the clubs which eventually affects the academy management. Ambiguous job descriptions concerning the academy and role confusions must be cleared by the management. Because the separation of roles and responsibilities is a hallmark of a well-organized professional football club (McCormack, 2003; Wilkesman & Blunter, 2002) and thus the academy management must state the aims and expectations clearly at the beginning of the season before asking for results at the end of the year. Sports organizations need to be very clear about what they are working to achieve (Collins et al., 2018). In this regard, in Turkey, most of the academy coaches are often unaware of the purpose behind their work (Sunay & Kaya, 2018) just because they do not receive any directive managerial objectives.

In terms of finance, the lack of sufficient financial resources in academies is a common organizational problem when implementing plans in sports organizations (Lamprecht et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2009). In the financial aspect, research conducted by ECA (2012) confirmed that one of the most critical constraint factors for successful academy management is limited academy budgets. This leads us to the conclusion that adequate funding is a very important infrastructural element in managing a football academy (Stotlar & Wonders, 2006). Hence, academy management should actively explore revenue-generating initiatives to ensure sustainability. A strong academy name would attract more students to football schools and camps, which indeed means a direct income flow to the academy's budget. Therefore, as discussed above, academies are encouraged to be involved in marketing and public relations activities for their branding and visibility in the football market. This can even result in opening football schools abroad, eventually providing an opportunity for global talent scouting and additional income from licensing the club's name to open international football schools.

7.2.6 Club governance support

Football academies in Turkey largely depend on their clubs' governance.

Because of this, problems at the club governance level automatically influence the academy management level within the club system. Good academy management starts with supportive club governance in Turkish football; otherwise, a few well-intentioned individuals in the academies cannot overcome the difficulties of a disordered system dominated by self-interested club directors. Regardless of the management's efforts and plans at the academy level, the grand strategic plans and capabilities of the club directors and governance will always have a direct effect on the success of the sports organization (Lussier & Kimball, 2014; McDonald & Westphal, 2011; Van Hoecke et al., 2006).

First, it is evident that a cultural shift in the paradigm towards academies is needed in Turkish football. This transformation starts with fostering an academy-friendly philosophy and mentality inside the clubs because talent can only be recognized and developed where it is valued (Tranckle & Cushion, 2006). Research increasingly emphasizes the importance of an identifiable, coherent, and shared philosophy and culture within player development environments (Henriksen et al., 2010; Larsen et al., 2013). The philosophy in sport may guide the management style and the delivery of services (Chelladurai, 2014). Therefore, the real management challenge is to ensure that all components, sub-systems, and the entire process from the club's governance to academy management share the same philosophy and are consistently well-maintained and aligned with each other (Aydın, 2018; Samur, 2018a). In the structural dimension of clubs, this is referred to as the unity of objectives in the literature, and it constitutes one of the main components of a well-organized sports organization (Daft, 2016; Hoye et al., 2012; Pedersen & Thibault, 2014). Having a common purpose and direction is essential for successful management in a system approach (Arregui, 2001). If the board of directors of the club does not show enough attention and interest in the club's academy, it may signal a lack of unity of objectives in the organization concerning the aims of the academy.

Not surprisingly, most successful clubs in Europe have a clear vision and philosophy linked to their academies, with 60% of these top distinguished clubs

considering the academy as a source of income rather than an expense (ECA Report, 2012). Consequently, these leading European clubs invest at least 5% of their gross turnover into their youth development programs (Nesti & Sulley, 2015). This underscores the significant influence of a club's corporate governance on football academy performance and sheds meaningful light on the case of football in Turkey. Strategic planning at a higher level is identified as the driver of organizational effectiveness (Wicker & Breuer, 2013). Topkaya (2015) asserts that in Turkey, the primary issue with football academies is, in fact, a problem of the clubs' governance. All other challenges in Turkish academies, from the lack of proper facilities to low salaries, stem from this negligence by the clubs' governance.

There are institutional problems that hinder club governances from adopting academy-friendly approaches. For instance, the high turnover of club executives in Turkish clubs, a result of their traditional club-constitution, leads to a lack of consistent strategy and long-term planning in most club governances in Turkey, as similarly observed in Europe (ECA, 2012). This situation directly impacts the focus of academy management. With frequent changes in leadership due to club elections in every 3 years, aims and plans become easily alterable. If everything changes with each new executive leadership shift, it creates a lack of clarity and consistency, fostering mistrust and inhibiting full commitment (Gilmore & Gibson, 2007). Consequently, academy staff, including managers, tend to focus on short-term gains to secure their current employment within the club. Due to the high turnover of club executives, job retention for academy managers and staff is also precarious in Turkish clubs. It is unrealistic to expect an academy manager to plan for the next five years in such an unstable working environment. Along these lines, some studies indicate that poor governance procedures (Ward, 2013), managerial instability and inconsistency (Rezende et al., 2010) can lead to severe financial instability and problems, and, in some cases, insolvency in football clubs.

Another issue identified in the research findings is the problem of nepotism within

the board of directors in clubs. Many club presidents tend to appoint friends in the executive board who are likely to agree with decisions without offering opposition. Additionally, club elections are significantly influenced by local politics, as clubs often receive financial support from municipalities and local governments. Consequently, the selected board members and club presidents frequently lack football or sector-specific knowledge, yet they hold crucial positions within the clubs. They are responsible for making important decisions and overseeing main investments in various club structures without any sectoral knowledge. This increases the risk of making incorrect decisions regarding academy matters.

Consequently, incapable board members or presidents seek alternative ways to renounce their controlling and decision-making responsibilities. In Turkish practice, it is still common to see head coaches of senior teams being held responsible for overseeing the academy's performance. This indicates an ineffective chain of command within the club, placing an unnecessary burden on A team coaches or senior teams' managing directors. Moreover, it creates organizational chaos within the club, leading to a lack of clear job divisions and ambiguous job descriptions related to the academy, resulting in role confusion in the club system. In clubs with organizational chaos, evaluations are often conducted superficially, with a primary focus on the immediate success of the A team. Therefore, it is advisable to exempt head coaches or managing directors of senior teams from overseeing the academy. Instead, a relevant expert group for important decisions may be established (Kalfa, 2019), or the academy manager may be promoted to the top-level manager in the club system to enhance autonomy and effectiveness in decision-making. Of course, achieving this requires more decentralization in the structures of the clubs.

Another paradox arises when the academy manager formulates a 5-year plan that needs evaluation and approval from a president who is selected for a maximum 3-year period. In many cases, presidents may not prioritize the existence or effectiveness of a 5-year plan, knowing they might not remain in the club for the next five years. If a president wishes to continue, they often channel

all club resources and efforts into the A team's success in league competitions, aiming for re-election for a new 3-year term. Due to outdated club constitutions, the predominant success criterion in Turkish football becomes saving the day, with the easiest route being the temporary success of the A teams. This approach leads to negligence and insufficient attention towards the academy, resulting in clubs' governance hesitating to invest in academies as the outcomes manifest only in the long term. It appears that temporary figures in the clubs may not provide permanent solutions to the real problems of Turkish football. Therefore, a structural reform is indeed necessary in Turkish football.

Alternatively, the academies may operate independently from the clubs or strive for more autonomous structures to establish their own expert executive boards capable and willing to address academy-related issues. It is evident that effective governance in academies is challenging with disinterested and incapable club board members. The demand, pressure and result-driven nature of first-team football at elite level is detrimental to youth players' development (Mitchell et al., 2020). Existing literature suggests that sport organizations benefit from knowledgeable boards of directors dedicating more time to managing their specific sport organizations, resulting in increased financial resources (Esteve et al., 2011). Additionally, empirical evidence indicates that organizations with efficient and focused corporate governance practices are less susceptible to accounting fraud and enhance quality and reliability (Dimitropoulos, 2011). In other words, successful athletic department practices often require additional financial and administrative freedom (Lapiano & Zotos, 2014).

In this context, as an original insight of the research, football academies may be established independently and function as self-governing sports companies under the club's name. or alternatively, football academies might be incorporated privately as independent, professional, for-profit, sports service-providing entities. The participants in the study often mentioned the desire to have more autonomous football academy structures. More autonomy and decentralized academy structures might provide speedier and more successful solutions to the

rooted problems of the system. Because the main objective of the A-team football is to deliver results which are in contrast with the aims of development football (McGuigan et al., 2023). An independent sports organization, whose sole aim and agenda is developing players for competing teams, may indeed bring about more success. Literature shows that forcing academy regulations on Premier League clubs did not show any efficacy in nurturing better and more youth players (Shin & Kim, 2021). Despite the well-intentions of these regulations on clubs, they often tend to be detrimental to clubs financially, performance-wise and in terms of providing the best entertainment to its fans (Shin & Kim, 2021). Elite football has already evolved into an industry that generates billions of pounds (Oprean & Oprisor, 2014) therefore why not consider the transformation of football academies into an industry serving professional clubs? While this institutional structuring is not yet common in the recent Turkish and European football environment, it presents possibilities for the future.

Another innovative idea stemming from the findings is the potential use of expert and neutral external sports management companies for the evaluation and oversight of academies. Development systems should adopt a long-term approach (Côté et al., 2007; Stafford, 2005), and thus, the success measurement of the academy should rely on long-term objective evaluations rather than the subjective opinions of temporary individuals working in the club at that particular time by chance.

Poor governance also contributes to a lack of financial investment in academies, as in Turkish football, it is the president who approves all major financial decisions related to academies. If the corporate governors of the club fail to recognize the value of the academy within the club system, they are unlikely to allocate the necessary budget to the academy's management staff. This is a prevalent issue in Turkish football, where the financial resources allocated to academies by football clubs are notably low (Topkaya, 2015). An effective talent development program requires direct financial support from the club (De Bosscher et al., 2008; Digel, 2002; Green & Oakley, 2001; Houlihan & Green, 2008). Therefore, the

availability of necessary financial resources and funding plays a critical role in the success of the organization (Bridgewater, 2010; Digel, 2002; Lindsay & Jeanes, 2011; Oakley & Green, 2001; Stotlar & Wonders, 2006). In a systemic approach, a mutually shared vision is crucial for the success of academy management, given that talent development is an expensive endeavour (Abbott et al., 2002).

Senge (2020) asserts that chief executives are generally pragmatic managers, which poses the risk of neglecting the long-term benefits of football academies in favour of short-term objectives for the A team. Board members may prioritize immediate needs of senior teams by making transfers worth a few million dollars, potentially sacrificing long-term investments in developing young players in the academies. In other words, clubs in Turkey's top two divisions often have access to abundant money for senior teams, and during financial crises, excessive financial support, often facilitated by government and local authorities, leads clubs to overlook the advantages offered by academy football. Sustainable and enduring solution to address the economic crises faced by football clubs lies, in fact, in the successful operation of football academies (Aslan et al., 2015) but as long as there is easy access to money in Turkish football, this solution is consistently overlooked. Consequently, it can be inferred that, at least in the Turkish case, a lack of money might be a more effective lever to promote the development of more academy players in Turkish football. Alternatively, it could be stated that money itself is not the issue; rather, the problem lies in the priorities and the way available funds are allocated and spent in Turkish football.

In addition, the participants stated the existence of frequent disconnections between the stated mission and actual goals of football clubs. Either no vision and mission statements were present, or the visions and missions of the academies were generally too idealistic on paper and not realistic in practice. Consequently, evaluations are challenging since there is minimal attention paid to achieving these idealistic visions and missions of the clubs regarding academies. For instance, mission statements such as 'introducing Turkish children to sport' sound positive and favourable, but there are no corresponding

elements of this mission in the aims and evaluations of the academy. Because of this, instead of seeking idealistic and ethically optimal missions, setting realistic missions and easier objectives that align with the actions of the academy holds greater value for effective management. This approach facilitates more accurate measurements and evaluations. As a result, in most of the academies, there is either no defined vision and mission concerning the academy or an inconsistency and lack of harmony between what is written and what is done. Since there is a lack of concern for the accomplishment of the missions, necessary corrective actions for the next seasons are not taken. This is one of the overlooked problems in the academies because for sports organizations to be successful, effective leaders who determine a clear vision and mission are essential (Özmutlu, 2018).

On the other hand, this study also revealed that sports directors were not required to define the mission and goals of the department in a way that connects the institutional mission (Lapiano & Zotos, 2014). Thus, a gap exists. Therefore, more important than having a statement on paper is that the vision and mission of the club must be embraced and consistently supported by all key stakeholders within the club system (Nesti & Sulley, 2015). For example, over 75% of the top European clubs have a well-defined youth development vision (ECA Report, 2012). This harmony in vision and mission would manifest in the club's strategy on youth development and ultimately influence resource allocation to the academy.

Apart from defining the vision and mission, a club's governance should work towards removing obstacles to create a hassle-free atmosphere for the academy management team (Koontz & Weihrich, 2010). In this context, the primary role of governance is to enhance the performance of the management team (Barros et al., 2007). Club governance bears certain responsibilities towards academy management. For example, to attract skilled coaches to the academies, clubs must enhance the financial incentives for academy coaches and provide improved working conditions. This is beyond the capacity of an academy manager. Otherwise, proficient coaches and former players may not be willing to

apply for academy positions due to poor working and financial conditions. In effect, currently, academy coaching is often seen as a stepping stone to senior team positions because of the more favourable economic and physical conditions in senior coaching roles (Sunay & Kaya, 2018; Topkaya, 2013). Evidently, organizational injustice within the same club leads to a lack of commitment and satisfaction (Mohammadi et al., 2016) in the academy staff.

Some coaches have highlighted nepotism issues stemming from the club's governance, affirming that the club's top management occasionally appointed acquaintances to academy coaching positions. Therefore, increasing the financial conditions of academy coaches and staff is not a standalone solution. If the salaries and financial gains of academy coaches and staff are increased without quality standardization, it could result in more nepotism and lower coaching quality within the clubs than ever before. Consequently, before salary increases, clear and fair recruitment processes in academies based on merits and academic qualifications should be established. An original suggestion will be presented in the discussion on the federation's responsibilities in the environmental domain, aiming to address standardization and nepotism problems within academies.

Furthermore, corruption and political influences can be considered significant stumbling blocks hindering the development of both players and the staff within football clubs. In such environments, it is believed that hard work and efforts may not be recognized by the club's governance, as decisions tend to be driven by personal interests. A corrupt president, for instance, may prioritize excessive player transfers at the professional level to maximize personal commissions rather than investing in the long-term development of young players. This creates a weak psychological contract between players and the club. When players observe the club's neglect of the academy, their expectations and dedication to football training decrease, knowing they may be ignored by the club regardless of their efforts. It is particularly important to direct more interest, trust and relevant investments towards academy football. Failing to do so, can result in working

conditions that fall below acceptable levels, demotivating staff and players in the workplace (McGrath & Bates, 2013). This, in turn, has a negative impact on the overall management of the academy.

7.3 Feedback domain

7.3.1 Communication

Previous studies have identified a lack of communication between staff in the academy and the professional team as a potential cause of misconceptions among players and staff (Larsen et al., 2013). Moreover, lack of clear and effective communication may impair player development initiatives (Mannix et al., 2023). In this context, effective communication between the academy and the A team is crucial for the sustainability of the club's academy system. The club should establish communication channels as institutional rules, as relying on the personal preferences of temporary employees may disrupt the flow of communication over time. In other words, the system should be designed to protect itself from individuals who could hinder its functioning. In this scenario, the sports director or managing director of the club must ensure that all communication and feedback channels operate regularly as initially established. The quality of internal communication ultimately shapes the organizational culture within the club, significantly impacting the overall atmosphere within the sports organization (Basım & Argan, 2009). Therefore, the success of the system relies on the cooperation and coordination between academy coaches and A team coaches, serving as essential soft powers that cannot be easily replicated by rivals (Gilmore, 2009). In terms of the general academy management system, mainly four communication channels should operate smoothly for an effective coordination of the system. These channels included: Inside the academy, with the A team (senior team), with the club executives, and with externals.

In relation to constructive feedback of evaluation, corrective mid-term feedback on is deemed more suitable, rather than maintaining a stance of disengagement throughout the season and deferring these assessments until the end of the season.

7.3.2 Motivation

Concerning staff management, the human side of the workforce cannot be overlooked by the academy management. Praising the opinions of the employees and the players, maintaining frequent and friendly communication, (Eren, 2012) involving them in decision-making processes (Kalfa, 2019), organizing social events, motivational activities (Hoye et al., 2012) and open-door policies are deemed to be important in the academy management processes. One of the primary duties of an academy management should be making the work exciting and keep the staff motivated (Baltaş, 2010; Donuk, 2008). This emphasis on motivation contributes to enhancing cohesion among the staff in a sports organization (Güzel et al., 2013; McLaren et al., 2015).

Additionally, reward systems have proven effective in boosting the motivation and dedication of academy staff. Therefore, clubs are encouraged to provide premium bonus payments for the successful performance of academy staff, as increased job satisfaction correlates with higher organizational commitment (Mohammadi & Dehkordi, 2013). For instance, if a player developed in the academy is transferred to another team, a fixed percentage of the transfer fee must be allocated to the academy staff who contributed to the player's development. This approach incentivizes staff to deepen their commitment to academy work and motivates them to invest more effort in the development process, as their success would directly and personally pay off. Consequently, staff members are likely to continuously enhance their skills to produce more and better players, fostering a stronger sense of belonging to the academy and, more generally, to the club.

7.4 Outcome domain

Regarding the outcome, the most realistic goal of academy management is to primarily develop elite players for the A team of the club, subsequently contributing to the broader football sector as a feeder club. When it comes to players, it is not realistic to expect an academy to produce 11 players of Messi's calibre for the team; some academy-raised players may be less talented but still

proficient enough to compete professionally. Another supplementary aim of successful academy management is generating income through the sale of developed players and providing financial contributions to the club. Beyond players, academies can also nurture other essential human resources for the club and the football sector. Academies can position themselves as educational institutions that supply human resources to football clubs (Topkaya, 2015). In Turkey, academies are already recognized as internship places or access points to professional and senior team positions. Acknowledging this reality in the sector, clubs can leverage this situation to their advantage and groom their football staff, excluding coaches, for professional roles in the football sector through academies in a more informed manner. This approach appears to be a suitable way to cultivate the internal workforce within the club. For instance, a football club can appoint young, educated administrative staff as assistants to the academy manager. They can learn the job in the field alongside the academy manager. This way, when the academy manager vacates the position, the assistant can step into the managerial role or potentially be promoted to the position of senior team manager due to their familiarity with the club's culture, structure, and personnel. In summary, it can be concluded that a football academy can aim for holistic player development, serve as a financial revenue generator, and provide an internal workforce.

7.5 Environment domain

7.5.1 External influencers

In terms of the external environment, having full control over the players' external environment is challenging, but academies can implement some protective measures. The relationship that youth football athletes have with significant others has an impact on their well-being (Reverberi et al., 2020). The most influential external factors include the parents or family members of the player (Coutinho et al., 2021; Xiang et al., 2023) whose influence can be both positive and negative in the development process. Therefore, their involvement must be carefully monitored and controlled by the academy management. Rather than direct contact between academy coaches and parents, assigning a liaison officer

would be more appropriate to maintain efficient but distant communication. Especially at young ages, parents often perceive their children as the next football star, making it crucial to discourage their interference in training sessions and coaching matters. Because parent's excessive involvement may have negative influences on players' sport development and performance (Coutinho et al., 2021). To control potential negative effects on player development, it is advised that the academy management organize education sessions for the parents of the players. In other words, parents must be prepared for the challenges of raising a professional footballer. Their proper support can make a real difference in a player's progression, so they need education just as much as the players do. Such training courses for parents are necessary to manage themselves and facilitate their children's development (Newport et al., 2020; Sweeney et al., 2021). Particularly at early ages, fathers of players may become overly involved in their football life, and their uninformed decisions may negatively impact the player's future career. In addition to parents, the management should not overlook the potential negative influences of fans, close friends, girlfriends, media, and agents. For peer and romantic relationships, specialized sports psychologists, or an expert therapist, may conduct meaningful interventions with players.

To reduce the influence of agents on players at early ages, another innovative idea has emerged from the findings. It is recommended that clubs establish a club-owned agency to take on the agent duties for academy players. According to FIFA rules, this innovative idea is not officially allowed or possible yet. However, in practice, it can be easily achieved if the agents working exclusively for the clubs are not officially affiliated with the club structure. In competitive environments like football, adhering strictly to regulations may not always be the most effective way to achieve optimal results for the organization. Several specialists suggest that good management should provide tangible proof that flexibility works to their advantage (Covell et al., 2019; McCormack, 2003). Additionally, sports managers are advised to ensure that their organizations are flexible enough to quickly respond to opportunities in the market and the demands

of relevant stakeholders (Chirila & Chirila, 2015; Hoye et al., 2006; Santos et al., 2022). As mentioned in the literature review, flexibility becomes a crucial component of well-organized sport organizations. Furthermore, academy management also needs to be involved in managing the welfare of young athletes who earn substantial amounts of money (Hoye, 2006). In this context, it is logical for the club to have an exclusive agent for the welfare of academy-raised players. The club's president may cover the salaries of the agents outside the club system while still receiving the necessary services from these agents under the club's control. This approach ensures that players are guided in the best interests of both the player and the club. As long as the agent is not officially affiliated within the club structure, they can legally and freely oversee the career and off-field issues of the players under the club's control.

Finally, in terms of player income, as a potential external distracter, teenage academy players should receive financial support in the form of fixed salaries, considering it an integral component of formal preparation for professional football. It is unjust to expect a young individual, who has relied solely on pocket money until the age of 18, to manage substantial sums, often in the hundreds of thousands of euros, when signing their first professional contract at the age of 19. In this context, huge amounts of income are commonly viewed as potentially detrimental and distracting at a young age. However, it is suggested that having no money during the academy years is more harmful for the upcoming years of professional football. The critical factor is not the amount but rather the player's preparation and development to handle that amount. Therefore, it is essential for academy management to plan the financial balance and preparation of the players. In this regard, enhancing the financial literacy of the players through extracurricular lessons should be emphasized.

7.5.2 Football federation

As previously discussed, the starting age for organized football and the initiation of professional football are areas of concern that require attention and resolution. Nowadays, playing football appears problematic due to the scarcity of accessible

green and open spaces and the chaotic urban layout in cities. In most Turkish academies, the youngest age group is the U12 team (Çevik & Onağ, 2019). This implies that young players who generally commence playing football around the age of seven would face a minimum 5-year gap before being introduced to organized football training in academies. In the past, children could safely play in the streets, functioning as informal football academies for preschool children until they transitioned to academy football. Nowadays, children are deprived of opportunities to engage in street football. On the other hand, early engagement with sports is not only enjoyable but also essential for the development of sports expertise (Côté et al., 2003). Substantial evidence has demonstrated that athletes with a diverse early sports experience and engagement in deliberate play during early childhood can achieve an elite level of performance in sports (Coutinho et al., 2016; Hayman et al., 2014). Moreover, early coaching is crucial for building character (Beswick, 2016), and important themes such as fair play should be instilled at these early ages under the guidance of proper pedagogue coaches (Erdemli, 2008). This suggests that the Turkish Football Federation, in collaboration with the Ministry of Sport, may need to create special projects for the early football education of preschool children. In other words, football education for children aged 5-10 should not be neglected but carefully planned to enhance the overall effectiveness of the academy education process.

In terms of coaching education and quality standardization, one of the research findings may shed light on the relationship between the universities, the federation and the football sector. As previously stated, coaching quality significantly influences the management quality of academies and most of the participant acknowledged the lack of coaching quality in the academies. Therefore, universities can provide tailor-made special programs for former football players who aspire to work as coaches in academies. It is unrealistic to expect a 35-year-old former player to attend a 4-year bachelor's degree program in a university to obtain an academic degree diploma and equip themselves with the necessary pedagogic and academic knowledge on coaching. On the other hand, one week training courses provided by the federation is not sufficient at all.

In this context, it is very possible and relatively easier for these experienced but unknowledgeable former players to undergo a specially designed academic training program in an affiliated university, supervised by professors, with a duration of one academic year. This program aims to equip them with the essential academic and pedagogical knowledge of academy coaching. This approach is highly recommended because coaches should receive both theoretical and practical lessons on youth development and teaching skills (Topkaya, 2015) before coaching in academies.

Moreover, in this research, football academies were already considered informal schools for new coaches, where they believed they could develop better coaching skills after their football career. Along the same lines, Cushion and Jones (2006) found that coaches' practices often appeared to be a product of past habits and unconscious processes. Due to this, clubs must be provided with an extensive and compulsory education scheme for coaches to equip them with relevant up-to-date skills and knowledge (De Bosscher et al., 2008; Nesti & Sulley, 2015) and to change unwanted old habits. Therefore, the Turkish Football Federation could introduce a new rule in its regulations, making this one-year university academic course a precondition to work in football academies. Subsequently, the federation could focus on introducing age-specific internal education courses for age-specific licensing. In other words, universities would be able to play a more active role in offering fundamental scientific education to those who aspire to be coaches after their playing career, while the federation could concentrate on internal licensing education. During this one-year academic coaching course at the university, former players could undertake their internship in the academies. This way, football academies would continue to serve as an internship place for newly retired footballers, as they already do, but now in a more organized, controlled, and academically informed manner. In summary, one year university degree with a one-year compulsory internship would make the former players more informed coaches.

Furthermore, there is a recognized need for establishing quality standards within

football academies and the training provided to young players. This issue underscores the importance of developing a national youth development strategy, which appears to be lacking, and enhancing coaching education programs tailored for each age group. Remarkably, Turkey lacks a nationally defined football teaching curriculum, resulting in coaches independently devising training programs according to their preferences. In this matter, the Turkish Football Federation's academy coordination appears ineffective and insufficient (Şenel & Saygın, 2021), and this might be one of the reasons why Turkish young players lack tactical maturity and positional knowledge at the beginning of their careers, as they are constrained by their coaches' abilities and decisions. This is unfavourable for the development of players for national teams as well, because firstly, the player is only confined to his coach's personal knowledge and abilities, and secondly, this prevents standardization in quality among Turkish players. While a 20-year-old player knows a specific tactic because he was taught in an academy, another same-aged player in another academy may lack the same knowledge just because their coach did not introduce it.

The standardization problem also extends to coaching quality. The quality of training primarily depends on the expertise of the coaches delivering these sessions in academies (Farrow et al., 2007). Half of the elite A-national players who participated in the research admitted that they did not receive adequate education during their academy years, and their academy experience did not contribute to shaping them into the footballers they are today. This is a discouraging revelation that merits contemplation.

There appear to be two dimensions to the issue of low coaching quality in Turkey. The first is the insufficient and inadequate coaching education opportunities for individuals aspiring to work in academies as a career choice. The Turkish Football Federation is required to address this matter, given its direct responsibility in organizing relevant education to enhance coaching quality in the country and maintaining standardization in coaching and teaching quality. To rectify the

problem of low coaching quality, the federation must first increase the number of coaching education events and then organize them regularly.

Besides organizing more education courses, the second dimension to the problem is that, apparently, the quality and competence of the trainers in the Turkish Football Federation Education Department should also be questioned. If there is a problem with coaching education, then obviously, there is a problem with the department responsible for organizing these effective education courses. It is evident that the primary requirement for delivering quality education is to have proficient educators (Kubat & Yıldız, 2022). Obviously, coaches with limited experience or lacking expertise at the Turkish Football Federation may face challenges in delivering effective training to the coaches under their guidance. Therefore, the Turkish Football Federation must first employ the best and the most experienced expert coaches in Turkey in its education department.

Concerning education, it should be noted that although board members and club presidents hold the autonomy to make crucial decisions for everyone working in the football sector, these positions are often assumed without the requirement of licenses or a prior knowledge background. About this, it was interesting to see that the participants in the research proposed that board members and club presidents should also undergo relevant education from the Turkish Football Federation and participate in certification programs on football club management.

There is another structural issue that indirectly affects the management of academies in terms of the federation. The president of the Turkish Football Federation is elected for four years by club presidents. Due to the closed nature of the general assembly of the football federation, the presidents of clubs in the first two divisions of the Turkish league system have controlling power to determine the winner in the elections. Therefore, the president of the federation must seek approval from these club presidents if they want to be re-elected for another term. It is a prevalent issue in sports development to observe a disregard for the long-term benefits of youth development in favour of immediate gains,

often done to appease interested parties or ensure re-election (Bramham et al., 2007). Because of this, the Turkish Football Federation often neglects its controlling function on the clubs in the hope of re-election, and thus, clubs do not rigorously adhere to Turkish Football Federation regulations on youth football. They are aware that they have the power to choose a new president in the next elections if the current Turkish Football Federation president imposes strict rules and control, especially on A-team issues.

Another issue associated with this matter is the impact of political influence on Turkish Football Federation elections. Particularly in lower divisions, clubs exploit the government's sports policy, driven by political populism. They are aware that as long as they maintain good relations with Ankara (the country's capital, where the government is headquartered), the Turkish Football Federation is unlikely to hold them accountable for any irregularity. This situation raises concerns about the Turkish Football Federation's autonomy, and thus the resolution to club-related problems often lies with the Ministry of Sports rather than the Turkish Football Federation. For instance, one of the participants even declared that due to a lack of control, some clubs received money from the Turkish Football Federation to invest in youth football, but they simply spent it on senior team transfers. Since these clubs are backed by very influential political figures, the Turkish Football Federation has seemingly overlooked this issue. Hence, structural reforms within the Turkish Football Federation general assembly are imperative, and elections should be extended to involve a broader spectrum of stakeholders in Turkish football to mitigate the influence of top-division clubs and political interests. Because the controlling function is an indispensable factor in increasing the effectiveness of football management (Samur, 2018a), and under the current circumstances of the country's football environment, this function of the Turkish Football Federation is not working properly.

In general, universities, clubs, and the Turkish Football Federation (TFF) should reassess and redesign their relationships to enhance the overall welfare of the football sector (Samur, 2018a).

7.5.3 Sport policy

Regarding sports policy, firstly, a national talent detection system must be established to ensure that no potentially talented young player is overlooked from any region of Turkey. Some players stated that they were introduced to football by their schoolteachers, providing valuable insights for talent detection practices. In Turkey, where there are 43,455 primary and secondary schools across the country (MEB, 2022), it is possible to designate all physical education teachers in those schools as natural talent scouts under the effective organization of the Ministry of Sports ministry and the federation. In other words, professional football clubs may benefit from this collaboration with local schools (Webb et al., 2016) under the guidance of the federation and the ministry.

Additionally, a successful sports policy of the country would inevitably impact the productivity of the clubs' academies (Aslan et al., 2015). Talent detection is closely related to the extent of grassroots football activities in the country (Bramham et al., 2007) and informed national-wide sports policy plays a crucial role in having a strong academy system in the country (Sunay & Kaya, 2018). The players in the research declared that they were introduced to football thanks to amateur football clubs in their childhood neighbourhoods. This provides valuable insights into understanding the importance of grassroots football in elite player development. Regardless of how good the academy is, they ultimately receive players from their operating environment. Grassroots and amateur football serve as the initial introduction to sports for children, especially within football. Amateur sports create a pool of potential talents; therefore, the larger the talent pool academies have, the better their selection chances. The health of any professional sports league is ultimately dependent on the strength of a particular sport's grassroots program in the country, as it is from grassroots that future players are born (Hassan & Hamil, 2010).

In this context, there are 8,257 amateur football clubs in Turkey as of 2022

(Turkish Football Federation, 2022). Most of these clubs only have one senior football team without any youth football section. A quick comparison reveals that there are 25,000 amateur clubs in Germany (Breur et al., 2019), and all of them have youth football sections, totalling 160,000 football teams. This disparity may be one reason why Germany can detect and raise world-class football talents among its 4 million Turkish immigrants while Turkey struggles to produce players of similar quality among its 83 million citizens. A more active nation with more amateur players is the foundation for developing more elite professional athletes at the top of the pyramid. Grassroots clubs have been the foundation of sports and still characterize the successful European sports model (Vos et al., 2012). Hence, the government and the federation must collaborate to improve amateur football clubs and grassroots football activities in Turkey.

In this context, it must be underlined that the sports policy of the government should not be based on political populism, such as creating so-called professional teams in each town. The real aim must be to strengthen amateur sports and athlete development in the cities, not to create more professional city teams. Currently, even amateur football clubs in amateur leagues are not amateur clubs in practice, and this paralyzed amateur league system in Turkey does not serve the development of new players. In other words, if all amateur football clubs in amateur leagues aspire to promote to professional leagues and allocate their limited financial resources towards this goal, amateur football may cease to serve the core values of amateur sports. This ultimately affects player development negatively. In relation to this issue, instead of populist approaches such as paying transfer fees or debts of the teams, state aid must be channelled into amateur football activities and grassroots talent development programs.

Another suggestion that emerged is that the government should open relevant football-related university degree courses to raise competent staff for the sector and encourage more relations between the academic world and football clubs. Since the management functions in a sport club can only be performed effectively by professional and expert managerial staff (Donuk, 2016), the competency of

the next generation of sports managers in Turkish football would be decisive in the success of Turkish football in the future. Apparently, the universities in Turkey do not provide practical and pragmatic solutions to the management problems of football clubs. A partnership amongst researchers, coaches, and athletes (Ericsson, 2003) can ultimately lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the key issues of the field. Considering the technological conditions of today, a collaboration between the Ministry of Sports and the federation and the universities could lead to the establishment of an online education platform, offering certificate programs through the MOOC system.

Lastly, schooling is still a dominant problem among elite athletes in Turkey since most of them must quit studying after high school to meet the high demands of professional football. Because living in football academies require a growing commitment to training and competitions and it is based on highly structured full-time schedules (Rongen et al., 2020). Hence, the most notable issue with schooling seems to be a lack of time for sufficient and efficient training. Therefore, the government, together with the Ministry of Education and Sports, should implement new projects for athlete-students.

Taking into consideration all the subjects discussed in this chapter, this research has devised a distinctive and original management framework that comprehensively delineates all the discussed aspects of the football academy management system. To achieve effective academy management in Turkey, all components must fulfil their respective roles. This management framework and final thoughts will be presented in the conclusion chapter.

CHAPTER 8. CONCLUSION

In this section, the general conclusions of the research are presented, covering both theoretical and practical aspects.

8.1 General conclusion

Successful football academy management is a multi-dimensional and complex process that cannot be solely left to the individual endeavour of academy managers. This process needs valuable inputs, namely players, manager, coaches, supporting staff, and resources from its environment. This environment is affected by external factors such as the implementation of the football federation and sports policy in the country. Internally, a football academy and its management cannot be separated from the club and the A team. The club and the A team are important stakeholders in a successful academy management process. They are interconnected parts of the talent development system in football. In other words, the management quality in the academy largely depends on the capabilities and philosophy of the club's governance. Similarly, the fate of the clubs also depends on the capabilities of the federation, and the federation is affected by the sports policymakers in the country. The quality of services and, ultimately, the outcome of a football academy will be the result of how well this interdependence is cultivated to produce a unified whole.

In this regard, the systems approach represents a valuable and instrumental framework for comprehending and enhancing football academy management. By adopting a holistic perspective, the systems approach allows researchers and practitioners to analyse the interconnectedness of various elements within the football academy structure. This method emphasizes the importance of viewing the academy management as a dynamic system in which each facet plays a vital role and is interdependent with others. Such an approach encourages a comprehensive understanding of how modifications in one aspect can affect the entire system and, consequently, the overall success of the academy. Through the systems approach, it becomes possible to identify areas of inefficiency and

opportunities for improvement within football academy management. By adopting a systems perspective, academics can gain deeper insights into football management as an academic field of sports management.

As a concluding insight from this research, a unique and comprehensive management framework for football academies has been developed, visually represented in Figure 4.

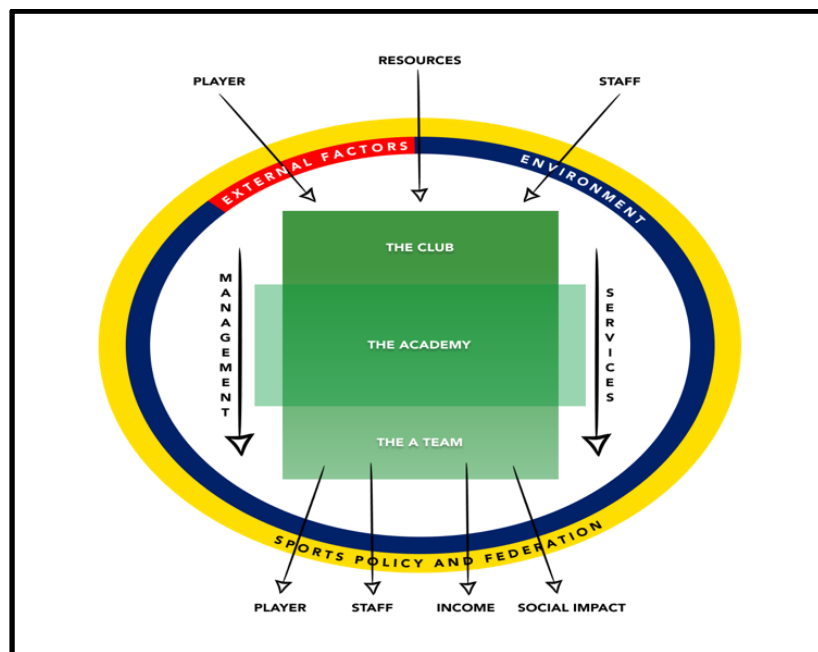


Figure 4: Football academy management framework

Figure 4 originally delineates all the important aspects of the football academy management system in Turkey. Football academy operates in an interdependent system, relying on the internal and external environment for inputs and the fulfilment of desired outcomes. The football academy is a central component of the academy management system, operating within the broader framework of a football club. It is intricately connected to various influential factors and domains within the club structure. Essentially, the academy functions as a subsystem of the club, meaning it is not autonomous but rather closely integrated with the club's governance and the A team (senior team). Consequently, any success or failure

experienced by the academy should be viewed in the context of the overall performance of the club. This includes the contributions of the senior team (A team) and club executives to the academy's outcomes. Because the effectiveness of the academy is depended on the club governance, as they are supposed to provide the essential financial support and necessary investments and resources. Without these crucial input, the academy's operations would come to halt. Additionally, the academy is dependent on the senior team, as its graduates must transition to the senior team to further their development and reach maturity as players. The effectiveness of management practices and service quality largely depends on the governance quality and support provided by the club, as well as the opportunities available within the senior team. Because the final phase of the academy education extends beyond the academy and includes the active involvement of the A team as well. Only after receiving support from the club's governance and the senior team, the manager's quality, education, and skills become significant factors for successful operational management in the academy. In addition to these two internal factors, a football academy also heavily relies on its external environment. First of all, it receives the valuable human input, namely players, coaches and staff, from the environment. The quality of the sports environment determines the capacity of the academy. Moreover, the players are constantly affected by the external factors, for instance, by parents or peers, or by the competition system in the country. Similarly, the coaches are affected by the quality of the educational courses offered by the federation or by the mindset in the society, or economic conditions of the country. There is always a dynamic impact of the environment, directly or indirectly, on the developmental process of academy. In the same way, football academy also sends the outcomes to the same environment. In this context, football federation, and at broader level, sports ministry of the country plays influential role in shaping the academy management system. Because their attitudes, actions and policies shape the football environment and football mentality in the country, and consequently the practices in the clubs.

Aligning with its objective to address the research gap in the management of

Turkish football academies, this research also embraced a pragmatic approach (Veal & Darcy, 2014). Because we believe that the criticism of the gap between science and practice is fair (Haugen, 2019; Sandbakk, 2018) and the relationship between scientific research and the practical world should be improved (Stricker & Goldfriend, 2019). There is also a drive for evidence-informed practice to underpin approaches and process in sports talent development and sports pedagogy environments (Taylor et al., 2023).

The following practical recommendations, presented in the form of concise items, are articulated to improve the performance of football academy management in Turkey.

How to enhance football academy management and its productivity in Turkey:

1. The selection of talented players is a pivotal aspect of effective academy management.
 - a) academies should have a designated scouting department and expert scouts on youth football. Controlling the quality of incoming players into the system is a key determinant of overall productivity.
 - b) scouting regions should be meticulously targeted to maintain focus on specific areas, minimizing the risk of overlooking any potential talent.
 - c) detection and selection procedures and policies within the academies should steer clear of subjectivity, preventing susceptibility to nepotism, ensuring a fair process, reducing the likelihood of favouring individuals with influential or familiar connections, and mitigating the potential for the selection of their children.
 - d) since soft skills have often been overlooked in the selection process, players require more comprehensive evaluations, not solely based on football abilities or physical appearance.
 - e) similarly, steps should be taken to diminish the impact of the relative age effect in the selection process.

- f) academy management should consider the skills and attributes that were identified in the research's results sections when selecting players for the academy.
2. Quality of coaching has a direct impact on the overall development of players and on the performance of the academy management.
- a) academy management must select the best coaches available in the sector for their academies.
 - b) when selecting coaches for the academy, academy management should give due consideration to the skills and attributes identified in the results sections of the current research.
 - c) coaching in academies demands specific knowledge and skills, warranting its recognition as a distinct area of expertise. Academy coaching is separate from senior team coaching.
 - d) coaching within the academy should be further specialized, with a focus on specific age groups to ensure tailored and effective development.
 - e) the Turkish Football Federation and public universities could collaboratively design a specialized, extensive one-year academic coaching program tailored for retired football players aspiring to become coaches in academies; subsequently, the federation could conduct training courses to issue special licenses for age-specific coaching. This one-year academic course and age-specific licencing procedure should include one-year compulsory internship.
3. Clubs should consider the senior team as a critical component of the player development chain.
- a) the A team plays an integral and indispensable role in nurturing the growth of academy players; without the team's active support and involvement, the academy alone cannot produce elite players.
 - b) Transition of academy players to the A team should be well-planned and prepared as an institutional club rule based on youth strategy and

policy, rather than being based solely on individual decisions of the A team's coaches.

4. Clubs should establish the communication channels between the A team and the academy as a club policy and enforce it as an institutional rule.
 - a) the head coach of the senior team also assumes a pivotal role in the ultimate development of academy players and bears co-responsibility for the final development of the academy-raised player.
 - b) They should keep constant communication with the academy, adhere to institutional rules based on club's youth policy.

5. The lack of professionalism is evident in the academies.
 - a) academy management should prioritize professionalism by securing full-time expert staff, including coaches, through extended contractual commitments, ensuring that all available positions are accompanied by detailed job descriptions and publicly advertised on the website to encourage individuals with suitable backgrounds to apply.
 - b) the provision of regular internship and volunteering opportunities is recommended to expand the talent pool.
 - c) academy management should conduct a needs assessment to ensure continuous staff development after the selection process.
 - d) academy staff must demonstrate proficiency in utilizing software programs and adopting new technologies for performance tracking and measurement.
 - e) internal education lessons, external courses, international training programs, field trips, and opportunities for international internships should be accessible to academy staff.
 - f) Techniques such as delegation and job enrichment should be utilized by the managers to promote staff development.

6. The physical conditions of the academy are significant factors in determining the overall development of players and the performance of the academy

management.

- a) essential facilities crucial for enhancing the management effectiveness include full-board housing, well-maintained and a sufficient number of pitches, transportation, nutrition and fitness services, and requisite technological hardware and software.
- b) to ensure effective academy management, it is recommended to allocate a minimum of four pitches exclusively for the academy's use.
- c) illuminated pitches prove beneficial for organizing evening training sessions.
- d) to address severe weather conditions and provide futsal opportunities for technical development, it is advisable to have at least one indoor pitch.
- e) same-site facility provision is both logical and advantageous, particularly for the oldest age group of the academy.

7. The academy manager is a decisive element in the academy's overall performance.

- a) the board of directors of the clubs must diligently select a competent academy manager to oversee operations, given that, although these positions are frequently filled by former players, the role demands explicit and robust management knowledge, skills, and suitable managerial traits.
- b) in addition to the academy manager, the competency of the general manager or CEO of the club is reflected in the overall performance of the academy.
- c) academy managers should conduct corrective mid-term feedback sessions to evaluate and enhance the academy's operations throughout the season.
- d) academy managers should have comprehensive, written job descriptions outlining significant task allocations, span of control and chain of commands.
- e) academy managers should actively listen to and value the opinions

of players and staff to foster a better working atmosphere.

- f) academy managers should actively embrace and include the families of employees to cultivate a family-like atmosphere in the workplace, thereby enhancing job dedication and motivation.
- g) organizing off-field social events and activities is essential to promote social development among the children.
- h) premium payments or similar financial incentives should be made available to academy staff in recognition of exceptional performance by the academy. Financial incentives for academy staff would lead to greater motivation, dedication and self-development, as their success directly benefits them.

8. Clubs require long-term planning and strategy concerning their football academies.

- a) the vision, mission, and aims of the academy must be articulated more solidly and realistically, since, currently, there is a disconnect between desired outcomes and actual practices.
- b) clubs should establish clear expectations and key performance indicators for the academy, accompanying these with concurrent investments to attain the defined expectations.

9. Clubs must adopt a more academy-friendly philosophy and demonstrate increased attention to their academies.

- a) achieving this requires structural reform within clubs, as presidents or board members, elected every three years, are unlikely to invest in areas where benefits extend beyond the duration of their mandate.
- b) the frequent turnover in club leadership hinders the accumulation of sector-specific knowledge and experience in football management.
- c) the structure of sports associations should transition towards that of private companies, introducing more sector-specific expertise to the board of directors, enhancing club governance and professional management, providing more investments, and reducing political

influences and corruption in clubs.

- d) Academies should be granted greater managerial autonomy within club structures, as the existence of a strict vertical hierarchy within the club organization can hinder rapid and effective management and decision-making. Alternatively, privately incorporated academies or academies with independent board members could provide a viable approach to delivering the same service.

10. Ensuring proper school education is not only a duty of the academy for the holistic development of players but also its social responsibility towards the community in which it operates.

- a) coordination and follow-up of school education must be executed effectively.
- b) enrolment in the same school offers significant benefits in terms of coordination, planning and time management.
- c) the Ministry of Sports and the Turkish Football Federation should address the schooling problem of young athletes; with today's technology and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) systems, such planning can be readily facilitated. Alternatively, half-day schooling or distance education could be implemented for elite athletes.

11. The training programs ought to integrate challenging and formative elements to nurture skill development and tactical learning, incorporating individual training sessions as well as theoretical and visual lessons into the overall football programs.

12. Psychological services and mental support should be available to academy players, particularly during the transition period is highly important. Psychologists need to be expert and experienced in sports and move from academic conversations to meaningful interventions.

13. The Turkish Football Federation should institute a comprehensive nationwide football development curriculum customized for each age group. They must prioritize the standardization of academy education to improve the quality in the trainings. The curriculum should also incorporate off-field courses designed to prepare young players for the professional football industry and for the challenges of the profession.
14. The delayed initiation of organized football training directly influences the sport age of Turkish players. To tackle this challenge, implementing a schedule of two games per week for academy teams and actively encouraging participation in tournaments and competitions is crucial. This necessitates structural adjustments in youth match planning and the academy leagues overseen by the Turkish Football Federation
15. Having playing experience in competitive leagues is an indispensable part of the player development process. If a country is unable to offer competitive league matches to its domestically trained players, the system is compromised in its ability to generate elite-level players. Potential solutions include permitting professional B-teams in professional leagues, exploring pilot team agreements, enforcing home-grown player allocation rules in the starting eleven (not in the squad), introducing obligatory internship periods for academy-graduates in the senior teams, implementing strict financial controls, introducing salary caps, quality standards on foreign transfers, and providing appealing incentives to clubs prioritizing home-grown talent.
16. Academies should formulate a clear marketing strategy to enhance the brand and visibility of their academy within the football sector, aiming to attract superior players and coaches while generating income through potential player sales.
17. Relying solely on the club's budget poses a risk for effective management; therefore, academies must seek greater economic independence, considering the establishment of football schools and engagement in brand

licensing as income sources. Additionally, as an institutional club rule, a defined and fixed percentage of the income generated from the sale of academy-raised players should be allocated exclusively to academy operations.

18. Clubs need business models to offer clearer player pathways to senior football, including career management departments.

19. TFF also should streamline pathways for the progression of players into professional football, which may also involve modifications to league structures.

20. The success of an academy is measured by its ability to produce elite players for national teams, for the A team, or as a feeder for the broader football sector, as well as by its capacity to operate profitably and generate revenue by player sales. Academies can also play important roles for internal workforce planning.

21. The academy should conduct educational courses for the parents of the players, preparing them to be supportive and informed during the challenging journey of nurturing and becoming an elite player.

22. The academy should monitor the impact of external influencers on players and devise appropriate precautionary measures if needed.

23. The Turkish Football Federation must improve both the quality and quantity of coaching education with competent educators. In addition to coaching education, the training of trainers constitutes a crucial aspect of overall football development quality.

24. The Turkish Football Federation must exercise its controlling and supervision function on youth development and introduce sanctions when required.

25. Structural reforms within the Turkish Football Federation general assembly

are imperative to mitigate the influence of top-division clubs and political interests. The delegate structure is susceptible to bias, nepotism, and external intervention.

26. Sports policy must be based on improving grassroots activities and amateur football, not political populism.

27. It is imperative to plan special projects for early football education, targeting pre-school children, to prevent the late commencement in organized football and to provide sport readiness for the academy football.

28. Club board members and executive directors represent the sole group exempted from mandatory licensing or diploma requirements, significantly impacting management quality. The Turkish Football Federation should implement managerial courses for individuals aspiring to become board members of football clubs. Additionally, positions related to football academy management and club administrative management should require special education and licensing.

8.2. Limitations

This research is bound by several limitations. Firstly, the research was done in Turkey. In other words, we had to confine our research to only one specific country and thus had a limited number of samples from a limited geography. Surely this research might be extended with a wider scope and with more international cases for further global investigation. Moreover, the population selected for the data collection was among the professional football clubs, professional elite players and coaches who were competing in the highest professional league in Turkey. This meant that the results only reflect the realities of the academies that operated inside the professional football clubs in Turkey. Understandably, the results won't directly bind the other clubs in other countries or the amateur clubs in Turkey since their environment, conditions and resources were different.

Moreover, since the qualitative approach tends to examine relatively few cases or subjects on a large amount of information (Veal & Darcy, 2014), only three internal key stakeholders of the academy management process – namely managers, coaches and players - were examined in this research. If we had added more external stakeholders such as parents (meaning at least 30 more subjects in different cities) or peers (difficulties on which influential peers of the interviewed players to select, some of them were already adults in their 30s living in different cities or even countries), this research could take longer years to finalize, and this was surely beyond the capacity of the researcher. Additionally, considering the collection and analysis processes implied in qualitative analysis, we had to put a practical limit on the number of subjects which could be included in the research (Veal & Darcy, 2014). Nevertheless, it is advisable that in a wider context and within more detailed research, the study could be extended taking other influential internal and external stakeholder's opinions and experiences into consideration.

For example, the research focused on successful elite players as the participants in the interviews, but sports talent development programs have a high rate of elimination (Xiang et al., 2023). In the specific case of footballer development, the success rate of securing professional contracts is exceedingly low. This indicates that the majority of young players entering the academy system do not become elite professional footballers. (Calvin, 2017; Groosmann & Lames, 2015; Taylor & Collins, 2019). Taking this into consideration, it is recommended that future research focusing on academy players who have dropped out or been left out in the academy system could provide valuable insights as well.

Another limitation of the research is that the data collection period concluded in late 2020. When interpreting the results, recent structural and ownership model changes in the Turkish club system should be considered to ensure a fair conclusion at the time of the publication of the dissertation.

Lastly, in order to understand the full picture of elite footballer development, it is necessary to conduct more studies that follow the professional career path of recently graduated academy players in the senior team.

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