

# **The influence of coach interpersonal attraction and homophily on youth soccer players' motivation**

## **Abstract**

It is well known that certain coaching behaviors and characteristics have the potential in shaping players' skill development. Interpersonal attraction and homophily are one relevant example that can be used to explain individual's affective evaluation of another individual's actions. In a sport context, the interpersonal characteristics of a coach can potentially influence players at different levels. This study investigated the influence of coach's interpersonal attraction (social, physical, and task) and homophily (attitude and background) on youth soccer players' motivation. A closed ended questionnaire was distributed to 94 youth soccer players to examine the impact of coach's interpersonal attraction and homophily on their motivation. The results showed that coach's social, physical, and task attractions have significantly influenced players' motivation. We also found that coach's attitude has positively contributed to players' motivation. Outcomes from this study offer new insights into the development of coaching relationship quality and players' motivation. It also enriches the current theoretical understanding on how certain interpersonal behaviors of a coach may influence individuals' motivation in a sport context.

*Keywords:* interpersonal attraction, communication style, homophily, motivation, physical education

## **1. Introduction**

Coach's behavior and communication strategies have been perceived by many scholars to play a key role in the development of players' skills. Previous studies have underlined a number of factors that may stimulate players' interest in achieving their goals,

such as trust in the coach (e.g., Chen & Wu, 2014; Kao, Hsieh, & Lee, 2017) and other coaching behavior-related factors such as encouragement (Kilit et al., 2019) and competency (Teng & Wang, 2020). These factors have been found to be beneficial to the perceived quality of the coaching relationship. Certain coaching behaviors can be considered important to the development of high relationship quality, such as demonstrating empathy, promoting encouragement, and establishing shared values (Kaya, Erdogan, & Bahadir, 2019; Lorimer & Jowett, 2009; Schwamberger & Curtner-Smith, 2019; Yuan, Wang, Huang, & Zhu, 2019). According to McKenna and Davis (2009), the coaching relationship with players is commonly driven by the interpersonal features of a coach.

Interpersonal attraction of an individual refers to "a constellation of sentiments which comprise the evaluative orientation of one person toward another" (Huston, 1974, p. 11). These sentiments/emotions are essential elements of interpersonal relationships development. The literature showed a number of studies that examined various interpersonal relationships in different contexts (O'Broin & Palmer, 2010), especially towards demographically similar individuals (Motsoaledi & Cilliers, 2012). Yet, there are still a limited understanding of how certain coach's attraction aspects may influence motivation of youth soccer players. In addition, most studies on the relationship between coach's interpersonal-related behavior and players' motivation in coaching literature are not sufficient enough to describe the nature of such relation. To our knowledge, there seems to be a lack in characterizing the impact of coach's interpersonal features on youth soccer players' motivation. Meanwhile, knowledge about the role of social psychological theories on interpersonal behavior in players' development is often neglected in coaching literature, despite the fact that they offer a useful explanatory framework (Ianiro, Schermuly, & Kauffeld, 2013; Rodrigues et al., 2018).

Our review of the literature showed a basic association between the coaching relationship for coaching success (e.g., De Haan & Gannon, 2017; Gettman, Edinger, &

Wouters, 2019; Terblanche & Heyns, 2020). This includes understanding the extent to which certain coaching behaviors may influence the development of the relationship to their players and what aspects constitute a high motivational value from the players' perspective are important aspects to consider. Typically, when the coaching process begins, coaches tends to provide players with the necessary atmosphere in order to motivate them in an abstract challenge, which is usually shaped based on certain rules, interactivity and feedback. In addition, the interpersonal characteristics of a coach has been found to influence players at a different extent. Such characteristics can offer the basis of the developing coaching relationship.

Despite these, there seems to be a gap in knowledge and understanding between the interpersonal behavior of a coach and players' motivation. This gap is of interest to many practitioners and researchers (e.g., Rocchi & Pelletier, 2018; Rocchi & Pelletier, 2017; Rocchi, Guertin, Pelletier, & Sweet, 2019; Vasalampi, Kiuru, & Salmela-Aro, 2018) who encouraged future debate on this subject. As such, this study attempts to examine the impact of coach's interpersonal attraction and homophily on youth soccer players' motivation, using a quantitative empirical approach. First, it is argued that coach's social, physical, and task attractions are essential for the development of players' motivation. Second, it is also argued that coach's homophily values in terms of attitude and background are relevant to players' motivation. Outcomes from this study can offer new insights into the development of coaching relationship quality and players' motivation. It also enriches the current theoretical understanding on how certain interpersonal behaviors—like interpersonal attraction and homophily of a coach—may influence individuals' motivation in a sport context.

## 2. Research model

Although quality coaching is an important aspect for encouraging and stimulating players' development, research in this area is still progressing. So far, little studies have investigated the factors that may influence the relationship between coaches and their players' motivation (Møllerlækken, Lorås, & Pedersen, 2017). Certain demographic backgrounds and attitude in the coach can help shape the quality of the relationship and hence the development of players (Lau et al., 2018; Murray, 2009; Woods & Rhoades, 2010). According to Hansen, Gilbert, and Hamel (2003), individuals' motivation is thought to be related to certain personality, social, and emotional factors that can potentially shape the view and behavior of a person at which he or she is evaluated, enters into competition with others, or attempts to attain some standard of excellence. Møllerlækken et al. (2017), on the other hand, argued that there could be a significant relationship between players' and coaches' perceptions of the motivational climate. The authors revealed that male and female players might perceive the motivational aspect to be associated with higher performance and mastery-oriented compared with the coaches.

Moreover, the concept of relational demography emphasizes that people in general tends to associate their own demographic characteristics with others from the same social context (Tsui & O'reilly, 1989). This association or the process of comparing one's demography to others is referred to as homophily at which some social-psychological mechanisms can shape individuals' preference for relationships with other individuals. From a theoretical perspective, Byrne (1971) introduced the similarity-attraction paradigm which focuses on the similarity results in interpersonal attraction. This led many scholars (e.g., Ladhari, Massa, & Skandrani, 2020; McCroskey, McCroskey, & Richmond, 2006) to quantify that individuals of the same social context are likely to have similar backgrounds, experience, and knowledge. Hence, it can be said that people would assume that others from

the same social group to understand them better and to react to situations in a similar way (Haveman & Wetts, 2019). This is where the concepts of interpersonal attraction and homophily in coaches can be linked to players' motivation in a game context.

The development of interpersonal attraction was firstly developed by McCroskey and McCain (1974) which consists of three dimensions: physical, social, and task. This measure has been used by many researchers in the field in order to determine potential associations between interpersonal characteristics and various personal development factors. McCroskey and McCain (1974) argued that if a person is attracted to another, he/she will likely attempt to communicate interpersonally with that person. Other scholars, such as Walster, Walster, and Berscheid (1978) have attempted to conceptualize interpersonal attraction as the tendency in which individual evaluate another person or the symbol of the person in a positive or negative way. Bekiari and Petanidis (2016) highlighted that instructors' verbal reaction was associated to students' social attraction, enjoyment/importance. The authors found distinct types of relations between students and instructors can be explained by the motivational value perceived by students. Weiss and Houser (2007) indicated that individuals' levels of physical, social, and task attraction can be somehow associated with their motivational goals in expressing interest in class and task. In addition, Çolak (2011) stated that attraction-related factors in academicians depends on certain demographical features that may potentially shape the relationship between social, physical, instructional attraction and individuals' motivation. Based on these, we proposed the following hypotheses:

H<sub>1</sub> The social attraction of the coach has a positive influence on youth soccer players' motivation.

H<sub>2</sub> The physical attraction of the coach has a positive influence on youth soccer players' motivation.

H<sub>3</sub> The task attraction of the coach has a positive influence on youth soccer players' motivation.

Another aspect for characterizing individuals' features and its relation to others was proposed by McCroskey, Richmond, and Daly (1975) as the concept of homophily (similarity of source and receiver). The main idea behind the concept of homophily is that the more source and receiver are similar (homophilous) the more communication attempts increase and the more likely communication will be effective (McCroskey et al., 2006). McCroskey, Richmond, and Daly (1975) developed an instrument to capture individuals' attitude and background as the main source of homophily for which extensive previous literature provided a conceptual base. The literature showed a limited number of studies on individuals' homophily and its impact on others' behaviors. This can be reasoned to that the majority of research is paying more attention to attraction than homophily in the area of interpersonal communication (McCroskey et al., 2006). Mohammad (2013) studied the relationship between instructors' homophily and students' motivation to learn in the classroom. The author argues that individuals from different social and educational backgrounds at college campuses can potentially influence students' motivation to learn. Ragg (2019) stated that it is likely that students will develop their competent communicative style as a result of the impact of instructors' homophily on students' motivation to learn. Based on these, this study proposed the following hypotheses:

H<sub>4</sub> The background of the coach has a positive influence on youth soccer players' motivation.

H<sub>5</sub> The attitude of the coach has a positive influence on youth soccer players' motivation.

Figure 1 shows the proposed relations between coach's interpersonal attraction (social, physical, and task) and homophily on your soccer players' motivation.

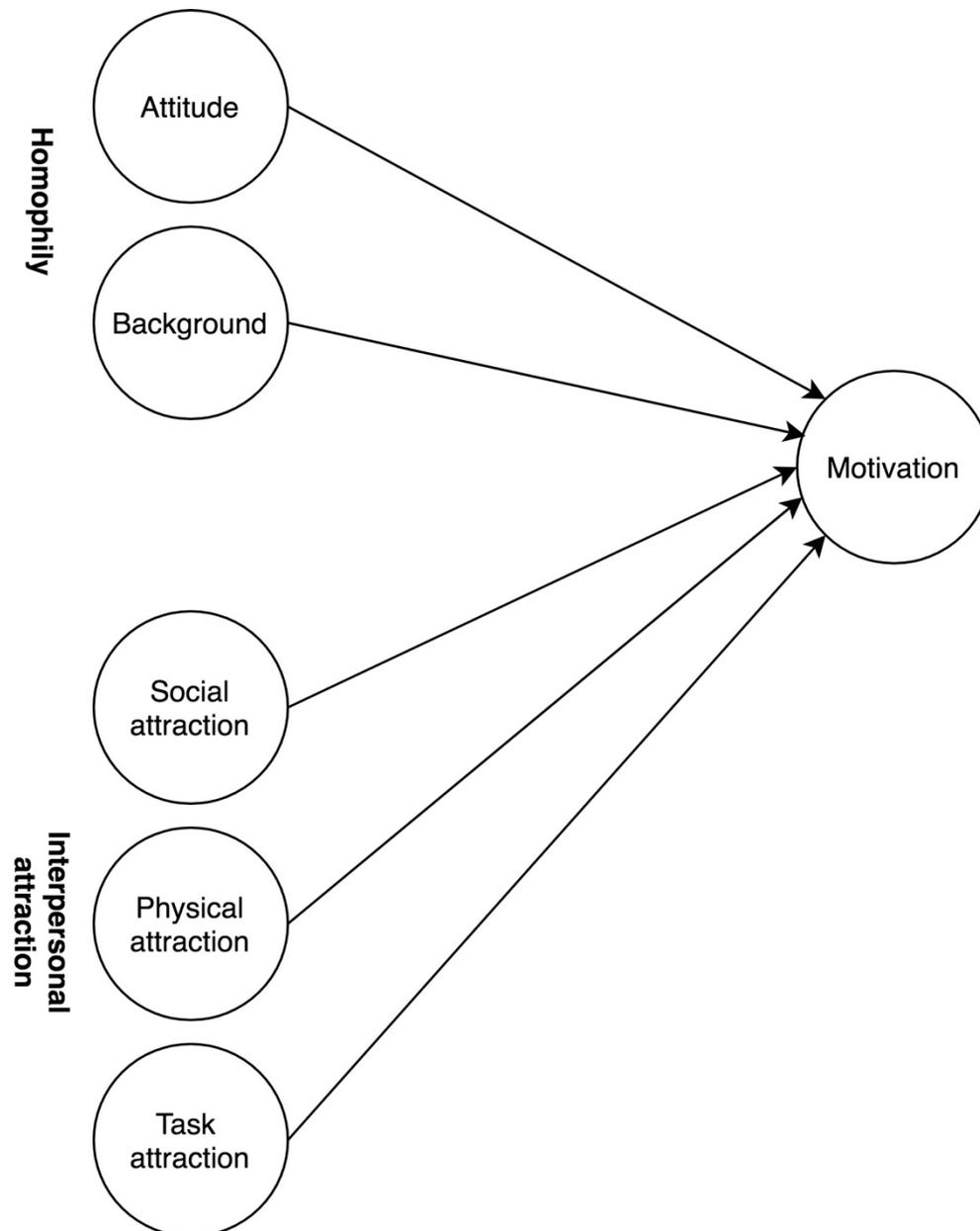


Figure 1: The proposed research model

### 3. Method

The aim of this study is to determine the extent to which coach's interpersonal attraction and homophily may influence youth soccer players' motivation. The population of this study includes all youth who participate in soccer clubs as players. In this study, 94 youth soccer players, using purposive sampling method, were recruited to examine the proposed

hypotheses. The soccer players came from four sport clubs in a developing country. The participants were asked to respond to a closed ended questionnaire in order to identify the influence of coach-related attractions (e.g., social, physical, and task attraction) and homophily on their motivation to learn. The required consents were obtained from all players, as well as the local ethics committee prior to the distribution of the questionnaire. We ensured that the participants' gender and demographic background were balanced in order to ensure the representativeness of the resulting sample from a statistical viewpoint.

### **3.1 Process**

We approached a number of soccer coaches with 10-13 coaching experience from four sport clubs. Four coaches were agreed to take part in this study by encouraging their coachee to take part in this study. We visited the four clubs to obtain the participants' demographical characteristics and consents. We also explained the goal of this study to all players during the first visit, with participants made aware that they could withdraw at any point. The second visit was conducted after a week in which we distributed the questionnaire to the selected players. A total of 94 responses were gathered and processed for future analysis. SmartPLS, a software for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), was used to examine the research hypotheses. SPSS was also used to test the collected data for normality issues.

### **3.2 Questionnaire**

A closed ended questionnaire was used in this study to examine soccer players' motivation-based coach's interpersonal attraction and homophily. A total of 18 items were adapted from McCroskey and McCain (1974) as a measure of social (n:6), physical (n:6), and task (n:6) attractions. These items were validated by many previous studies in different

contexts. As for the coach's homophily, we used 8 items that were developed by McCroskey et al. (1975) to examine the impact of coach's attitude (n:4) and background (n:4) on youth soccer players' motivation. The motivation (achievement motivation) of soccer players was assessed with the Psychological Skills Inventory for Sports (PSIS-R-5) developed and validated by Mahoney, Gabriel, and Perkins (1987). The items for measuring players' motivation consisted of 8 items. Scores on all items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale. The respondents' demographic background was also obtained.

All the items used in this study were previously validated through exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses. In addition, the reliability of the items was previously confirmed by previous studies (e.g., Forsman et al. 2016; McCroskey, McCroskey, & Richmond 2006).

### **3.3 Data preprocessing and analysis**

We used SPSS to examine the collected data for normality, outliers and missing values. Outcomes from the data screening resulted in no modifications to the measures. There were no outliers detected through the covariance matrix based on the on the Mahalanobis distance test ( $p < .001$ ) of standardized values ( $\pm 3.00$ ) (Tabachnick, Fidell, & Ullman, 2007). There were no missing values in the collected data. Then, the descriptive statistics for the items of each variable were processed and obtained. For data analysis, we employed a two-step SEM process based on the recommendation of Anderson and Gerbing (1988) and Chin (2010). The first step consisted of assessing the measurement model by examining the convergent and discriminant validity of the measures. The second step consisted of assessing the structural model and the relationship between the constructs. SmartPLS was used to test the proposed hypotheses using Chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ ) to indicate the model's overall goodness of fit to the collected data.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1 Participants**

A total of 94 questionnaire were distributed to all the identified youth players. Since this study consisted of youth soccer players, all the respondents (n: 94; 100%) were between 13-15 years old. With regard to the gender distribution, a total of 64 players were (68%) were male and 40 (32%) were female. All the respondents were actively participating in various soccer-related programs under the supervision of their coach.

### **4.2 Assessment of the measurement model**

In this study, we used convergent validity and discriminant validity to assess the proposed model. The association between the variable were also assessed using the goodness of fit (GoF) (see section 4.3).

#### *4.2.1 Convergent validity*

We followed the recommendations of Fornell and Larcker (1981) in order to assess the convergent validity of the measures based on three criteria: 1) The loadings of each item should be greater than 0.70; 2) Internal consistency results in terms of composite reliability and Cronbach's Alpha should be greater than 0.70; and 3) average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct should be greater than 0.5. Based on the results shown in Table 1, it can be concluded that the factor loadings for each item exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70. The values of composite reliability (CR) for each construct was found to be between 0.810 to 0.894, thus meeting the accepted threshold criteria above. In addition, the AVE

values for all constructs were found to be between 0.706 to 0.811, thus meeting the accepted threshold value of 0.50. Based on these, it can be said that all three conditions for convergent validity were achieved. We also assessed the internal consistency reliability in order to help us determine the unidimensionality of the measures. This was achieved by using the Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) value for each construct. Based on Table 1, it can be seen that all the  $\alpha$  values were ranging between 0.783 and 0.842, thus meeting the threshold of 0.70.

Table 1: Constructs measures and loading

	<b>Construct Measures</b>	<b>Loading</b>	<b>Composite Reliability (CR)</b>	<b>Average Variance Extracted (AVE)</b>	<b>Cronbach's <math>\alpha</math></b>
<b>Homophily</b>	<b>Attitude (ATT)</b>		0.831	0.731	0.810
	ATT1	0.689			
	ATT2	0.703			
	ATT3	0.769			
	ATT4	0.842			
	<b>Background (BG)</b>		0.894	0.804	0.799
	BG1	0.773			
	BG2	0.849			
<b>Interpersonal Attraction</b>	<b>Social Attraction (SA)</b>		0.855	0.734	0.842
	SA1	0.750			
	SA2	0.867			
	SA3	0.735			
	SA4	0.837			
	SA5	0.800			
	SA6	0.736			
	<b>Physical Attraction (PA)</b>		0.873	0.706	0.806
	PA1	0.701			
	PA2	0.941			
	PA3	0.836			
	PA4	0.840			
	PA5	0.736			
	PA6	0.867			
	<b>Task Attraction (TA)</b>		0.881	0.811	0.783
	TA1	0.731			
	TA2	0.840			
	TA3	0.874			
TA4	0.795				
TA5	0.866				
TA6	0.802				

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<b>Motivation</b>	<b>Motivation (MOT)</b>		0.810	0.760	0.801
	MOT1	0.892			
	MOT2	0.926			
	MOT3	0.834			
	MOT4	0.741			
	MOT5	0.700			
	MOT6	0.815			
	MOT7	0.860			
	MOT8	0.910			

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#### 4.2.2 Discriminant validity

To evaluate the discriminant validity, Fornell and Larcker recommended that the square root of each constructs' AVE should be greater than its highest correlation with any other constructs. Our results in Table 2 presents the AVE values of the square root for each construct (on the diagonal). The obtained results of the AVE values showed that each construct correlated significantly with itself when compared with all the other constructs in the model. Based on these, it can be concluded that each construct had adequate convergent and discriminant validity in the measurement mode.

Table 2: Constructs correlations and discriminant validity

	ATT	BG	SA	PA	TA	MOT
ATT	<b>0.822</b>					
BG	0.342	<b>0.793</b>				
SA	0.404	0.361	<b>0.801</b>			
PA	0.226	0.413	0.324	<b>0.831</b>		
TA	0.442	0.462	0.532	0.511	<b>0.742</b>	
MOT	0.301	0.355	0.334	0.341	0.461	<b>0.830</b>

Bold Numbers in the diagonal represent the AVE of the construct; to achieve the discriminant validity of the construct, the AVE of each construct should exceed the correlations shared between the construct and other constructs in the model

#### 4.3 Assessment of the structural model

The proposed hypotheses were tested in this study by assessing the structural model. Here, we used the path coefficients ( $\beta$ ) for the relationship between two variables (independent and dependent variables) to determine the level of effect between constructs and degree of significance of that effect. We applied bootstrapping standards of 5000 samples in order to examine the level of significance of the paths (t-value). In addition, we used the GoF index to examine the association between constructs in the hypothesized model. For this, we followed the recommendations of (Tenenhaus, Vinzi, Chatelin, & Lauro, 2005). The GoF index was measured

by determining the geometric mean of the construct's AVE value and the average R2 (for endogenous constructs) as shown below:

$$\text{GoF} = \sqrt{(\overline{R^2} \times \overline{\text{AVE}})}$$

The GoF value for the proposed model in this study was 0.741. Wetzels, Odekerken-Schröder, and Van Oppen (2009) asserted that a GoF value greater than 0.36 is considered large. Therefore, it can be said that the model GoF value of 0.741 is an acceptable representation of the model's validity.

Table 3 presents the testing results of the structural model by demonstrating the values of path coefficient ( $\beta$ ), t-value, and p-value. The results showed that four out of five hypotheses were supported by the data. The results showed that Coach's characteristics in terms of attitude ( $\beta = 0.196$ ,  $t = 1.892$ ,  $p = 0.045$ ) had a significant influence on youth soccer players' motivation. However, the results showed no significance influence of Coach's characteristics in terms of background on youth soccer players' motivation ( $\beta = 0.043$ ,  $t = 1.020$ ,  $p = 0.311$ ). This can be due to that youth players are connecting to their coaches with strong relationships that may prevent the influence of coach's background characteristics on their motivation. In addition, the results showed that coach's interpersonal attraction in terms of social attraction ( $\beta = 0.340$ ,  $t = 3.744$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), physical attraction ( $\beta = 0.218$ ,  $t = 0.331$ ,  $p = 0.013$ ), and task attraction ( $\beta = 0.327$ ,  $t = 3.429$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ) had a significant influence on youth soccer players' motivation. All the tested hypotheses revealed an excellent model fit for the data.

Coefficient of determination (R2 value) was employed to test for model conformity based on the model's predictive accuracy between a specific endogenous construct's actual and predicted values. The literature showed that R2 values of 0.75, 0.50, or 0.25 for the endogenous

constructs can be described as respectively substantial, moderate, and weak (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2016). Our results showed that the model accounted for 72% of the variance which explained youth soccer players' motivation, which considered substantial (Hair, et al., 2016).

Table 3: Significance testing results of the structural model path coefficients

Path	Path Coefficients ( $\beta$ )	t-value	p-value	Result
H <sub>1</sub> : ATT -> MOT	0.196	1.892**	0.045	Supported
H <sub>2</sub> : BG -> MOT	0.043	1.020	0.311	Not supported
H <sub>3</sub> : SA -> MOT	0.340	3.744***	0.000	Supported
H <sub>4</sub> : PA -> MOT	0.218	0.331**	0.013	Supported
H <sub>5</sub> : TA -> MOT	0.327	3.429***	0.000	Supported

\*p<0.10, \*\*p<0.05, \*\*\*p<0.01, NS= not significant

## 5. Discussion

The impact of coach's interpersonal attraction and homophily on youth soccer players' motivation was assessed in this study. The modeling results showed that coach's homophily features in terms of attitude had a significant influence on players' motivation. This can be explained by the fact that attitude itself can be considered as an independent source of individual differences at which it can operate collectively with the effect of personality and cognition. Changes in coach's attitude in the context of this study can be attributed to different educational environments and thus, behavior of coaches can significantly influence players' motivation with a sense of commitment and belongingness towards the learning process. Based on these, it can be said that coach's attitude is the result of collective perceptions that players develop on different aspects of coaching situations. This finding is in line with the work of Pawar (2017) who characterized that the attitude of a teacher is responsible for the development of students' motivation level in the classroom. The finding also supports the work of Woldeamanuel (2019) who argued that individuals' motivation is influenced by certain attitude factors, principles, and

concepts which help them to solve different learning problems. However, the results showed no significant influence of coach's background on youth soccer players' motivation. Our review of the literature reviewed a very little evidence about the impact of individuals' background on people motivation. Yet, this finding is not in line with few previous studies, like (Buriro, Buriro, & Abbasi, 2015) who found that the higher the socio-economic status and the more stable individuals' socio-economic background, and the more motivated they were to learn.

As for the impact of coach's interpersonal attraction in terms of social attraction on youth soccer players' motivation, the result showed a significant influence. This can be explained by the role of certain attraction subgroups change in shaping individuals' quality. The literature (e.g., Çolak, 2011) showed that there is a significant correlation between social, physical, instructional attraction and motivation. This finding adds to the work of Kutluca and Gokalp (2011) who argued that social attraction can be explained through the social abilities and status of a person, which in turn can influence individuals' motivation. The results also showed that coach's interpersonal attraction in terms of physical attraction can influence youth soccer player's motivation. According to McAuley, Wraith, and Duncan (1991), physical attraction are possible dimensions representing a hierarchical or second-order unitary construct of motivation. Won and Kitamura (2006) reported that aesthetics and physical skill may largely contribute to individuals' motivation. Despite these, the literature showed a limited evidence about the influence of physical and task attraction on individuals' motivation. One of the few studies by Bekiari and Petanidis (2016) which showed a positive association between physical attraction and enjoyment/importance. Most of the studies conducted in this field were looking on the impact of interpersonal attraction on individuals' use of technology. We also found a significant influence of task attraction on players' motivation. Boekaerts (1999) stated that the value an

individual attach to a task (task attraction and perceived relevance) can somehow drive people's motivation to learn. This finding supports the work of Coulson, Barnett, Ferguson, and Gould (2012) which predicted that task attraction appears as a predictor of liking at which the utility of task might be expected to be manifest. In addition, task attraction/relevance can somehow help justify the increase in students' self-referenced cognitions and motivational beliefs.

## **6. Limitations and future works**

There are a number of limitations that can be addressed in future works. For example, although this study examined the impact of the three dimensions of interpersonal attraction (e.g., social, physical, and task) on youth soccer players' motivation, understanding how these dimensions influence the homophily of a coach has not been investigated in this study. Meanwhile, other coach-related values, such as commitment, encouragement, and competency, were not considered in this study. The sample of this study was also limited to youth soccer players with age group between 13-15 years. Based on these, this work provides some interesting opportunities for future studies. The obtained results in this study demonstrate the impact of certain interpersonal attractions and homophily of the coach on players' motivation in a developing country, however, the impact of these characteristics might be different in other countries. As such, it is recommended that future studies further investigate the different dimensions of interpersonal characteristics in a sport context and examine its impact on players' learning development in different institutional contexts. Future research may also pay more attention to the relationship between coach's interpersonal attraction and homophily. Also, it could be interesting to compare the findings from different perspectives of coaches and players.

Outcomes from such comparison may help sport centres and coaches to pay more attention to challenges that are directly linked to players' skills development.

## **7. Conclusion**

This study examined the impact of coach interpersonal attraction and homophily on youth soccer players' motivation. The PLS results showed a positive influence of coach's interpersonal attraction in terms of social, physical, and task on youth soccer players' motivation. We also found that coach's homophily attraction in terms of attitude to positively influence the motivation of soccer players. These findings can contribute to the development of coaching quality and players' motivation by identifying effective leadership styles to enable players become emotionally involved.

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