



# Enhancing Child Development with Grassroots Football: Exploring A Coach's Challenges and Achievements

Stephen A. Fadare<sup>1\*</sup>, Jerome N. Dela Pena<sup>2</sup>, Jearlie Mae A. Basergo<sup>3</sup>, Josephin Salapuddin Duyaguit<sup>4</sup>, Anielou B. Espinosa<sup>5</sup>, Precious Salas Jamin<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1,6</sup>College of SPEAR, Mindanao State University, Marawi, Philippines; fadstep@yahoo.com (S.A.F.).

<sup>2</sup>University of Science and Technology of Southern Philippines, Claveria, Philippines.

<sup>3</sup>Mainit Elementary School, Mainit Iligan City, Philippines.

<sup>4,5</sup>Mindanao State University- BUUG Campus, Datupanas BUUG, Zamboanga Sibugay, Philippines.

**Abstract.** UNESCO and UNICEF strongly support the use of sports (e.g., grassroots football) as a means to promote the development and empowerment of children and youth. Purpose: The article delves into the challenges and achievements of a specific coach in Butuan City, Philippines, as they strive to foster the holistic development of children through grassroots football. This study is a case study to understand how selected coach navigate the complex landscape of developing children through grassroots football in the community. The study utilized narrative inquiry in qualitative, using semi-structured interview guide, photographs, observation, life history and other artifacts. We also used convenient sampling underpinned by others corroborate literature review. The findings revealed eight areas of interview guide results that were revealed, Background Information, Approach and Philosophy, Balance technical and tactical, Challenges in Grassroots football, How to overcome, Achievement/Success, Collaboration with Other Coaches, Enhanced ability to develop the whole child. It was concluded that grassroots sports events foster community engagement, social cohesion, and trust, leading to sustainable impact on social capital. It promote collaboration, teamwork, and social support, strengthening community bonds and development among coaches and children. Investing in such initiatives can have long-term benefits for social progress.

**Keywords:** Achievement, Community engagement, Developing children, Grassroots football, Struggles.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The power of sports to transform lives and communities has been well-documented, and grassroots football is increasingly recognized as a particularly effective avenue for holistic youth development. Unlike the highly competitive and often professionalized realm of elite football, grassroots football programs focus on engaging children and youth at the community level, providing them with opportunities to not only hone their athletic skills but also develop essential life skills, character, and social-emotional well-being. According to the material, both UNESCO and UNICEF strongly support the use of sports, namely grassroots football, as a means to promote the development and empowerment of children and youth (Othman et al., 2022; Cunningham, 2019).

UNESCO acknowledges the intrinsic worth of sports and physical education in fostering the whole growth of young individuals (Bailey, 2018; Cunningham, 2019). They promote the integration of sports and physical exercise into education systems, since they enhance the physical, cognitive, social, and emotional well-being of children and adolescents (Messing et al., 2019).

UNESCO has provided backing for a range of projects and programs that employ sports, such as grassroots football, to promote social integration, the cultivation of life skills, and the encouragement of good behavioral transformation among young people. For instance, collaborated with groups such as Football for Humanities in the Philippines to execute grassroots football initiatives that empower youth and contribute to the development of communities (Mariga, 2021).

UNICEF's Stance: UNICEF strongly advocates for the efficacy of sports and play in promoting the robust growth and welfare of children and adolescents (WHO, 2021; Otterbein, 2020). They acknowledge that sports have the potential to serve as a potent instrument for encouraging physical exercise, enhancing mental well-being, cultivating social relationships, and imparting essential life skills (Gadai et al., 2022). Also, it has consistently advocated for the implementation of community-based sports initiatives, such as football, to effectively include and empower disadvantaged and vulnerable young individuals. UNICEF has partnered with local groups in the Philippines (PFF, FFH) to construct grassroots football programs aimed at providing secure environments for children to engage in play, education, and holistic growth (Gadai et al., 2022).

Both UNESCO, UNICEF and WHO have continuously supported the incorporation of sports and physical activity into development and education initiatives (WHO, 2019; Karageorghis et al., 2021). They acknowledge the significant impact these activities may have on the lives of children and youth, including the promotion of grassroots football in the Philippines. Documentation of the creation and development of grassroots sports in developed nations, such as the United Kingdom (UK), the United States of America (USA), Canada, and others, demonstrates an increase in youth participation and engagement in sports. Research has shown that developed countries have made significant strides in promoting and sustaining grassroots sports programs, leading to increased youth participation and engagement. The UK conducted a study that revealed a 25% increase in the number of children and young people participating in regular sports activities over the past decade, largely

attributed to the growth of grassroots initiatives (Chalkley & Milton, 2021). Also, a longitudinal study in the UK found that young people who were actively involved in community-based sports activities were more likely to develop leadership skills, pursue higher education, and maintain healthy lifestyles in adulthood (Coalter, 2015).

Furthermore, grassroots sports programs improve physical and mental well-being among young participants. A study conducted in the USA found that children and adolescents involved in community-based sports activities exhibited higher levels of physical fitness, self-esteem, and social-emotional competence compared to their non-participating peers (Lewis et al., 2017). In addition to this, a study in Canada revealed that community-based sports programs were effective in bridging cultural divides, fostering inter-group relationships, and facilitating the integration of immigrant and refugee youth (Spaaij, 2015). As a result, research has demonstrated the long-term benefits of grassroots sports participation in many developed countries.

In the Philippines, a nation where basketball has long reigned supreme, a quiet revolution is unfolding on the grassroots football pitches (Wrack, 2022). Over the past decades, the once-overlooked sport has gained remarkable momentum, driven by the unwavering passion of dedicated coaches, visionary community organizations, and impactful international development initiatives (Peace, 2024; Wrack, 2022).

Amidst this evolving landscape, new possibilities for empowering young people and fostering positive change at the local level have emerged. Football, once perceived as a secondary pursuit, has now become a catalyst for transforming the lives of Filipino/Filipina youth, offering them a pathway to personal growth, social inclusion, and community empowerment (Othman et al., 2022; Mielick, 2023). But the grassroots football movement in the Philippines is not just about the sport itself. It has garnered the support of a growing network of organizations and NGOs (Darnell et al., 2019), all committed to keeping children away from harmful behaviors and providing them with constructive alternatives. Entities like Football for Humanities (FFH), UCSSC United Countries School Sports Council, Unity NET, and UNESCO have joined forces to develop and expand grassroots football, recognizing its unique power to shape the futures of the nation's youth (Forde, 2023; Coombes & Rossato, 2023; Kagan, 2014).

Through these collective efforts, the once-muted voices of grassroots football in the Philippines are now resonating loudly, painting a vision of a future where the whole child – their physical, cognitive, social-emotional, and character development – is nurtured through the transformative power of the beautiful game (Cutcher, & Boyd, 2018; Baquiran, 2014).



**Figure 1:** Coaching and developing children using football.

### 1.1. The Importance of Holistic Youth Development Through Grassroots Football

The unique potential of grassroots football to contribute to the holistic development of young people lies in its ability to address various aspects of their growth and well-being. Beyond the development of technical and physical skills, grassroots football programs in the Philippines and elsewhere have been found to cultivate essential life skills, such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and leadership (Husni, 2020; Lee, 2002). Furthermore, research has shown that participation in grassroots football can have a positive impact on the

social-emotional well-being of young people, including enhanced self-confidence, resilience, and the ability to navigate interpersonal relationships (Thorpe, 2021; Bondoc Jr, 2023; Bandoles, 202). The inclusive and community-driven nature of these programs creates a supportive environment where young people can explore their identities, build meaningful connections, and develop a sense of belonging (Fadare et al., 2022).

Grassroots football also holds the potential to address broader societal challenges faced by communities in the Philippines, such as youth unemployment, violence, and social exclusion. By providing structured activities, positive role models, and pathways for personal and professional development, grassroots football programs can serve as a catalyst for social change and empower marginalized youth to become agents of transformation in their communities (Husni, 2020; Lee, 2002).

### **1.2. The Role of Grassroots Football Coaches in Developing the Whole Child**

At the heart of the grassroots football movement in the Philippines are the dedicated coaches who have committed themselves to the holistic development of young people. These coaches play a crucial role in shaping the experiences and outcomes of the participants, as they are responsible for designing and implementing the program activities, fostering supportive relationships, and serving as role models (Bandoles, 2021). Grassroots football coaches in the Philippines often come from diverse backgrounds, with some having formal training in coaching, while others have learned through their own experiences and passion for the sport. Regardless of their previous experience, these coaches are united in their belief that football can be a powerful tool for personal growth, social inclusion, and community empowerment (McSweeney, 2020).

However, the path of grassroots football coaches in the Philippines is not without its challenges. They often face resource constraints, limited access to professional development opportunities, and societal perceptions that may undervalue the importance of their work (Prabhakaran, 2017). Navigating these obstacles while maintaining a focus on the holistic development of young people requires immense dedication, creativity, and resilience.

Despite these challenges, grassroots football coaches in the Philippines have demonstrated remarkable achievements in their efforts to nurture the whole child (Dempsey, 2023). Through innovative programs, community partnerships, and personalized approaches, they have been able to positively impact the lives of young people, fostering their physical, cognitive, social-emotional, and character development (Lerner et al., 2021).

### **1.3. The Significance of Exploring the Experiences of Grassroots Football Coaches**

Understanding the experiences, struggles, and achievements of grassroots football coaches in the Philippines is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, by shedding light on the realities faced by these coaches, policymakers, and stakeholders can better recognize the value of their work and develop strategies to support and empower them (Newman et al., 2020).

Secondly, exploring the perspectives and practices of grassroots football coaches can provide insights into the effective implementation of holistic youth development programs. By learning from the successes and challenges of these coaches, other communities and organizations can adapt and replicate effective approaches, ultimately expanding the reach and impact of grassroots football initiatives (Millar et al., 2020; Crisp & Brackley, 2022; Hindmarsh, 2020).

Moreover, amplifying the voices and experiences of grassroots football coaches can contribute to a broader understanding of the transformative power of sports-based interventions in addressing societal challenges, particularly in the context of developing countries like the Philippines. This knowledge can inform policy decisions, funding priorities, and the design of future programs that harness the potential of sports for holistic youth development and community empowerment (McSweeney, 2020).

The article delves into the challenges and achievements of a specific coach in Butuan City, Philippines, as he strives to foster the holistic development of children through grassroots football, as a case study to see how he navigates the complex landscape of developing the whole child through his work at the community level. By delving into the perspectives and practices of these dedicated individuals, the research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the transformative potential of grassroots football and the critical role played by coaches in realizing this potential.

## **2. METHODS**

### **2.1. Study Design and Sample**

#### **2.1.1. Case Study of Coach at Butuan City**

The study employed narrative inquiry as a qualitative research approach, utilizing a semi-structured interview guide, pictures, observation, life history, and other artifacts. Other corroborating literature studies further substantiated our selection of respondents through convenient sampling. This research delves into grassroots football coach in the City of Butuan, in the Philippines, with a specialized coach in grassroots football as a case study to see how the coach navigates the complex landscape of developing with nano-enhanced grassroots football by exploring the challenges and success stories.

## 2.2. Procedure

We utilized rigorous selection criteria to carefully select the respondent for the study, focusing on involvement in coaching grassroots football and numerous accomplishments. Professionals in the field meticulously designed and semi-structured the interview guide questions, then thoroughly evaluated them. We provided the coach with the interview guide question and a request for consent. Additionally, we informed the coach about the research goal and sought his support and agreement on it. We conducted the observation and interview using an internet platform, and the coach also recorded the data to ensure its clarity. The respondent's involvement in community assignments and coaching grassroots programs prolonged the interview. Witnessing the respondent's coaching technique also enriched the interview. The next section examines eight aspects of the interview's findings, as revealed by the grassroots football coach in Butuan City. Contextual information, methodology, and beliefs help maintain a harmonious equilibrium between the technical and tactical aspects. Obstacles encountered in community-level football: Strategies for overcoming challenges include striving for achievement or success, collaborating with other coaches, and improving the capacity to create the holistic well-being of the child.



**Figure 2:** Coaching and developing children using football.

## 3. FINDINGS

### 3.1. Contextual information

- [ ] AFC "C" Licensed
- [ ] Grassroots Development Officer
- [ ] Football for Humanity Regional Coordinator
- [ ] Head Coach of Father Saturnino Urios University
- [ ] Founder of First Touch Football Grassroots Training Development
- [ ] 17 years coaching Grassroots
- [ ] My compassion and accountability that motivated me to be in coaching grassroots; 17 years ago when I saw my nephew was in video games addiction, as their uncle it was my accountability to reach them out from that addiction. I used football for them. I spent the money I saved for my laptop. I bought 15 balls and a goal post.

### 3.2. Approach and Philosophy

- [ ] Grassroots Philosophy: Football is for everyone, everywhere and anywhere
- [ ] My philosophy in coaching grassroots anchored with :
- [ ] Accountability, Empowerment and Legacy

### 3.3. Balance technical and tactical

It's one step at a time per child development. Technical first before tactical

Technically sound can perform tactical easy.

My focus in coaching grassroots its not all about football but LIFE values, i shared to the kids the ultimate purpose of LIFE. There's 5 impacts to know their purpose.

1. God's Love
2. To Love God
3. Love your Family
4. Love Others
5. Our Goal: to glorify God

### 3.4. Obstacles Encounter in Grassroots Football

1. No Fundings
  - [ ] Training equipment especially footballs the ratio is 1 kid 1 ball
  - [ ] Venue rental
  - [ ] Tournaments registration/transpo/accommodation
2. Lack of support
3. When parents overpower the coaches
  - [ ] Parents interfere the coach decisions
4. Envy (the crab mentality)

### 3.5. Strategies for overcome

1. Raising funds
  - [ ] Conducting football clinics
  - [ ] imposed monthly dues or registration from the parents
  - [ ] Sponsorships/ Looking for partners
2. Orientation: Parents code of conduct presentation
3. Ignore all those negatives, just keep on doing, focus on your program. It will sustain if you have vision and vision fueled by passion.

### 3.6. Achievement /Success

1. Proud Coach knowing that all my grassroot football players are now in different schools in Manila as Varsity Players.
2. The players who represent the Caraga region this year 2024 got their Championship back after 8 years in Football.
3. They are matured in their IQ and know what they are doing and is the good of everybody, and they are now serving the community in their various schools they represent not only in football but in the community.

## 4. DISCUSSION

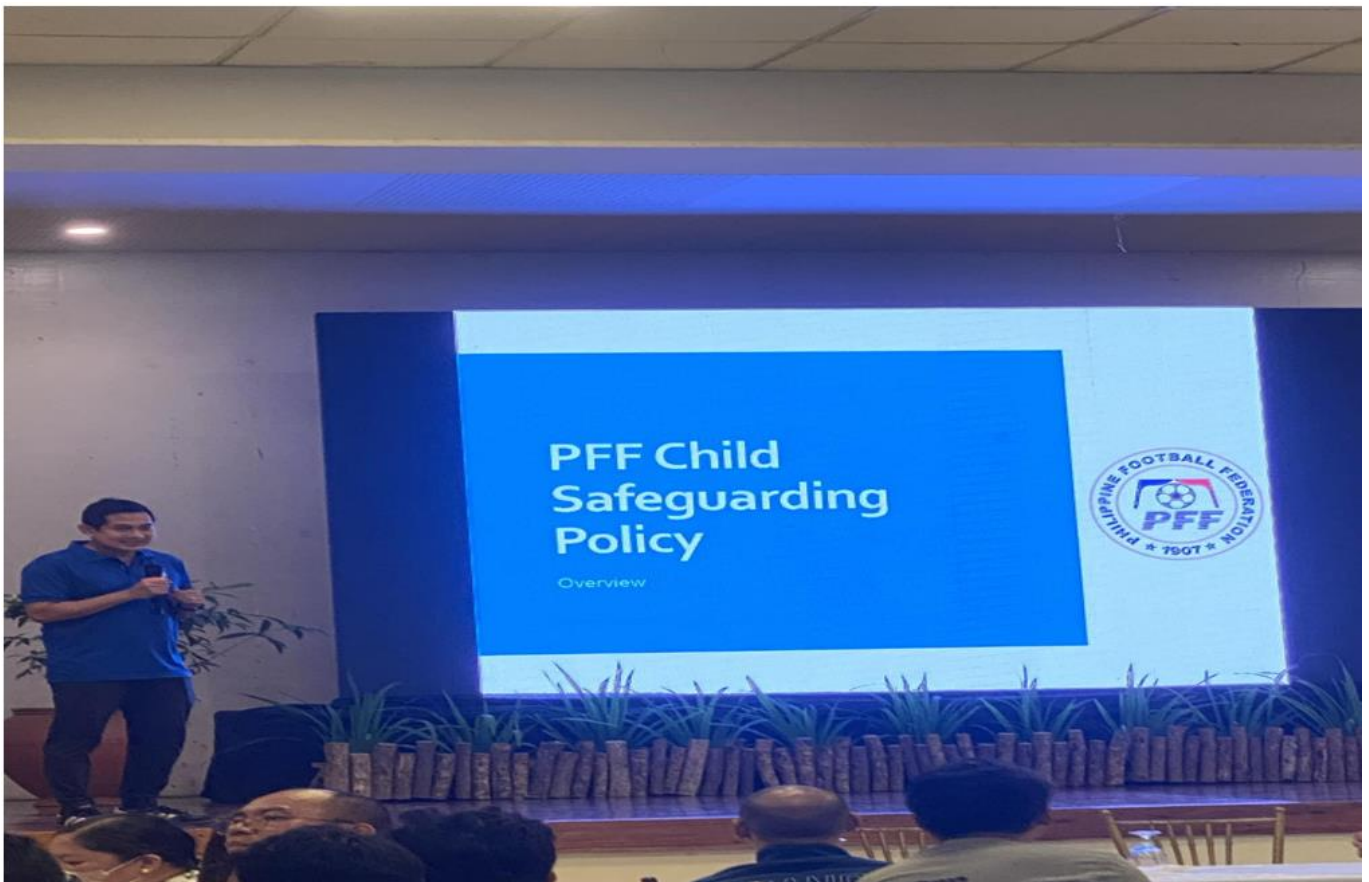
The aim of the study is to explore the struggles, and achievements of grassroots football coach at the City of Butuan, in the Philippines with specialized coaches in grassroots football as a case study to see how the coach navigates the complex landscape of developing the whole child through grassroots football in the community. Although, it demonstrated the validity of the following theories, which form its foundation and part of the themes. *Self-Determination Theory* (SDT) by [Deci and Ryan \(2008\)](#) focuses on intrinsic motivation, autonomy, and competence as essential factors for human motivation and well-being. We can use it to understand the motivation of coaches, their perception of autonomy in coaching decisions, and their sense of competence in promoting the development of children in grassroots football. It implies that when coaches and trainers receive adequate motivation from parents, communities, and leaders, they will give their best and want to do more. Similarly, when children reflect on the support and motivation they received from their parents and the entire community, they will undoubtedly achieve success.

The research also highlighted *Social Learning Theory* by [Bandura \(1977\)](#), this may be utilized to analyze the process by which coaches acquire knowledge by seeing and engaging with other coaches, and how they subsequently implement these observations into their coaching methodologies within grassroots football. Furthermore, via analyzing how coaches actively participate in peer learning and utilize those insights in their teaching methods, this reveals the influence of observational learning on the development of coaching skills. Coaches can enhance their skills by attending training sessions conducted by experienced colleagues, taking part

in coach education seminars, or participating in collaborative debriefs after matches to discuss ideas and techniques. Through the analysis of these interactions, we may gain a deeper comprehension of how coaches learn novel information and abilities from their colleagues, resulting in enhancements in their coaching methodologies and the outcomes of player growth.

According to Coach, football is a sport that brings people together from all walks of life, crossing boundaries, ethnicities, and backgrounds. However, for many young children, taking the initial step into the world of football can be intimidating, especially if they have no prior experience with or exposure to the game. The coach also revealed that the training program is the beginning of a lifelong passion for the sport.

Our philosophy is based on the belief that every kid has the right to experience. Figure Furthermore, the results of the study suggested that utilizing football as an intervention to address video game addiction in young individuals can lead to positive personal development outcomes, increased social responsibility, and community engagement (Bruner et al., 2023). The supporting studies highlight the positive impact of sports-based youth development programs and sports coaching on youth's personal development, wellbeing, and social responsibility (Lower-Hoppe et al., 2021). This interpretation aligns with the participants passion for coaching grassroots football and using it as a tool to positively impact the lives of young individuals.



**Figure 3:** Collaboration among Coaches during seminar and training to safe guarding and developing children using football.

Conversely, the research conducted by Karimi (2024) provided insight into the constraints and difficulties associated with utilizing sports-based therapies, such as football, to tackle child addictions such as video game addiction. It may provoke concerns regarding the efficacy of sports programs in tackling deeply ingrained addictive habits and highlight the necessity for comprehensive, interdisciplinary methods to resolving addictions in young people.

This view implies that although football and coaching might have advantages, they may not be the exclusive remedy for dealing with intricate behavioral problems such as addiction. By integrating these interpretations with our study findings, we can acquire a more all-encompassing comprehension of the potential consequences and significance of utilizing football and coaching in grassroots development to tackle video game addiction and foster personal growth and social accountability among young individuals. Based on the statement "Philosophy: Football is for everyone, everywhere and anywhere" combined with the coaching philosophy of "Accountability, Empowerment, and Legacy" implies a strong commitment to inclusivity, accessibility, and values-driven coaching in grassroots football (Almonacid-Fierro et al., 2024; Bergh & Ohlander, 2020).

Hover et al. (2016) study explores the impact of grassroots athletic events on social capital. They conducted a case study on a European Capital of Sport event, focusing on how these events can enhance social capital within communities. Social capital, which includes interconnectedness, associations, and shared values, is facilitated by

promoting social connections, belonging, shared experiences, and collective identities among participants, volunteers, and stakeholders.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study revealed some tangible lessons that can be derived from it, including:

1. Importance of community engagement: Grassroots sports events can serve as a platform for bringing the community together, fostering social connections, and promoting active participation among individuals from diverse backgrounds.
2. Promotion of social cohesion: By providing opportunities for collaboration, teamwork, and shared experiences, grassroots sports events can help strengthen social bonds within the community and build a sense of solidarity.
3. Building trust and reciprocity: Participation in grassroots sports events can promote trust, reciprocity, and social support among community members, leading to the development of robust social networks and relationships.
4. Sustainable impact: The study highlights the long-term benefits of grassroots sports events in contributing to the social capital of a community, emphasizing the importance of continued investment in such initiatives for sustainable social development.

In summary, the study underscores the positive influence of local sports events on enhancing, nurturing, and training new coaches, thereby fostering a sense of unity and interdependence within community-based football. Recognizing the potential of sporting events to boost social engagement and communication, stakeholders may develop and execute projects that harness the influence of sports to reinforce social connections, generate enduring beneficial effects in communities, and support and motivate additional grass-roots football coaches. It also emphasizes that other professions or professionals in other specializations look into alternative ways or means of developing a child in different areas of education. Further studies can be used to include other coaches in both adult and female football to see how this can help develop our community through sports and utilize other methods of research to investigate the study.

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