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INVESTIGATION OF THE POSITIONAL COMPETITION LEVELS OF U17 – U19 AND A-TEAM FOOTBALL PLAYERS

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ABSTRACT

By measuring the reflections of competition in football, it is aimed to determine the status of factors that directly affect individual and team performance, such as development effort, teammate support, supporting a teammate, communication, personal awareness, knowing the coach and coach preference. In the study, the "Positional Competition Scale in Sports" was applied to the football players. While there are differences compared to other athletes in the categories of teammate support and coach preference of football players between the ages of 14-16, there are differences compared to other athletes in the sub-categories of development effort and self-awareness of football players in the 14-16 age group. Get 1-3 years of education in the education age category. When the team category was evaluated, it was determined that the U19 and U17 groups made a difference in the teammate support and coach preference subcategory. There seems to be a general difference in forwards compared to defenders and midfielders. As a result, it is understood that young athletes have more in-team group support in terms of regular training process, and that they make significant progress in the development effort categories in terms of being included in the team and taking responsibility, compared to other subgroups. and self-awareness.

Keywords- Football, positional competition, team sports

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Beyond the sport, physical activity and game feature that brings people together in masses for the same purposes, football has developed rapidly as an economic, industrial and commercial process thanks to the organizations organized at national and international levels. In this process, football has become one of the cornerstones of the economy by increasing the level of competition and revealing new types of competition (Akgül & Karafil, 2021). Competition is considered to be an indispensable element in sports. It is thought that when a player, coach or spectator participates in any sports organization, the feeling of competition will manifest itself for different reasons not only among the teams but also among the athletes. It is normal for a branch followed by millions of people through social media and visual media to create internal and external pressures on athletes. These pressures and expectations directly affect performance (Dinçer, Arı & Sözen, 2017). In order to realize expectations and dreams such as personal satisfaction, professional satisfaction, recognition, winning awards and earning economic income, football players have to perform at a better level than their teammates, especially those competing in their own positions. In order to play well on the field and gain superiority over the opponent, it is important that all players in the team have high skill levels.

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Athletes may experience physiological and psychological ups and downs during their performance for different reasons (Karalaş et al., 2011).

Performance in football includes physiological, technical, and tactical values of football, as well as psychological processes, such as fighting under pressure, commitment to the system, coping with stress and anxiety, and continuity of attention and concentration. Professional football players cover an average distance of 10 kilometers during a match (Palucci-Vieira et al., 2018), but only 10% of this distance is achieved at high tempo (Rampinini et al., 2007). Each position in football has different styles, performance expectations and physical fitness requirements. Different playing positions need to be considered and these actions must be followed carefully (Oliva-Lozano et al., 2020). To advance research on intra-team competition in sports, it is important to relate specific dimensions of positional competition to relevant group dynamics. It is thought that the literature research will deepen the understanding of how competition within teams can contribute to athletes' sports experiences (Worley et al., 2022).

In addition to the desire to belong to a team and be a part of it, football players want to realize their potential and be different from other football players by imitating successful football players in the industry or taking them as a model. They want to feel strong and special, along with factors such as the desire to be ahead of other football players and the desire to compete with them for her personal sporting success. Coaches and professionals in this sport should be encouraged to contribute to the motivation levels of the developing football player through strategies and teaching methods that enable them to make decisions and stand out more, in order to reduce or mitigate the negative effects that competition can have in football (Harenberg et al., 2021; Ureña-Lopera et al., 2020). All team athletes are in competition with their teammates in the positions they specialize in. Football players are expected to fulfill their duties and responsibilities consciously and reflect their performance. In the positional approach, it cannot be said that any position is more important than other positions. It may be concluded that in football, where defensive and offensive strategies are developed, positions are given equal importance (Konter, 2005).

In recent years, there has been an increase in the literature on issues related to athlete tracking (Gabbett et al., 2017), with numerous electronic performance monitoring systems (Go´mez-Carmona et al., 2019), helping coaches measure competitive differences and their team's goals by providing a detailed understanding of football match demands. positive impact ethics has been seen in determining (Gabbett et al., 2017; Olivares, 2019). Observations, analysis and tests play an important role in making game performance more efficient and in training long-term performance athletes. It will also contribute to determining training plans according to player levels and examining the tactical behavior of athletes. This study aims to help football clubs and coaches make the right decisions in player selection processes and to ensure that teams are more competitive by measuring the positional competition of athletes playing in different positions at U17, U19 and team A levels and the level of this competition in different categories. An improved player selection process and better player placements can increase the success of teams and help them achieve better results.

2.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Research group

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The population of the research consists of licensed football players in the team A, U19 and U17 teams who are actively involved in the Turkish Football Federation 2022-2023 football season. The sample group of the research consists of 500 football players playing in amateur and professional teams registered by the Turkish Football Federation in Istanbul and Kocaeli provinces.

In the research, on a voluntary basis, the teams met face to face with the players on the training days and hours, the purpose of the study was explained, and then they were asked to fill out the survey individually. In addition, data was collected by carefully conducting a survey on Google form with the coaches of the teams that could not be reached due to environmental conditions. The research was conducted with the approval of Kocaeli University Social and Humanities Ethics Committee dated 01.11.2022 and numbered 314119.

Table 1: Research group demographic characteristics

	Category	N	%
Age (year)	14-16	170	34.0
	17-19	166	33.2
	20 and above	164	32.8
Training Age (year)	1-3	97	19.4
	4-6	177	35.4
	7-9	123	24.6
	10 and above	103	20.6
Team Position	Defense	164	32.8
	Midfielder	167	33.4
	Striker	169	44.8
Group Category	U17	209	41.8
	U19	98	19.6
	Team A	193	38.6
Education	Middle School	38	7.6
	High School	311	62.2
	University	151	30.2

2.2 Research Limitation

Athletes included in the research; Being an athlete in Istanbul and Kocaeli, being an athlete in a licensed football club, athletes being male, being over 14 years old and training for at least one year.

2.3 Data Collection Tools

“Positional Competition Scale” deals with the comparison of athletes playing in the same position within the team with other athletes. The scale is a 7-point Likert type scale consisting of 25 questions and 7 sub-factors (1=I do not agree at all, 7=I completely agree). Sub-factors of the current scale include effort to improve, push by teammate, pushing teammate, communication, self-awareness, coach recognition, and coach selection. Its development was carried out in four stages (item creation, preliminary item analysis, scale improvement, validity and reliability estimation). The Cronbach Alpha coefficient of the scale ranged between 81 and

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87, and the composite reliability value (CR) took values between .75 and .90. This scale was adapted into Turkish by Akgül and Karafil (2021) of the "Positional Competition Scale in Sports" developed by Harenberg, Riemer, Dorsch, Karreman and Paradis (2019) (Harenberg et al., 2019; Akgül and Karafil, 2021).

In adapting the scale to Turkish, the study group consisted of a total of 235 athletes playing professional and amateur football, and language validity, confirmatory factor analysis, divergent and convergent validity, item analysis, Cr and Cronbach Alpha internal consistency methods were used (Akgül and Karafil, 2021). In the study, the suitability of the survey analysis to normal distribution was applied with the Kruskal-Wallis test. The Cronbach Alpha value of the survey was found to be .931. Cronbach Alpha values of the survey subcategories were determined as .910, teammate support .848, teammate support .893, communication .860, self-awareness .856, coach recognition .870 and coach preference .704.

2.4 Statistical analysis

The data of the study were analyzed with the IBM SPSS (Version 22 for Windows; IBM, Armonk, NY, USA) program, and parametric test analysis was performed after it was determined that it was suitable for normal distribution ($p < .05$). In the analyses, Kruskal-Wallıs H Test (Kruskal-Wallıs One Way Anova) was used for difference analysis and LSD test, one of the post hoc tests, was applied to determine the source of the differences. The analysis of the data was determined at a 95% confidence interval and a significance level of .05.

3.0 RESULTS

Table 2: Scale analysis by age category of the research group

	Age (year)	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	Sig.	LSD
Positional Competition Scale	14-16	170	6.020	0.886	2.238	.108	
	17-19	166	5.943	0.794			
	20 and above	164	5.820	0.926			
Efort to Improve	14-16	170	6.509	0.834	2.893	.056	
	17-19	166	6.420	0.880			
	20 and above	164	6.262	1.110			
Push by Teammate	14-16	170	5.812	1.341	3.204	.041	a>c
	17-19	166	5.651	1.289			
	20 and above	164	5.430	1.510			
Pushing Teammate	14-16	170	6.043	1.259	.001	.999	
	17-19	166	6.036	1.048			
	20 and above	164	6.038	1.173			
Communication	14-16	170	6.241	1.166	.553	.576	
	17-19	166	6.229	1.169			
		164	6.120	1.113			

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	20 and above						
Self Awareness	14-16 17-19 20 and above	170 166 164	6.273 6.247 6.142	1.064 0.979 1.121	.708	.493	
Coach Recognition	14-16 17-19 20 and above	170 166 164	6.165 6.062 5.957	1.125 1.054 1.268	1.354	.259	
Coach Selection	14-16 17-19 20 and above	170 166 164	4.922 4.769 4.598	1.044 1.107 1.170	3.573	.029	a>c

While there was no significant difference in the Positional Competition Scale analysis (p>.05), a significant difference was detected in favor of the 14-16 age group in the subheadings of push by teammate and coach selection (p<.05). In the category of push by teammate and coach selection, it was observed that the 14-16 age group was larger than the 20 and above group (LSD: a>c). According to the average values in other subheadings, it is seen that the 14-16 age group is better than other age groups (Table 2).

Table 3: Scale analysis according to the training age category of the athletes in the research group

	Tarinig Age (year)	**N**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**F**	**Sig.**	**LSD**
Positional Competition Scale	1-3 4-6 7-9 10 and above	97 177 123 103	6.087 5.906 5.948 5.796	0.853 0.931 0.742 0.918	1.934	.123	
Efort to Improve	1-3 4-6 7-9 10 and above	97 177 123 103	6.227 5.962 5.978 5.825	0.947 1.102 0.941 1.043	2.676	.047	a>b,d
Push by Teammate	1-3 4-6 7-9 10 and above	97 177 123 103	5.379 5.261 5.354 5.289	0.871 0.935 0.751 0.983	.486	.692	
Pushing Teammate	1-3 4-6 7-9 10 and above	97 177 123 103	6.289 6.119 6.222 6.063	0.908 0.979 0.790 1.044	1.263	.286	
Communication	1-3 4-6 7-9 10 and above	97 177 123 103	6.219 6.085 6.138 5.949	0.954 1.048 0.831 1.040	1.369	.252	

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Self Awareness	1-3	97	6.113	1.054	3.222	.022	a>c,d
	4-6	177	5.900	1.204			
	7-9	123	5.813	0.979			
	10 and above	103	5.634	1.163			
Coach Recognition	1-3	97	6.165	1.001	1.154	.327	
	4-6	177	5.970	1.143			
	7-9	123	6.024	0.968			
	10 and above	103	5.906	0.972			
Coach Selection	1-3	97	6.299	1.012	2.318	.075	
	4-6	177	6.109	1.013			
	7-9	123	6.138	0.891			
	10 and above	103	5.926	1.116			

No significant difference was found in the Positional Competition Scale analysis according to the training age category of the football players (p>.05). It was determined that there was a significant difference in the subcategories of effort to improve and self-awareness between athletes with a training age of 1-3 years compared to other groups (p<.05). In the development effort to improve sub-category, it was observed that athletes with a training age of 1-3 years were more than athletes who trained for 4-6 years and 10 years or more (LSD: a>b,d). In the self-awareness sub-category, it was observed that athletes with a training age of 1-3 years were more than athletes who trained for 7-9 years and 10 years or more (LSD: a>c,d). In other subcategories, it was observed that football players with a training age of 1-3 years had higher average values (Table 3).

Table 4: Scale analysis of the research group according to Team category

	Team Catogory	**N**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**F**	**Sig.**	**LSD**
Positional Competition Scale	U17	209	5.961	0.915	1.089	.337	
	U19	98	5.999	0.798			
	Team A	193	5.858	0.861			
Efort to Improve	U17	209	6.475	0.891	1.308	.271	
	U19	98	6.301	0.943			
	Team A	193	6.365	1.015			
Push by Teammate	U17	209	5.703	1.369	4.459	.012	a,b>c
	U19	98	5.903	1.137			
	Team A	193	5.420	1.497			
Pushing Teammate	U17	209	6.014	1.242	.486	.615	
	U19	98	6.143	1.024			
	Team A	193	6.013	1.140			
Communication	U17	209	6.181	1.205	.118	.888	
	U19	98	6.247	1.087			
	Team A	193	6.190	1.122			
Self Awareness	U17	209	6.190	1.123	.863	.423	
	U19	98	6.347	0.892			
	Team A	193	6.192	1.057			

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Coach Recognition	U17	209	6.085	1.152			
	U19	98	6.197	0.933	1.323	.267	
	Team A	193	5.971	1.248			
Coach Selection	U17	209	4.903	1.093			
	U19	98	4.653	1.164	2.789	.062	a>c
	Team A	193	4.672	1.099			

There was no significant difference in the Positional Competition Scale according to the team levels of the football players (p > .05), and it was determined that there was a significant difference in the U17 team category compared to other categories in the subcategory of push teammate and coach selection (p>.05). It was determined that in the push teammate sub-category, the U-17 and U-19 groups were more than the A team (LSD: a.b>c), and in the coach selection sub-category, the U-17 group was more than the A team (LSD: a>c). In other subcategories, it was observed that the U19 team category was better in terms of average values in the subcategories of supporting teammate, communication, self-awareness and coach recognition (Table 4).

Table 5: Scale analysis according to the Team Position category of the research group

	Team Position	**N**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**F**	**Sig.**	**LSD**
Positional Competition Scale	Defense	164	5.859	0.969			
	Midfielder	167	5.918	0.878	1.218	.297	
	Striker	169	6.007	0.760			
Efort to Improve	Defense	164	6.341	1.043			
	Midfielder	167	6.350	0.990	1.503	.223	a<c
	Striker	169	6.501	0.804			
Push by Teammate	Defense	164	5.483	1.489			
	Midfielder	167	5.611	1.358	2.212	.111	
	Striker	169	5.800	1.305			
Pushing Teammate	Defense	164	5.950	1.211			
	Midfielder	167	6.079	1.141	.722	.487	
	Striker	169	6.086	1.134			
Communication	Defense	164	6.127	1.240			
	Midfielder	167	6.141	1.210	1.521	.220	
	Striker	169	6.322	0.977			
Self Awareness	Defense	164	6.108	1.141			
	Midfielder	167	6.230	1.059	1.751	.175	
	Striker	169	6.323	0.956			
Coach Recognition	Defense	164	5.998	1.253			
	Midfielder	167	6.124	1.076	.492	.611	
	Striker	169	6.065	1.126			
Coach Selection	Defense	164	4.850	1.141			
	Midfielder	167	4.725	1.092	.709	.492	
	Striker	169	4.722	1.110			

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No significant difference was found in the Positional Competition Scale according to the team positions of the football players (p>.05), and it was determined that there was a significant difference between forvard and defence players in the development effort to improve subcategory (p<.05) (LSD: c>a). It was observed that forward players scored higher in terms of average values in the subcategories of teammate support, supporting a teammate, communication and self-awareness, while midfielders scored higher in knowing the coach and defenders in choosing a coach (Table 5).

4.0 DISCUSSION

It is thought that by examining the effects of positional competition on players in football with scientific approaches, competition can have positive contributions to game quality, player performance and motivation, and provide a useful perspective on the development of athletes. In addition, the positional competition scale in football can help coaches and athletes better understand their competitive profile, especially in terms of highlighting some of the athletes' strengths and weaknesses, as well as situations that may affect intra-team relationships and performance. In the future, using this scale with larger sample groups and in different sports branches may contribute to a more in-depth understanding of competition and the development of athletes.

In football, athletes playing in different positions with different systems and tactics in the game, depending on the defensive and offensive areas, have become important, and it has been seen that teams that act by knowing their weaknesses and strengths both individually and as a team during the competition can be successful (Konter, 2005). It can be said that the average values of team unity of athletes and football players with 0-5 years of training history in different sports branches are higher than in other ages and sports (Dorak, 2006). It showed that the task orientation scores and mastery climate scores of defenders were higher than those of midfielders (p=.003 and p<.001). There is a significant difference between the ego orientation and performance climate scores of midfield players in favor of midfield players (p<.001; p<.001), while there is no difference between the task and ego orientation scores of forward players and the task and ego orientation scores of midfielders and defenders. It was determined that the performance climate score was higher than the midfield players' score (p<.001). It was concluded that athletes with high task orientation and mastery climate scores were played as defenders, and athletes with high ego orientation scores and performance climate scores were played as midfielders (Çekiç, 2018).

It is foreseen that the individual talents of the athletes are insufficient on the road to success in team sports, and that they will be more successful if team unity and dynamics are formed. Players who have strong communication within the team, respect each other and support each other throughout the process, perform more efficiently against teams that lack these characteristics. The closeness of the togetherness levels of athletes active in team and individual branches reveals the importance of sub-factors such as competition in sports, development effort, communication, self-awareness, loyalty to the coach and teammate support (Moralı, 1997). In the research on athletes' coach-athlete relationship and sportsmanship orientations, positive high scores emerged as a result of the "Coach-athlete relationship scale", which includes the athletes' closeness, commitment and complementarity sub-dimensions (p<.05). Athletes' communication power with their coaches; It directly affects commitment,

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trust and motivation. At the same time, it was observed that the athletes participating in the research were happy to be under the same roof with their coaches (Güllü, 2018).

In the research conducted on the coach-athlete relationship and constant self-confidence in football, a significant difference was detected in the football players' relationships with the coach in line with their answers to the survey ($p<.05$). Attention and focus, discipline, team harmony and motivation are positively affected in athletes who establish positive relationships with their coaches. It is emphasized that the strength of the relationship will increase the sports performance within the team (Tolukan, 2019). According to the coach-athlete relationship inventory of athletes playing in different positions and categories, it was seen that the athletes with high closeness, commitment and complementarity results were the athletes who established the best relationship with the coach. Positive effects were observed on the physiological, psychological and social development of athletes who established their relationships on solid foundations ($p < .05$). It has been found that goalkeepers are more competitive than defenders and midfielders, and forwards are also more competitive than defenders and midfielders. It is thought that the reason for this is that the competition rate is higher since the number of goalkeepers and forwards in a football team is less than the number of football players playing in other positions (Gök, 2022). It may indicate a change in the content of talent development programs for elite youth football players, encouraging coaches to place greater emphasis on tactical skills and, in particular, Positioning and decision-making (Kannekens et al., 2011).

5.0 CONCLUSION

As a result, it is understood that youth athletes have more in-team group support in terms of regular training process, and that they provide improvement compared to other subgroups in the categories of inclusion in a team, development effort in terms of taking responsibility, and self-awareness. It can be said that it is important for coaches to train youth athletes to the next level, especially in terms of being a team sport, to train them carefully in terms of organizing the training by making correct tactical decisions, and also to be able to reflect the training outcomes on match performance.

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