

## PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO COMPETITION ANXIETY AMONG COACHES OF IRAQI FIRST-CLASS FOOTBALL CLUBS

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### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to identifying the level of psychological flexibility and the level of competition anxiety and the relationship between the two variables among the coaches of first-class football clubs for the season 2022-2023, as the researchers assumed the existence of a statistically significant correlation between the level of psychological flexibility and competition anxiety for the coaches, and the researchers used the descriptive approach in the manner of correlations to suit it with the nature of the research. The research community was identified with coaches and assistant coaches working in first-class football clubs, who number (66) coaches, and they represent the research community and sample, as they were chosen by the intentional method and the tools used in the research, measures of psychological flexibility and competition anxiety. Football has low psychological flexibility and high psychological anxiety, and that there is a relationship between psychological flexibility and competition anxiety among the coaches of the first-class clubs in Iraq for football, and the researchers recommended the need to use the two research measures as a means by the federation to identify the psychological flexibility and competition anxiety possessed by the coaches on a regular basis. Also, the need for coaches to pay attention to their psychological preparation in order to control the level of psychological flexibility and competition anxiety and make it at a good level, which directly helps in controlling the behavior of the coach during exposure to great pressures, and this directly helps in achieving athletic achievement.

**Keywords:** Psychological flexibility. Psychological anxiety. Football

### Introduction

The football game is one of the most important competitive games, and one of its most important elements is the coach, whose goals are to build a team that competes at a high level and works to achieve championships, but this coach needs many factors, including being familiar with a lot of sports sciences and having personal characteristics. It helps him to face the variables of the training periods and also helps him to continue developing the sports team, and that the different abilities of the coaches in turn create psychological characteristics specific to each game, and the game of football is one of these games that requires the coach to possess certain characteristics, just as the nature of the competitions and the accompanying events generate. The psychological

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state of the coach differs from one person to another, and psychological flexibility and competition anxiety are necessary psychological characteristics that must be taken care of because they represent the mind that guides the rest of the physical and mental abilities, as their increase or decrease affects the results of the team as a whole, given that attention to the psychological aspect is a basic pillar for the coach, so we find that the football coach tries during the match to adapt his energies and psychological abilities and not to be provoked. This is generated from the psychological flexibility that the coach possesses, which thus helps him to face the great pressures he is exposed to, both during training and competition periods (Bader, & Othman, 2021). During training times, coaches are exposed to many pressures, including providing the requirements for success. And providing a good stadium and providing players with a high level of readiness, but in periods of competition there are many pressures, including the pressure of playing with teams at a higher level than his team or on greater readiness or the pressure of matches from successive results or the pressure of the audience and management or the pressure of players who may go through periods. Different, and therefore the extent to which he possesses this feature will affect his competition anxiety, and all of this is in order to record good results for the team, and in order to benefit from the psychological aspect, we must know the type of relationship between the two psychological variables, which are psychological flexibility and competition anxiety, and their role in influencing the mental performance of the coach.

### Research Problem

The process of psychological stability and mental focus of the coach is one of the necessary tasks that the coach works on because of its role in influencing the rest of the other aspects of training, so the nature of the training and what the player possesses is good psychological preparation, i.e. high psychological flexibility to deal with the situations he faces that may hinder. From his mental, intellectual and physical performance and the ability to make appropriate decisions that directly affect the result of the team, we find this evident in football coaches when they are affected by negative situations during the match and they lose their temper as a result of poor experience in controlling the excitement that occurs during sudden situations such as fatigue or unsportsmanlike behavior from the competing team or the players of the team work outside the plan prepared by the coach and this behavior reflects negatively on the team's performance.

Therefore, through this research work, we will provide the appropriate means to measure the level of psychological flexibility of football coaches as well as

the level of competition anxiety they have, as well as identifying the nature of the relationship between the psychological flexibility of football coaches with their competition anxiety. Through this study, we will be able to confront the negative situations that occur during matches such as weakness and low psychological flexibility or a high level of competition anxiety and how to direct the coach to control any difficult circumstance he may face and work to transform stress from negative to positive anxiety.

### Research objective

- Identifying the level of psychological flexibility and competition anxiety among the coaches of first-division football clubs for the 2022-2023 seasons.
- Identifying the relationship of psychological flexibility with competition anxiety among the coaches of first-class football clubs for the 2022-2023 seasons.

### Research hypotheses

- There is a statistically significant relationship between psychological flexibility and competition anxiety among first-class football club coaches for the 2022-2023 seasons.

### Research Methodology and Field Procedures

#### Research methodology

The descriptive approach was used in the style of correlational relations in order to suit it with the nature of the study, and this approach aims to "collect data to try to choose hypotheses or answer questions related to the current or current situation of the research sample individuals" (Allawi and Ratib, 1999) (Fahem, & Ibraheem, 2022).

#### Community and sample research

The research community included coaches and assistant coaches working for first-class football clubs for the season 2013-2022-2023 with (20) teams. As for the research sample, it consisted of all coaches and assistant coaches teams with (66) coaches from the participants in this tournament, as shown in the table 1 (Table 1).

#### Field research procedures

**Table 1:** Shows the distribution of the research sample.

No.	Sample	Sample number	Percentage
1	Experimental sample	5	7.575%
2	Sample scale application	61	92.424
	Total	66	100%

**Table 2:** Shows between the arithmetic mean, standard deviation, standard error, and the hypothetical mean for the variable of psychological flexibility.

Scale	Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation	Standard error	Hypothetical mean
Psychological flexibility	89.22	5.12	0.91	100
2	Sample scale application	61	92.424	

**Table 3:** Shows between the arithmetic mean, the standard deviation, the standard error, and the hypothetical mean for the competition anxiety variable.

Scale	Arithmetic mea	Standard deviation	Standard error	Hypothetical mean
Competition anxiety	92.11	9.81	0.80	90

**Table 4:** Shows the arithmetic means and standard deviations, the correlation coefficient and the level of significance.

Variables	Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation	Correlation coefficient	Type sig
Psychological flexibility	89.22	5.12	0.043	sig
Competition anxiety	92.11	9.81		

Significant > (0.05).

**Procedures for preparing the two search criteria:** Reliance was made on scientific sources and the scale of psychological flexibility, which was prepared by the researcher (Dina Ismail) and transmitted by (Al-Hamdani, 2022), which consists of (50) statements, with (35) positive statements, and (15) negative statements, distributed on (5) axes, namely (The emotional axis, the mental axis, the social axis, the moral axis, the ability to confront problems axis), and with a three-step gradation of the keys (yes, to some extent, no), with weights (1, 2, 3) for the positive statements, and the inverse of the gradation for the negative statements. Thus, the highest score for the scale is (150) degrees, and the lowest score for the scale is (50) degrees. The scale was presented to a group of experts and specialists in the field of sports psychology, the field of testing and measurement, and the field of football, and they expressed their opinion on the suitability of the scale with some conducting Minor modifications in the formulation of some phrases, and it appeared in its final form as in appendix (Appendix 1).

As for the competition anxiety scale for soccer coaches, the competition anxiety scale was relied on by (Allawi, 1998), as the scale consists of (45) phrases that the tester answers with a three-step gradation of the answer keys. It was also presented to the experts and specialists who were previously mentioned and showed its suitability for the work. The final form of the scale is shown in appendix (Appendix 2).

**Exploratory experience:** This experiment was conducted on 20/1/2023 on (5) trainers from the research community, during which the extent to which the trainers understood the two scales, the extent of the clarity of instructions and phrases, and overcoming the difficulties that could occur were identified in order to prepare for the main application of the two scales.

#### Scientific characteristics of the scale

**Validity:** Validity is one of the scientific conditions and characteristics of a good test, as validity means "that the test measures what was set for its measurement and does not measure anything else" (Mostafa, 1999) (Jasim, & Ali, 2023).

The validity of the two scales has been verified by finding their virtual validity by presenting them to a group of experts and specialists in the field of sports psychology, the field of testing and measurement, and the field of football (Alkazaly, Altay, 2023).

**Stability:** Cronbach's alpha equation was used to extract the stability coefficient. It was (0.79) for the psychological endurance scale, and (0.84) for the competition anxiety scale. These are two high indicators of the stability of the two scales (Mohammed & Fathi, 2021).

**Main experience:** This was done during the period of the Middle Euphrates Universities Championship for Girls Volleyball from 21/1/2023 to 5/2/2023, as the two scale forms were distributed to each team within the research sample of (61) coaches, and after both scales were answered with all The two terms the questionnaires were collected to obtain the search results.

### Results and Discussion

#### Identifying psychological flexibility and competition anxiety among the research sample:

It is clear to us through table 2 that the value of the arithmetic mean is (89.22), which is less than the hypothetical mean whose value is (100) for the sample, which indicates the weak possession of the research sample of psychological flexibility, and the researchers believe that the reason for this is due to the lack of external participation and the interior that creates a kind of adaptation among the coaches, which raises the factor of psychological flexibility in them by adapting to the conditions of the match, and here also comes the coach's role in directing himself and constantly familiarizing himself with the concepts of modern psychology, how to possess them, and the mechanism for using them behaviorally when needed in times of matches, such as not jerking and being sweet. Patience when exposed to sudden situations during the match, especially the influence of the audience, which tries to provoke the rest of the teams, or the behavior of some players in unconventional behavior, to reduce his psychological flexibility and thus cause loss and defeat for the team in front of the opposing team. Therefore, we find that the calculated values were greater than the tabular ones at degrees of freedom (60) and the level of significance (0.05), which indicates the existence of significant differences between the calculated and tabular degrees (Table 2).

As for competition anxiety, table 3 will show its value in the sample and the relationship between the arithmetic mean and the hypothesis (Table 3).

It is clear to us through table 3 that the value of the arithmetic mean (92,11), which is more than the hypothetical mean whose value is (90), which indicates that the study sample has competition anxiety, so we find that the value of the t-test between the arithmetic mean and the hypothetical mean is significant when A degree of freedom (60), and a level of significance (0.05), as the reason for the high competition anxiety is due to many reasons, including the coaches' fear of the opposing team, their poor possession of wide knowledge of the developments in the science of sports training, and their weakness in taking training courses continuously and sufficiently to adapt to the playing conditions. Hadith, as "anxiety, fear and psychological conflict are among the forms of psychological emotions that affect athletic achievement" (Elwes, 1983).

#### Identifying the relationship between psychological endurance and competition anxiety among the research sample:

To identify the relationship between psychological endurance and competition anxiety among the research sample, the correlation coefficient (Pearson) must be found, as shown in table (Table 4).

It is clear to us through table 4 that the relationship is significant between psychological flexibility and competition anxiety among the coaches of first-class football clubs in Iraq. If competition anxiety dominates the behavior of the coaches, they will lose the psychological flexibility that works to face the pressures of the continuous matches throughout the football season, which sometimes extends to more than (7) months in which the team plays many matches at a high level. Some matches may reach to maintain advanced positions. In the arrangement of clubs or playing matches that threaten the team with relegation to the ranks of lower-class clubs, and the coaches' possession of psychological flexibility, which will help them overcome the anxiety of competition, will give them advice and successful positive motivation for the player, as well as controlling the surrounding circumstances. Therefore,

"the successful coach is skilled in organizing the energies of Physical and psychological players and how to control and control the thoughts and feelings of his players during the competition, which makes the performance develop in a correct direction" (Ratib, 1995), that is, directing to control anger and trying to benefit from the available advice in order to bear any sudden situation that the coach is exposed to during the match, and there is a difference in the degree of anxiety before, during and after the conditions of psychological stress related to sports competitions, as thinking about a situation that raises stress and tension before it occurs affects the personal functions of the athlete, but the actual contact with that situation reduces the effect and the degree of low and high level of anxiety that depends on the type of sports activity.

Through the aforementioned, the research hypothesis has been achieved in the existence of a relationship between psychological flexibility and competition anxiety, but this psychological flexibility must be high in order to reduce the anxiety factor and achieve good results, i. Acquaintance with him on many principles of modern psychology, as well as on many sports situations for coaches, how to control events, reach calmness, and also remove negative thoughts and move towards positive thoughts, thus achieving a good achievement for the team.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

#### Conclusions

- Coaches of first-class football clubs in Iraq have low psychological flexibility and high psychological anxiety.
- There is a relationship between psychological flexibility and competition anxiety among coaches of first-class clubs in Iraq for football.

#### Recommendations

- Using the two research measures as a means by the federation to identify the psychological flexibility and competition anxiety possessed by the coaches on a regular basis.
- Coach's attention to his psychological preparation in order to control the level of psychological flexibility and competition anxiety and make it a good level, which directly helps in achieving athletic achievement.
- Need to hold developmental courses for football coaches to provide them with the necessary psychological aspects.
- Applying the two research criteria to Iraqi soccer club players in order to identify the level of their psychological flexibility and competition

anxiety and work on preparing them towards raising the state of psychological readiness to face the pressures of competitions.

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