

## Challenges and Issues Encountered by Elite Coaches in Developing Student-Athletes at Malaysian Sports Schools

### Desafíos y problemas que enfrentan los entrenadores de élite en el desarrollo de estudiantes-atletas en las escuelas deportivas de Malasia

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**Abstract.** The Malaysian Sports School (MSS) is a governmental institution under the purview of the Ministry of Education Malaysia. It is a specialised institution that prioritises sports education and training for exceptionally gifted young athletes. The primary goal of MSS is to create a conducive environment for students to thrive in both academic and athletic pursuits. It is imperative to enhance the domain of sports at the school level in order to optimise the performance and accomplishments of student-athletes across different sports disciplines. Hence, this study aims to investigate the specific problems and obstacles encountered by top-tier coaches at MSS in nurturing gifted student-athletes. The study employed the Qualitative Method, specifically utilising the Evolved Grounded Theory approach developed by Strauss and Corbin. Data were gathered from ten elite coaches in five MSS using in-depth semi-structured open interviews, observation, and document analysis. The purpose was to identify the primary issues and challenges they encountered. The data were transcribed exactly as spoken and analysed using Atlas.ti 8.0 software, following the recommended approach of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding as proposed by Strauss and Corbin. The study's findings indicate that coaching presents three primary challenges: 1) Roles and Responsibilities, 2) Performance goals, and 3) External Factors. In addition, there were three primary coaching issues: 1) Facilities, 2) Maintenance, and 3) Transportation. Hence, this discovery will assist MSS stakeholders, particularly the ministry and other stakeholders, in recognising and addressing areas that can be enhanced and reinforced for the mentoring and growth requirements of student athletes. This will ensure that MSS plays a pivotal role in cultivating skilled student athletes who can represent Malaysia in the future.

**Keywords:** Elite coach, student-athlete's development, challenges, issues, challenges, Malaysian sports school.

**Resumen.** La Escuela de Deportes de Malasia (MSS) es una institución gubernamental dependiente del Ministerio de Educación de Malasia. Es una institución especializada que prioriza la educación y el entrenamiento deportivo para jóvenes deportistas excepcionalmente dotados. El objetivo principal de MSS es crear un entorno propicio para que los estudiantes prosperen tanto en sus actividades académicas como deportivas. Es imperativo mejorar el dominio de los deportes a nivel escolar para optimizar el rendimiento y los logros de los estudiantes-atletas en diferentes disciplinas deportivas. Por lo tanto, este estudio tiene como objetivo investigar los problemas y obstáculos específicos que enfrentan los entrenadores de primer nivel en MSS al formar a estudiantes-atletas talentosos. El estudio empleó el Método Cualitativo, utilizando específicamente el enfoque de la Teoría Fundamentada Evolucionada desarrollada por Strauss y Corbin. Se recopilieron datos de diez entrenadores de élite en cinco MSS mediante entrevistas abiertas semiestructuradas en profundidad, observación y análisis de documentos. El propósito era identificar los principales problemas y desafíos que encontraron. Los datos se transcribieron exactamente como se hablaron y se analizaron utilizando Atlas. software ti 8.0, siguiendo el enfoque recomendado de codificación abierta, codificación axial y codificación selectiva propuesto por Strauss y Corbin. Los hallazgos del estudio indican que el coaching presenta tres desafíos principales: 1) Roles y Responsabilidades, 2) Metas de desempeño y 3) Factores externos. Además, existen tres cuestiones principales de coaching: 1) Instalaciones, 2) Mantenimiento y 3) Transporte. Por lo tanto, este descubrimiento ayudará a las partes interesadas del MSS, en particular al ministerio y otras partes interesadas, a reconocer y abordar áreas que pueden mejorarse y reforzarse para los requisitos de tutoría y crecimiento de los estudiantes atletas. Esto garantizará que MSS desempeñe un papel fundamental en la formación de estudiantes atletas capacitados que puedan representar a Malasia en el futuro.

**Palabras clave:** Entrenador de élite, desarrollo de estudiantes-atletas, desafíos, problemas, desafíos, escuela de deportes de Malasia.

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## Introduction

Sport is widely regarded as having the potential to improve the lives of individuals and communities and generate positive social impacts in society (Purnomo et al., 2024). Schools serve as the main setting where young athletes with remarkable talent undergo considerable development. Coaches at the grassroots and youth levels should assume a more proactive role in developing athletes who will represent the country at the international level. To enhance the execution of coaching duties at the school level, it is imperative to augment the involvement of teachers who have been designated as coaches (Martens, 2023). According to Deraman et al. (2017), the most important role of the school is to nurture and develop future influential figures.

The initiation of grassroots sports in Malaysia should commence within educational institutions, given that the country's educational system encompasses individuals from 6 to 18 years old. As stated by Ahmad (1999), the school's sports coach plays a crucial role in fostering the growth and achievement of exceptional student-athletes, as well as in designing sports development programs. Coaches serve as both motivators and strategists, responsible for ensuring that student-athletes and teams excel in competition and attain success (Ahmad, 1999).

Sports and school development is a challenge to be faced by many teenagers and youngsters who need to reconcile dedication to sports and study routine at the same time (Flach et al., 2023). The Sports Centre of Excellence, established by the Ministry of Education Malaysia, is a

specialised school that serves as a sports centre. Its primary purpose is to find and nurture the athletic abilities of promising student-athletes under the supervision of skilled coaches (KPM, 2021). According to (Deraman et al., 2017), define a school as a social institution consisting of a collective of individuals who engage in organised activities to achieve common objectives. The coach's expertise and skills in developing sports programs and managing the organisation are closely linked. This connection is crucial for recruiting, planning, and implementing an effective coaching approach (Rosalejos & Lubos, 2019). The Ministry of Education built five Malaysian Sports Schools (MSS) as part of the Fifth Malaysia Plan (5th MP; 1991–1995). The first MSS, Bukit Jalil Sports School (BJSS), was founded in 1996, followed by the Tunku Mahkota Ismail Sports School (TMSS) in 1998. The establishment of Malaysia Pahang Sports School (MPSS) took place in 2012, followed by the establishment of Malaysia Sabah Sports School (MSSS) in 2013 and Malaysia Terengganu Sports School (MTSS) in 2014. The MSS Policy was implemented to bolster and augment the Sports Policy, which received approval from the Cabinet on January 20, 1988. The policy encompasses both high-level and popular sports. The Ministry of Education Malaysia is a government agency responsible for the direct implementation of the National Sports Policy. This policy recognises that sports have the potential to not only produce competitive and productive individuals but also contribute to the overall development of humanity, in line with the National Education Philosophy (NEP).

Elite sports coaches are essential in developing athletes' performance in the competitive world of sports. Nevertheless, they frequently encounter intricate challenges and problems that necessitate inventive answers and comprehensive solutions. A primary obstacle encountered by coaches is the insufficiency of suitable infrastructure and amenities. According to a study conducted by Wasserbauer in 2023, inadequate training facilities can result in congested training schedules and decreased comfort for athletes. Coaches often face challenges in athlete development as a result of economic hardships. Barker-Ruchti et al. (2018) found that insufficient funding can have a negative impact on athlete development programs, leading to a scarcity of skilled coaches. Another significant obstacle is the psychological dimension of sports. The research conducted by MacIntyre et al. (2017) highlights the need for coaches to comprehend and effectively handle the psychological stress experienced by athletes in order to assist them in attaining a state of tranquility and concentration during competitive events. When it comes to coaching leadership and skills, having the necessary leadership talents and expertise is crucial. The study conducted by Subijana et al. (2021) emphasises the need for skilled and knowledgeable coaches to provide athletes with the best possible assistance. In addition, coaches must not disregard the difficulties associated with programme and performance management. Schlenker and Siefken (2019) establish that proficient management of training programs is crucial for achieving athlete

excellence. Hence, it is important for elite sports coaches to tackle a multitude of obstacles in order to aid athletes in attaining their utmost capabilities. Coaches may overcome these challenges and drive their athletes to higher levels of achievement by improving facilities, fostering athlete development, comprehending sports psychology, demonstrating effective leadership, and executing sound programme administration.

Coaches in training centres have encountered several challenges and issues, including inadequate sports infrastructure, insufficient technical knowledge, training concerns related to coaching, and deficiencies in coaching abilities among the coaches themselves (Karim et al. 2018; Karim & Nadzalan, 2017). Many school sports coaches frequently encounter difficulties and issues pertaining to training facilities and sports equipment when implementing training programs (Mohd Judan et al., 2022). According to research by (Aznar-Ballesta & Vernetta, 2023), athletes in general enjoy, are motivated and feel satisfied, with values close to the maximum, with the service offered in sports facilities. Moreover, coaching behaviour has the potential to elicit adverse responses from players and foster unfavourable interpersonal dynamics between athletes and coaches (Noor, 2014). According to (Din et al., 2015), argue that the satisfaction of athletes in their chosen sport can be influenced by various factors, including the coach's leadership style, the coach's work satisfaction, and the effective administration of the coach's training programme. The research conducted by (Khan et al., 2020), suggests that athletes or players occasionally fail to recognise the coach's contribution to the development of life skills through sports. Furthermore, it is imperative to provide physical education teachers or coaches with the necessary expertise and proficiency to utilise information and communication technology (ICT) equipment for activities such as video analysis in sports competitions and training (Irwahand et al., 2022). Prior research has demonstrated that athlete accomplishment can be influenced by coaching behaviour that is informed by athlete evaluations (Allen & Howe, 1998; Amorose & Horn, 2001). This discovery aligns with Ahmad's results (Ahmad, 2021), which assert a decline in the participation and achievement of MSS athletes at the national and international tiers.

Furthermore, previous research on sports coaching at MSS only examined characteristics such as coaching style, motivation, and goal orientation (Mohd Judan et al., 2022; Mohd Rasyid, 2009); coaching leadership style (Din et al., 1980); MSS efficacy (Seman et al., 2021); athlete physical fitness level (Amorose & Horn, 2001) and social support and mental health status (Basri, 2018).

These studies do not paint a whole picture of the role and experience of MSS best coaches. These studies also failed to take into account the difficulties, tensions, pressures, and dilemmas that MSS elite coaches face while performing their duties. In this regard, it is essential to conduct research on MSS elite trainers based on the issues or problems that arise, so that this study can reveal the problem in

detail as well as the best way and method to solve The problems that exist among MSS coaches and serve as a guide for those interested in improving MSS's coaching aspect. Consequently, the objective of this study is to explore the challenges and issues faced by MSS elite coaches in developing student athletes at MSS. This research is important so that the ministry and sports schools may empower, improve, focus on, and support the development and advancement of MSS coaches, who in turn contribute to the development and excellence of MSS student-athletes.

## Materials and Methods

The study employed the Qualitative Method, specifically utilizing the Evolved Grounded Theory approach developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998). Data were gathered from ten elite coaches in five MSS using in-depth semi-structured open interviews, observation, and document analysis. The purpose was to identify the primary issues and challenges they encountered. The data were transcribed exactly as spoken and analysed using Atlas. ti 8.0 software, following the recommended approach of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding as proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1990,1998).

### Participant

The study included a total of 10 elite coaches who were actively engaged in the sports development program at MSS. Elite coaches possess exceptional skills and extensive experience in specific sports domains. Their primary responsibility is to train aspiring student-athletes to compete at the national and international levels on behalf of their country (Karim, 2016). The participants were chosen from five distinct MSSs, specifically Bukit Jalil Sports School (BJSS), Tunku Mahkota Ismail Sports School (TMISS), Malaysia Pahang Sports School (MPSS), Malaysia Sabah Sports School (MSSS), and Malaysia Terengganu Sports School (MTSS). The chosen participants comprised individuals in sports such as athletics and badminton, while team sports included football, rugby, and hockey.

The participants were chosen using purposeful sampling, a method that involves selecting individuals based on particular criteria that are relevant to the study's objectives, following the guidelines proposed by Strauss and Corbin (2008). The selection criteria for participants include possessing a minimum qualification of the National Coach Certificate Level 2 or an equivalent certification, having a minimum of five years of experience training MSS student-athletes, demonstrating a strong track record in producing successful student athletes at both national and international levels, and being willing to provide genuine and sincere cooperation and feedback to researchers.

### Procedure

The study employed a qualitative research design to get insight into the perspectives of elite MSS coaches regarding the challenges and issues encountered in cultivating

student-athletes. Qualitative research is appropriate for examining intricate and contextual social processes that are not easily quantifiable using numerical data (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Qualitative investigations enable researchers to derive novel ideas and theories from data obtained directly from participants, rather than relying on preconceived assumptions or hypotheses (Hennink et al., 2020). The study employed the Evolved Grounded Theory technique, as advocated by Strauss and Corbin (1990,1998), as its qualitative research design. Evolved Grounded Theory is a research methodology that seeks to generate a theory or model by carefully gathering and analyzing evidence (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998).

This approach is appropriate for examining the issues and challenges encountered by the elite coaches of the Malaysian sports school in cultivating student-athletes. It enables the researcher to comprehend the phenomenon through the lens of the perpetrator and their social environment. The study will be conducted following the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) set by the Ministry of Education Malaysia, specifically the Education Policy Planning and Research Division (EPPRD) and Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI). Before receiving permission to conduct field research, the researcher diligently followed and successfully completed a university-run ethics course. According to Creswell & Creswell (2018), study ethics refers to the concepts or moral ideals that researchers must adhere to when carrying out responsible, ethical, and truthful research. The researcher obtained research data by conducting face-to-face interviews utilizing in-depth semi-structured interviews.

The purpose of these interviews was to gather participants' perspectives and experiences regarding the difficulties encountered in developing student-athletes. Furthermore, the researcher also acquired the individuals' demographic information and personal history in a confidential manner. Interviews are held in venues that are conducive and appropriate for participants, such as conference rooms, workspaces, or athletic facilities. Each interview has a duration of at least one to one and a half hours and is recorded with the participant's consent using an audio recording device. The interview technique employed in this study was assessed for both face and content validity for each individual item. The viewpoints of all experts were taken into account in order to determine the validity and reliability of the interview items. The compatibility of the analytical unit with the research theme was evaluated using Cohen's Kappa index analysis. The Cohen Kappa technique was employed for this purpose (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), and it was used to ascertain the validity and reliability values of these experts.

The research instrument is considered optimal, as it has a Cohen Kappa value of 0.891. Researchers employed theoretical sampling methods to gather data from participants. These approaches involve the selection of units based on the theoretical considerations of researchers to build and develop theoretical data (Saunders et al., 2018). This process

continues until theoretical saturation is reached, meaning that further evidence no longer contributes new information or affects the developed theory (Lohr, 2021). The concept of theoretical saturation implies that the categories and correlations derived from the data are comprehensive and firmly established, rendering additional data or analysis unnecessary (Patton, 2002).

### **Data Analysis**

The data obtained from interviews, analytical documents, and observations is evaluated using the Evolved Grounded Theory Strauss and Corbin technique (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998, 2008). This approach comprises three distinct phases of examination, specifically open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Open coding entails the process of deducing concepts and categories that arise from the data using inductive reasoning. Axial coding entails establishing connections between categories and subcategories identified in open coding based on dimensions, attributes, and causal linkages. Selective coding entails the development of a theoretical framework focused on the primary category that comprehensively describes the phenomenon under investigation. Furthermore, the researchers employed data triangulation to compare and validate their findings by utilizing different methods and data sources. Data triangulation is a method that entails combining many data sources in a study to elucidate themes or perspectives by corroborating information from multiple sources (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Lebar, 2018).

Utilizing a blend of discourse, scrutiny, and record-keeping serves as a dependable means of acquiring pertinent discoveries, thereby guaranteeing the precision and legitimacy of the outcomes. In this work, researchers utilized the Atlas TI 8.0 program as a supplementary tool to examine qualitative data obtained from open-ended, semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted with elite MSS trainers. The software facilitates the systematic and flexible management, encoding, connection, mapping, and interpretation of data by evolved grounded theory (Friese, 2002).

### **Results**

The study's findings indicate the average age of study participants is 45 years. The youngest participant was 35 years old, while the oldest participant was 57. All participants were male coaches who have served with MSS for more than five years. All participants were excellent coaching credentials, including at least a level two sports science certificate and a level two sports-specific certificate. In this study, the findings obtained to address the objectives connected to issues and challenges experienced by elite coaches in developing student-athletes revealed six key themes that were obtained in line with qualitative data analysis, namely three themes related to coaching challenges: 1) Roles and Responsibilities, 2) Goals and Performance, and 3) External Factors, along with three coaching issue themes: 1)

Facilities, 2) Maintenance, and 3) Transportation.

This theme is aligned with the purpose of the research and considers the priority of addressing the research objectives related to the issues and challenges of the coach. In this study, open coding resulted in 512 codes. The main goal of open coding is to explore the thinking, experience, knowledge, and perception of elite coaches throughout their tenure as coaches to train and polish student-athletes. In axial coding, sub-categories are conceptualised in more detail based on the codes derived from open coding to identify the key aspects of the issues and challenges facing the elite coaches at MSS. Therefore, all codes obtained in open coding are categorized by specifying the cause, effect, and equational relationship. Axial codes obtained as a result of categorizing are conceptualised as facilities, maintenance, transportation, roles and responsibilities, performance goals, and external factors. These codes are structured and classified according to repetitive processes that can provide meaning, influence each other, and lead researchers to the production of core code.

Based on the findings in open coding and axes related to the issues and challenges experienced by elite coaches in performing their duties as coaches, the codes have been refined more meaningfully. Sports school coaches often complain about the related matters of facility requirements, maintenance requirements, and transportation requirements required to implement effective sports training programs. In addition, the theme related to roles and responsibilities, performance goals, and external factors also emerged in this study after going through the coding process, indicating that the matter is a matter of concern and worry for the coach as it cannot be resolved by either the school or other stakeholders, such as the ministry. Elite coaches bring up all of these issues, which spark debates and discussions between them in the context of problems and difficulties that have slowed down their pace and work in delivering the best performances and qualities as a coach at MSS. The resulting axial code leads to the emergence of a story that guides the researcher to the core code.

The six sub-categories or themes that emerge in axial coding are connected and integrated to form the main theme of "Coaching Issues and Coaching Challenges," which was the final finding of this study. The theme of coaching challenges consists of three sub-themes that explain the challenges that afflict coaches during their tenure as coaches at MSS, namely "Roles and Responsibilities, Performance Goals, and External Factors." The theme of coaching issues comprises three sub-themes that describe the phenomenon that occurs among the coaches of MSS, namely "Facilities, Maintenance, and Transportation." The main theme of "Coaching Issues and Coaching Challenges," resulting from this study, encompasses and represents all the sub-themes mentioned above, and it is a core category that illustrates all the problems that surround the elite coaches at MSS. An important finding derived from in-depth interviews is that despite all these shortcomings, most of the coaches interviewed often state that the issues

and challenges they face are situations that need to be addressed by the relevant parties, especially the school and the ministry, to ensure that coaches can perform their duties and responsibilities excellently in maximising the potential of student-athletes. The coaches who were interviewed tirelessly tried to overcome all the problems and constraints they faced, especially when it came to training and competition needs at a venue away from the school, as all aspects involving the welfare and safety management of the student-athletes need to be emphasised. In addition, the coaches remain passionate and persistent in carrying out their duties and responsibilities, as the trust that has been given to educate and train the best athletes selected for the MSS must be prioritized.

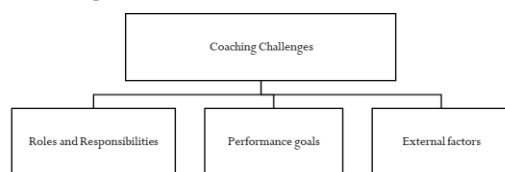


Figure 1. Key themes of the coaching challenges faced by elite coaches in developing MSS student athletes

This study examines the coaching challenge, which refers to the aspects that influence the performance, well-being, and development of the athletes coached. These aspects can originate from the coach, the athlete, the organization, or the environment. The coaching challenge demands that coaches adapt, solve problems, and find solutions that benefit both the athletes and themselves. The data analysis, conducted using the Evolved Grounded Theory technique procedures, revealed three sub-themes under the theme of the Coaching Challenge that describe the difficulties encountered by the coaches in developing student-athletes at MSS.

### *Roles and Responsibilities*

This research revealed that most of the coaches faced challenges related to other roles and responsibilities besides their coaching duties. The data indicated that the coaches at MSS had to perform other tasks related to the school management. The coaches' job was not limited to designing programs and training pupils, but also involved other assignments that were not related to coaching. The participants' statements were as follows::

"At the sports school, we are not only coaches, but also have other assignments. For example, I am a hockey sports coordinator and a secretary of the school's cross-country sports at SSBJ. SSBJ also has a school sport. I am the school's cross-country secretary and I also participate in asset inspection and other side tasks. The coach has to be involved in these tasks and see what program the school will do" (Interview result with Coach J1).

"Currently, I am the head of the coaching field. But so far, I can manage both training and administrative work. I don't know about the future, I am afraid of having too much work to handle" (Interview result with Coach J2).

"Besides being an athletic coach at MSS, I am also the

head of the sports coaching field. So my knowledge is not only about athletics but also about other sports offered at MSS. I need to acquire the knowledge of these sports" (Interview result with Coach J3).

"I assist the school in carrying out auxiliary tasks, especially when the school hosts events such as parent dialogues, collaborative programs with strategic partners, and teacher club activities" (Interview result with Coach J8).

This study reveals the challenges that coaches face regarding their role and responsibilities at MSS. Besides their primary duty of coaching, the school assigns them other tasks that are not related to training the student-athletes. These tasks are crucial for the development and improvement of the coaches' career and competence, as well as for facilitating the management of the coaches' needs.

### *Performance goals*

This research, under the theme of the coaching challenge, demonstrates that performance goals as a coach pose a challenge to MSS coaches. The school sets these performance goals in consultation and agreement with the coach. As the leading sports centre of excellence under the Ministry of Education Malaysia, coaches have to ensure that student-athletes achieve good performance in training and competitions, according to the students' current level of performance. The following are some of the participants' statements about performance goals in an interview:

"Every year, we have performance goals that we aim to achieve. The school does not pressure us as coaches but lets us set our targets, such as for our youth league team. For example, last year we set our KPI as double champion. The principal was positive about our target for the youth hockey league. In the end, we achieved our target. This year, we are trying to maintain the champions first. The administrators, especially the principals, are very supportive, and the school always assists. They facilitated 100% of our journey as coaches to prepare a strong team and achieve our targets." (Interview result with Coach J1)

"The school does not expect the team to win every game. We know that we are still in the development phase, so we are still developing the players. It is normal that we sometimes fail to achieve our goals, such as last year when we aimed to reach the Ministry of Education Malaysia league final but lost in the semi-finals. When we report back, we answer the administrators' questions and explain our constraints and what we have done throughout the year." (Interview result with Coach J2)

"The coach and the school jointly decide the annual target. Usually, we can achieve the set targets, but if we cannot, we inform the postmortem meeting why we did not achieve the target. There is some stress because the targets we set are not easy. During my time at MSS, our targets were at least to have athletes representing the state." (Interview result with Coach J3)

"So far, we have a job target that we try to achieve. But sometimes it may not be possible due to the lack of tournaments. For instance, during the MCO period, we did not

play for two years.” (Interview result with Coach J4)

To conclude, setting performance goals for MSS is a crucial and strategic measure to enable MSS to realize its vision of being a world-class sports school that integrates quality academic education and sports training. These performance goals offer various advantages and incentives for MSS, such as enhancing the academic and sports performance of MSS athletes, ensuring the quality of MSS management and administration, and boosting the image and reputation of MSS.

### External factors

This research confirms that the elite MSS coach was the key figure who plans and trains MSS student-athletes to excel in sports. However, the findings also revealed that elite MSS trainers encounter various challenges in their work, such as “external factors”. These are aspects that the coach cannot control but that influence the training and development of the student-athletes. External factors that affect elite MSS coaches include weather, changes in competition schedules, athlete injuries, meetings, courses, and other assignments. Unpredictable weather can interfere with the training schedule and impair the athlete’s performance. MSS coaches have to adapt their training to the weather conditions and ensure that the athletes receive sufficient protection and care. Unexpected changes in competition schedules can pose problems for planning strategies, preparations, and recovery. MSS elite coaches have to modify their training schedules and offer guidance to the athletes on how to deal with these changes. An athlete’s injury is the most severe external factor that can prevent an athlete from taking part in training or competitions. MSS Elite Coaches have to be cautious in preventing, detecting, and treating athlete injuries, as well as providing emotional and psychological support to injured athletes. Meetings, courses, and other assignments related to the role of elite MSS coaches can be useful but can also create a strain on the coach. MSS coaches have to balance the demands of their roles as coaches and employees.

The interview process conducted with the study participants provided feedback that illustrates this. The following are some of the coaches who gave an overview of the challenges they faced:

“Although we have planned a beautiful training program, sometimes there are distracting factors during the implementation, such as environmental factors and external environmental factors. Sometimes, our training programme was disrupted by changes in the tournament schedule, such as when a tournament in May is postponed to July. Sometimes, we face unexpected challenges, such as the hot weather that our country is experiencing now, while our tournament is in July. We have been ready since the beginning of the year. We should be in the pre-match phase now, where we need games. We want to have many friendly matches, game situations, form a team with a formation, and many more things. But in this environment, we cannot do anything. This is what we are planning, which is obvious

from what I can tell you. Environmental factors, such as schools not being able to go out for training in the field, are a nuisance.” (Interview result with Coach J3)

“For me, as an individual sports coach, the external factor that is a challenge is when an athlete has a serious injury. If the athlete’s injury takes a long time to heal, I have to change the training plan. So, what I plan for the athletes changes. It is a challenge to restore the athlete’s performance. I also have to make sure that the training plan I implement does not cause the athletes any further injuries. So I have to adjust the plan according to the level of the athlete who has just recovered from the injury.” (Interview result with Coach J5)

“In terms of planning, all coaches have been prepared for the whole year. The challenge is when I, as a coach, have to do other tasks besides coaching. Usually, I have to attend courses, meetings, or other assignments that involve my work as a coach. So if the work lasts for three days or a week, I have to structure and restructure the training plan. But so far, I can still manage well and make changes according to the team’s training needs.” (Interview result with Coach J6) To summarise, this study has identified external factors that pose a challenge to the elite MSS trainers, who have to adopt appropriate strategies to cope with them effectively and wisely. The researchers also suggest that elite MSS trainers should display a positive, flexible, and creative attitude towards these external factors. Moreover, coaches should communicate and collaborate well with the sports school management, athletes, parents, and other stakeholders to find suitable solutions and alternatives that can reduce the negative impact of these external factors. By doing so, the coaches of the MSS can enhance their contribution to the development of world-class MSS athletes.

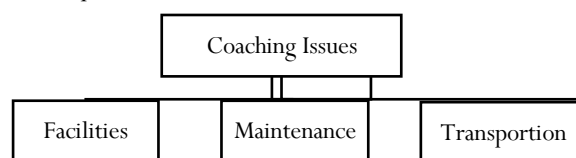


Figure 2. Key themes of the coaching issues faced by elite coaches in developing MSS student athletes

This study has revealed a number of issues that emerged from the information collection and data analysis processes. These coaching issues may compromise the planning of MSS student athletes’ training programs and, consequently, their development and performance outcomes. The researchers found that the coaches could not resolve these issues by themselves, as they were beyond their authority and required the assistance and support of the school and the ministry. MSS should initiate a planned collaboration with the stakeholders to address some of the issues and problems related to facilities, maintenance, and transportation that MSS coaches and student athletes faced, especially in relation to training and competitions. These problems, if left unresolved, will have a negative impact in the long impede the coaches’ efforts to produce talented athletes who can represent the country consistently and dynamically.

### **Facilities**

The problem of facilities at MSS in this study pertained to the insufficiency, incompatibility, or inadequacy of sports amenities supplied by MSS for student training. High-quality sports facilities are essential for enabling MSS student-athletes to train comfortably and safely while also enhancing their interest, motivation, and enjoyment in their respective sports.

The coaches who provided a comprehensive analysis of training facility-related matters are as follows:

“We have no problem with the facilities for the training. The main problem is the pitch. We have a gym for the training equipment. We have no problem with that. The training ground for hockey needs to be turf; otherwise, it is hard to polish the players’ talent. Before, when the pitch was not available, we could not do the training. So it is a bit difficult to do the training we plan” (Results of interview with Coach J1).

“The infrastructure is still new and needs to be upgraded. We will see how it goes. We have fifteen sports. The gym at SSTMI is small. The training sessions are limited. For example, a football team has twenty-two people. But they are given, maybe, an hour. So we have to adjust to our holidays, Saturdays or Fridays training” (Results of interview with Coach J2).

“Right now, when we have increased the number of students, we feel that our gym is small and not enough. So we have had a discussion with the school, and the principal asked us to do some paperwork to expand the gym, and it is up to them to talk about it” (Results of the interview with Coach J5).

This study has shown that sports facilities play a vital role in influencing the success of student athletes at SSM. State-of-the-art, advanced, and secure sports facilities can foster an optimal setting for student athletes to cultivate their talents and expertise in their preferred sports. Sports facilities can additionally bolster the motivation, discipline, and enthusiasm of student players, hence impacting their sports accomplishments. The presence of comprehensive sports facilities enhances the caliber of training and fosters the growth of student-athletes.

### **Maintenance**

MSS is officially acknowledged as a premier sports facility by the Ministry of Education Malaysia, and has nurtured numerous gifted athletes who have effectively represented the nation. The achievement can be ascribed to the Ministry of Education Malaysia's provision of well-equipped and world-class sports facilities, which aim to ensure that student-athletes perform at their highest level. The Ministry of Education Malaysia has successfully furnished a diverse range of high-quality sports amenities to cultivate and evaluate the students' aptitude in their chosen athletic disciplines. Nevertheless, this study has identified certain challenges that impede the progress of student-athletes, specifically pertaining to the difficulties in maintaining sports facilities faced by MSS. These challenges have the potential to

negatively impact the performance and safety of the student-athletes.

This problem can be discerned by gathering and scrutinising data acquired from MSS trainers who are taking part in this study. The issue was noted by the trainers listed below in their feedback:

“The turf field facilities are good, but they have been used for almost ten years. The pitch has become unsuitable for training or competition, as it is thin and hard. He also explained that the condition of a football turf field with increasingly thin synthetic grass can cause injuries to players. Fortunately, not many injuries have occurred. But if we continue to use it, the risk of injury is high” (Results of interview with Coach J2).

“The sports facilities are fine, but the maintenance is the problem. The facilities are not the problem. But the maintenance is. For example, when something is broken, like a floodlight, there is a problem that I cannot fix. So during the month of fasting, we should train at night. But we cannot practice at night. That means the facility is there, but the maintenance is not” (Results of interview with Coach J4).

“In general, I am very satisfied because I am at MSS. I am grateful because at MSS, everything is in one place. The field race track is at the school. It is just that the track maintenance and equipment are a bit difficult. If they can be improved, it would be good. So far, they are still okay to use” (Results of interview with Coach J5).

“In terms of the facility, I think it is a bit leaky. Maybe it is possible to improve the facilities available” (Results of interview with Coach J7).

“I think the sports school facilities are provided, but the repair of the broken ones is a bit slow. It takes a long time and disrupts the training we are going to do. Actually, the sooner the better, so that it does not interrupt our team's training” (Results of interview with Coach J9).

To summarise, the issue of maintaining sports facilities at MSS is a pressing concern that necessitates prompt attention and resolution from MSS management. The MSS administration must use proactive and efficient strategies to address the issue of maintaining sports facilities in schools. The significance of having high-quality and secure sports facilities lies in their ability to facilitate optimal sports training and enable MSS student-athletes to attain exceptional sports performance. MSS, as an educational institution that places emphasis on sports as a profession, must demonstrate dedication and accountability in offering and upholding high-quality sports amenities for MSS student-athletes.

### **Transportation**

The research proves that MSS offers a diverse selection of high-quality sports facilities to develop and evaluate students' abilities in their chosen sports. Nevertheless, the researcher's examination of the trainers uncovered transportation-related issues those MSS trainers encountered, particularly with their transit to training places and competitions. These issues have the potential to impact the

attendance and safety of student-athletes.

The study found the transportation issue by analyzing the information provided by multiple coaches throughout the interview process. The subsequent remarks from the coaches elucidate this matter with further clarity:

“The reason for the long travel time is that we use the school bus. I said it was a bus transport because at SSBJ there was only one bus for us to use to go to the training ground. If the bus breaks down or another sport uses the bus, we cannot go to practice on the field. If the school has another school program that sometimes requires using the bus that hockey uses, we cannot go either. That is one of our problems here. We have to tolerate it, too. Because it is a priority, after the hockey team comes cricket if it is nearby. But sometimes when other sports need it, we have to tolerate it as well” (Results of interview with Coach J1).

“In terms of transportation, there is a school bus for us to participate in the competition. However, we must rent another bus if other sports are using it at the same time or if it needs maintenance. The coach has to organize the schedule well with the other coaches so that the bus usage schedule does not overlap. If it happens, we will usually discuss with the school how to solve the problem according to the priority of which team should use the school bus. After all, the buses have only two to cover all sports. So if there is a bus that breaks down or has to be repaired, it will be a problem, especially if there is a competition outside” (Results of interview with Coach J2).

“For now, because we have a training centre inside the school, the travel distance for training is not very far. The boys walk from the hostel to the field. It is just that there is usually a slight problem when there is a competition or a change in the time of the competition, and at the same time, the school bus is already used by other sports” (Results of interview with Coach J4).

In summary, the transportation issue at MSS is a pressing matter that necessitates the focus and intervention of MSS management. The provision of reliable and secure transport is crucial for ensuring that MSS students arrive punctually at the training location while also offering convenience and alleviating anxiety. Moreover, reliable and secure transportation might enhance the involvement of MSS students in outside activities or competitions. MSS, as an educational institution that places a high importance on sports as a means of accomplishment and triumph, must establish suitable and efficient measures to tackle the transport issues within the school. This will demonstrate its dedication and accountability in furnishing and enhancing transport for MSS student-athletes.

## Discussion

The pursuit of excellence in sports requires not only raw talent but also meticulous training, guidance, and infrastructure. The Malaysia Sports School (MSS) aims to be a crucible for nurturing world-class athletes, but this noble endeavor was not without its challenges. In this article, we

delve into the multifaceted landscape faced by elite MSS trainers as they strive to cultivate the potential of chosen student-athletes. The study's findings indicate that MSS elite trainers have numerous challenges in their endeavour to cultivate the talent of chosen student athletes and fulfil MSS's aspiration of being a platform for generating world-class athletes (Noor, 2004; Ahmad, 2021). While the significance of this endeavour cannot be understated, elite MSS trainees encounter numerous challenges and barriers. The stakeholders involved in the management of MSS must prioritise and take into account these issues to minimise associated problems and ensure that the student-athletes perform at their best and achieve the return on investment (ROI) made by the parties involved.

The main issue revolved around the absence of appropriate amenities and the requirement for well-coordinated and sufficient transportation. Having enough facilities and reliable transportation is crucial to facilitating efficient training and competition for student-athletes. The absence of appropriate amenities poses a significant hurdle for both trainers and athletes. Well-equipped training facilities are essential for honing skills, refining techniques, and achieving peak performance. However, inadequate resources—ranging from outdated equipment to insufficient training spaces—hamper the seamless execution of training programs. Elite trainers grapple with the reality that their charges require optimal conditions to thrive (Pestano & Ibarra, 2021). In addition to that, the aspect of efficient transportation is the heart of any sports academy. Student-athletes must travel back and forth between practice venues, competitions and academic institutions. A well-coordinated transportation system ensures athletes arrive on time, minimizing disruption to their schedules. However, logistical challenges such as unreliable transportation services or long travel times can drain valuable energy and focus. Elite coaches must navigate these areas to optimize their athletes' training experience (Balabanian, 2020). In terms of ensuring the athlete's performance is always at its best, elite coaches face the difficult task of planning a year-round program. Performance goals, seasonal variations and external factors (such as weather conditions) all affect training schedules. The ability to adapt and optimize training plans throughout the year is a hallmark of successful coaching. Elite coaches must be adept at managing these complexities to ensure consistent progress among athletes and thereby improve their performance and achievement (Edwards, 2021).

The psychological influence on athletes and coaching personnel is also an important concern. Goals that are overly focused on outcomes can lead to burnout, emphasizing the need of defining objectives that go beyond athletic performance. These broader objectives can offer a more balanced and comprehensive approach to sports engagement and personal development. Furthermore, a high performance work system, which includes coaching methods, has a significant impact on employee and organizational performance (Kaushik & Mukherjee, 2022). The interaction



between coaching behavior and performance goals is complex, shaped by various factors such as the coach's leadership style, the athlete's level of motivation, and the prevailing organizational culture (Yin, 2023). According to Yin (2023), this complex relationship emphasized the need for a nuanced understanding of how coaching strategies align with performance objectives. The stability of coaching positions varies widely across different sports disciplines and countries. Certain modalities or regions may offer greater job security, allowing coaches to implement long-term developmental strategies without the immediate threat of termination following short-term setbacks. In contrast, other sports or countries may experience frequent turnover in coaching roles due to unsuccessful outcomes (Lara-Bercial et al., 2020). Lara-Bercial et al. (2020) also added that the ongoing professionalization of coaching and its recognition as a profession contributed to the stability and recognition of the role of coaching at the global level.

Coaches have a wide range of roles in sports, going beyond the traditional realm of player development. Previous investigations have suggested that their responsibilities include a wide range of critical functions. First, coaches are required to be knowledgeable about injury prevention, correct diagnosis, and effective rehabilitation. This competence ensures peak performance while prioritizing speedy and safe injury recovery (Nicholls, 2021). Second, coaches are actively involved in education, imparting knowledge to athletes, parents, and coaches. Topics covered include heat disease prevention, equipment maintenance, and facility safety (Hackfort & Schinke, 2020). Finally, the trainer carefully plans and implements the conditioning program. These programs not only boost performance but also lower the likelihood of injury and illness (Snarr & Beasley, 2022). There are also past researchers such as Furley et al. (2023); Siedentop et al. (2019); Martens & Vealey (2023), suggest that coaches should fulfill teaching, organizational, strategic and social functions in addition to creating a positive environment and collaborating with a multidisciplinary team, including coaches, physicians and physical therapists, to provide comprehensive care to their athletes. In addition, coaches develop emergency action plans to ensure preparedness for unexpected scenarios. In conclusion, the specialized literature emphasizes a holistic approach to training, consistent with the increasing role of the coach in sport.

Experimental studies with high-performance and amateur athletes, students with school failure and/or success and practitioners of collective and individual sports can expand the understanding of the topic and provide more precise evidence, based on the specificities like facilities and reliable transportation (Maciel et al., 2022). These findings align with prior research (Karim et al., 2018; Karim & Nadzalan 2017), indicating concerns regarding the quality of facilities and sports equipment at training centres. Furthermore, there are also difficulties encountered in the execution of training programs throughout the year (Desa & Salamuddin, 2022). Aside from annual training, performance targets, and required chores, elite coaches must also

address other obligations. These include formulating and achieving specific goals, as well as dealing with external variables that may impede training planning throughout the year (Siedentop et al., 2019). This emphasized the significance of effective administration and delivery of assistance to guarantee the seamless execution of training (Ramalu et al., 2021). While in aspects related to external factors such as changes in the competition schedule, bad weather factors, player injuries, tasks other than coaching such as courses, meetings, workshops and side tasks that are a challenge for elite MSS coaches, who need to use appropriate strategies to overcome them effectively and smart. Researchers also suggest that elite MSS coaches should show a positive, flexible and creative attitude towards these external factors. Coaches should communicate and cooperate well with sports school management, athletes, parents, and other stakeholders to find appropriate solutions and alternatives that can reduce the negative effects of these external factors (Ishak, 2017). By doing so, MSS coaches can increase their contribution to the development of world-class MSS athletes.

Some of the basic aspects of a grassroots school sports academy are mental, discipline, training, goals, focus, confidence, motivation, and physicality. Patiño et al. (2024) found that students with strong problem-solving skills are also better at planning, organizing, and managing their time. This is a basic aspect taught mainly by coaches in grassroots school sports academies (Akbar et al., 2024). The results of this study can be a valuable resource for coaches when designing and adapting appropriate development programs for student-athletes. It can also be a resource for stakeholders and interested parties to assess and prioritize current and urgent needs for schools and coaches in improving the design of student-athletes development programs. Elite coach communication directly affects player behavior. Therefore, it is necessary to determine how elite coaches communicate during training sessions and competitions (Deborah et al., 2023). Furthermore, Camilo et al. (2024), stated that student-athletes require guidance from coaches regarding mental health, social support during injury recovery, ongoing mental health education, close relationships between coaches and athletes, the involvement of psychiatrists or sports psychologists, environmental support, and a balance between performance and personal development. The findings of the study are directly related to the purpose of the study to identify obstacles and issues faced by MSS elite coaches.

This objective has been accomplished through the identification of issues such as inadequate resources, increased trainee responsibilities, and the impact of external factors on training planning. The practical ramifications of this study entail the necessity for stakeholders to prioritize enhancement of facilities, the effective administration of supplementary duties, and the provision of continuous assistance to MSS coaches. This also enhances the holistic development of young student-athletes. The sole focus on top MSS coaches in this study limits its scope. Subsequent

research endeavours should consider the viewpoint of student-athletes, the specific athletic discipline, and additional variables that may impact the holistic development of student-athletes. Our study findings serve as a compass for stakeholders. Prioritizing facility upgrades, streamlining transportation and maintenance logistics and providing ongoing support to MSS trainers is essential. Additionally, we support a holistic approach that considers not only the top level coach but also the student-athletes perspective. Future research should explore discipline-specific nuances and additional variables that impact holistic athlete development. In conclusion, the journey towards producing world-class athletes is difficult but rewarding. By continuously addressing challenges and fostering a collaborative ecosystem, MSS can continue to be a beacon for potential champions.

## Conclusions

This study investigates the challenges and issues that elite coaches encounter in the context of Malaysian Sports Schools (MSS). Previous studies have mainly focused on specific aspects of coaching, such as coaching style, motivation, and goal orientation, overlooking the wider experiences and difficulties that MSS elite coaches face. The aim of this research is to illuminate these challenges and issues, providing insights that can inform the improvement of coaching practice in MSS. Existing research has overlooked the various challenges and issues that MSS elite coaches face, such as issues of sports infrastructure and equipment, other task commitments, athlete dynamics, performance goals, and the influence of the environment and unforeseen external factors.

The study emphasized that some challenges and issues, especially those related to facilities, maintenance and transportation, are beyond the direct control of the coach. Resolving this issue requires a collaborative effort involving schools, ministries and other stakeholders. The challenges and issues identified can have a significant impact on the planning and implementation of training programs, potentially impeding the long-term development and achievement of student-athletes. This study aligns closely with its objective to explore the challenges and issues that elite MSS coaches face. It expands the scope beyond conventional aspects of coaching, offering a comprehensive understanding of the difficulties coaches face in their role.

The findings of this study have practical implications for trainers, schools, and ministries involved in MSS. Addressing the challenges and issues identified is essential for optimizing coaching strategies, enhancing athlete performance, and ensuring a satisfactory return on investment. While the study focuses on elite MSS coaches, future research could extend its scope by considering athletes' perspectives, sport-specific nuances, and additional factors influencing overall athlete development. Addressing these limitations could improve the depth and applicability of future investigations.

To conclude, this study supports a nuanced

understanding of the coaching challenges and issues that elite MSS Coaches face, stressing the need for collaborative solutions. By addressing these issues comprehensively, aspects of coaching at MSS can be improved, contributing to the holistic development of young athletes and the consistent production of world-class talent.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest concerning the research, authorship, and publication of this article

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