Effects of a skill for life program on youth soccer coaches

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the effects that a Skills4Life program has on the social, emotional and pedagogical skills of youth soccer coaches and assemble information from both outcome data as well as interviews with participating coaches to improve comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness of the intervention. Research methods: To answer these research questions we used a mixed method research design. For the quantitative part we use questionnaires, pre- and post-intervention, in a within subject design. Subjects were 87 youth coaches. For the qualitative part in-depth, semi-structured interviews were held with a random sample 14 of the participants. Findings: Data shows a significant increase in generalized self-efficacy belief among participants as well as significant changes in coping style, towards more active, problem-oriented coping. Participants also showed a significant increase in rational thinking. The qualitative data both indicate a strongly positive reception of the intervention by coaches as well as a number of relevant aspects for further improvement. The Skills4Life intervention is received well and the results point towards significant improvement of youth coaches’ self-efficacy, coping style and rational thinking. The quantitative and qualitative data gathered confirm one another in these respects. The next step has to be the implementation of a randomized control trial on the effectiveness of the program with long-term follow-up.

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Keywords: soccer coaches; youth; intervention effectiveness
1. Introduction

Youth sport participation is firmly established in contemporary Western society, and profoundly touches upon the lives of many young people. Youth sport participation is commonly regarded as of pervasive importance in child and adolescent development, and believed to have direct relevance for the acquisition of pro-social attitudes and behaviours. However, the empirical evidence for these assumptions is relatively weak (e.g. Bailey et. al., 2009). A number of authors hypothesize that it is not so much sport participation itself but the influence of coaches that determine (positive) social-emotional effects.

2. Problem Statement

Youth coaches are commonly seen as important influences on youth development and behaviour. At the same time the practice of coaching can be typed as complex. Coaches not only have to fulfil a number of roles but they also act as ‘role models’ (Cote, 2006). To complicate matters further youth coaches, at least in The Netherlands, are often not certified as such. Roundtable discussions with coaches revealed that they often feel inadequate and unsure. They have to deal, nowadays with an increase of anti-social behavior, aggression complexity of influences as well as with high expectations from others and themselves.

3. Research Questions

(1) What are the effects of a collaborative (researchers and coaches) developed Skills4Life course on coaches’ behaviour, attitudes and pedagogical skills?

(2) How did the coaches experience participation in such a course and do they see room for improvement in terms of structure, content and relevance for their work?

4. Purpose of the Study

To construct a Skills4Life intervention for youth coaches that is both effective as well as experienced as comprehensible, manageable and meaningful for coaching practice and pedagogical guidance of pupils.
5. Research Methods

For answering the research questions we used a mixed method research design. For the quantitative results data were collected through standardized questionnaires: the Utrecht Coping List (UCL) (Schreurs, Van de Willige, Brosschot, Tellegen & Graus, 1993) the General Self Efficacy Scale (GSE) (Jerusalem & Schwarzer, 1992) and the Rational Thinking Questionnaire (RTQ, Diekstra et al., 2004). The UCL and GSE were taken from 87 coaches at pre- and post-intervention and the RTQ was taken from 40 of the 87 coaches. The UCL is used to get more insight how the individual coaches cope (before and after the course) in difficult situations. Handling difficult situations are mentioned as one of the aims of the coaches participating in the roundtable sessions. The General Self Efficacy Scale measures the coaches' belief in their personal abilities to reach their aims. The coaches told in roundtable discussions that they mostly did not feel secure about their pedagogical skills and judge their self-efficacy in this realm to be low. The RTQ is a scale that measures rational goal-directed thinking. In-depth, semi-structured interviews have been used to determine the experiences and opinions of the coaches about the intervention and whether they have suggestions to improve the relevance of the intervention for their coaching and pedagogical skills.

6. Findings

The results indicated significant changes between pre- and post-test on all three measures (GSE, UCL and REE). There was a statistically significant increase in self-efficacy belief t(87)=8.21,p<.001. Furthermore, analysis of coping strategy changes showed a statistically significant increase in active coping t(87) =6.11,p<.001. Also, the coaches showed a statistically significant increase in rational, goal-directed thinking as a result participation in the training program, t(40)=3.33,p<.001. As to the data from the interviews (n = 14), statements by the great majority of interviewees support an increase in self-efficacy regarding pedagogical understanding and influencing of their pupils as well as changes in coping style regarding key situations and incidences in the sport arena.

7. Conclusions

The Skills4Life course examined in this study appears to lead to significant improvement of youth soccer coaches’ self-efficacy, coping style and rational thinking. A possible explanation for these results is that we did not choose to offer a model driven solution as an answer to all the possible difficulties that can rise in and around the soccer field (see Cushion, Armour & Jones, 2006). Coaches values courses in which they have room to explore ideas, where they can disagree with each other and the trainers on coping styles, can share their problems and practices.
with others (Nelson, Cushion & Potrac, 2013; Piggott, 2012), but also are trained in well-researched behavioral intervention and extension of their coping repertoires. As to suggestions for alterations in the intervention, coaches indicated the importance of (even) more practice by training and by modeling. Therefore, with a grant we contracted a film company and together (academics, coaches and the film company) wrote scripts and recorded videos, therewith producing a training DVD supporting the main themes of the intervention.

As to the limitations of this study; first, although the within subject design was suitable for this study, the final proof has to come from a randomized controlled design. Further research is also strongly recommended because it cannot be excluded that the present intervention is first and foremost suitable for soccer coaches, since they were the participants in the study. Beside the soccer union there are now five more national unions (Volley-ball, Basketball, Judo, Badminton, and Korfball) that opt to introduce the course in their coach training. It has however first to be established what the effects of the course are in these contexts and given by other professionals than the developers, who were the trainers in the present study.

8. References


