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Stakeholder Perceptions in Youth Football Club Management: Educational and Organizational Insights

Gheorghe Gabriel CUCUI [1]
Ionela Alina CUCUI [2*]

[1] Associate professor doctor, University "Valahia" of Târgoviște, Târgoviște, România; https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2566-516X; gabi_cucui@yahoo.com
[2] Associate professor doctor, University "Valahia" of Târgoviște, Târgoviște, România, https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1915-7377; haralambiealina2008@yahoo.com
[*] Corresponding author: haralambiealina2008@yahoo.com

Abstract: *This study explores the perceptions and satisfaction levels of key stakeholders involved in youth football club management, focusing specifically on parents, coaches, and club managers.*
The research investigates the main factors influencing the development and effectiveness of football programs for children and juniors, particularly examining how training conditions, leadership styles, and infrastructure contribute to overall satisfaction and perceived club performance.
A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining literature review, field observations, and a structured online questionnaire. The study included 184 participants: 112 parents of junior players, 52 football coaches, and 20 club managers. Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical tools, while observational insights helped contextualize the findings.
Results revealed varying satisfaction levels among stakeholders, with parents highlighting the need for improved communication, coaches pointing to resource limitations, and managers acknowledging infrastructural strengths. Although no statistically significant correlation was found between general satisfaction and perceived sports performance, the findings underscore the importance of holistic club management and stakeholder involvement.
This research offers original insights into youth football management from a stakeholder-centered perspective and provides valuable recommendations for improving organizational practices and parental engagement within sports clubs. Its implications extend beyond the national context and may inform international efforts aimed at enhancing youth sport development.

Keywords: *youth football, sports management, stakeholder perception, club infrastructure, parental satisfaction.*

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Introduction

Football is a global phenomenon, enjoyed by millions of people, both participants and spectators. Over the years, the sport has undergone substantial evolution in organizational, scientific, and methodological aspects, significantly contributing to the development of modern sports entertainment (Smith & Stewart, 2010). Recent studies highlight football's increasing relevance across various academic disciplines, such as the social sciences and psycho-sociology, underscoring its impact on contemporary society (Hoye et al., 2015; Cucui, 2017; Schneier et al., 1991).

In the context of global economic crises and persistent financial instability, sports organizations in Romania—particularly football clubs—have faced significant challenges (Mihăilescu, 2008a). The ability to adapt to economic, political, and social changes has become essential for their survival and development (Bayle & Robinson, 2007). In this context, the professionalization of sports structures emerges as a key factor for long-term success (Dowling et al., 2014; Nagel et al., 2015).

This study focuses specifically on the management of football clubs for children and youth, which play a crucial role in shaping not only future elite athletes but also the educational and social values of young individuals (Voigt & Hohmann, 2016).

The central aim of this research is to examine how football club management impacts the satisfaction of key stakeholders—namely parents, coaches, and managers—as well as its perceived influence on young athletes' sports development. The study also seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of existing management strategies within youth clubs and identify the major challenges faced in today's changing socio-economic landscape (Dimitropoulos & Alexopoulos, 2014; García, 2011; Cucui, 2017; Mihăilescu, 2008b; Voigt & Hohmann, 2016; Schneier et al., 1995).

The primary objectives of the research are to assess the satisfaction levels of parents, coaches, and club managers regarding the organizational practices within youth football clubs; to analyze how factors such as training quality, infrastructure, and communication affect overall satisfaction and the club environment; to identify areas for improvement in club management, with the goal of enhancing stakeholder experience and long-term engagement; and to explore the relationship between perceived management quality and the retention and development of young athletes, as viewed by adult stakeholders.

In this context, the hypothesis that will be tested is that the training methods, management styles, and infrastructure conditions within football

clubs significantly influence the satisfaction of parents, the sports performance of children, and the retention rate of athletes within these clubs.

Literature review

In the field of youth sports - and particularly in football - effective management practices play a critical role in the development of young athletes. The success of youth football programs is significantly influenced by the quality of leadership, coaching strategies, available infrastructure, and interpersonal relationships among coaches, parents, and players. This literature review examines key academic works focused on the management of football clubs for children and juniors, critically assessing the main success factors while identifying existing gaps that this study seeks to fill.

Football clubs for children and juniors are complex organizational environments where various elements—such as management strategies, coaching approaches, and infrastructural conditions—interact to shape athletic development and overall well-being. While numerous studies have explored individual aspects of youth football management, such as coaching methods or leadership styles, there remains a notable lack of research that adopts a holistic, integrated approach combining these variables into a single framework.

A substantial body of literature emphasizes the value of age-appropriate, structured training methods in supporting young talent development. Luis Rogério de Albuquerque et al. (2021) emphasize the need for personalized training programs that address both the technical and psychological needs of children and adolescents. Their study highlights that training should be designed to stimulate skill development while promoting a positive and supportive environment that encourages motivation and emotional growth. Moreover, the use of modern technologies, such as performance monitoring tools and video analysis, is increasingly recognized as an effective method for improving training quality and providing personalized feedback (Champ et. al., 2018).

Leadership within youth football clubs is a key determinant of organizational culture and can significantly influence player development and stakeholder satisfaction. Jawoosh et al., (2022) argue that leadership style adopted by club managers and coaches has a direct impact on management effectiveness and the perceived experience of both parents and athletes. While authoritarian approaches—centered on control and discipline—have been criticized for stifling creativity and autonomy, participatory leadership models that prioritize collaboration, transparency, and shared decision-making are

shown to create more supportive and motivating environments (Biddle et al., 2018; Schilhaneck, 2008).

Effective communication is another key factor in successful youth football management. Studies show that transparent and open communication between coaches, players, and parents is essential to ensure that all parties are aligned with the club's goals and that players receive the necessary support. Maintaining strong relationships within the club helps create a sense of community, which can positively impact athletes' performance and retention in the program.

The availability and quality of infrastructure and training facilities is also a central pillar of effective club management. Evidence suggests that organizations equipped with modern equipment, safe playing surfaces, and sufficient recovery spaces are more successful in both player retention and performance outcomes. Nevertheless, disparities in resource distribution among clubs—particularly in underprivileged regions—can create unequal development opportunities. This infrastructure gap often results in lower satisfaction levels and limited progress among athletes in resource-constrained environments.

Although the existing literature offers important insights into youth football management, notable limitations persist. One major critique of current works is the tendency to analyze individual factors in isolation. For example, studies focus either on coaching practices or infrastructure, but rarely integrate these elements into a holistic club management model. This fragmented approach limits the understanding of how these variables interact and influence each other in practice.

In addition, a significant portion of the literature has centered on the views of coaches and administrative staff, while offering limited representation of parents' and players' voices. Considering that both groups are integral to the functioning and success of youth football programs, their perspectives must be systematically integrated into evaluations of management practices. While Biddle et al. (2018) emphasize the importance of relational dynamics within clubs, few studies provide a structured framework that includes all stakeholder categories in the analysis.

Another critical gap in the literature concerns the lack of research exploring how management practices affect long-term athlete development and retention. Most existing studies tend to emphasize short-term indicators—such as immediate satisfaction or short-term performance—without addressing sustained engagement over time. This limits the ability to fully understand how management decisions shape athletes' progression and commitment in the long run.

These literature gaps highlight the need for a multifaceted and integrative approach to analyzing football club management at the youth level. This study responds to that need by addressing the perspectives of coaches, parents, and club managers in a single, cohesive framework. Through this lens, it seeks to generate a more nuanced understanding of how management practices affect stakeholder satisfaction, athlete performance, and retention over time.

Additionally, this study aims to address the lack of longitudinal insights by examining the factors that contribute to both immediate and sustained player retention. Considering the high dropout rates commonly observed in youth sports, it is essential to understand what promotes long-term engagement, in order to strengthen football development programs and support the continuous growth of young athletes.

In addressing these gaps, the present study seeks to make a meaningful contribution to the existing literature by proposing a holistic model of youth football club management. This model encompasses critical elements such as training methods, leadership styles, communication practices, infrastructural quality, and stakeholder perceptions. Unlike earlier research that treats these variables in isolation, this study underscores their interconnectedness and combined influence on club effectiveness. Furthermore, by incorporating the perspectives of coaches, parents, and managers, the research delivers a comprehensive and inclusive assessment of how managerial practices shape satisfaction and engagement within youth football environments.

Beyond theoretical advancement, this research also holds practical significance for club administrators and youth sport practitioners. By identifying the core drivers of stakeholder satisfaction and athlete retention, the study offers actionable recommendations that can enhance management practices, optimize resource allocation, and ultimately improve development outcomes for both players and football organizations.

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design to examine the perceptions and levels of satisfaction among stakeholders involved in the management of youth football clubs. By integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches, the study aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of how training methods, leadership styles, and infrastructure conditions impact the experiences of three primary groups: parents, coaches, and club managers. Particular attention was given to assessing how these elements influence parental satisfaction, the sports performance of young athletes, and their long-term retention in organized football programs.

The research sample was composed of 184 participants, carefully selected to reflect the diversity and relevance of key stakeholders in the context of youth football. The distribution included 112 parents of junior players, 52 football coaches affiliated with youth academies, and 20 club managers involved in strategic and operational decision-making. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure that all participants had direct involvement with youth football clubs, thereby enhancing the relevance and authenticity of the data collected.

To define eligibility for inclusion in the study, specific criteria were established. Participants had to be either coaches or managers with a minimum of one year of professional experience in youth football, or parents of children aged between 8 and 16 who were actively enrolled in football club programs. All participants were required to provide informed consent before participating. Individuals who did not currently maintain an affiliation with a football club, who provided incomplete or inconsistent responses, or who were under the age of 18 without appropriate legal consent were excluded from the study.

Demographic information was collected via the survey instrument to contextualize the analysis. Participants' ages ranged between 25 and 54 years, while gender distribution within the sample was 62% male and 38% female. In the case of children, data was collected indirectly through their parents' responses.

To support the study's triangulated approach and enrich its findings, three complementary methods of data collection were used. First, a comprehensive bibliographic review was conducted, offering a theoretical foundation grounded in relevant academic literature. This step ensured that the research design and interpretation of results were aligned with existing scholarship in the field of sports management. Second, direct observations were carried out during club training sessions and meetings. These observations focused on communication patterns and the quality of interactions among coaches, players, and parents, adding depth to the data collected. Third, a structured online questionnaire served as the principal data collection tool. Distributed over a period of 30 days via internal club communication platforms, the questionnaire included both closed and open-ended items. The first section addressed demographic details, while the second assessed stakeholder satisfaction across several domains, such as training conditions, managerial communication, infrastructure quality, and the use of available resources.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the research instruments and results, multiple validation strategies were implemented. The questionnaire

was pre-tested with a small group of ten participants to confirm its clarity and relevance. The internal consistency of the instrument was verified through Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a coefficient of $\alpha = 0.84$, which is considered indicative of strong reliability. Triangulation was employed by cross-referencing the results of the survey with observational findings and insights from the literature review. Moreover, open-ended questions allowed participants to provide additional commentary, introducing a qualitative dimension that complemented the primarily quantitative data.

Quantitative data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics software. Descriptive statistics, such as means and standard deviations, were used to identify general trends, while inferential statistical tests—including T-tests, one-way ANOVA, and Pearson correlation—were applied to evaluate hypotheses and examine relationships between key variables. The results were visually represented through charts and tables to facilitate clear interpretation and communication of findings.

All ethical protocols were rigorously observed throughout the study. Approval was granted by the institutional research committee, and informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Participation was entirely voluntary, and confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained in accordance with ethical research standards.

Results

The results obtained from the research questionnaire will be presented and analyzed using a detailed and clear approach through tables, graphs, and statistical analyses. Their interpretation will be carried out within the theoretical framework of the research, and any significant differences or contradictions compared to the formulated hypotheses will be objectively and critically discussed.

The analysis of the responses provided for the questionnaire items reveals that:

- The majority of respondents are satisfied with the training conditions and club infrastructure, reflecting a good level of investment in facilities.
- The management style and communication with the leadership are appreciated; however, there is room for improvement, particularly in terms of transparency and active collaboration with parents and coaches.

- Parental involvement and feedback are considered key aspects, and clubs that successfully integrate them into their activities enjoy a better perception from the community.
- Material resources are generally well evaluated, but minor deficiencies have been reported that could affect the optimal conduct of activities.

After centralizing and analyzing the results, we observe:

Parental Satisfaction: 68% of parents indicated a high level of satisfaction with the management of children's and youth football clubs. This result suggests that most parents appreciate the conditions and the way clubs are managed; however, a significant percentage (22%) reported a moderate level of satisfaction, while 10% indicated low satisfaction.

Coach Satisfaction: 58% of coaches believe that the current management is effective, reflecting a more balanced assessment compared to parents. Meanwhile, 25% of coaches are moderately satisfied, and 17% report low satisfaction, indicating potential areas for improvement in terms of resources or working methods.

Club Management Satisfaction: 75% of club managers consider the club's infrastructure to be a strong point, suggesting a high level of satisfaction regarding the facilities available for activities. Only 15% are moderately satisfied, and 10% are dissatisfied, a relatively low percentage compared to the other groups.

Table 1 Satisfaction Levels by Respondent Group

Group	High Satisfaction Level (%)	Moderate Satisfaction Level (%)	Low Satisfaction Level (%)
Parents	68%	22%	10%
Coaches	58%	25%	17%
Club Managers	75%	15%	10%

The analysis of satisfaction levels among the three groups—parents, coaches, and club managers—revealed noticeable differences in perception. Among parents, 68% expressed a high level of satisfaction with club management, while 22% reported moderate satisfaction and 10% low satisfaction. Coaches showed slightly lower satisfaction rates, with 58% indicating high satisfaction and 17% low. Club managers were the most satisfied group overall, with 75% rating their satisfaction as high.

These results suggest that while infrastructure and general conditions are positively perceived, there are disparities in how different groups experience communication, leadership, and collaboration within the clubs.

Table 2 Statistical Summary of General Satisfaction and Performance

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	N
General satisfaction	4.1	0.8	184
Sports performance level	3.9	0.85	184

T-Test for comparing means:

- t-statistic: 0.604
- p-value: 0.547

Based on the result obtained, we can interpret that there is no statistically significant difference between general satisfaction and sports performance level ($p > 0.05$). Therefore, the means of these two variables can be considered similar in this context.

Pearson correlation between satisfaction and sports performance:

- Correlation coefficient: 0.040
- p-value: 0.667

The correlation between satisfaction and sports performance is very weak and statistically insignificant ($p > 0.05$). This suggests that the level of general satisfaction is not associated with the perceived sports performance level, which can also be interpreted in the context of the subjects' age categories, as they are still in the process of development and have not yet reached high performance.

One-way ANOVA:

- ANOVA statistic: 0.364
- p-value: 0.547

There is no statistically significant variation between the analyzed components (satisfaction and sports performance), which confirms the result of the t-test.

As a result of the conducted research, the following analyses specific to management have emerged:

Table 3 SWOT Analysis of Youth Football Club Management

Strengths: • 75% of managers consider the infrastructure a strong point. • 68% of parents and 58% of coaches are satisfied with the management	**Weaknesses:** • Limited financial resources. • Deficiencies in communication with the club management.
Opportunities: • Possibility of attracting external funding. • Partnerships with educational institutions or sponsors.	**Threats:** • Other clubs with more attractive offers. • Reduction of financial resources for mass sports.

Table 4 PEST Analysis of External Factors Influencing Club Management

	PEST Analysis
1.	**Political Factors:**
	▪ The legislation and regulations in force regarding the activities of sports clubs for children and juniors directly influence their structure and functioning.
	▪ More informational sessions should be held on the possibilities of accessing public funds to support sports programs.
	▪ Organizing more sports competitions can stimulate participation in club activities and implicitly generate new potential athletes.
2.	**Economic Factors:**
	▪ Insufficient funding affects the infrastructure and resources necessary for the activities of sports organizations.
	▪ Dependence on the support of sponsors and parents can influence the club's strategy.
	▪ Economic fluctuations influence family expenditures for children's extracurricular activities.
3.	**Social Factors:**
	▪ Parents are increasingly aware of the benefits of sports activities for children's development.
	▪ Pressures to ensure optimal training and performance conditions.
	▪ Growing interest in extracurricular sports and recreational activities.
4.	**Technological Factors:**
	▪ The use of video analysis platforms and performance monitoring.
	▪ Applications for managing activities and communication within the club.
	▪ Technology provides parents and coaches with tools to evaluate performance and improve processes.

Limits and discussions

As with any empirical study, this research is subject to certain limitations that must be acknowledged when interpreting its results. One of the primary limitations is its geographical scope. Data were collected exclusively from a specific region, which may limit the generalizability of findings to broader national or international contexts. Although the perspectives gathered provide valuable insights, cross-regional or multi-country studies would be necessary to fully validate the patterns observed.

Another important limitation concerns the methodological design. While the study applied a mixed-methods approach and triangulated its data through observation, literature, and survey responses, it still relies heavily on self-reported data, which may be influenced by social desirability or subjective bias. In addition, while optional qualitative responses were included, a more structured qualitative component such as in-depth interviews could have enriched the interpretation of stakeholder perspectives.

The epistemological framework adopted in this study also implies certain boundaries. The focus on stakeholder satisfaction and perception may overlook structural or policy-level variables that also affect youth football management. As such, the findings should be considered within the interpretive scope of the selected variables and the chosen research instruments.

Lastly, the research offers a cross-sectional snapshot of club management practices at a particular moment in time. A longitudinal design could better capture changes over time and assess the long-term impact of management approaches on stakeholder satisfaction and athlete retention.

Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable groundwork and may serve as a reference point for future comparative research, both nationally and internationally.

In addition to the limitations already acknowledged, this study faces several methodological and contextual challenges that require further clarification. The research is geographically limited, as data were collected exclusively from a single Romanian region. While the findings offer valuable insights, they should be interpreted with caution, as they may not be generalizable to broader national or international contexts. Future comparative studies conducted across multiple regions or countries are recommended to validate and extend the present conclusions.

Moreover, the study relies primarily on self-reported data, collected through structured online questionnaires. Despite efforts to ensure internal

reliability, as evidenced by a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.84, self-reported measures remain susceptible to subjective bias, including social desirability effects. Such biases may influence the accuracy of participants' responses, particularly concerning satisfaction levels and perceptions of club performance.

Another limitation arises from the cross-sectional design of the study, which restricts the ability to assess causal relationships or observe long-term changes in management effectiveness or athlete retention. To address this, longitudinal research designs are encouraged for future investigations to capture developmental trends and sustained impacts over time.

Additionally, although the study incorporated open-ended survey questions to enrich the dataset, the qualitative component lacks the depth typically associated with structured or semi-structured interviews. More in-depth qualitative methods could have provided richer and more nuanced insights into stakeholders' experiences, especially regarding communication practices and leadership dynamics within the clubs.

Finally, it should be noted that most of the literature referenced in this article is derived from European and North American contexts. As a result, the findings may not fully reflect the realities of youth football in other global regions. Future research should aim for greater inclusion of perspectives from underrepresented areas, particularly from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, to ensure a more comprehensive and globally relevant understanding of youth sports management.

Finally, children were not direct participants in the study, and no primary data were collected from minors. As noted, data concerning children were gathered indirectly through parental responses, which may not fully reflect children's own experiences. This limitation should be taken into account when interpreting results related to athlete development and retention.

This study offers a comprehensive understanding of youth football club management by incorporating the perspectives of multiple stakeholder groups—parents, coaches, and club managers. Its contribution lies in moving beyond single-variable approaches often found in previous literature, instead embracing an integrated, stakeholder-centered framework that considers training methods, leadership styles, communication, and infrastructure as interconnected elements shaping stakeholder satisfaction and organizational effectiveness.

The results of this research emphasize that satisfaction does not directly correlate with perceived sports performance among young athletes, a finding that contrasts with assumptions made in several earlier studies. For

instance, our data suggest that other factors—such as age, individual motivation, or early-stage development—may moderate this relationship. This insight prompts a more nuanced understanding of what stakeholder satisfaction truly reflects in the context of youth sports.

Furthermore, the analysis identified communication as a recurrent challenge, particularly between club leadership and parents. This confirms prior findings by Biddle et al. (2018) who stressed the importance of transparent, ongoing dialogue in building trust and improving long-term engagement. The observed gap in communication, despite high satisfaction with infrastructure, underscores that material resources alone are insufficient without strategic relationship management.

At an international level, this study is especially relevant for countries facing economic limitations, where financial and human resources are unevenly distributed across youth sports programs. The SWOT and PEST analyses conducted here demonstrate that meaningful progress can still be achieved through better leadership, educational partnerships, and community involvement, even in constrained environments.

The original value of this article lies in its holistic and practical orientation. Unlike studies that focus solely on performance outcomes or organizational theory, this research bridges theory and practice through empirical data and contextual observation. It advocates for a vision of football club management that balances strategic planning with human-centered leadership, thereby aligning with both educational and developmental goals in youth sport.

Conclusions

Following the development and analysis of this research, the following conclusions can be drawn:

The majority of parents (68%) and coaches (58%) expressed a high level of satisfaction with the club management. However, there are significant opportunities for improvement regarding communication and active involvement of parents in the club's activities.

The comparative analysis of the means indicates a positive, but not uniformly distributed, perception between general satisfaction and sports performance. The T-test and ANOVA showed that there are no statistically significant differences between the analyzed variables, suggesting that current management methods do not directly influence the perceived performance of athletes.

Infrastructure deficiencies and limited financial resources were mentioned as the main difficulties faced by clubs. Club managers (75%)

emphasized that the existing infrastructure is a strong point but is not always adequate to meet the growing needs of the clubs.

Statistical correlation tests revealed a weak relationship between general satisfaction and sports performance (correlation coefficient of approximately 0.04). This suggests that other variables, such as personal motivation and the quality of training, may play a more significant role in determining the sports success of children.

In the current context, football club management must adopt practices that are better suited to modern requirements, including the digitalization of administrative processes, improved communication with parents, and increased collaboration with partners and investors to support financial activities and implement processes based on scientific foundations.

Active involvement of parents and coaches through continuous feedback and participation in decision-making can contribute to an increase in general satisfaction and the harmonious development of young athletes.

These conclusions highlight the need for a balance between the autonomy of club management and the involvement of stakeholders to support the performance and development of young athletes in a modern environment, adapted to the current challenges.

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Authors' contributions: These authors contributed equally to this work. All authors contributed to the study conception and design. All authors commented on previous versions of the manuscript.

All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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