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Psychological effects of ability grouping in football

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Abstract

This paper aims to examine the effects of ability grouping in youth football, on self-confidence, anxiety, and well-being. 830 children born in 2004 and 2005 answered a questionnaire that included questions about gender, level of playing and experience in football. Using SPSS, researchers explored means and anovas for which team the players played as well as gender to explore joint effect. While both team and gender had significant effects on confidence, negative thinking and worry, there was no significant joint effect. Generally, players in A teams (highest level) scored higher on confidence and lower on negative thinking and worry but further research is needed to determine if those results are due to ability grouping.

Keywords: ability grouping, confidence, negative thoughts, worry, youth, football

Rannsókn var framkvæmd til að meta áhrif getuskiptingar í knattspyrnu á vellíðan ungmenna, sjálfstraust og kvíða. 830 þátttakendur fæddir árin 2004 og 2005 svöruðu spurningalista þar sem fram kom kyn, hvaða lið einstaklingur spilaði fyrir og reynsla. Notast var við SPSS til að framkvæma anova og skoða meðaltal svara fyrir áhrif bæði kyns og liðs, sem og samvirknihrif. Bæði voru áhrif kyns og liðs marktæk en emalei samvirknihrifin. Almennt skoruðu leikmenn í A liðum hærra á sjálstrausti og lægra á neikvæðum hugsunum og kvíða en nánari rannsóknir þarf til að fullyrða um hvort orsakatengsl sé að ræða

Lykilorð: getuskipting, sjálfstraust, neikvæðar hugsanir, áhyggjur, ungmenni, knattspyrna

Psychological effects of ability grouping in football

In Iceland, around 80 percent of children, between the ages of six to twelve, practice at least one sport outside of school (Sigurjónsson, 2016). This shows how important it is to put focus on the mental aspects, and not just the physical, in childrens‘ sports as well as within the school system.

In football training in Iceland, a method called ability grouping is used. Ability grouping is the practice of dividing individuals in a group into smaller groups based on their skill level (Kneer, 2013), for example by teaching the best math students to solve more advanced math problems while teaching the other students simpler problems. This is done in Iceland in youth football training. The best players are put into the so-called “A team” and then the next best group of players are put into the “B team” and so on. These teams then play only against other teams of the same ability from other clubs. Sometimes these players also exclusively train together during practice and therefore players in the A team and the D team might never spend time together at all (Haraldsson, 2014).

Ability grouping is used to make sure that players get appropriate challenges and opportunities to improve. This means that players are not competing against other players much better than they are and therefore not getting a chance to touch the ball and that the best players are not playing against players much weaker than them and thereby not challenged as a result.

However, some people, including Iceland’s football association’s current president Vanda Sigurgeirsdóttir, question these methods and point out that getting put in the lower teams can have negative effects on young players’ attitude toward themselves, their peers, and the sport. It is also possible that they get bullied for being in lower ranked teams. Sometimes this method

results in friends getting split up. A player can also get stuck in a team where he/she does not belong or get moved around against his/her wishes, often leading to negative feelings and insecurity. In 2012 Vanda said that she believes that before the age of ten the practice of ability grouping should be banned as it is impossible to tell before then, or before puberty, who has a realistic chance of excelling in the sport and who does not (Sigurgeirsdóttir, 2012).

While these reasons are cited for the use of this grouping in football in Iceland, more research may be needed for its justifications, both mentally and physically. Most literature on ability grouping is about research done in schools, and those results will be looked at in this paper as there is valuable information to be gathered, while the lack of precise research in youth sports persists. This too supports the need for further research on ability grouping in football.

Questions such as whether it can be considered other children's responsibility to support and improve others, and whether it is fair to take the best players away from the others as it can result in taking away a valuable teacher, have not been sufficiently explored. The biggest problem when considering ability grouping in sports, is the lack of research and writing about the actual effects on children. While many claim it is an effective method in regard to footballing results there is not enough research on its effects to make the argument for whether it is worth using.

Using data relating to ability grouping in schools to assess the use and implications of ability grouping in football has both advantages and disadvantages. While it is necessary for this paper due to the lack of research in youth sports, it is also not completely applicable to children’s sporting activities outside of the school environment. Children practicing sports may have different attributes than children in schools, which all children must attend. For example, more

boys than girls might participate in sports (Sport, n,d.) and LGBTQ+ children might also be hesitant to participate (Hekama, 2008). Still, the psychological effects within groups and confidence are most likely present in both surroundings.

One of the questions often asked is whether the less capable groups receive the same quality of teaching/coaching as the more advanced groups. It is also often pointed out that among the negative results of ability grouping is the fact that players can feel discouraged and less motivated when separated from the more advanced (Slavin, 1990).

In 2013, Marian E Kneer published a paper called *Ability grouping in physical education.* In the paper she talks about ways to identify ability and the standard on which to base ability judgments. This raises questions regarding how young players are judged. Is this to be done purely on skill, attitude, maturity or other factors? After making such judgments, having to justify why one is regarded above another in ability can be tricky and result in other difficulties (Kneer, 2013).

In 1986 Aage B. Sörensen and Maureen T. Hallinan wrote that ability grouping actually provides less opportunities to learn but also a better use of those chances and that higher ability groups have more opportunities than lower ability groups (Sörensen & Hallinan, 1986). This is referred to as the "self-fulfilling prophecy" and means that the expectations of others, for example coaches, can influence the behavior of the players and their performances (Weaver et.al., 2016).

Another practice used in children's football is having the best players from one age group play with an older age group. This is called Playing up. A similar practice of letting the most talented female players train with males is also used, in the belief that the best girls will get a

more appropriate challenge with the boys. In 2021, Daniel E. Goldman wrote about athletes' perceptions of playing up in youth football, specifically focusing on the influences on skill and psychological development. The athletes cited their teammates and coaches playing pivotal roles in both. Often the older players in a group will be more advanced on average and by moving a player up between teams he/she is put in an older group. This may however result in difficulty in adjusting, as being technically advanced or physically mature does not necessarily go hand in hand with being mature mentally. (Goldman, 2010).

Another method used is mixing male and female children in training. Lenskyj and van Daalen (2006) do however report findings that letting male and female players train together, tends to allow males to exert control and power over the females (Lenskyj & van Daalen, 2006).

Playing up can lead to the same problems within peer groups. Players who are pulled up to older age groups may end up being left out of friend groups, in both age groups. Katie Fitzpatrick in 2011 wrote: “Deeper interpersonal relationships, however, don’t automatically form without conscious and ongoing interaction. Opportunities for such interaction occur in any number of school-based activities, but physical education is an especially powerful site for relationship building“ (Fitzpatrick, 2011). The social aspect of children’s lives is an important factor in their development and one that must not be forgotten when discussing the organization of sports.

Another theory that ought to be considered is the „Relative age effect“. This refers to the fact that children born earlier in the year are much more likely to excel in sports due to maturing earlier and therefore getting ahead of those born later. An example of this is Mujika and Vaeyens‘ paper titled „The relative age effect in a professional football club setting“. In the paper the

authors examine research done in Spain where the birthdate distribuition of 13.519 players was compared over 21 seasons. A significant bias towards early births in each year was clear, when compared to the population‘s births of the same year. The relative age effect increased with a higher level in youth football (Mujika, 2009).

The question of whether children receive the same level of quality in coaching is not the same debate as the one referring to the effects on their well-being. Kulik and Kulik argue that while the focus is often on whether or not ability grouping is an effective method of teaching, this has not been established well enough, and the wrong methods have been used to explore this. They cite Slavin and Karweit’s research where they carried out a small quantitative synthesis on different types of class grouping. Grouping students by aptitude or performance proved to be beneficial for learning, showing a 0.55 percent increase in test scores and claimed it to be the same effect as tutoring each child within the group individually (Kulik & Kulik, 2007).

It is also important to study the negative effects ability grouping can have on self-esteem and confidence, as self-esteem and confidence can affect performance as well. Brockner wrote in 1979 that „task performance of low self-esteem individuals suffers in the presence of self-focusing stimuli “. He demonstrated that when students with low self-esteem received negative feedback it would lead to further negative performances. If being grouped in a lower ability group is considered negative feedback to the students, then they are likely to have lower self-esteem and therefore worse performances. On the other hand, positive feedback had a positive effect on low self-esteem students and a bigger effect than on those with high self-esteem (Brockner, 1979).

Using data from psychological tests on youth football players in Iceland this paper will now examine these effects further, specifically looking at the effects on confidence, negative thoughts and worry. The researcher expects to find both a significant effect on these aspects based on ability groups (teams) and a joint effect between team and gender.

Material and Methods

Participants

Hafrún Kristjánsdóttir and Grímur Gunnarsson collected data from 830 children who, at the time, practiced football in Iceland. 358 participants (43.13 percent) were born in 2004 and 470 (56.63 percent) were born in 2005. They were grouped together, as children from two different ages train together at all times. The group included 626 male players (75.42 percent) and 202 female players (24.34 percent). The data also included players' birthdays so that relative age effect could be examined. Participants were split into groups, based on what team they most often played in, with 549 (66.14 percent) in either A or A2, 156 (18.8 percent) in B or B2 and 35 (4.22 percent) in C or C2. No female players were in C teams. The data included information about what age they started training and whether they had been involved in elite training for the National Football Association.

Measurements

The participants reviewed a list of statements and indicated how much they agreed with each statement. Examples of statements were: "I have great faith in my ability", "I feel secure with who I am" and "I worry about performing poorly", with possible answers being; "strongly agree" (4), "agree" (3), "somewhat agree" (2) and "do not agree" (1). Examples of types of

statements were, “I have techniques to calm myself”, “I talk to myself in a negative manner during playing” or “I calm myself down before training” with possible answers being “never” (1), “seldom” (2), “sometimes” (3), “often” (4) and “always” (5). All participants filled out the same questionnaire. If a question was not answered or was not answered in the correct manner, that question would be marked missing, with the rest of the data used. In this research paper the questions were grouped by what was being measured, including depression, anxiety, and self-confidence.

Data analysis

The writer of this paper reviewed the data and chose a number of questions which best fit the question groups for depression, anxiety and self-confidence to review the corraltation between ability grouping and well-being based on the lists. Using SPSS the researcher performed analysis comparing the players‘ answers between teams. The researchers created question groups for negative thinking, confidence and worry and performed a bonferroni anova to examine whether or not a significant effect was present between players in A teams, B teams and C teams, male and female players and whether a joint effect between team and gender existed.

Results

Out of 720 participants who answered the statement „I have much faith in my ability“ most participants also played for either the A team or the A2 team, 530 to be excact (73.61 percent). 35 participants (4.86 percent) played for the C or C2 teams. The mean score, „do not agree“ relating to one and „strongly agree“ relating to four, was 3,11 for the A team players and only 2.5 for C2 team players.

Meanwhile, results showed that for the statement „I worry about performing poorly“, players in team C2 scored 2.5 on average while players in team A scored an average of 1,98. Players in the C2 team also agreed more strongly with the statement „during games I think about mistakes“ than those in the A team, scoring an average of 3.5 as opposed to the 2.65 average.

Players in the A team were also most likely to use methods of relaxation, scoring an average of 2.25 as opposed to the 1.91 average of the players in the C team, Players in the B2 team were lowest however, scoring only 1.85. They also scored lowest on the statement „During games I think about mistakes“, only 2.65.

Results showed that players in the lowest teams, C and C2 scored the highest average on self deprecation, 2.31 and 2.5 respectively, while players in the A and A2 teams scored an average of 2.18 or 2.13 respectively. Again, players in the B2 team scored 1.8 on average which is the lowest score.

There was however less of a difference, than expected, between the players of different teams, regarding the statements „I can calm down when I get stressed during competition“ and „I can control intrusive thoughts when I train“ . For example, players for A teams scored an average of 3,63 and 3,84 respectively, regarding these statements, while the C2 teams scored 3,5 and 4. The B2 teams, meanwhile, scored 3,74 and 3,94 on average.

There was not a big difference in the answers to the statement „When I have to, I can calm down in competitions to perform well.“ Players in the A team scored an average of 3.61 while the players in the C2 team scored 3.5. In addition, players in team A had an average of 2.63 for the statement „I have a hard time keeping calm when I get excited in competition“, while C2 players scored an average of 2.5. While this is not a big difference between groups, it is flipped

from the previous statement, where A players scored both higher on difficulty with calming down and higher on ability to calm down.

A team players scored higher on statements relating to positive self talk and on statements relating to emotional control. The average score on the statement „I worry about letting others down“ for A team players was 2.02 and 2.0 for C2 players.

Players in lower teams scored lower on the statement „I feel much lack of confidence about myself“ as the A team had an average of only 1.71 agreement as opposed to the 2.11 of the B2 team and 2 of the C team.

A team players were the only players to average over 3 (3.11) on the statement „I have much faith in my ability“, C2 players scored lowest at 2.5. A team players also scored highest on „I have abilities that distinguish myself from others, 2.74 vs 2 of C2.

Looking at the bonferroni anovas results showed that a significant difference was present between effects of both gender and team on confidence (Table 3). The A and A2, B and B2 and C and C2 teams were paired together and the A teams‘ mean was 16.8288 compared to the 14.8069 and 15.0303 of the B and C teams respectively (Table 1). Only the A and B teams had a significant effect (Table 2). For gender, Males scored a mean 16.6357 and Females scored 15.1049 (Table 1). There was no significance to the joint effect of team and gender on confidence (Table3)

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Table 1

Confidence between teams and gender

Team	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
1.00	Male	17.2417	3.53771	393
	Female	15.4876	3.90110	121
	Total	16.8288	3.69841	514
2.00	Male	15.1301	3.41635	123
	Female	13.0000	2.22539	22
	Total	14.8069	3.34643	145
3.00	Male	15.0303	2.85575	33
	Total	15.0303	2.85575	33
Total	Male	16.6357	3.59925	549
	Female	15.1049	3.79531	143
	Total	16.3194	3.69033	692

Note. 1.00 is the A team, 2.00 is the B team and 3.00 is the C team.

Table 2

Confidence by team

Team	Team	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.[d]
1.00	2.00	2.300[*]	.447	.000
	3.00	1.334[b]	.640	.112
2.00	1.00	-2.300[*]	.447	.000
	3.00	-.965[b]	.736	.571
3.00	1.00	-1.334[c]	.640	.112
	2.00	.965[c]	.736	.571

Note. 1.00 is the A team, 2.00 is the B team and 3.00 is the C team.

Table 3
Tests of Between-Subjects Effects – Confidence

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	889.265[a]	4	222.316	17.924	.000
Intercept	44754.038	1	44754.038	3608.199	.000
Team	384.394	2	192.197	15.495	.000
Gender	234.295	1	234.295	18.889	.000
Team * Gender	2.195	1	2.195	.177	.674

Regarding negative thinking, a significant effect was found in SPSS between both gender and team although the table below (Table 4) shows no significant effect between any two teams. The A team mean was 3.7055, B team mean was 3.5811 and C team mean was 3.4848.

Table 4

Negative Thinking by team

Team	Team	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.[c]
1.00	2.00	.155	.091	.271
	3.00	.088[a]	.129	1.000
2.00	1.00	-.155	.091	.271
	3.00	-.067[a]	.150	1.000
3.00	1.00	-.088[b]	.129	1.000
	2.00	.067[b]	.150	1.000

Note. 1.00 is the A team, 2.00 is the B team and 3.00 is the C team.

There is also a significant effect on worry between both gender and team, meaning that both the age of the player and what team they are in has an effect, but no joint effect can be detected from these results, meaning that the same effect of team is found, regardless of the age of the players. Again, the significance can not be found in the pairwise comparisons table (Table 5).

Table 5

Worry by team

Team	Team	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.[c]
1.00	2.00	-.989	.442	.077
	3.00	.347[a]	.619	1.000
2.00	1.00	.989	.442	.077
	3.00	1.336[a]	.717	.188
3.00	1.00	-.347[b]	.619	1.000
	2.00	-1.336[b]	.717	.188

Note. 1.00 is the A team, 2.00 is the B team and 3.00 is the C team.

Table 6

Confidence by age

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	569.387[a]	5	113.877	8.836	.000
Intercept	53035.657	1	53035.657	4115.182	.000
Team	437.002	2	218.501	16.954	.000
Age	18.931	1	18.931	1.469	.226
Team* Age	1.046	2	.523	.041	.960
Error	8841.034	686	12.888		
Total	193705.000	692			
Corrected Total	9410.421	691			

Note. Team* Age stands for the joint effect between team and age

In table 6, no significant difference can be seen based on age, whether an individual is born in 2004 or 2005. As seen in table 7 the average score on the confidence scale for individuals born in 2004 is 15.912 as opposed to 15.322 for players born in 2005. There is also no joint effect between the year of one's birth, and therefore age, and team.

Table 7
Mental Toughness Confidence

			95% Confidence Interval	
Age	Mean	Std. Error	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
2004	15.912	.381	15.164	16.660
2005	15.322	.303	14.726	15.917

It is strange that out of the 514 players in A team, only 247 of them are born in 2004 and 267 born in 2005. This means more players in A teams are younger than older. In total though, more players born in 2005 took part in the research than those born in 2004, 383 in 2005 and 309 in 2004. There was no significance of effects on worry or negative thoughts either.

Discussion and Conclusions

Players in A teams were most likely to use methods of relaxation, scoring an average of 2,25 as opposed to the 1,91 average of the players in the C team. They also scored lowest on the statement „during games I think about mistakes“, only 2.65. It is however possible that they are in less need of relaxation methods due to having the least amount of stress and anxiety, them being more mature due to the relative age effect or having higher confidence and self-esteem due to being in higher ranked teams.

The stress that can be put on children by putting them in the best teams should also be explored as they are thereby given the message that they are above others and are put under pressure to remain that way or otherwise be removed from the team. Teaching ways of dealing with that kind of stress and anxiety is important (Sigurjónsson, 2016). Jón Stefán Jónsson, an experienced football coach in Iceland, mentions that often there are more audience members for

the A team games than the D team games (Taktíkin, 2021). This could cause further performance anxiety and further emphasizes the need for teaching relaxation methods to players.

With the average score on the statement „I worry about letting others down“ being only slightly higher for A team players than that of the C team players, one might think that while the added pressure on the A team players is there, it is only slightly more than on others. Generally, A team players also worry less (2.04 vs 2.22 in the B team) about „not having my best game“. This could have been predicted to be higher as the fear of being moved down a team after a bad game could have effects.

In exploring whether to use ability grouping, other researchers' works must be considered. Slavin said (1990) that his work is often used in counter arguments for separating gifted individuals from the rest of the group. He believed that all students should have the chance to achieve their full potential and was against holding the gifted back. He did however stress that this needed to be achieved with every individual getting the chance to achieve their full potential (Slavin, 1990).

Carol L. Tieso wrote in 2003 that "flexible ability grouping, combined with appropriate curricular revision or differentiation, may result in substantial achievement gain both for average and high ability learners". Both Slavin and Tieso's viewpoints emphasize the importance of researchers and staff working with gifted individuals in education being aware of all details of ability grouping throughout the process, be it a semester or a season of football (Tieso, 2003). This means coaches may need to be more open to different types of ability grouping than they generally are and must be willing to change things throughout the time period, maybe repeatedly, for example by moving players between teams more often.

It is clear that more information is needed to properly find out whether the practice of ability grouping has more positive or negative effects within football. Whether or not ability grouping actually leads to player improvements is crucial information but so is knowing the ramifications such as effects on maturity, confidence and self-esteem. It is also a judgment call when splitting larger groups into subgroups is needed and/or justified as there are benefits to having smaller groups, such as each individual getting more attention from teachers and coaches.

The problem with the literature available on this topic is that the emotional effects of ability grouping, as well as the social effects, have not been looked at closely enough. Not only is it important to keep children's happiness in mind but also the effects of confidence and peer acceptance on improvement and performance.

The psychological aspect of success is massively important as well as the physical, as Hafrún Kristjánsdóttir stated in 2016. Hafrún is a psychologist and one of the developers of „Sýnum karakter“ (Show Character) which has the goal of improving coaching practices within youth sports, with a focus on the mental and psychological aspects (Sigurjónsson, 2016).

Hafrún et al wrote a paper in 2019 called „Psychological characteristics in women football players: skills, mental toughness, and anxiety„ wherein they address the fact that women's football has been far less studied than men's. In the paper they aim to analyze differences in psychological skills, mental toughness and anxiety according to the individual in question‘s level of playing, as well as predict the players level according to the three aspects in the title. Looking at 142 participants grouped into three, according to their playing level, little difference was found in psychological skills. Mental toughness and anxiety were however the

highest and lowest respectively in top level players as opposed to players in the second or third levels (Kristjánsdóttir, 2019).

In 2018, Hafrún et al wrote a paper called Psychological skills, mental toughness and anxiety in elite handball players. Here they analyzed these aspects refered to in the title, relating to age group and gender aiming to explain handball performance from a psychological perspective. This study was based on 174 participants where the average age was 18,8 and the standard deviation of 3,5 years participating from the national teams. Differences between teams for each gender were explored through three questionnaires.

The participants were split into two groups within their teams based on whether they were „starters“ (player who begin games in the starting lineup) or „non starters“ (those who do not) and while there was no difference between age groups there was a difference detected in relation to gender, with men reporting lower anxiety, as well as a difference between the starters and non starters (Kristjánsdóttir, 2018).

With other factors, such as the relative age effect causing an advantage for those born earlier in the year, it is also important to note when a child starts training in the sport. Often there is pressure from the community to sign children up for sports early but children‘s interests differ and some have more ambition early on than others (Taktíkin, 2021).

Having the early advantage of being born earlier in the year can also have negative effects, such as getting used to being the best based on physical strength rather than technical ability. These players can struggle when other players reach their physical level and that can cause these players to feel discouraged or even quit. (Peterson, 2009).

The idea of ability grouping starting later in sports might be one to consider as younger children are more likely to be enrolled in sports for fun rather than actual competitive improvements. In some countries players have options of professional or casual training but in Iceland every club is semi-professional, creating a gap between those who are serious about a future within sports and those who are not.

If ability grouping were to start later on, then the players may be more developmentally equipped to deal with the obstacles that come with it. At that point it might also be more acceptable to quit the sport if one does not excel or only wants to play casually with friends rather than competitively. However, according to Ward and Williams (2003) the differences between players likely to excel and those who are not, can be seen from the age of nine, providing an argument for starting ability grouping at that age.

Þórður Einarsson, a coach at Leiknir Reykjavík, tried in 2012 to divide his group in training, aged nine and ten years old, into teams with one player from each level. Each team would then have about five players, one from team A, one from A2, one from B and so on. The teams played a few eight minute games against each other while Þórður took note of how long the players from the A team had the ball in the games. In the first game the A team player had the ball for one minute and 50 seconds, with over 100 touches while the player from the lowest team only had the ball for a total of four seconds with four touches. In the final game the two players from the A team had the ball for 33 percent of the game while the rest of the players combined shared 67 minutes with the ball (Leifsson, 2017). This shows that if players from all levels are playing together, the best players get the most time with the ball and therefore gain the most from it.

One of the aspects the researcher wanted to explore was the effects of ability grouping on the growth of players over time, not just their psychological state at the time. The data did however not provide that information.

Helsen et.al‘s research from 2000 shows that when age groups are divided, based on birthdays from January, the coaches say that the best players are those born in January to April but when the age division is done later in the year, the coaches say that the best players are those born from August to November (Leifsson, 2017).

Whether it is right or fair to allow the relative age effect to affect the chances of those born later in the year is debatable and ways of combating those effects have been considered (Cobley et.al., 2009). Among the ideas that have come forth is changing age groups every nine months instead of every year. This would mean that every child would at one point be among the youngest and oldest in their group (Sierra-Díaz et.al., 2017).

Research done by Ottó Valur Leifsson in Iceland on the views of coaches on ability grouping shows that 92 percent of coaches, who answered a questionnaire, felt that ability grouping should start before puberty and before the children start playing on full size fields. The questionnaire had 13 questions and included information about gender, experience and education. 108 coaches answered the questionnaire, of which 93 were male and 15 female (Leifsson, 2017).

The data, however, shows that views on whether or not to use ability grouping in training differ with 34 percent of the coaches for boys‘ teams stating that they always use ability grouping in training while 56 percent stated that they do it most of the time. Meanwhile only eight percent of coaches for girls‘ teams do it in every training while 84 percent do so most of the time (Leifsson, 2017).

Importantly, 83 percent of coaches believe that all players benefit from ability grouping while no one stated that they thought ability grouping was not beneficial for anyone (Leifsson, 2017).

As argued before, ability grouping has its benefits and drawbacks but the popular opinion is that it is beneficial in football coaching. The results of this research paper do not provide enough evidence to make ~~for~~ a solid case against it. In the future more research needs to be done within the football environment, to explore the potential negative effects of this practice as well as ways to minimize them.

The term „Separate but equal“ is something parents might mention in regard to ability grouping. „Is my child getting the same level of coaching the other children are getting? “. Here it is important to note that while all children may not be getting the same exercises, they may be getting exercises better suited to them and their ability.

Due to a lack of participants in C teams in the present study, the data is not as reliable as would be ideal. The results however, while not necessarily significant, show that there are differences between those in the best teams (higher ability) and those in the less able (lower performance) teams. The question remains unanswered, however, whether these aspects cause the differences in ability or whether the splitting of players into groups lead to these results. To answer that, research would have to be done using a more complete questionnaire to further examine, over time, how children’s answers change as they grow and move between teams, using a more complete questionnaire and starting younger.

It came as a bit of a surprise that the data were not more significant regarding the negative effects of ability grouping, but that might indicate that there is not a huge difference between the

general well-being of players in A teams and D teams. According to the research, gender also has a lesser effect than expected, although there were some differences between the groups. Ideally, there will be a more even split between gender within the participant group in future research as well as a more equal number of players in each team. It is also worth noting that in Iceland, all children can sign up to train and play for any club, while abroad, clubs only let the best players sign for them and the rest are left out. This means that in Iceland all children have access to the same quality of coaching.

In the future further research is needed, searching for answers to the question of whether ability grouping is indeed the cause of the results on confidence, negative thoughts and worry mentioned earlier in this paper, or if it may even in fact be the opposite. In any case the children scoring worse on these factors need proper care. It is also important to provide everyone with preventative measures ahead of time before the children are introduced to ability grouping. Coaches and parents can help by relieving the pressure early on, regardless of what team their kids end up in. By doing so they help the children avoid ending up with higher scores on statements such as “I worry about letting people down”. If clubs are not going to use different methods, they should at least consider having a few spots in the teams that rotate from game to game so that while some players clearly belong in the A team, others are more consistent and need to be able to move up and down. This would also make it easier for coaches to move players between teams as it would be clearer that there are regular rotations each week and being moved down does not mean they can not be back in the previous team a week later.

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