THE VIABILITY OF LONG-TERM COACHING DEVELOPMENT MODEL FOR CRICKET PLAYERS: AN INITIATIVE FROM SIALKOT, PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to investigate the viability of the Long-Term Coaching Development Model for Cricket Players in Pakistan. It has been suggested that the coaching model is fundamental to enhancing the practice and performance of cricket players. There is a need to develop a standardized model of coaching from the perspective of Pakistan to follow by the players and coaches for skill-based training. Thus, the current study aims to explore the feasibility and acceptability of the "Long Term Coaching Development Model" based on the perspective of the Long-term athlete development (LTAD) model in Pakistan. The Qualitative study was conducted through purposive sampling by selecting professional coaches (N=03) having a minimum of 10 years of experience in the field of cricket coaching, and players (N=20) were recruited in City Cricket Association Player (CCA) Sialkot, Pakistan. A total of 23 semi-structured interviews were conducted. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by independent researchers. The transcripts were analyzed using a systematic approach that incorporates inductive thematic analysis. The themes emerged that the coaching model comprised the five main elements: 1) Ground Realities, 2) Mental Toughness, 3) Situational Analysis, 4) Development of Match Scenario, and 5) Improvisation in a different match. Other than the coaching element, effective communication is very important for the player and coach in preparing cricket players to excel on the field and in life.

INTRODUCTION

Cricket has become universal in South Asia as the dominant sport (Khondker, 2022). There is a lack of evidence-based practices in cricket, which indicates the factors to enhance the player's performance (Vickery et al., 2020). Technology and innovation are the most essential elements to include in sports after the fourth industrial revolution (Peng & Changming, 2022). Therefore, it is necessary to adapt the approaches of every sports participant, including coaches, players, analysts, and additional support staff, to meet the requirements of the modern era (Connor et al., 2020).The essential component is to develop coaching styles that are considered successful in cricket sports (Renshaw et al., 2019). Research indicates that cricket is not only current and aligned according to modern-day trends but also relevant to the needs of the players (Van Mullem, 2020). Therefore, there is a greater need for time, and in cricket, sports coaches must be well-equipped with modern concepts, skills, and attributes so the diversity of the field can be maintained (Armour, 2013).

Over the last few decades, cricket has consistently been recognized as a complex game. Due to its multifaceted issue, each player has a position in a team that is very challenging for a coach to manage

(Noorbhai & Noakes, 2015; Samuel et al., 2020). While understanding the other perspective of coaching, it is also important to understand the link between coaching manuals, skills, practices and individual players (Hill-Haas et al., 2011; Charness et al., 2014; Noorbhai, 2022) as every team member is quite different from other members due to their unique characteristics such as; skills, expertise, personality, mindset, backgrounds, and experience (Petermann & Zacher, 2020; Noorbhai, 2022). To manage all the mentioned characteristics of all team members, it is also important that a soothing environment can be developed so coaches can understand their players and vice versa. To address the needs of the players, we implemented the long-term athlete development (LTAD) model developed by Balyi et al. (2013) for skill-based coaching while maintaining the biological or development growth among cricket players in Sialkot, Pakistan.

The classic straight backlift is often recommended in coaching literature, in which the cricket bat is brought back in a straight line from one wicket to another, with the top hand maintaining control. Numerous research, however, have put this standard method into question. The findings of one study dispute conventional thinking, implying that good batters frequently use a backlift directed towards the gulley or point region, known as the rotational way of batting. This approach, distinguished by the route of the bat, is often connected with cricket icons such as Grace, Bradman, Richards, and Kohli (Noorbhai & Noakes, 2016). It is worth noting that this rotating method has been adopted by 77% of the greatest test batters in history. This statistic begs the issue of why, despite its ubiquity among cricket's best, this strategy is not considered traditional. Furthermore, Sir Donald Bradman, widely considered one of the greatest cricketers of all time, departed from conventional coaching literature. He used a grip that defied convention, aligning the hand of his left hand with the splice of the bat. This distinct grip enabled him to successfully target different scoring zones on the field. Furthermore, Bradman had tremendous expertise in manipulating the crease, expertly guiding the ball to various sections of the field. His ability to do so was aided by his diminutive size and quick footwork, indicating that success in cricket batting isn't simply determined by following conventional coaching techniques (Bradman, 1998).

Another important consideration is the dynamic nature of coaching systems, which must have a firm basis even as they adapt to changing times (Bennie & O'Connor, 2010). Some coaches, for example, advocate a Humanistic approach that emphasizes cultivating all aspects of the player, with a specific emphasis on a few essential technical components. This method recognizes the value of holistic player development that extends beyond technical skills (Lyle, 2016). From a different perspective, it's not unexpected that one of the few well-established and largely acknowledged conclusions in coaching literature is that coaching knowledge and practices, whether among elite or non-elite coaches, are derived from a combination of formal and informal sources. This suggests that coaches gain ideas and methods from several educational channels, combining organized formal education with experiential learning from a variety of sources throughout their coaching journey (Trudel & Gilbert, 2001; Lemyre et al., 2007; Nelson et al., 2006; Cushion et al., 2003).

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in the city of Pakistan at Jinnah Stadium, Sialkot. The coaching trial was implemented on a group of team members (N=20) in City Cricket Association Player (CCA) Sialkot. The players were from the age of 19 to 35 years. The team of players includes batsmen, bowlers, and wicketkeepers. Furthermore, a group of coaching staff (N=03) was also trained according to this current coaching model by the head coach (M.A). The selected coaches of the study were experienced in coaching for at least 10 years. The coaching staff includes a batting coach, bowling coach, and fielding coach. After the implementation of the model, the semi-structured interview was conducted with the players and the coaches. The interview was conducted individually for 35 to 45 minutes to explore their experiences and the model's effectiveness.

Conception of Modern Coaching Method

According to the LTAD model, it has seven stages providing a variety of development needs and biological growth (See Figure 2). We adopted the LTAD model in the context of skill-based coaching. We divided our

coaching model into different phases under the one domain of "Net Practice session," both on a group and individual basis (See Figure 1).

The model of coaching has implemented in three phases these were:

Phase 1: Development of the Model

Phase 2: Implementation of the Model

Phase 3: Impact of the Model

Phase 1: Development of the Model

The development of the model was done by "Ms. Maham Rasheed" a Clinical Psychologist with experience of more than 8 years in the field of mental health (She has a strong background in implementing culturally sensitive therapeutic techniques, evidence-based treatment approaches, and conducting comprehensive psychological assessments. Her expertise lies in developing individualized treatment plans to promote mental well-being, and she has contributed significantly to the field through extensive publication records, with over 13 high-indexed research articles. She holds professional licenses and memberships, including the Dubai Health Authority (DHA), the Pakistan Association of Clinical Psychologists (PACP), and the American Psychological Association (APA) and a former International cricketer "Mr. Mansoor Amjad" with the experience of 20 years of Professional cricket (Pakistan, Pakistan A, Pakistan emerging, Pakistan Academy, Pakistan Under 19s, Pakistan under 15s, Sialkot Region, Sialkot Stallion's, Zari Tarakiati Bank Limited (ZTBL), National bank of Pakistan (NBP), State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), Water and Power development authority (WAPDA), Pakistan, Leicestershire County Cricket Club, Northern Nights Ireland, Brother Union Bangladesh, Galle Cricket Club Siri Lanka, etc.) and 10 years of National & International coaching (Colne Cricket Club UK, Settle Cricket Club UK, Civil Service North of Ireland Cricket Club (CSNI), Rishton Cricket Club UK, Clitheroe Cricket Club UK, Cambell College Belfast Northern Irland, Methody College Belfast, Gillnahirk Primary School Belfast, ST Malachy's Primary School Belfast, CCA Sialkot Head coach, PCB central Punjab under 19 head coach, Central Punjab first Team Batting & Bowling assistant and fielding Coach, Gujranwala/ Sialkot Division Under 19 Head Coach, Pakistan Junior League (PJL) Gujranwala Giants Fielding Coach, Lahore Qalandar's Spin Bowling Coach). Due to his international exposure, he analyzed the needs of the Pakistan coaching system. He took the initiative to develop a modern skill-based coaching model adapted from the Balyi et al. (2013) theory. They proposed the main five essential domains in coaching (See Figure 1).

Phase 2: Implementation of the Model

Initially, the coaching model has been implemented in a small group of players (N=20) and coaches (N=03). The sample of the players and coaches has been selected for the team at the city level of Sialkot. Initial training covers all mentioned aspects by the head coach, both theory and practical. The training also covers "Match awareness, Cricket ethics, and Discipline". The coach training was conducted for 07 days (14 hours; 2 hours per day) and for players, it was for 07 weeks (105 hours; 3 hours per day). After the training, the team played in the City Cricket Association tournament in 2021-2022, sponsored by the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB). The event was played in different cities, such as Sialkot, Lahore, Gujranwala, and Hafizabad. The duration of the tournament was approximately 07 weeks. The evaluation of the tournament was conducted in points, and the Sialkot team finished second with a point-based system.

The player's performance can be analyzed verbatim by 01 of the coaches that were;

> "My achievement in this tournament as a coach was to get a positive response from players and to get results by executing our plans, which we worked on during our team sessions and matches. I'm very happy with the response I have gotten from players. They have been great to work with. When I engaged with the players in conversations and heard what the players had to say, I managed to answer their questions. I then noticed that they took on board what information and

knowledge I had passed on as they displayed this on the field through great application in the matches (Anonymous)."

Net Practice Session (Group & Individual)		
Phases	**Instrumental definition**	**Pictorial view**
On ground realities	The practice according to the realistic match	
Mental toughness	Well-prepared to face challenges in the match	
Situational analysis (Situation reading/ Handling)	To analyse the situation and guide the team accordingly, It all about team collaboration	
Development of Match scenario	According to the ups and downs of the match	
Improvisation in different match situations	Execution and implementation	

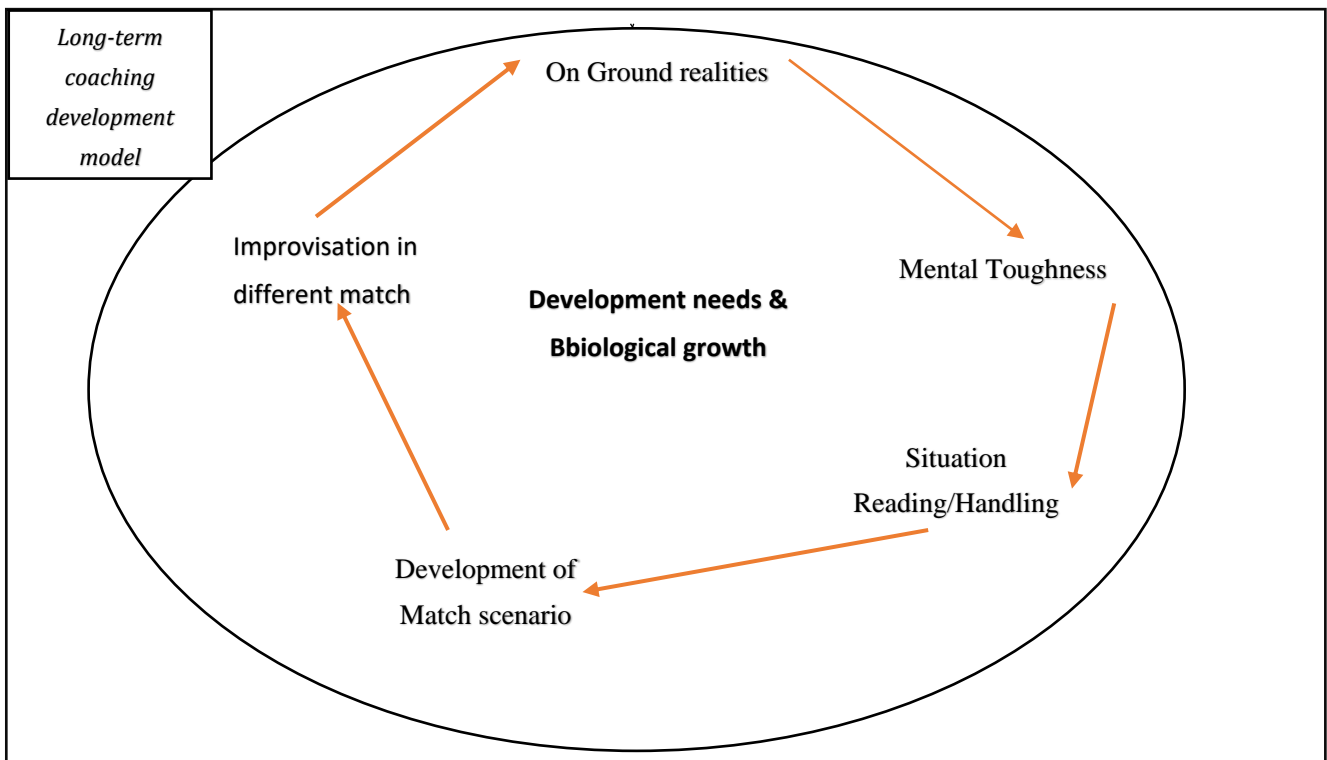Figure 1. Long-term coaching development model while adapting LTAD.

Figure 2. Long-term Coaching Development Model; Note: This model in Pakistan has been tailored based on the principles of the LTAD model.

Phase 3: Impact of the Model

Stage three has been about the impact of the model that applies after the long session of coaching on the players and coaches. The model has been presented to the experts of cricket and identified some questions through which we will measure the impact of the coaching model. The criteria of the experts were they must be working in the field of cricket, especially in coaching, for a minimum10 of years and a maximum of 18 to 20 years. After meeting the expert's inclusion criteria, a total of 06 experts, both National and International, joined the discussion through proper invitation and signed the informed consent while making sure that confidentiality would be maintained throughout the research. The demographic questions asked in the study were Age, Position in the team (batsman/ bowler, fielder, etc.), Education, Gender, Area in the city (rural/urban), and whether there are any Family members in cricket. The questions were mutually decided by the group of experts after a long discussion while were;

1. What is your own opinion about the ground realities practiced in coaching?
    a. Prompts
        i. Net practice?
        ii. Group practice
2. What is your opinion about the importance of mental toughness during practice?
    a. Individual practice
    b. Group practice
3. What is your opinion about the importance of Situation Reading/Handling according to the match scenario?
    a. Importance
    b. Impact
    c. Effect on Player's Performance
4. What is your opinion about the practice of the players in the perspective while developing a match scenario?
    a. Importance
    b. Effect on Player's Performance / Impact
    c. Coaching knowledge about this step
5. What is your own opinion about the importance of improvisation in a different match for the development of a player?
    a. Importance
    b. Effect on Player's Performance/ Impact
    c. Coaching knowledge about this step
6. Was your coach/ player/ team getting your feedback/reviews after the practice session?
7. Does your coach/ player/ team have a good understanding of you/your players?
8. Was your coach/ team/ player a good and active listener?
9. Do you face any difficulty with your coach/ player/ team during a practice session?
10. What do you think about the access of your coach/ players on/off the field?
11. Are there any suggestions to improve the coaching process?

The above-mentioned questions support measuring the impact of the coaching model. The following themes have been merged from the semi-structured interviews with the players (N=20) and coaches (N=03).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Theme 1: On-ground realities

In the mentioned coaching model, on-ground realities measures and polish the skills according to the demands of the upcoming game; the coach can identify individual shortcoming of the players and work to strengthen the skills to get the desirable outcomes. For example, Sometimes bowlers only practice with one condition ball, either a new ball or an old ball, but it's the coach's responsibility to practice with bowlers with all types (new/semi-new and old) of balls to meet the unpredictable pressure of an upcoming game as the length of the balls is also different such as; Line & length, Yorkers, bouncers and slow balls. According to this coaching model, our participants suggested that coaches have provided them with individual mentorship to handle the on-ground realities, as one of the participants reported;

> "Individual sessions enhanced my skills as I am very shy, and my coach strengthened my pitfalls into strengths (PI: 09:11-12)"

The other element is batting; when we need to do net practice, we prefer to prepare match scenarios according to the ground realities or upcoming targeted matches. For example, as a coach, random practices affect us more, and it has been explored in the current study that random practice makes players more perfect than block practices. As one of the participants shared his experience;

> "As I am a shy guy, individual practice polished my skills and provided me with the command to meet the expectations of the match (PI:07:121-122)."

Another participant also reported;

> "Individual Practice gives me confidence and polishes my skills, although group practice provides me the scenario to play in the competition (PI:04:68-69)."

He further explained;

> "Individual practice is the first step to move forward towards the second step, such as confidence gives me the strength to meet the match scenario (PI: 04:72-73)"

Thus, the interviews revealed that most of the players gave importance to both of the practices as they considered both to be mutually essential. Without individual practice, they are not able to meet the expectations of the real match, and individual practice gives them that internal confidence while polishing their skills and abilities. Thus, it is all about the coaching process when and where we need whatever step, either individual or group.

Furthermore, the third aspect is fielding, which is an essential element to meet the expectations of modern cricket and to give toughness to their competitors. Good fielding requires a variety of variations (ground fielding, flat and high catches, front running, backward running, and side always flat and high catches), angles (field position angels), vertical and horizontal bat shots, the ball dipping, the ball spins, targeting stumps (under the arm, over the arm, sidearm wrist flick, throws), and a lot of group practices to achieve the targeted goal decided as a team. Previously, the fielding element was ignored and remained less attentive, but nowadays, when we are practicing as a team, the role of the coach is to identify the fielding weak points to represent a strong team. As one of the participants reported;

> "I always not want to become a fielder, as it seems very difficult and boring, but my coach makes it easier and knows I enjoy it more and guide others on the ground as well (PI: 11:86-88)"

Theme 2: Mental Toughness

There are different descriptions of mental toughness described in different studies. According to the literature and modern studies, we described mental toughness in the main five dimensions so participants can analyze the coaching perspective. These were Personal responsibility, Dedication and commitment, Belief, Developmental factors, and Coping with pressure. Furthermore, while preparing the team in these

dimensions during the coaching, coaches also practiced tough thinking while providing the team with different scenarios, providing the players with tough thinking on and off practice so they can build up their attitudes related to the different situations when playing with the competitors. The most important element the players discussed in their semi-structured interview was that during the coaching, they developed a tough character, which means environmental stimulus did not affect their performance as they are sensitized and well-prepared to handle all types of situations. As one of the participants reported,

"My coach always gives us a scenario after starting/ ending our practice, and we try to achieve that situation; almost all players remain active and enthusiastic until the successful healthy discussion with the coach is completed (PI: 07:345-347)."

Another participant reported;

"The game of cricket under modern coaching prepared us as good human beings as well as good cricket players, and life is full of difficulties we can now manage what will be the appropriate action according to the situation (PI:09:174-176)."

Another coach reported;

"In Pakistan, mental toughness is being ignored, and as players are being emotional after loss, mental toughness is the most positive aspect in this model of coaching being practiced (CI:02:221-222)."

Another coach reported while sharing his experience;

"Throughout my career, I often faced reluctant behavior from the management and the players from the perspective of building mental toughness; while practicing this caching model, I saw a dramatic change in the player's personality to tackle the game and difficulties in an amazing manner (CI:03:321-324)."

Theme 3: Situation reading/handling

According to the current coaching model, not a single person is a captain and responsible for the management of difficult situations; when we play as a team, we are all responsible for our actions. It's all about collaboration. Mutual understanding or sharp analysis to judge the situation from all players makes a quick and strong strategy to provide toughness to the opposition. In the previous practices in Pakistan, it has been analyzed that we can, as a team, judge the situation and analyze the importance of strategy; even though we built the strategy to handle the situation, we failed to implement the specific strategy that was decided. For example, according to my experience (M.A), Australia and England are the best implementers of the strategy according to the analysis of the situation.

As one of the coaches has shared his views;

"The coaching is all about putting efforts equally to prepare all players and to polish their skills equally in all domains. To rely on one ability to one player is the only expectation that could be changed in the real game and became the cause of huge drawbacks (CI:01:98-100)."

Another coach has reported;

"The team mostly did a strong communication about handling the situation but follow up of implementation lacks, in this model, we practiced this a lot so it will be the habit of the players (CI:02:274-275)."

One of the players reported;

"I often analyze the situation, but how to implement was lacking; I learned through this coaching model how to implement and do a follow-up of the specific plan throughout the game (PI:06:671-673)."

Theme 4: Development of Match scenario

For delivering effective training and to prepare the players, the practice could be done through different match scenarios. The coach has the responsibility to practice players while providing different match scenarios. This element also stimulates the players to play well and deal with different unpredictable situations.

As reported by one player;

> "Our coach gives us different scenarios; the recent one was 5 wickets down, 3 runs and over for the next thirty overs. Bowlers and batters develop a strategy and practice the match accordingly (PI: 04:351-353)."

According to this model, different match scenarios need to be present for the bowler and the batters. As one of the coaches reported;

> "We set the field, encourage them to try, on occasions, to rush the batsmen. Spinners may bowl their deliveries consecutively. One over on, one teaches them getting onto length straightaway (CI: 01:98-100)."

Another player shared his views by saying;

> "We as Batters emphasize singles and the use of a routine to help them to be optimally ready for each delivery. Our coach Allowed us to call for runs, thereby changing the strike (PI: 09:1005-1006)."

Theme 5: Improvisation in different match

The last step was providing improvisation in different situations. Improvising means substitution. Thus, it refers to the provision of a substitute or an alternative form of available material for a particular thing that is not available. Practicing through improvising provides players with different qualities such as one of the players reported;

> "Through this, we can practice with great attention (PI: 02:301)."

Coach expresses his views by saying;

> "It provides the opportunity for learners to assess performances on their own while working with alternative resources. It makes a player more flexible as a person as well (CI: 411-412)."

Theme 6: Effective Communication Skills

The other aspects we explored in the activity were the "Good communication skills" that must be in the coach and the players to practice the coaching model. The coaching model focuses on feedback so the players and coach understand each other and reflect on their learning strategies. As one of the players reported;

"Our coach at the end gives us feedback both positive and negative, and also requests for his feedback that helps us to communicate in a better way (PI: 11:1135-1236)."

One of the coaches reported;

> "In past times, we as a player never asked for the feedback and never allowed, but modern practice encourages players and coaches both, it also develops professionalism (PI: 06:608-609)."

Another player reported;

> "The pattern of feedback develops us more in our practices (PI: 03:356)."

CONCLUSIONS

The model of practice is very important to be implemented according to the cultural perspective and the needs of the players. The mentioned model represents the Pakistani player's needs both in development and physically to perform well in the field. It also provides the direction for the new coaches to set their skills according to the needs of the cricket players. Finally, the coaching methodology described in this study incorporates numerous essential aspects that demonstrate its efficiency in preparing cricket players for success. Theme 1 emphasizes the necessity of dealing with on-the-ground reality through individual and group practice sessions, with players appreciating the value of both techniques in improving their abilities and confidence. The second theme emphasizes the development of mental toughness in players, who describe their personal and professional growth as becoming resilient and capable of handling pressure. The third theme stresses collaborative scenario interpretation and handling, highlighting the importance of teamwork and strategy execution for success. The fourth theme emphasizes the utilization of match scenarios to imitate real-game conditions, developing strategic thinking and adaptability. The fifth theme highlights the importance of improvisation in practice, encouraging players' flexibility and resourcefulness. Finally, Theme 6 emphasizes the need for excellent communication skills in providing feedback and improving player-coach relationships, which ultimately contributes to overall player growth and professionalism. Overall, it appears that this coaching technique is thorough and useful in training cricket players to flourish both on and off the field.

Acknowledgment

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