

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

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ABSTRACT:

Objective: It has been indicated 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 (Balyi et al., 2013) in Pakistan. **Method:** The Qualitative study was conducted through purposive sampling by selecting professional’s 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. **Results:** The themes emerged that the coaching model comprised the five main elements; **i)** On Ground Realities **2)** Mental Toughness **3)** Situational Analysis **4)** Development of Match Scenario **5)** Improvisation in a different match. Other than the coaching element, effective communication is very important for the player and coach.

Keywords: Coaching model, Cricket team, Ground realities, Mental toughness, Effective communication

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

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industrial revolution (Peng & Changming., 2022). Thus, it is necessary to perform according to the needs of the modern era to all sports members such as coaches, players, analysts, and other support staff (Connor et al., 2020). The essential component is to develop coaching styles that are considered successful in cricket sports. Research indicated that cricket is not only current and aligned according to modern-day trends but also relevant to the needs of the players (Mullem, 2020). Therefore, there is a greater need for time, and in cricket sports that coaches must be well-equipped with modern concepts, skills, and attributes, so the diversity of the field could be maintained.

Over the last few decades, cricket consistently has 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). While understanding the other perspective of coaching, it is also important to understand the link between coaching manuals, skills, practices and individual players as every team member is quite different from other members due to their unique characteristics such as; skills, expertise, personality, mind-set, backgrounds, and experience (Noorbhai, 2020). To manage all 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 need 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.

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 19 to 35 years. The team of players includes; batsmen, bowlers, and wicketkeepers. Furthermore, a group of the 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 on an individual basis for 35 to 45 minutes to explore their experiences and the effectiveness of the model.

2.1. Conception of Modern Coaching Method:

According to the LTAD model, it has seven stages providing a variety of development needs and biological growth. 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 1.1*

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 a former 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 and took an initiative to develop a modern skill-based coaching model adapted from Balyi et al (2013) theory. He purposed the main five essential domains in coaching. (See figure 1.1)

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 analyze the situation and guide the team accordingly, It all about team collaboration	

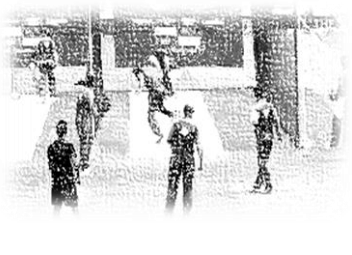

Development of Match scenario	According to the ups and downs of the match	
Improvisation in different match situations	Execution and implementation	

Figure 1.1. Long-term coaching development model while adapting LTAD

Phase 2: Implementation of the Model:

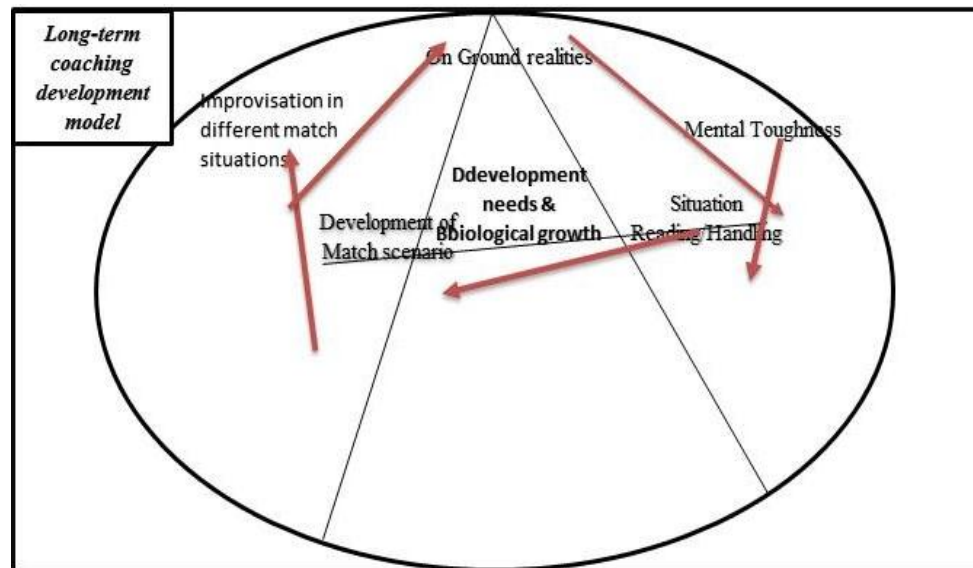
Initially, the coaching model has been implemented in a small group of players ($N=20$) and coaches ($N=03$). The sample of the players and coaches has been selected team at the city level of Sialkot. Initial training covers all mentioned aspects by the head coach both theory and practical. The training also covers "Match awareness, Cricket ethics, and Discipline". The coach training was conducted for 07 days (14 hours; per day 2 hours) and for players, it was for 07 weeks (105 hours; per day 3 hours). After the training, the team played in the city cricket association tournament in 2021-2022 sponsored by 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 base system.

The player's performance can be analyzed the verbatim of 01 of the coach that was;

"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 during 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)”

Figure 1.2



Note: This model has been adopted in Pakistan from the rules 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 and especially in coaching minimum 10 of years and a maximum of 18 to 20 years. After meeting the expert's inclusion criteria total of 06 experts both National and International join the discussion through proper invitation and signing the informed consent while making sure that confidentiality will 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), Is there your any Family member 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 practice in coaching?
 - **Prompts:**
 - Net practice?
 - Group practice
2. What is your opinion about the importance of mental toughness during practice?
 - Individual practice
 - Group practice
3. What is your opinion about the importance of Situation Reading/Handling according to the match scenario?
 - Importance
 - Impact
 - Effect on Player's Performance
4. What is your opinion about the practice of the players in the perspective while developing a match scenario?
 - Importance
 - Effect on Player's Performance / Impact
 - 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?
 - Importance
 - Effect on Player's Performance/ Impact
 - Coaching knowledge about this step
6. Were 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).

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 has the ability to 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 are also different such as; Line & length, Yorkers, bouncers and slow balls. As 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 strengthen 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 instead of 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 give importance to both of the practices as they considered both to be mutually important and 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's all about the coaching process when and where we need whatever step either individual or group.

Furthermore, the third aspect is fielding, which is a very 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 angles*), 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, 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, 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 to build 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 the difficult situation, when we play as a team then 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 but we lack 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 drawback (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 for 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 Allow 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 are able to practice with great attention (PI: 02:301)"

Coach express 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)"

CONCLUSION:

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 well perform in the field. It also provides the direction for the new coaches to set their skills according to the needs of the player set criterion of standards.

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