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A MATRIX OF ANXIETY AS A TRAIT OF THE FUTURE
FOOTBALL SPECIALIST

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Abstract

Drawing the portrait of a sports coach automatically involves the essential traits of his personality, the ones that will be more or less noticeable in his future performance. The work performed by a sports coach with football specialisation reflects in his ability of meeting the challenges with a fearless attitude. The necessity of knowing the specialist's optimal profile, in terms of personal fears and concerns, can be associated with the need of finding quick and solid responses to the external and internal stimulus specific to the football game. The purpose of this study is to analyse the level of impact that anxiety, as a mental trait, has over a football coach. The research is based on the results from EMAS-T and SAS-T questionnaires (as parts of Ender Multidimensional Anxiety Scales), which allow a more precise analysis of anxiety in seven different situations. The two questionnaires were applied to students from the National University of Physical Education and Sports (UNEFs) with football specialisation (3rd year full-time students, part-time and master students in the 1st and 2nd years) and to some coaches with experience at a basic level in football. The recorded, processed and analysed data will emphasise the optimal support regarding anxiety.

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Keywords: Anxiety, coach, football, students.



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1. Introduction

The football game is a branch of sport with multiple valences and specific characteristics, which requires the specialists to have a high level of professional training.

The main task of the coach, namely achieving the best possible performances regardless of the level of work, finally contributes to the development of this beautiful sports game, with a decisive role in the formation of psychosocial traits.

In the context of this study, we shall make reference to a trait or a state of the future coach-teachers with football specialisation, namely anxiety.

Anxiety is defined as an emotional state consisting of three main elements: the perception of an imminent danger, an attitude of expectation and the feeling of total helplessness when facing that danger. Thus, anxiety manifests through states of worry, the fear being predominant in situations (although not clearly determined ones) that can be potentially dangerous (Predoiu, 2016, p. 54).

Some stressors, such as participation in a sports competition (with a social and financial stake, a common situation in all football competitions from the junior level to top performance) or the illness of a beloved person cause anxious reactions that are normal (they disappear when the stressor has disappeared), but people suffering from generalised anxiety are excessively worried about the reality and are afraid without having objective reasons. There is a distinction between anxiety as a state and anxiety as a trait. State anxiety refers to transitory anxious reactions that may occur in any person, as a result of the interference of external factors (for instance, the presence of certain people next to the football field: head coaches of national teams, agents, close family members, supporters of one's own team or other teams, club or federation officials etc.) or internal factors (judging a situation as important: receiving a goal kick, executing a penalty kick, being eliminated from the game etc.), while trait anxiety is an apparently innate individual feature, which implies the trend of (constantly) having anxious symptoms in situations that involve competition, for example (Hagger & Chatzisarantis, 2005, p. 133). In the case of trait anxiety, there is a disproportioned fear associated with a wide range of situations involving social evaluation, physical danger, ambiguity, separation, self-disclosure to friends etc.

Endler presents the issues that cause an increase in the pre-competitive anxiety state (associated with the anticipation of situations characterising the competition): fear of failure (fear of being defeated by weaker-ranked opponents – changes in the level of self-esteem are possible to appear); fear of being negatively evaluated by others (colleagues, teammates, supporters); fear of injury; ambiguous situations (for example, an athlete does not know whether in the official game he will be a full player or a substitute player); a change in the routine (an athlete can be asked to play on another position than that of specialisation, for instance when a teammate is injured) (LeUnes, 2008, p. 91).

According to Jones (2011), competitive anxiety can affect the athletes “both physically and mentally” (p. 79), their performance being negatively influenced as follows:

- a high level of cognitive anxiety (negative stress, worry) is associated with a low level of self-confidence. We all know that when we are not sufficiently self-confident in pressure situations, we will not achieve the best technical and tactical executions. Mullen, Lane and Hanton (2009) have identified that higher self-confidence is associated with a low level of trait anxiety;

- if an anxious athlete focuses too much on the opponent or the playing conditions, he will not be able any longer to focus at higher parameters on the task he has to perform (he will lose a part of his available psycho-nervous energy, which is anyway limited);

- a high level of cognitive anxiety (too much worry, insecurity) influences the athletes' motivation and judgment, and therefore their performance. Anxiety can increase motivation (the athlete tries too hard, spending too soon his energy resources), but it can also reduce motivation, in which case the athlete is not sufficiently mobilised (the provided effort is low). Specialists talk about an optimal anxiety zone, but also about the importance of the motivational optimum. Krane (1993) has stated that this optimal zone (within which an individual can achieve the best performances) differs from one person to another.

The specific manifestations of anxiety vary depending on several intrapersonal variables, such as: anticipation ability, personal experience in the practiced branch of sport, athlete's perception of the current situation, personal expectations (Fisher & Zwart, 1982). To these are added the athletes' age and gender, the result being a more or less anxious behaviour during the competition. Regarding the gender-related differences, Jones, Swain and Cale (1991) have highlighted, by studying various team sports, that men's cognitive anxiety remained stable before starting the competition. However, in the case of women, it was found a constant increase in anxiety until the beginning of the competition.

Anxiety, like stress, is not always harmful. At a moderate intensity, anxiety can lead to an increase in the adaptive potential and the work efficiency. But high intensities and prolonged durations turn anxiety and stress (which are in a very close relationship and influence each other) into extremely harmful phenomena for the body (Tüdös & Mitrache, 2011, p. 81).

For this reason, we believe that the anxiety manifestations in the future football specialists must be known and improved, so as, through optimal behaviour, to meet all professional requirements.

2. Problem Statement

Mitrache, Predoiu, Coliță and Coliță (2014) have noticed, in the context of some research studies referring to trait anxiety and the performance of football players aged 14-15 years, that if anxiety as a trait is much below the average level – in physically dangerous situations, it correlates with the athletes' poor performance in training and competition. Instead, if trait anxiety in physically dangerous situations is maintained at an average level or slightly below the average level, it correlates with a better performance of junior football players. Kleinert (2002) refers to three situations that generate the fear of injury:

- situations where the level of competence is low;
- situations where the stake is high;
- situations where the person feels that he/she is losing control.

Pedagogical mastery of the coach-teachers, reflected in an appropriate specific training process, can fully contribute to achieving the performance goals, so that situations such as those presented above become controllable, without representing a methodological impediment.

Through self-knowledge and self-control, specialists can overcome their anxiety states and can achieve training lessons whose dynamic, attractive and comprehensive content leads to a low level of anxiety as a state and as a trait.

3. Research Questions

Research on the level of anxiety in the future coach-teachers with football specialisation highlights three structural problems:

- how is it as a trait related to the level of general (human) model?
- how is it as a trait related to the level of senior specialists in the field?
- what are (if any) the essential, obvious differences between them?

We think that the responses to these questions can finally give us a concrete picture and even a model of specific professional anxiety.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to provide, after the data processing and interpretation, a real picture of the differences between specialists and the future coach-teachers included in the research, so that the latter ones become aware of the anxiety-related problems and can successfully intervene in their own personal development and their own carrier.

5. Research Methods

To conduct the research, we used the following methods: observation method, questionnaire method, mathematical and statistical processing, graphical method.

5.1. Subjects

The research subjects are UNEFS students with football specialisation (3rd year full-time students, part-time and master students in the 1st and 2nd years) (25 subjects) who have chosen or will choose football specialisation. Their responses were compared with those of experts/teachers (20 subjects).

5.2. Instruments

To solve the research issues, we used two questionnaires – EMAS-T and SAS-T (part of EMAS – Endler Multidimensional Anxiety Scales) allowing high accuracy in the prediction and evaluation of anxiety across seven situations. The scales measure people's predisposition to experience anxiety in socially-evaluative and separation situations, in daily routines, self-disclosure to family, self-disclosure to friends and physically dangerous, new or ambiguous situations (Predoiu, Predoiu, & Milea, 2016).

5.3. Procedure

The EMAS-T and SAS-T questionnaires were hand scored and lasted about 25 minutes.

6. Findings

Table 01. General results - Descriptive statistics - A-trait (Trait anxiety)

A-trait										
	Students					Teachers				
	Avg.	St. dev.	Coef. of variation	Max.	Min.	Avg.	St. dev.	Coef. of variation	Max.	Min.
socially-evaluative situations	46.6	6.44	13.80%	63	30	48.4	6.5	13.42%	58	39
physically dangerous situations	34.9	6.57	18.80%	46	23	37.1	4.51	12.15%	45	32
new or ambiguous situations	49.7	8.99	18.08%	62	33	48.1	4.61	9.58%	55	39
daily routines situations	61.3	4.91	8%	70	53	62.6	3.46	5.52%	67	58
separation situations	39.8	6.29	15.80%	53	28	37.4	8.39	22.43%	52	27
self-disclosure to family situations	44.7	5.83	13.04%	53	34	44	3.85	8.75%	50	39
self-disclosure to friends situations	46.5	5.99	12.88%	60	36	45.25	6.13	13.54%	53	36

Table 01 shows low and average scores for the calculated standard deviations and high homogeneity among teachers for 6 of the 7 indicators used (the coefficient of variation shows percentages up to 15%); in the case of students, homogeneity is high in 4 situations and average in 3 situations.

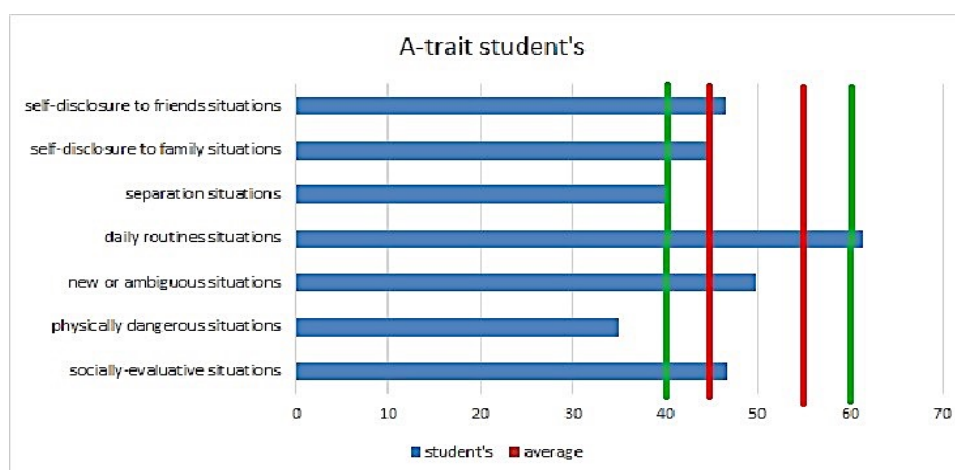


Figure 01. EMAS-T and SAS-T for students

The responses given by students indicate a below-average score for the situations of separation from a beloved person, as well as for the physically dangerous situations; an average score is recorded in 4 situations (self-disclosure to friends, self-disclosure to family, new or ambiguous situations, socially-evaluative situations); an above-average score is recorded for daily routines situations.

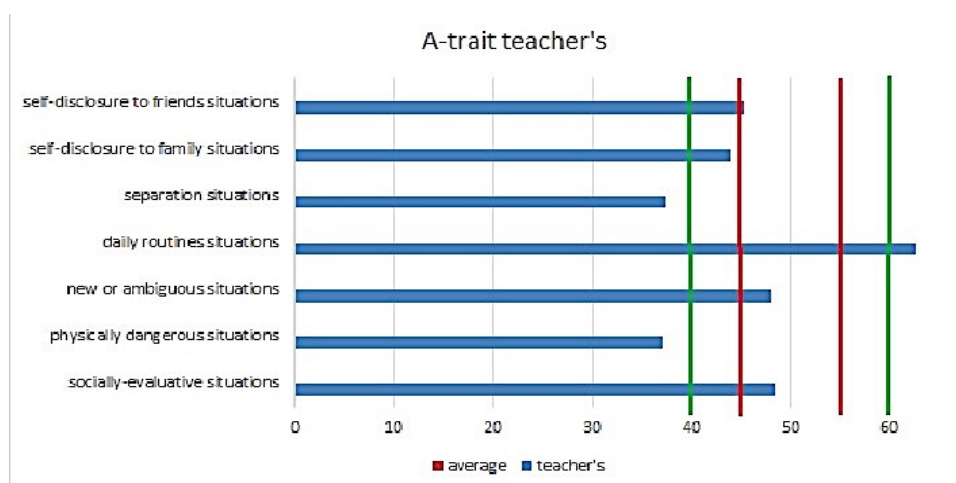


Figure 02. EMAS-T and SAS-T for teachers

The responses given by experts/teachers indicate a below-average score for the situations of separation from a beloved person, as well as for the physically dangerous situations; an average or slightly below-average score is recorded in 4 situations (self-disclosure to friends, self-disclosure to family, new or ambiguous situations, socially-evaluative situations); an above-average score is recorded for daily routines situations.

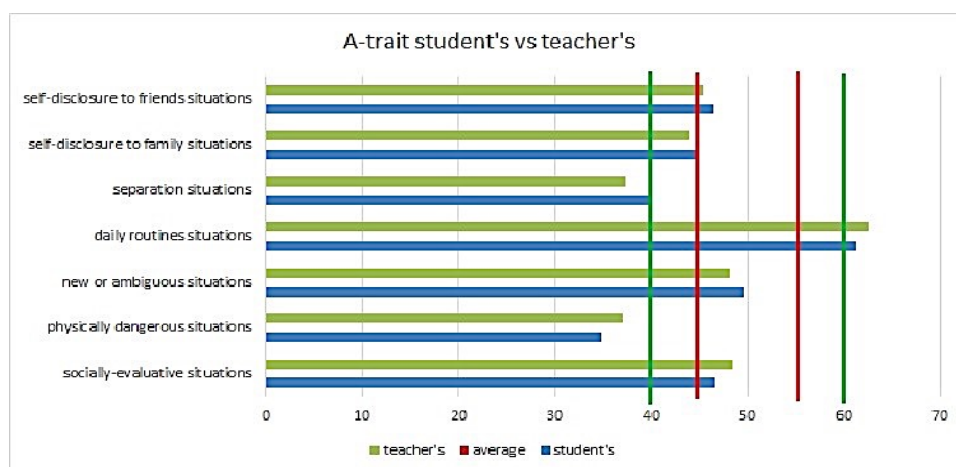


Figure 03. EMAS-T and SAS-T for students and teachers

Analysing the level of anxiety as a trait for the future coaches and in the case of experts/teachers, it is found that the two samples of participants involved in the research recorded: a below-average score for anxiety in situations of separation from an important person and also in potentially harmful situations; an average score for self-disclosure to friends situations, new or ambiguous situations and socially-evaluative situations); a low-average score (teachers) and an average score (students) of anxiety in situations involving self-disclosure to a family member; over-average results of anxiety in daily routines situations.

7. Conclusion

Our study aimed to highlight a matrix of anxiety as a trait, in the case of football experts/teachers with seniority in the field, in order to identify the differences between them and the future coach-teachers, ensuring thus the premises for the personal development of students, who, becoming aware of the problems related to anxiety, could successfully intervene in their own training and their own carrier. By making a comparison between the levels of trait anxiety in the future coach-teachers with football specialisation and the current specialists in the field, important differences were noted between the two groups of participants. Thus, the largest differences were found in the case of anxiety caused by the separation from an important person, but also in the case of anxiety caused by situations involving physical danger, social evaluation and ambiguity (see Table 01). We mention that the group of experts/teachers had a lower score for the separation anxiety and that determined by new or unusual situations, and a higher score for the anxiety caused by physical danger and social evaluation, compared to the group of future coach-teachers. This can be explained by the longer participation of specialists in training and competitions, training camps and internships in the country or abroad, they becoming over time less anxious about their separation from an important person. Also, the experience gained by experts has left its mark on the anxiety felt in unusual situations, they becoming less sensitive and resisting thus better, in new situations, the various stimuli with anxiogenic potential. We have stated before that football specialists achieved a higher score for the anxiety caused by potentially harmful situations and social evaluation situations. This can be explained by the fact that experts in the field have realised how important the lack of football injury is. This relatively higher anxiety level in physically dangerous situations can lead to performing more advanced training sessions, from a technical, tactical and physical point of view, the specialists anticipating the potentially harmful problems during the competition. In the case of social evaluation situations, football experts/teachers with seniority in the field also have a higher anxiety level, which can be explained by the existence of press conferences, discussions with parents or officials, or can be the result of pressures from the media. All these moments in the carrier, where the specialist can be observed, evaluated or judged, influence their way of relating to the environment, a slightly higher anxiety level helping them to anticipate and appropriately respond to external demands. The results of our study are useful to the future coach-teachers with football specialisation, who, becoming aware of the existing differences between their own anxiety level and the anxiety level of experts in the field (with superior results in competitions), can intervene in their own development and professional training.

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