

Article

Young Norwegian Football Players' Cross-Sectional Experiences of Coach Recognition: A Quantitative Survey Study Related to the Pedagogical Approach of Being Seen

Pål Arild Lagestad * , Marianne Granhus Bakken and Arne Sørensen 

Department of Teacher Education and Art, Nord University, 7600 Levanger, Norway

* Correspondence: pal.a.lagestad@nord.no

Abstract

The experience of being acknowledged by one's coach has been highlighted as important, but the pedagogical approach of being seen has not been empirically explored within sport. The purpose of this study was to investigate the extent to which young Norwegian football players experienced being seen by their head coach in football, as well as to examine gender differences in these experiences with a previous validated questionnaire, originally developed for students within physical education, but adapted for football. Using a list of all teams participating in the Boys 19 league and the Girls 17 league in Trøndelag County, 7 boys' teams and 9 girls' teams were randomly selected. A total of 212 players (107 boys and 105 girls) responded to the questionnaire. Participants' ages ranged from 15 to 19 years. The results showed that 83 percent of the boys and 87 percent of the girls agreed (slightly to strongly) that they experienced being seen by their head coach during training or football matches. There were no significant gender differences regarding this experience, nor in four of the five underlying factors contributing to being seen. However, a significant gender difference was found according to good dialogue, where girls scored higher than boys when rating their coaches. Finally, the results indicated that players perceived their coach as most competent in facilitating good dialogue, and least competent in involving players in assessment and goal setting, and in creating opportunities for players to showcase themselves. Based on these results, coaches should actively create opportunities for dialogue before, during, and after training or matches, signaling openness through body language, tone, and availability so players feel comfortable initiating conversation. Coach education programs should emphasize communication strategies that promote psychological safety and belonging, including practical steps such as brief one-on-one conversations during warm-up or cool-down to help players feel seen without disrupting team flow. The gender difference in good dialogue highlights the importance of tailoring communication strategies to individual needs while ensuring that dialogue opportunities are accessible to all players.

Academic Editor: Antonio
Hernández-Mendo

Received: 20 January 2026

Revised: 3 March 2026

Accepted: 11 March 2026

Published: 19 March 2026

Copyright: © 2026 by the authors.

Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland.

This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the [Creative Commons Attribution \(CC BY\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) license.**Keywords:** being seen; youth football; recognition; belonging; gender differences

1. Introduction

Engagement in physical activity is widely recognized as essential for promoting both physical and mental health (Gasana et al., 2023; Warburton & Bredin, 2017), and participation in organized youth sports has been shown to contribute significantly to enhanced quality of life and personal development (Bengtsson et al., 2025; Bruner et al.,

2021; Fernandes et al., 2024). Empirical evidence indicates that coach behaviors, together with the quality of the coach–athlete relationship, characterized by support, constructive feedback, emotional attunement, and adaptive leadership, play a critical role in enabling youth athletes to feel acknowledged, fostering personal development, enhancing resilience, promoting sustained sport participation, and improving psychological well-being (Jowett & Chaundy, 2004; Llanos-Muñoz et al., 2023; Pan & Sui, 2025; Simons & Bird, 2022; Stanford et al., 2022). Building on this evidence, it is pertinent to consider how these relational qualities intersect pedagogical constructs such as ‘being seen’, which emphasize athletes’ perceptions of meaningful attentiveness and inclusion.

In relation to the findings reported by Andresen et al. (2023), the pedagogical construct of being seen is defined as the extent to which athletes perceive their coach as meaningfully attentive to them as individuals through consistent pedagogical practices that promote participation, voice, feedback, and opportunities for competence expression. Specifically, being seen is operationalized through athletes’ perceptions of (a) the quality and usefulness of the feedback they receive, (b) the coach’s expressed care for and interest in their well-being, (c) opportunities for constructive dialogue, (d) active involvement in assessment and goal-setting processes, and (e) opportunities to demonstrate and develop their skills within the training environment. The study by Lyngstad et al. (2019) employed a qualitative interview design and identified several factors that positively influenced students’ experiences of being seen by their physical education teacher. The findings indicated that students benefited from teachers who offered encouragement, provided constructive feedback, and demonstrated respect and support throughout the learning process. Conversely, students who did not feel seen expressed perceptions such as “the teacher does not see me anyway,” which was associated with gradual demotivation and reduced engagement and effort.

Lagestad et al. (2020) also conducted a qualitative interview, and the aim was to investigate which factors contributed to the feeling of being seen in PE, and whether there were differences in students’ experiences based on their physical fitness. The researchers concluded that the feeling of being seen was influenced by four factors: The perception that the teacher cared, receiving feedback from the teacher, the opportunity to showcase one’s skills, and the experience of good dialogue with the teacher. Furthermore, the findings showed that while half of the students with low aerobic capacity did not feel seen by the teacher, all students with high aerobic capacity experienced being seen. Andresen et al. (2023) conducted a quantitative study involving 208 boys and 200 girls from upper secondary schools. The aim of this study was to examine the extent to which students experienced being seen by their PE teachers. In addition, the study investigated which factors were significant for being seen by the PE teacher, using questionnaire data and factor analysis. Through factor analysis, Andresen et al. (2023) identified the same four factors as in Lagestad et al. (2020). However, Andresen et al. (2023) also identified a fifth factor, that students’ experience of involvement in assessment and goal setting emerged as an additional significant factor for being seen. Based upon these studies, Bjørklund and Lagestad (2025) conducted an intervention who demonstrated the benefits of introducing the pedagogical approach being seen to PE teachers.

The definition of being seen is closely aligned with Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2000) as it reflects pedagogical interactions that support athletes’ basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy is primarily supported through dialogical interactions and athletes’ involvement in assessment and goal-setting processes. Competence is primarily supported through the provision of constructive and informational feedback from the coach, as well as through athletes’ opportunities to demonstrate and develop their skills. In contrast, relatedness is supported through the coach’s expressed care and interest in athletes’ well-being. SDT is a motivational theory that

explains how and why people find motivation to learn. The theory posits that humans have three basic psychological needs that must be met to foster intrinsic motivation: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. As athletes, it depends on the fulfillment of these three needs to feel motivated, engaged, and to thrive. Several studies examining the influence of football coaches' behaviors on players' motivation have demonstrated that autonomy-supportive training environments are positively associated with enhanced intrinsic motivation among youth players (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Adie et al., 2012; Balaguer et al., 2018).

In previous studies examining the concept of being seen in physical education teaching, Honneth's (2008) theory of recognition has been employed as a theoretical framework, as the theory conceptualizes recognition as arising from individuals' experiences of being seen and acknowledged by others. Ligestad et al. (2020) argue that being seen can be related to recognition, referring to Honneth's (2008) theory of recognition. Honneth's (2008) theory is a critical framework that can be applied across various fields of practice. The theory centers on how individuals must develop and realize their potential. People form experiences based on their surroundings throughout life, which significantly influences who they become (Honneth, 2008). Honneth (2008) argues that humans are recognition-seeking beings who depend on recognition from others. Through receiving recognition, individuals gain self-respect, self-worth, and self-confidence—qualities that are essential for realizing their inherent potential. Thus, people rely on others to develop these attributes. Recognition is therefore considered a fundamental human need and a prerequisite for psychological development and social functioning in society (Jordet, 2020).

Honneth (2008) identifies three distinct forms of recognition, dividing his theory into: Emotional attachment (love), legal recognition (respect) and solidarity (social appreciation). Jordet (2020) uses these forms as a basis for applying the theory in a pedagogical context. Honneth's theory of recognition shares several important similarities with the concept of being seen. Honneth's notion of recognition as care is reflected in the questionnaire's operationalization of being seen through items related to caring relationships, positive feedback, and dialogical interaction between teacher/coach and student/athlete. The connection to Honneth's concept of recognition as respect is reflected in the emphasis on dialogue and feedback, as these practices acknowledge students as autonomous subjects whose perspectives and contributions are taken seriously. The connection between the being seen questionnaire and Honneth's understanding of recognition as social esteem lies in the way students' experiences of being seen are linked to the acknowledgment of their abilities, contributions, and individual distinctiveness.

However, thorough literature reviews indicate that this pedagogical approach has only been researched within physical education (PE) and not within sport. Our study is based upon four previous conducted studies (Andresen et al., 2023; Bjørklum & Ligestad, 2025; Ligestad et al., 2020; Lyngstad et al., 2019). Even if these studies are related to students' relations to their PE teacher, we will argue that the pedagogical approach is also relevant according to football players' relations to their head coach (Stone et al., 2020). The roles of a PE teacher and a football coach may be argued to be very similar, where both roles involve guidance, leadership, and individual development within a learning process related to practical activities (Lawson, 2005). Like teaching, coaching is a multifaceted process shaped by social and psychological factors (LaVoi, 2007). Research has shown that the role of the youth football coach and the role of the physical education teacher share several fundamental characteristics, while also exhibiting clear structural differences (Demiral & Nazıroğlu, 2024; Wright, 2020). Both professions work to promote the holistic development of children and adolescents through physical activity, and studies indicate that they frequently employ many of the same instructional and pedagogical methods (Harvey & Jarrett, 2014; Kinnerk et al., 2018; Richardson et al., 2024). Furthermore, they

tend to value these methods in similar ways, particularly regarding their capacity to foster motivation, learning, and a sense of competence and mastery (Demiral & Nazıroğlu, 2024).

Previous research has demonstrated that the interpersonal relationship between coaches and athletes represents a critical factor influencing both their physical development and psychosocial well-being (Jowett & Cockerill, 2002). In a study among football players aged 14–18, Berntzen and Lagestad (2025) showed that when feedback was given, it led to a significant increase in the experience of being noticed by the coach and motivation for playing football, compared to the same training session when they did not receive feedback. Fraser-Thomas et al. (2005) emphasizes the coach's critical role in promoting positive developmental outcomes for athletes. Transformational leadership behaviors have been theoretically associated with positive developmental outcomes in youth sport contexts. Moreover, the coach–athlete relationship serves as a fundamental mechanism through which coaches seek to foster life skills among young athletes (Jowett & Chaundy, 2004; Vella et al., 2013).

Previous studies related to the coach's leadership style and the effects on athletes' motivation indicate that girls tend to place greater emphasis on the relational aspect of the coach–athlete relationship (Hovden & Tjørndal, 2019; Keathley et al., 2013) and have a greater need for feedback, recognition, and follow-up (Lagergren & Fundberg, 2015). Furthermore, Lyons et al. (2024) reported that boys in football scored higher on the long-term development focus, while female players reported higher amotivation. Female athletes tend to emphasize relational support, autonomy, and individually acknowledging feedback, whereas male athletes are more likely to prioritize directive instruction and performance-related guidance. These differences are shaped by socialization processes within sport cultures and should be understood as contextual rather than fixed (McCleery et al., 2023; Abadi & Lidor, 2025). Subijana et al. (2021) identified an association between the form of leadership exhibited by football coaches and players' motivational orientations. Specifically, transformational leadership was associated with higher levels of intrinsic motivation among players.

To experience relatedness, individuals must perceive themselves as part of a community and feel a sense of self-worth in relation to others. For a player to feel relatedness, it depends on a coach who genuinely cares (Berntsen & Kristiansen, 2019). Football is a social arena where players can establish meaningful and supportive relationships with both coaches and teammates. A lack of such relationships may lead to a sense of absence from relatedness. Research suggests that children's and youth sport is increasingly marked by tendencies toward specialization, including earlier selection and a stronger emphasis on performance-oriented training environments (Bell et al., 2016; Bergeron et al., 2015; McLellan et al., 2022). When children's and youth sport becomes more serious and specialized, there is a risk that coaching practices increasingly prioritize performance-related goals, thereby neglecting sport's pedagogical potential to support social development and relational outcomes. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to investigate youth athletes' experiences related to the pedagogical principle of 'being seen'. The pedagogical principle of 'being seen' addresses fundamental psychological needs that are essential for fostering a sense of care and social connectedness within the coach–athlete relationship. Given the developmental characteristics of adolescence, the pedagogical principle of 'being seen' is particularly pertinent in youth football. Supportive coach–athlete relationships have been shown to play a decisive role in shaping young athletes' motivation, well-being, and sense of social belonging, making relational attunement a central element of positive youth sport environments (Lisinskiene, 2018). Youth athletes consistently describe interpersonal recognition and relational connection as critical for their developmental experiences, identity formation, and continued sport participation (Battaglia & Kerr, 2024).

Moreover, perceived coach support is closely associated with increased self-confidence and psychological well-being, underscoring the importance of being acknowledged and valued during this sensitive life stage (Broch, 2022). These insights highlight why examining experiences of being seen is not only relevant but essential for understanding the relational dynamics that shape youth football participation and development.

Research Questions

Based on the above discussion, this study aims to address the following research questions:

1. How do football players perceive the experience of being seen by their head coach during training and matches?
2. Are there gender differences in this overall experience and the five underlying factors of being seen?
3. How do football players' experiences vary across the five factors underlying the pedagogical approach of being seen (feedback, care, good dialogue, assessment and goal setting, and opportunity to showcase oneself)?

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Because the main analyses involved testing expected differences between predefined groups on the questionnaire-based outcome, power calculations were conducted using an estimated effect size derived from a previous study on the same construct of "being seen" (Bjørklímárk & Lagestad, 2025—manuscript in preparation at the time of planning). Although that study examined a different population than the present sample of football players, it provided the closest available reference for estimating sample size. This type of sample size calculation is appropriate when survey data are used for inferential hypothesis testing. Using the expected between group difference ($d = 0.81$), $\alpha = 0.05$, $\beta = 0.80$ and a standard deviation of $SD = 1.70$, we determined that a minimum of 70 participants per group was required to achieve adequate statistical power (Cohen, 1988). To address the research questions and deal with some invalid data, the study aimed to include 200 participants. An approximately equal gender distribution was sought. The inclusion criteria were participation in the Boys 19 league for boys and the Girls 17 league for girls, which represent the junior-level football offerings for youth in Norway. The Trøndelag Football Association was selected based on convenience and practical considerations, as the researcher needed to be physically present during data collection. An overview of all Boys 19 and Girls 17 teams in the Trøndelag Football Association was obtained from the Norwegian Football Federation's website. Because it was not feasible to include all eligible clubs, a simple random sampling procedure was used to select teams from the total pool of Boys 19 and Girls 17 clubs. Each club was assigned a number, and a number generator was used to randomly draw the required number of teams. The purpose of this approach was to reduce selection bias while staying within logistical constraints, rather than to ensure proportional representation of all clubs. Stratified random sampling was therefore not applied, as the study did not aim to achieve stratified representation but to obtain a feasible and randomly selected subset of available teams.

In total, 42 clubs had Boys 19 teams, and 35 clubs had Girls 17 teams. In total, 14 boys' teams and 16 girls' teams were contacted. Of these, 7 boys' teams and 9 girls' teams agreed to participate in the study. The remaining teams did not participate for one of three reasons: the team no longer existed, the designated contact person did not respond, or the team declined to participate. This resulted in a total of 212 players: 107 boys (age 17.3 ± 1) and 105 girls (age 15.8 ± 0.8) participated in the survey. Only players who answered all questions were included in the analysis (see Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1. Teams and valid answers within each team.

Teams	Number of Players with Valid Data
Boys team 1	19
Boys team 2	10
Boys team 3	19
Boys team 4	10
Boys team 5	16
Boys team 6	13
Boys team 7	16
Girls team 1	10
Girls team 2	10
Girls team 3	13
Girls team 4	20
Girls team 5	14
Girls team 6	10
Girls team 7	11
Girls team 8	9
Girls team 9	5

Table 2. Participants' age.

Age	Boys (N)	Girls (N)
15	8	39
16	8	42
17	42	21
18	35	0
19	10	0

In Norway, anonymous survey studies that do not involve the collection of identifiable or sensitive personal data do not require formal ethical approval from REK (Regional Committees for Medical and Health Research Ethics) or any other national ethics committee. Norway does not employ a general IRB system for non-medical research. The present study is in accordance with the National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH) guidelines and GDPR requirements. As the questionnaire was fully anonymous and included no personal identifiers, no formal ethical application was required. All participants (and guardians when applicable) provided informed consent in accordance with Norwegian regulations.

2.2. Questionnaire

A questionnaire developed and tested within the same age group by [Andresen et al. \(2023\)](#) was used in this study. The original questionnaire was designed to explore students' experiences of being seen by their PE teacher and underwent exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and internal consistency testing, supporting its reliability and construct validity for this context. In their development process, an exploratory principal components analysis (PCA) was conducted on items 13–51, resulting in a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value of 0.966 and a significant Bartlett's test of sphericity ($p < 0.001$), confirming the suitability of the dataset for factor analysis ([Andresen et al., 2023](#)). Five components were identified and named based on content validation: "Feedback" (8 items, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.939$), "Teacher's caring" (10 items, $\alpha = 0.946$), "Good dialogue" (5 items, $\alpha = 0.910$), "Evaluation and goals" (4 items, $\alpha = 0.871$), and "Display one's skills" (5 items, $\alpha = 0.915$). All factors demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.87$), and corrected item-total correlations exceeded 0.3. These results support the questionnaire's reliability and construct validity for

measuring students' experience of being seen in physical education. We chose this questionnaire because the roles of PE teacher and head coach share important pedagogical features: both lead physical activities, provide guidance, and support individual development within a structured learning process (Lawson, 2005).

The questionnaire was adapted for this study by replacing terms such as "PE teacher" with "head coach" and "physical education" with "football training/match." These wording changes were minimal and did not alter the underlying constructs being measured, which remained consistent with the original validated instrument. Such contextual adaptations are common in research and have been applied in previous studies using instruments like the Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (IMI) across different activity domains (Skjesol et al., 2025). However, we acknowledge that some items may be interpreted differently in a competitive team sport context compared to PE classes, given differences in voluntariness, performance expectations, and social dynamics. This could influence construct validity, and future research should validate the instrument specifically within organized sport settings. The questionnaire includes items designed to uncover players' experiences of being able to showcase themselves, feeling that the coach cares, receiving feedback from the coach, and having good dialogue with the coach. It begins with introductory questions (1–6) to gather information on gender, age, and activity level. Questions 7–12 address players' relationship with football training and their coach, while the remaining questions explore the various factors related to "being seen." The questionnaire consists of 51 items in total, with items 7–51 using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from most negative to most positive (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree).

Prior to data collection, the questionnaire was reviewed by one 15-year-old football player to check for clarity and relevance. He found the questionnaire clear and easy to follow, and it was therefore used without further changes. While this provided initial feedback, it does not constitute a formal pilot test, which is acknowledged as a limitation.

The survey was conducted over a three-week period in the autumn of 2024. The first survey was administered on 19 September 2024, and the last on 6 October 2024. This period was chosen due to time limitations in the spring and the likelihood of higher attendance during the competitive season. The questionnaire was printed on paper. The researcher visited the teams to provide information, distribute, and collect the questionnaires. Players were informed about the purpose of the survey, the voluntary nature of participation, complete anonymity, that coaches would not have access to their responses, and the requirement to answer all questions. The survey took approximately 10 min to complete, with some players finishing in 5 min and others taking up to 13 min.

2.3. Analysis

Because the full factor structure of the instrument had already been established and validated in prior work (Andresen et al., 2023), the present study did not aim to revalidate the entire latent model in a new context.

Our goal was instead to make applied use of the existing measurement instrument while ensuring that the minor wording adaptations (e.g., replacing "PE teacher" with "head coach") did not alter item–factor alignment.

Therefore, we conducted targeted component analyses for each predefined factor rather than a full exploratory or confirmatory factor analysis. Five separate PCAs with Varimax rotation were performed, each including only the items belonging to a single factor identified in the original validation (Table 3). These analyses served strictly as quality-assurance checks, verifying that the adapted items continued to load strongly on their intended factors and that the original structure remained coherent in this football context. They were not used to derive new factors or to test global model fit.

Table 3. Component Matrix test.

Question	Receiving Feedback	Teachers Caring	Good Dialogue	Involvement in Assessment and Goal Setting	The Opportunity to Showcase One's Skills
Nr.21	0.871				
Nr.22	0.848				
Nr.23	0.833				
Nr.24	0.692				
Nr.25	0.792				
Nr.26	0.871				
Nr.27	0.824				
Nr.28	0.864				
Nr.13		0.835			
Nr.14		0.822			
Nr.15		0.857			
Nr.16		0.732			
Nr.17		0.861			
Nr.18		0.832			
Nr.19		0.867			
Nr.20		0.806			
Nr.46		0.702			
Nr.49		0.730			
Nr.44			0.743		
Nr.45			0.850		
Nr.47			0.743		
Nr.48			0.859		
Nr.51			0.794		
Nr.29				0.882	
Nr.30				0.872	
Nr.31				0.842	
Nr.32				0.860	
Nr.33					0.822
Nr.35					0.863
Nr.36					0.896
Nr.37					0.878
Nr.38					0.817

Following standard applied scale procedures, factor loadings ≥ 0.70 were interpreted as evidence of strong item–factor associations, while items marginally below this threshold were assessed for their conceptual fit. Across all five PCAs, the expected factor structure was preserved, and no items displayed cross-loadings or conceptual misalignment.

Given that the original instrument had already undergone full EFA and internal consistency testing, and because our aim was not structural revalidation but applied measurement, a CFA was not performed. CFA requires a study design and sample size powered for confirmatory modelling and is most appropriate when testing a new or substantially modified measurement model. Here, the adapted instrument remained very close to its original form, and the targeted PCAs provided sufficient assurance that the minor adaptations did not compromise item coherence.

Internal consistency was examined using Cronbach's alpha for each subscale. All five factors demonstrated high internal reliability ($\alpha = 0.87\text{--}0.94$), consistent with the original validation study and indicating stable internal coherence in the present sample (Ringdal, 2018; Thrane, 2018).

The results of the Cronbach's alpha tests ranged from 0.872 to 0.938, indicating high reliability of the measurement instrument (see Table 4). It can therefore be argued that the five factors effectively measure what they are intended to measure. Furthermore, the test showed that removing any items would not result in a meaningful increase in the

Cronbach's alpha value for any of the factors. Thus, all items were retained in the study. Although the adapted questionnaire demonstrated strong internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.87\text{--}0.94$), we acknowledge that very high alpha values can indicate item redundancy. Future research should consider item reduction or alternative reliability measures to ensure optimal scale efficiency.

Table 4. Cronbach's alfa test.

Factor	Number of Questions	Cronbach's Alpha
Receiving feedback	8	0.932
Teachers caring	10	0.938
Good dialogue	5	0.872
Involvement in assessment and goal setting	4	0.886
The opportunity to showcase one's skills	5	0.907

To examine the extent to which football players feel seen by their head coach during training and matches, and whether there are differences in players' experiences regarding the five underlying factors of being seen, descriptive statistics are presented. Although Likert-type data are technically ordinal, it is common practice to treat multi-point Likert scales (e.g., 1–7) as approximately continuous for descriptive purposes (Norman, 2010; Carifio & Perla, 2008). Therefore, we report both median and mean/standard deviation to provide a comprehensive view of central tendency and variability, while using non-parametric tests for inferential analyses. A Kolmogorov–Smirnov test showed that the assumptions for parametric tests were not met for many of the variables, as the variables were not normally distributed ($p < 0.05$) and the variables were ordinal, so non-parametric tests were appropriate (O'Donoghue, 2012). To determine whether there were gender differences, Chi-square tests were conducted (O'Donoghue, 2012). Effect sizes for Chi-square tests were estimated using Cramer's V, interpreted according to Cohen's conventional thresholds: 0.10 = small, 0.30 = medium, 0.50 = large (Cohen, 1988).

To explore players' experiences of the five underlying factors of being seen, a non-parametric Friedman test was used. Effect size for the Friedman test was calculated using Kendall's W, interpreted as: 0.10 = small, 0.30 = medium, 0.50 = large (Cohen, 1988). Post hoc analyses were conducted using Wilcoxon signed-rank tests with Bonferroni corrections. Effect sizes for Wilcoxon tests were estimated using $r (Z/\sqrt{N})$, where Z is the standardized test statistic and N is the total sample size, with interpretation following Cohen's thresholds: 0.10 = small, 0.30 = medium, 0.50 = large (Cohen, 1988). Convergent validity between the single-item measure of “feeling seen by the head coach” and the multi-factor scale was examined using Spearman's rank correlation, computed for the full sample and separately by gender. The multi-factor scale score was calculated as the mean of the five subscales (feedback, care, good dialogue, assessment and goal setting, and opportunity to showcase oneself). Finally, Spearman correlation tests were conducted between the experience of being seen and the five underlying factors for all players and related to gender. All analyses were performed using statistical software SPSS version 29 (IBM, Armonk, NY, USA).

3. Results

Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics for all participants in the study, as well as for boys and girls separately. All mean and median scores were between 4.5 and 6 on the seven-point scale. The lowest score was 4.5, which was reported by boys in relation to assessment and goal setting. Table 5 shows that, overall, players scored highest on good dialogue, while the lowest average score was for opportunity to showcase oneself. This pattern was also evident when analyzing boys and girls separately.

Table 5. Descriptive data.

Factor	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation
Being seen by the head coach			
- Total	5.71	6.00	1.27
- Boys	5.62	6.00	1.30
- Girls	5.79	6.00	1.24
Receiving feedback			
- Total	5.29	5.25	1.08
- Boys	5.14	5.13	1.11
- Girls	5.45	5.50	1.24
Teachers caring			
- Total	5.32	5.50	1.16
- Boys	5.29	5.50	1.16
- Girls	5.34	5.55	1.16
Good dialogue			
- Total	5.85	6.00	0.96
- Boys	5.76	6.00	1.08
- Girls	5.95	6.00	0.81
Involvement in assessment and goal setting			
- Total	4.76	4.75	1.34
- Boys	4.66	4.50	1.44
- Girls	4.86	5.00	1.22
The opportunity to showcase one's skills			
- Total	4.72	4.60	1.24
- Boys	4.61	4.60	1.31
- Girls	4.84	4.80	1.17

3.1. The Players Experience of Being Seen by Their Head Coach During Training and Matches

Figure 1 illustrates the extent to which players experienced being seen by their head coach during training and matches. The figure shows that boys and girls share similar experiences of being seen by their coach. In total, 4.8% of the boys responded, “strongly disagree,” “disagree,” or “slightly disagree” to the statement, while 5.9% of the girls gave the same responses. Among the boys, 82.6% answered “slightly agree,” “agree,” or “strongly agree” that they feel seen by their football coach, compared to 87.2% of the girls. A Chi-square test showed that there was no significant difference between boys and girls in relation to the question of being seen by their head coach ($\chi^2_6 = 3.3, p = 0.770$, Cramer's $V = 0.13$).

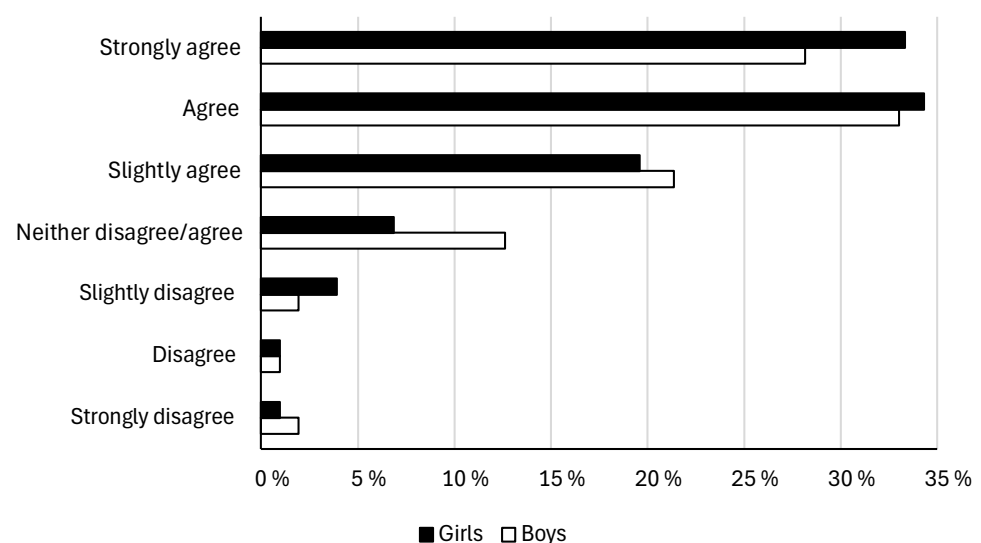


Figure 1. Respondents' answers to the question: "I feel seen by my head coach during football training/matches".

3.2. Players' Experience of the Five Underlying Factors of Being Seen

Figure 2 shows boys' and girls' experiences of the five factors and suggests that both genders perceive these factors similarly. Chi-square tests confirm that there are no significant gender differences in any of the five factors: Feedback ($\chi^2_{35} = 36.6$, $p = 0.394$, Cramer's $V = 0.42$), cares ($\chi^2_{42} = 47.1$, $p = 0.272$, Cramer's $V = 0.48$), assessment and goal setting ($\chi^2_{22} = 25.5$, $p = 0.272$, Cramer's $V = 0.35$), or opportunity to showcase oneself ($\chi^2_{28} = 31.3$, $p = 0.305$). However, a chi-square test showed there were significant gender differences related to the experience of good dialogue ($\chi^2_{20} = 33.0$, $p = 0.034$, Cramer's $V = 0.39$), where girls experienced this higher than boys did. Friedman tests show that there are significant differences in how players experience the five factors, both among boys ($\chi^2_4 = 159.2$, $p < 0.001$, Kendall's $W = 0.39$) and girls ($\chi^2_4 = 160.31$, $p < 0.001$, Kendall's $W = 0.39$). Wilcoxon follow-up analyses with Bonferroni corrections revealed that among boys, there were significant differences ($p < 0.005$) between all factors except between opportunity to showcase oneself and assessment & goal setting ($Z = -0.4$, $p = 0.697$, $r = -0.02$). The same findings were observed among girls, with significant differences ($p < 0.005$) between all factors except between coach care and feedback ($Z = -1.7$, $p = 0.094$, $r = -0.12$), and between opportunity to showcase oneself and assessment and goal setting ($Z = -0.5$, $p = 0.631$, $r = -0.04$). Both boys and girls rated good dialogue significantly higher than all the other four factors, with effect sizes $r = 0.60$ – 0.80 . These results will be discussed further considering previous research and theory in the discussion chapter.

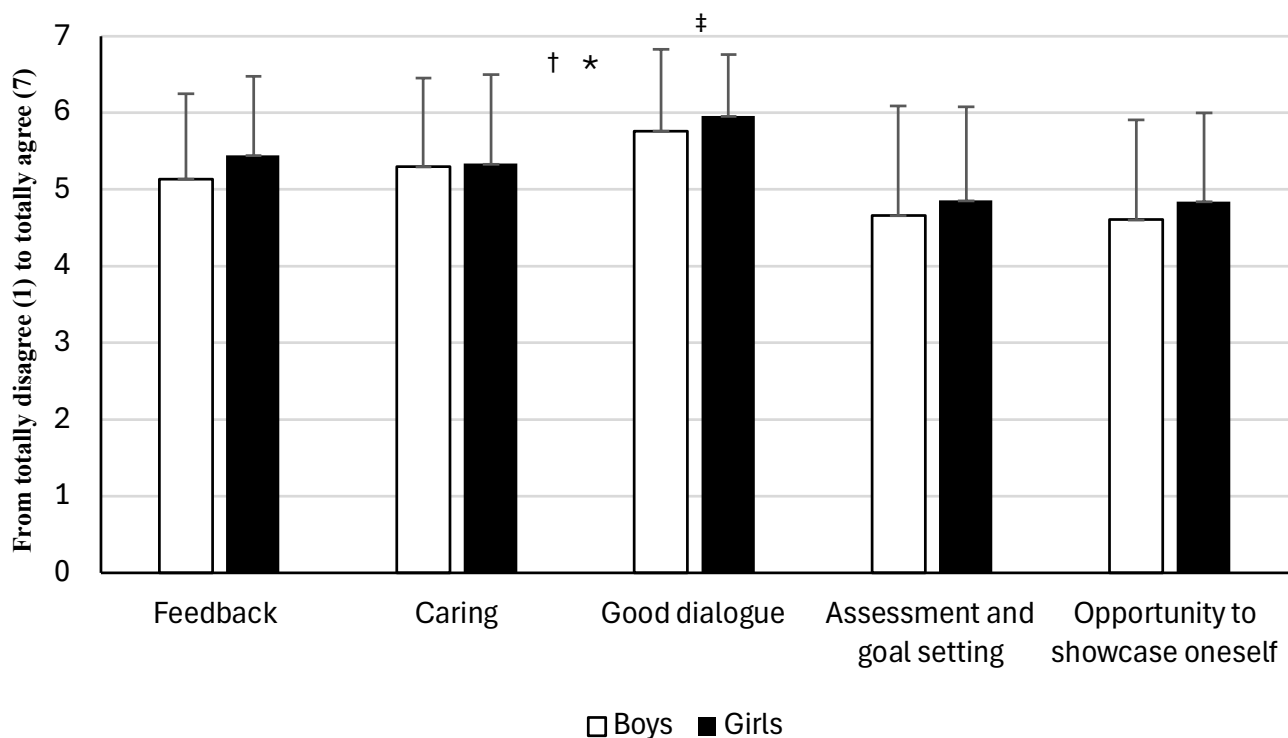


Figure 2. The extent to which players experienced being seen in relation to the five underlying factors of being seen. * Indicates a significant difference ($p < 0.001$) among boys between all factors except between opportunity to showcase oneself and assessment & goal setting ($p > 0.05$). † Indicates a significant difference ($p < 0.001$) among girls between all factors except between coach cares and feedback and between opportunity to showcase oneself and assessment and goal setting ($p > 0.05$). ‡ Indicates a significant gender difference ($p > 0.05$).

Table 6 shows that correlations between the single-item measure of “feeling seen” and the five underlying factors ranged from 0.657 to 0.816 ($p < 0.01$), which are considered large according to Cohen’s (1988) guidelines. Similar patterns were observed within each gender

group (Tables 7 and 8), indicating that the single-item question and the multi-factor scale capture the same underlying construct of being seen. These results provide strong evidence of convergent validity and support the theoretical coherence of the scale.

Table 6. Spearman correlation test between the experience of being seen and the five underlying factors (all players).

	Experience of Being Seen	Feedback	Caring	Good Dialogue	Assessment and Goal Setting
Feedback	0.694 **				
Caring	0.762 **	0.816 **			
Good dialogue	0.675 **	0.746 **	0.802 **		
Assessment and goal setting	0.657 **	0.792 **	0.756 **	0.682 **	
Opportunity to showcase oneself	0.681 **	0.814 **	0.767 **	0.692 **	0.788 **

** Significant correlations at the 0.01 level.

Table 7. Spearman correlation test between the experience of being seen and the five underlying factors (boys).

	Experience of Being Seen	Feedback	Caring	Good Dialogue	Assessment and Goal Setting
Feedback	0.649 **				
Caring	0.701 **	0.807 **			
Good dialogue	0.631 **	0.788 **	0.773 **		
Assessment and goal setting	0.616 **	0.797 **	0.797 **	0.706 **	
Opportunity to showcase oneself	0.620 **	0.780 **	0.758 **	0.685 **	0.760 **

** Significant correlations at the 0.01 level.

Table 8. Spearman correlation test between the experience of being seen and the five underlying factors (girls).

	Experience of Being Seen	Feedback	Caring	Good Dialogue	Assessment and Goal Setting
Feedback	0.738 **				
Caring	0.819 **	0.813 **			
Good dialogue	0.731 **	0.693 **	0.841 **		
Assessment and goal setting	0.705 **	0.788 **	0.709 **	0.646 **	
Opportunity to showcase oneself	0.720 **	0.837 **	0.759 **	0.686 **	0.805 **

** Significant correlations at the 0.01 level.

4. Discussion

The results of the study can be summarized into four main findings related to the three research questions which will be discussed below.

The main finding related to research question one indicated that players generally feel seen by their head coach in football during training and matches. This finding is consistent with Norwegian regulations for youth sport, which mandate that athletes aged 13–19 be actively engaged in the planning and execution of their own training activities in collaboration with their coaches (Norges Idrettsforbund, n.d.). In addition, young athletes are expected to participate meaningfully in the formulation of their individual performance

goals. This suggests that the soccer coaches are familiar with the regulations and structure their training sessions and matches in accordance with these guidelines.

Although a large majority of players in this study reported feeling seen by their head coach (83–87%), this finding should be interpreted with caution. High satisfaction rates in youth sport environments may, at least in part, reflect social desirability bias rather than purely authentic perceptions. Adolescents may be reluctant to report negative experiences, particularly when these relate to authority figures such as coaches, who play a central role in their daily sporting lives. The survey was administered in a team setting, and although anonymity was ensured, players may still have feared indirect consequences or worried that negative responses could reflect poorly on themselves or their team. Such tendencies are well documented in youth sport research, where athletes often underreport negative relational or motivational experiences due to loyalty, fear of coach disapproval, or a desire to maintain team harmony. Furthermore, because participation in football is voluntary and competitive, players who remain in the sport may already be those who experience supportive coach–athlete relationships, while those with more negative experiences may have withdrawn from the sport earlier. This self-selection effect could inflate positive responses and contribute to the unusually high satisfaction levels observed. Thus, while the present findings suggest that most players perceive high levels of recognition from their coach, alternative explanations related to social desirability, perceived expectations, and sample composition must also be considered.

Another plausible explanation for the overall sense of being acknowledged is that the coaches exhibit strong interpersonal competencies, or place greater emphasis on social goals than on athletic success, thereby effectively fostering a climate of recognition among players. This aligns with previous research suggesting that transformational leadership in sports contexts can enhance intrinsic motivation (Subijana et al., 2021). According to Honneth's (2008) theory of recognition, individuals depend on recognition to realize their inherent potential. He identifies three forms of recognition that people need: love, social appreciation, and rights. On the training field, love is not meant in a literal or romantic sense but rather refers to the coach showing care and providing a sense of safety to the players (Honneth, 2008). To do this, the coach must meet players with genuine interest and see them as individuals as a whole—not just as football players. As football players and members of society, individuals participate in a broader community. According to Honneth (2008), players also need to be recognized for their abilities and contributions to this community.

Andresen et al. (2023) found a positive correlation between the four factors identified as crucial for being seen in the study by Lagestad et al. (2020). Additionally, Andresen et al. (2023) found a positive correlation between assessment and goal setting and the experience of being seen. Both studies by Andresen et al. (2023) and Lagestad et al. (2020) were conducted in the context of PE, which may explain the consistency in their findings. It is reasonable to assume that these findings also apply to organized sports, given the many similarities between the roles of teacher and coach. We have argued that the roles of PE teacher and head coach share important pedagogical features. Both roles involve pedagogical responsibility and are largely about facilitating development, mastery, and guidance toward goal achievement for the individual by leading physical activities, providing guidance, and support individual development within a structured learning process (Lawson, 2005; Stone et al., 2020).

The results from this study show that 84.9% of the players experienced, to some degree, being seen by their head coach. This is somewhat higher than the 76.2% reported by Andresen et al. (2023) in a PE context. However, these two settings differ in important ways, and direct comparison should therefore be interpreted with caution. One possible

contributing factor may be group size, as smaller groups can increase opportunities for individualized attention (Lagestad, 2017). Previous research highlights that class sizes of 20 or more pose challenges for teachers in ensuring that all students feel seen (Andresen et al., 2023; Lagestad et al., 2020). A teacher with a class of 25 students will naturally face greater challenges in facilitating the experience of being seen than a coach working with a smaller group during a training session. Future research should examine this hypothesis within comparable contexts.

The results further indicate that coaches can create meaningful and supportive relationships with their players. Such relationships may contribute to players' experience of being seen, as feelings of safety and acceptance from the coach are important for fostering a sense of belonging (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Relationships characterized by respect and trust signal will, according to self-determination theory, make players experiencing belonging as one of the three basic psychological needs. This is essential for intrinsic motivation, engagement, and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Previous research suggests that when these needs are supported, athletes are more likely to experience positive outcomes such as motivation and thriving in sport (Deci & Ryan, 2000). While these theoretical links indicate that recognition and belonging may be important for sustained participation, our study does not establish causality, and longitudinal research is needed to examine these relationships over time (Honneth, 2008; Hattie, 2013; Lagestad et al., 2020).

Although the results indicate that coaches have largely succeeded in facilitating recognition and fostering a sense of belonging among players, the findings also suggest that some coaches have failed in this regard—particularly with certain individuals. A total of 4.8% of boys and 5.9% of girls responded, “slightly disagree,” “disagree,” or “strongly disagree” to the statement about feeling seen by their head coach. This may indicate that these players have not received the support they need to experience recognition and belonging from their coach. The findings may also be interpreted considering the increasingly early talent selection and the intensified performance-oriented training environments that characterize contemporary youth sport (Bell et al., 2016; Bergeron et al., 2015; McLellan et al., 2022). When coaches prioritize athletic success exclusively, goals related to social development may be neglected. Considering recognition theory and self-determination theory, this can be considered a negative finding for these individual players. Both recognition and belonging are fundamental needs and are crucial for players' motivation, well-being, enjoyment, and development (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Honneth, 2008).

The first main finding, related to research question two, was no significant gender differences in relation to the question about players' experience of being seen by their head coach during training and matches. Earlier research has demonstrated gender differences in preferred coaching behaviors, with female athletes tending to emphasize relational support, whereas boys have shown a preference for performance-oriented guidance (McCleery et al., 2023; Abadi & Lidor, 2025). The absence of gender differences in the present study is likely attributable to the questionnaire, which captures multiple psychological dimensions such as caring, feedback, and sport-related development.

The results suggest that coaches of both boys' and girls' teams are equally skilled at fostering a sense of belonging, as well as recognizing and respecting their players. One possible explanation is that both boys' and girls' teams have similar training frequency, and therefore comparable levels of contact with their coach and team. Our findings diverge from those of Lyons et al. (2024), who reported gender-based differences in motivation among football players. Specifically, male players scored higher on measures related to long-term development focus, whereas female players exhibited higher levels of amotivation.

Considering Self-Determination Theory, this finding can be interpreted positive finding, as belonging is a fundamental need for all players and equally important regardless

of gender (Deci & Ryan, 2000). All players need to feel valued and cared for. Moreover, this experience is crucial for maintaining intrinsic motivation to participate in football (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Intrinsic motivation not only strengthens the desire for continued participation but may also contribute to increased physical activity levels, which can enhance athletic performance through persistence and promote positive health outcomes (Helsedirektoratet, 2022; Lagestad & Mehus, 2018). Similarly, through the lens of Honneth (2008), this finding can be viewed as positive. Honneth highlights how individuals develop and realize their potential based on their experience of their surroundings throughout life, which significantly influences who they become. Honneth (2008) points out that humans are recognition-seeking beings who depend on recognition from others to realize their inherent potential.

The same applies when interpreting the results through the lens of Honneth's (2008) recognition theory. Since both boys and girls reported similar levels of feeling seen, it may be inferred that they experience equal levels of recognition from their coaches. This is beneficial for players, as a lack of recognition—or experiences of disregard—can have harmful effects on an individual's self-esteem (Jordet, 2020).

The second main finding related to research question two was that there were no significant gender differences in four of the five factors: feedback, care, assessment and goal setting, or opportunity to showcase oneself. A significant gender difference was found in the fifth factor—good dialogue—where girls scored higher than boys with a medium effect size according to Cohen's thresholds (Cohen, 1988). While these results suggest that both boys and girls reported meaningful experiences of being seen across several factors, we cannot conclude statistical equivalence, as this would require equivalence testing (e.g., TOST). Our findings are, however, supported by previous research indicating that girls in youth sport, to a greater extent than boys, prefer close and relational interactions with their coach (McCleery et al., 2023; Abadi & Lidor, 2025; Berntzen & Lagestad, 2025). Although the girls in our sample were younger ($M = 15.8$ years) than the boys ($M = 17.3$ years), it is scientifically justified to examine gender differences in experiences of being seen. Research shows that gender operates as an independent analytical category in youth sport, shaping access to resources, visibility, expectations, and recognition in ways that cannot be explained by age alone (Mateo-Orcajada et al., 2021). International sociological studies of sport further demonstrate that gendered norms and power structures systematically influence participation, opportunities, and the valuation of athletes across sport cultures globally, making gender a central analytical dimension rather than a secondary demographic variable (Mateo-Orcajada et al., 2021; Plaza et al., 2017). It is important to note that the boys and girls in this study belonged to different age groups and competitive levels (U19 vs. U17), and the age difference of approximately 1.5 years may have influenced the results. According to developmental psychology and youth sport research, mid-to-late adolescence is characterized by rapid and uneven maturation across physical, cognitive, social, and emotional domains (Malina et al., 2004). Even relatively small age gaps within this period may therefore affect how athletes perceive social evaluation, recognition, and visibility. From a sport-science perspective, differences in biological maturation, training age, and competitive experience can shape both self-confidence and social positioning within a team, meaning that the observed gender differences may partly reflect age-related developmental variations in addition to gendered social dynamics (Steinberg, 2014).

Future research should therefore examine gender differences within comparable age and league contexts. Viewed through the lens of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and Honneth's (2008) recognition theory, these experiences are theoretically associated with well-being, motivation, and enjoyment in sport (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Honneth, 2008).

The gender difference in good dialogue adds nuance to this interpretation. Girls' higher scores suggest that they may place greater value on interpersonal communication or perceive coaches as more approachable. This highlights the importance of coaches being attentive to individual communication needs and ensuring that dialogue opportunities are accessible to all players. While dialogue is a key mechanism for fostering recognition and belonging, coaches should consider that boys may require different strategies to engage in meaningful dialogue compared to girls.

The main finding related to research question three was significant differences in players' experiences in the five underlying factors of being seen. Both boys and girls rated good dialogue significantly higher (approximately 0.5–1.1 higher on a 7-point scale) than the other four factors, with large effect sizes according to Cohen's thresholds (Cohen, 1988). Based on the findings, this suggests that dialogue is the factor most experienced in practice. Good dialogue can take many forms and occur in both formal and informal settings—before, during, and after training. The wide availability of situations in which meaningful dialogue can occur may help explain why players strongly experience this factor. Dialogue is also an effective way for coaches to meet young athletes' needs for recognition and belonging, as it can provide safety, respect, insight, and opportunities for individual adaptation (Jowett, 2005). Thus, good dialogue serves as a valuable tool for helping players feel seen. This is supported by findings from LaVoi (2007), who found that both boys and girls perceive communication as the most important factor for feeling close to their coach. Closeness can be viewed as an indirect factor in the experience of being seen, as it is associated with emotional connection (Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004).

Viewed through the lens of recognition theory, good dialogue touches on all three forms of recognition (Honneth, 2008). It may be that dialogue scores highest because it enables recognition across all three dimensions: Recognition as love is expressed through face-to-face interaction. In the context of being seen, this may be reflected in personal dialogue where the coach listens, shows genuine interest, and allows space for the player's perspective. This form of recognition is supported by dialogue's ability to highlight a player's effort, skills, and knowledge. When the coach actively listens and responds, players receive confirmation that their contributions are valuable and meaningful.

Honneth (2008) also emphasizes that humans are recognition-seeking beings. Among the five factors, good dialogue is the only one where the initiative for interaction does not necessarily have to come from the coach. In other words, players have the opportunity to initiate contact and dialogue with the coach themselves. Honneth (2008) argues that the experience of recognition is so important that individuals actively seek it. One possible explanation for why this factor scores highest may be that players themselves actively seek dialogue with the coach. One of the survey questions related to good dialogue reads: "...is easy to approach during football training/matches." This question indicates that the initiative for good dialogue does not have to come from the coach. A possible explanation for why good dialogue is rated highest can also be found in Self-Determination Theory. From this perspective, good dialogue between player and coach may be a relatively simple and effective way to promote the experience of belonging. Good dialogue can help players feel respected, connected, and mutually engaged. This can foster a sense of significance and respect, precisely because they are being listened to. Dialogue creates human connection, which can strengthen the sense of belonging for both coaches and players (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Thus, a possible explanation for why good dialogue scores highest is that it is an accessible and direct way to promote belonging. This requires the coach to be present, actively listen, and show respect toward the players participating in the dialogue.

Considering the findings we argue that coaches should actively create opportunities for dialogue before, during, and after training sessions. Since players value the ability

to initiate dialogue, coaches should signal openness—through body language, tone, and availability—so players feel comfortable approaching them. Girls appear to value dialogue more strongly than boys. Coaches may need to ensure that they provide sufficient relational support for girls while finding ways to engage boys in meaningful dialogue without forcing it (Miele, 2024). “Not forcing” dialogue with boys means giving them low-pressure chances to talk, such as short check-ins, brief one-to-one conversations, or open-ended questions, without expecting them to share personal details or engage in long discussions. This allows boys to speak when they feel ready, supports their sense of autonomy, and helps prevent discomfort or reluctance (Chu & Koppenhaver, 2025).

Coaches can use dialogue to acknowledge effort, skills, and progress, reinforcing players’ sense of competence and significance. This aligns with self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and recognition theory (Honneth, 2008). Effective dialogue requires listening, empathy, and respect. Coach education programs should include training in communication strategies that promote psychological safety and belonging. For example, short one-on-one conversations during warm-up or cool-down can help players feel seen without disrupting team flow. Finally, coaches should regularly reflect on whether their communication style meets the needs of all players and consider gender-specific tendencies in valuing dialogue.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

We will argue that quantitative methods were best suited for collecting the necessary data to answer the research questions. The choice of questionnaire was based on the desire to gain insight into the phenomenon through a large number of respondents—something that qualitative interviews with a small number of informants would not provide. However, since a questionnaire was used as the data collection method, the researcher did not gain deeper insight into the respondents’ experiences of being seen by their head coach in football. Participants were also unable to elaborate on their answers, as the questionnaire only included predefined response options. Nevertheless, the questionnaire provided a solid foundation for understanding players’ experiences of the five factors central to feeling seen by the coach. A limitation of this study is that the questionnaire was only reviewed by one participant prior to data collection. A more comprehensive pre-test with a diverse sample would have provided stronger evidence of clarity and appropriateness. A key limitation of this study concerns the adaptation of an instrument originally developed for the physical education context. Although PE teachers and youth coaches share several pedagogical functions—such as guiding learning processes, providing feedback, and supporting individual development—the contexts differ in meaningful ways, including voluntariness, performance expectations, competitive structures, and social power dynamics. These contextual differences may influence how players interpret certain questionnaire items. While the present study provides initial evidence that the adapted items performed coherently, the instrument has not been fully revalidated for use in competitive sport, and future research should therefore undertake comprehensive validation work (e.g., CFA, ESEM, and measurement invariance testing). A second limitation relates to our analytic approach. Because our intention was not to re-establish a new measurement model, we conducted targeted PCAs on each factor rather than running a single, global CFA. Although this approach is methodologically appropriate for verifying the stability of items after minor wording changes, it does not provide evidence of overall model fit, factor distinctiveness, or higher-order structure in a football context. Future studies should evaluate the full measurement model using CFA or ESEM in samples powered for confirmatory analysis.

The relatively large standard deviations (≈ 1.2 on 7-point scales) suggest meaningful heterogeneity in players’ experiences of being seen. However, our data did not include

potential moderators such as playing time, team performance, or years with the head coach, which limits our ability to explain this variability. Future research should incorporate these and other contextual factors (e.g., coach experience, team culture) and apply multilevel modeling to better understand sources of variation. Another limitation of this study is the participation rate, as only about half of the teams contacted agreed to take part. This raises the possibility of selection bias, where teams with less positive coach–player relationships may have declined participation. Consequently, the findings may overrepresent teams with coaches who are more communicative or supportive.

Finally, the age difference between the boys (U19) and girls (U17) teams represents a meaningful confounding variable. Developmental stage is known to influence relational expectations, perceptions of recognition, and social evaluation. Future research should examine gender differences within comparable age groups and competitive levels and incorporate additional variables (e.g., playing time, coach experience, team culture) to better explain individual variability in the experience of being seen.

5. Conclusions

This study investigated football players' experiences of being seen by their head coach during training and matches and examined whether there were differences in how the five underlying factors—feedback, care, good dialogue, assessment and goal setting, and opportunity to showcase oneself—were perceived. A survey using a validated questionnaire (Andresen et al., 2023) among 107 boys and 105 girls aged 15 and 19 years showed that, overall, players largely experienced being seen by their head coach in football. While no significant differences were found related to the questions of being seen or in four of the five factors, a significant difference emerged in good dialogue, where girls scored higher than boys. Both boys and girls rated good dialogue significantly higher than the other four factors, suggesting that dialogue is the most experienced and valued dimension of being seen. Still, the results indicate that players in this study experienced all five factors at relatively high levels.

The findings were discussed in relation to recognition theory (Honneth, 2008), self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), and previous research. Recognition and belonging are fundamental human needs, and the pedagogical phenomenon of “being seen” appears important for both genders. For individual players who reported not feeling seen by their head coach during football training or matches, this may be critical for their continued participation in the team, as the experience of not being seen can negatively affect well-being, motivation, and enjoyment in sport (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Honneth, 2008).

Considering these findings, we argue that coaches should actively create opportunities for dialogue before, during, and after training sessions. Since players value the ability to initiate dialogue, coaches should signal openness through body language, tone, and availability so players feel comfortable approaching them. Dialogue can be used to acknowledge effort, skills, and progress, reinforcing players' sense of competence and significance, which aligns with Self-Determination Theory and recognition theory. Effective dialogue requires listening, empathy, and respect; therefore, coach education programs should include training in communication strategies that promote psychological safety and belonging. Practical steps include short one-on-one conversations during warm-up or cool-down to help players feel seen without disrupting team flow. Finally, coaches should regularly reflect on whether their communication style meets the needs of all players and consider gender-specific tendencies in valuing dialogue. The gender difference in good dialogue highlights the importance of tailoring communication strategies to individual needs while ensuring that dialogue opportunities are accessible to all players. Our findings showed that girls in youth sport, to a greater extent than boys, tend to prefer close and

relational interactions with their coach. However, this finding should be interpreted with caution, as the boys in the sample were on average 1.5 years older than the girls, which may have introduced some uncertainty into the result.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, P.A.L. and M.G.B.; Methodology, P.A.L. and M.G.B.; Software, P.A.L.; Validation, P.A.L. and A.S.; Formal analysis, P.A.L.; Investigation, M.G.B.; Resources, P.A.L.; Data curation, P.A.L. and M.G.B.; Writing—original draft, P.A.L. and M.G.B.; Writing—review and editing, P.A.L. and A.S.; Supervision, P.A.L.; Project administration, P.A.L. and M.G.B. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and was approved by the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (SIKT) (No: 522,442) on 4 December 2023.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors without undue reservation.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

- Abadi, E., & Lidor, R. (2025). Girls' preferences for coaches' pedagogical behaviors in sport training. *Advances in Physical Education*, 15(3), 315–340. [CrossRef]
- Adie, J. W., Duda, J. L., & Ntoumanis, N. (2012). Perceived coach autonomy support, basic need satisfaction and well- and ill-being of elite youth soccer players: A longitudinal investigation. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 13(1), 51–59. [CrossRef]
- Andresen, F., Torvik, E., & Ligestad, P. (2023). Students' experience of being seen by their physical education teachers and associated factors. *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living*, 5, 1101072. [CrossRef]
- Balaguer, I., Castillo, I., Cuevas, R., & Atienza, F. L. (2018). The importance of coaches' autonomy support in the leisure experience and well-being of young footballers. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9, 840. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- Battaglia, A., & Kerr, G. (2024). Youth athletes' perspectives on developmental influences of relationships in individual and team sports. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 10(1), 2392023. [CrossRef]
- Bell, D. R., Post, E. G., Trigsted, S. M., Hetzel, S., McGuine, T. A., & Brooks, M. A. (2016). Prevalence of sport specialization in high school athletics: A 1-year observational study. *American Journal of Sports Medicine*, 44(6), 1469–1474. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- Bengtsson, D., Svensson, J., Wiman, V., Stenling, A., Lundkvist, E., & Ivarsson, A. (2025). Health-related outcomes of youth sport participation: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 22(1), 89. [CrossRef]
- Bergeron, M. F., Mountjoy, M., Armstrong, N., Chia, M., Côté, J., Emery, C. A., Faigenbaum, A., Hall, G., Jr., Kriemler, S., Léglise, M., Malina, R. M., Pensgaard, A. M., Sanchez, A., Soligard, T., Sundgot-Borgen, J., van Mechelen, W., Weissensteiner, J. R., & Engebretsen, L. (2015). International olympic committee consensus statement on youth athletic development. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, 49(13), 843–851. [CrossRef]
- Berntsen, H., & Kristiansen, E. (2019, February 25). *Feilaktig syn på hva som er god "coaching" gir utbrenthet, frafall og mistriivsel* [A misguided view of what constitutes good coaching leads to burnout, dropout, and discontent]. Norges idrettshøgskole. Available online: <https://www.nih.no/om/aktuelt/bloggen/2019/feilaktig-syn-pa-hva-som-er-god-coaching.html> (accessed on 5 October 2025).
- Berntzen, I., & Ligestad, P. (2025). Effects of coaches' feedback on psychological outcomes in youth football: An intervention study. *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living*, 7, 1527543. [CrossRef]
- Bjørklum, I., & Ligestad, P. (2025). Importance of being seen as a pedagogical approach among physical education teachers at a lower secondary school—An intervention case study. *Frontiers in Education*, 10, 1631248. [CrossRef]
- Broch, T. B. (2022). The cultural sociology of sport: A study of sports for sociology? *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*, 10(4), 535–542. [CrossRef]
- Bruner, M., McLaren, C., Sutcliffe, J., Gardner, L., Lubans, D., Smith, J., & Vella, S. (2021). The effect of sport-based interventions on positive youth development: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 16, 368–395. [CrossRef]

- Carifio, J., & Perla, R. J. (2008). Resolving the 50-year debate around using and misusing Likert scales. *Medical Education*, 42(12), 1150–1152. [CrossRef]
- Chu, T. L., & Koppenhaver, P. (2025). One size doesn't fit all: Gender differences in strategies for satisfying psychological needs through youth sport. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance*, 96(2), 47–53. [CrossRef]
- Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The “what” and “why” of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4), 227–268. [CrossRef]
- Demiral, Ş., & Nazıroğlu, M. (2024). Examination of experienced coaches and physical education teachers' teaching methods and their perceptions regarding these methods-2023. *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living*, 6, 1383361. [CrossRef]
- Fernandes, H. M., Costa, H., Esteves, P., Machado-Rodrigues, A. M., & Fonseca, T. (2024). Direct and indirect effects of youth sports participation on emotional intelligence, self-esteem, and life satisfaction. *Sports*, 12(6), 155. [CrossRef]
- Fraser-Thomas, J. L., Côté, J., & Deakin, J. (2005). Youth sport programs: An avenue to foster positive youth development. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 10(1), 19–40. [CrossRef]
- Gasana, J., O'Keeffe, T., Withers, T. M., & Greaves, C. J. (2023). A systematic review and meta-analysis of the long-term effects of physical activity interventions on objectively measured outcomes. *BMC Public Health*, 23(1), 1697. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- Harvey, S., & Jarrett, K. (2014). A review of the game-centred approaches to teaching and coaching literature since 2006. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 19(3), 278–300. [CrossRef]
- Hattie, J. (2013). *Synlig læring: Et sammendrag av mer enn 800 metaanalyser av skoleprestasjoner* [Visible learning: A synthesis of more than 800 meta-analyses on student achievement]. Cappelen Damm Akademisk.
- Helsedirektoratet. (2022). *Fysisk aktivitet, helse og aktivitetsnivå* [Physical activity, health, and activity levels]. I *Vunne leveår og helsetapsjusterte leveår (DALYs) ved fysisk aktivitet* [Gained life years and disability adjusted life years (DALYs) associated with physical activity]. Helsedirektoratet. Available online: <https://www.helsedirektoratet.no/rapporter/vunne-levear-og-helsetapsjusterte-levear-dalys-ved-fysisk-aktivitet/innledning/fysisk-aktivitet-helse-og-aktivitetsniva> (accessed on 10 March 2026).
- Honneth, A. (2008). *Kamp om anerkjennelse: Om de sosiale konfliktenes moralske grammatikk* [Struggle for recognition: On the moral grammar of social conflicts]. Pax.
- Hovden, J., & Tjønndal, A. (2019). The gendering of coaching from an athlete perspective: The case of Norwegian boxing. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 54(2), 239–255. [CrossRef]
- Jordet, A. N. (2020). *Anerkjennelse i skolen: En forutsetning for læring* [Recognition in schools: A prerequisite for learning] (1st ed.). Cappelen Damm Akademisk.
- Jowett, S. (2005). The coach-athlete partnership. *Psychologist*, 18(7), 412.
- Jowett, S., & Chaundy, V. (2004). An investigation into the impact of coach leadership and coach-athlete relationship on group cohesion. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 8(4), 302. [CrossRef]
- Jowett, S., & Cockerill, I. (2002). Incompatibility in the coach—Athlete relationship. In I. Cockerill (Ed.), *Solutions in sport psychology*. Thompson Learning.
- Jowett, S., & Ntoumanis, N. (2004). The coach-athlete relationship questionnaire (CART-Q): Development and initial validation. *Scandinavian Journal of Medicine & Science in Sports*, 14(4), 245–257. [CrossRef]
- Keathley, K., Himelein, M. J., & Srigley, G. (2013). Youth soccer participation and withdrawal: Gender similarities and differences. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 36(2), 171–188.
- Kinnerk, P., Harvey, S., MacDonncha, C., & Lyons, M. (2018). A review of the game-based approaches to coaching literature in competitive team sport settings. *Quest*, 70(4), 401–418. [CrossRef]
- Lagergren, L., & Fundberg, J. (2015). *På väg mot eliten: Vad kan förväntas av kvinnliga idrottare?* [On the road to the elite: What can be expected of female athletes?]. Idrottsforum.org/Nordic Sport Science Forum. Available online: <https://idrottsforum.org/lagergren-fundberg151125/> (accessed on 14 March 2025).
- Lagestad, P. (2017). Å velge aktiviteter selv som grunnlag for trivsel og mestring: En casestudie av kroppsovingsundervisningen ved en videregående skole [Choosing activities independently as a basis for well-being and mastery: A case study of physical education teaching in an upper secondary school]. *Acta Didactica Norge*, 11(2), 4. [CrossRef]
- Lagestad, P., Lyngstad, I., Bjerke, Ø., & Ropo, E. (2020). High school students' experiences of being 'seen' by their physical education teachers. *Sport, Education and Society*, 25(2), 173–184. [CrossRef]
- Lagestad, P., & Mehus, I. (2018). The importance of adolescents' participation in organized sport according to VO2peak: A longitudinal study. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 89(2), 143–152. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- LaVoi, N. M. (2007). Expanding the interpersonal dimension: Closeness in the coach-athlete relationship. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 2(4), 497–512. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- Lawson, H. A. (2005). Empowering people, facilitating community development, and contributing to sustainable development: The social work of sport, exercise, and physical education programs. *Sport, Education and Society*, 10(1), 135–160. [CrossRef]

- Lisinskiene, A. (2018). The effect of a 6-month coach educational program on strengthening coach-athlete interpersonal relationships in individual youth sport. *Sports*, 6(3), 74. [CrossRef]
- Llanos-Muñoz, R., Pulido, J. J., Nobari, H., Raya-González, J., & López-Gajardo, M. A. (2023). Effect of coaches' interpersonal style on young athletes' individual resilience and team adherence intention: A season-long investigation. *BMC Psychology*, 11(1), 412. [CrossRef]
- Lyngstad, I., Bjerke, Ø., & Ligestad, P. (2019). 'The teacher sees my absence, not my participation': Pupils' experiences of being seen by their teacher in physical education class. *Sport, Education and Society*, 24(2), 147–157. [CrossRef]
- Lyons, M. J., Conlon, J. A., Nimphius, S., Keller, B. S., & Joyce, C. (2024). An athlete's perspective: Comparing talent development environments for boys and girls in Western Australia youth soccer. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 19(5), 1995–2005. [CrossRef]
- Mageau, G. A., & Vallerand, R. J. (2003). The coach-athlete relationship: A motivational model. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, 21(11), 883–904. [CrossRef]
- Malina, R. M., Bouchard, C., & Bar-Or, O. (2004). *Growth, maturation, and physical activity* (2nd ed.). Human Kinetics.
- Mateo-Orcajada, A., Abenza-Cano, L., Vaquero-Cristóbal, R., Martínez-Castro, S. M., Leiva-Arcas, A., Gallardo-Guerrero, A. M., & Sánchez-Pato, A. (2021). Influence of gender stereotypes, type of sport watched and close environment on adolescent sport practice according to gender. *Sustainability*, 13(21), 11863. [CrossRef]
- McCleery, J., Tereschenko, I., Li, L., & Copeland, N. (2023). Gender differences in coaching behaviors supportive of positive youth sports experience. *Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal*, 31(2), 63–72. [CrossRef]
- McLellan, M., Allahabadi, S., & Pandya, N. K. (2022). Youth sports specialization and its effect on professional, elite, and olympic athlete performance, career longevity, and injury rates: A systematic review. *Orthopaedic Journal of Sports Medicine*, 10(11), 23259671221129594. [CrossRef]
- Miele, L. M. (2024, April 13). Coach communication is key. *Psychology Today*. Available online: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-whole-athlete/202404/coach-communication-is-key> (accessed on 10 January 2025).
- Norges Idrettsforbund. (n.d.). *Retningslinjer for ungdomsidrett* [Guidelines for youth sport]. Available online: <https://www.idrettsforbundet.no/tema/ungdomsidrett/retningslinjer-for-ungdomsidrett/> (accessed on 16 January 2026).
- Norman, G. (2010). Likert scales, levels of measurement and the “laws” of statistics. *Advances in Health Sciences Education*, 15(3), 625–632. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- O'Donoghue, P. (2012). *Statistics for sport and exercise studies: An introduction*. Routledge.
- Pan, F., & Sui, W. (2025). Research on coach-athlete relationship and team performance based on 3Cs theory: The chain mediating role of emotional intelligence and athletic engagement. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 16, 1587900. [CrossRef]
- Plaza, M., Boiché, J., Brunel, L., & Ruchaud, F. (2017). Sport = male... but not all sports: Investigating the gender stereotypes of sport activities at the explicit and implicit levels. *Sex Roles*, 76(3), 202–217. [CrossRef]
- Richardson, S. J., McRobert, A. P., Vinson, D., Cronin, C. J., Lee, C., & Roberts, S. J. (2024). Systematic review of sport coaches' and teachers' perceptions and application of game-based and constraints-led pedagogy: A qualitative meta-study. *Quest*, 76(1), 113–134. [CrossRef]
- Ringdal, K. (2018). *Enhet og mangfold: Samfunnsvitenskapelig forskning og kvantitativ metode* [Unity and diversity: Social science research and quantitative method] (4th ed.). Fagbokforlaget.
- Simons, E., & Bird, M. (2022). Coach-athlete relationship, social support, and sport-related psychological well-being in National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I student-athletes. *Journal for the Study of Sports and Athletes in Education*, 17, 1–20. [CrossRef]
- Skjesol, K., Ulstad, S. O., Sorensen, A., & Ligestad, P. (2025). Perceptions of interest/enjoyment, perceived competence, and value/usefulness among young soccer players in an 11-week soccer training program: A randomized controlled trial. *Psychology International*, 7(4), 101. [CrossRef]
- Stanford, J., Healy, L., Sarkar, M., & Johnston, J. (2022). Interpersonal perceptions of personality traits in elite coach-athlete dyads. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 60, 102154. [CrossRef]
- Steinberg, L. D. (2014). *Age of opportunity: Lessons from the new science of adolescence*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Stone, J., Rothwell, M., Shuttleworth, R., & Davids, K. (2020). Exploring sports coaches' experiences of using a contemporary pedagogical approach to coaching: An international perspective. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 13, 639–657. [CrossRef]
- Subijana, C. L. d., Martin, L. J., Tejón, O., & Côté, J. (2021). Adolescent athletes' perceptions of both their coaches' leadership and their personal motivation. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 128(2), 813–830. [CrossRef]
- Thrane, C. (2018). *Kvantitativ metode: En praktisk tilnærming* [Quantitative method: A practical approach]. Cappelen Damm Akademisk.
- Vella, S. A., Oades, L. G., & Crowe, T. P. (2013). The relationship between coach leadership, the coach-athlete relationship, team success, and the positive developmental experiences of adolescent soccer players. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 18(5), 549–561. [CrossRef]

- Warburton, D. E., & Bredin, S. S. (2017). Health benefits of physical activity: A systematic review of current systematic reviews. *Current opinion in cardiology*, 32(5), 541–556. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
- Wright, S. C. (2020). Regarding the dual role of teaching and coaching—What conflict? *Journal of Physical Education Research*, 7(II), 1–17.

Disclaimer/Publisher’s Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.