



An Empirical Survey on Basic Football Skills Among 10–13-Year-Old Athletes of Tanjung Balai United Football School

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Abstract: Football serves as a fundamental medium for developing children’s motor and coordination skills. However, young athletes often focus more on playing than on mastering essential techniques, leading to suboptimal skill development. This study aimed to empirically examine the basic football skill levels of 10–13-year-old athletes at the Tanjung Balai United Football School (SSB) in 2022. Employing a quantitative descriptive design, data were collected through a survey method with standardized tests and measurements. Twenty male athletes aged 10–13 years participated in this study. The instrument utilized was the Football Skills Test for Ages 10–13 developed by Daral Fauzi (2009), with a validity coefficient of 0.98. Data were analyzed statistically and presented in percentage form. Findings revealed that 0% of the participants were in the very poor category, 42.4% in the poor category, and 57.6% in the moderate category, with none achieving good or very good classifications. These results indicate that the overall basic football skills of the athletes fall into the moderate level. The study underscores the importance of structured and consistent training programs to improve fundamental football skills at an early developmental stage.

Keywords: Football Skills; Motor Development; Performance Evaluation

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the development of fundamental football (soccer) skills among youth athletes has gained increasing attention in both academic and practical sports-science communities. The urgency of this research arises from the recognition that basic technical proficiency such as passing, dribbling, ball control and shooting constitutes a critical foundation for long-term athlete development and competitive performance (Al Ardha et al., 2023). Despite this recognition, many youth programmes still report sub-optimal outcomes, with young players often operating at “moderate” rather than “good” levels of skill mastery (Sahrizan, Suwirman & Arsil, 2023).

Previous researchers have sought to measure the current status of basic football skill among youth players in different contexts. For example, Hamid, Waluyo & Warih Adi (2022) surveyed academy students aged 13–15 and found limited proficiency in passing, dribbling and stopping skills. Younis, Al-Dhahir & Jumaa (2025) demonstrated that certain physical tests significantly predicted technical skill outcomes in young academy players, suggesting the inter-relation of physical and technical attributes. Meanwhile, Putra et al. (2024) showed that the implementation of a Small Sided Games (SSG) model significantly improved basic football technical skills (passing, dribbling, shooting) in U-

12 players. Furthermore, Rambe, Kirâm & Arsil (2024) found that combinations of SSG and rondo-training methods, along with physical conditioning, significantly enhanced basic technique in youth players aged 10–12. Other studies, such as Paško et al. (2021), have extended the focus to cognitive and anthropometric correlates of technical skill. A notable review by Almonacid-Fierro, Souza de Carvalho, Sepúlveda-Vallejos, Méndez-Cornejo & Aguilar-Valdés (2024) highlighted that although many interventions exist in grassroots soccer, methodological inconsistencies and a focus on non-representative skill tests limit generalisability. Similarly, “Skill assessments in youth soccer: A scoping review” (2022) emphasised the large variability of assessment protocols and the gap in representative match-like skill measures.

The current landscape of scientific articles thus underscores both progress and persistent gaps. On the one hand, training models such as SSG are gaining empirical support; on the other hand, many studies emphasise the need for context-specific assessments, longitudinal designs, and clearer links between skill levels and developmental outcomes. Moreover, few studies have examined cohorts of younger athletes (e.g., 10-13 years old) within the Indonesian club/academy context, leaving a niche for investigation.

Against this backdrop, the present study offers novel contributions in several ways. First, it targets the 10–13-year age group in a local football school context, a group often under-represented in empirical research. Second, it applies a standardised, validated skill-test battery, enabling comparison with prior international work. Third, the study situates the analysis in the specific cultural and infrastructural conditions of Indonesian youth football, thereby enhancing ecological validity. Fourth, the research explicitly aims to quantify the current status of basic football skills and interpret findings in terms of practical implications for training design and curriculum development.

The objectives of this article therefore are: (1) to empirically assess the level of basic football technical skills (passing, dribbling, ball-control, shooting) among 10–13-year-old athletes in a football school; (2) to identify the distribution of competency levels (e.g., poor, moderate, good) within the cohort; (3) to relate the findings to training implications for early youth development; and (4) to propose a set of recommendations for coaches and programme designers based on empirical data.

From the research findings, we expect several contributions. Firstly, a clearer baseline profile of youth players’ technical skills will provide benchmark data for local practitioners and future research. Secondly, the study will inform coaches about the critical skill areas needing improvement at this developmental stage. Thirdly, by situating the findings within existing literature, the work will help refine training models suited for younger athletes in emerging football contexts. Ultimately, the results may contribute to more targeted, evidence-based training curricula that enhance youth football development, thereby supporting broader goals of talent identification and long-term athlete progression.

METHOD

This research employed a quantitative descriptive design using a survey approach to evaluate the basic football skills of athletes aged 10–13 years. The design was intended to describe the current condition of the athletes without applying any treatment or intervention. The study focused on the existing performance level of the participants based on standardized testing procedures. This design was chosen because it allows for the collection of measurable and comparable data that reflect actual conditions in the field (Sugiyono, 2019).

The research was conducted at SSB Tanjung Balai United, located in Tanjung Balai City, North Sumatra, Indonesia. The data collection process took place during the 2022 training season, specifically between May and July 2022, coinciding with the athletes' regular training schedule. The field setting allowed for the observation and testing of players in their natural training environment, ensuring ecological validity of the results.

The population of this study consisted of all male football athletes aged 10–13 years who were actively enrolled in the SSB Tanjung Balai United training program. The total population comprised approximately 33 athletes. From this population, 20 athletes were selected as the sample for the study. These participants were considered to represent the range of ability levels typical of this age category within the club.

The purposive sampling technique was used to determine the research sample. This non-probability method was chosen because the study required participants who met specific criteria: (1) male athletes aged between 10 and 13 years; (2) had participated in SSB training for at least six months; and (3) were actively engaged in competitive or training sessions during the data collection period. The purposive selection ensured that only individuals relevant to the study objectives were included (Arikunto, 2014).

The data were collected using the Football Skills Test for Ages 10–13 developed by Daral Fauzi (2009) under the Indonesian Ministry of National Education. This test comprises six components that represent core technical skills in football, namely: Dribbling (ball control while moving), Short Pass (accuracy of short-distance passing), Throw-In (distance and precision of throw-in technique), Running with the Ball (speed and control while dribbling), Heading the Ball (accuracy and control when heading), and Shooting the Ball (accuracy and power in shooting).

Each test component was conducted under standardized conditions, and athletes' performances were scored numerically according to official test guidelines. The total scores were then transformed into T-scores to normalize data distribution. The validity coefficient of the instrument was reported at 0.98, indicating high measurement accuracy, while its reliability was acceptable for field research applications.

All collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques. The results of the football skills tests were first tabulated, and the scores for each participant were classified into five categories based on normative standards: very poor (≤ 245), poor (246–322), moderate (323–400), good (401–478), and very good (≥ 479) (Fauzi, 2009). Each athlete's overall skill level was determined by summing the T-scores from all six components. Subsequently, the frequency and percentage of athletes in each category were calculated.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The data obtained from the field tests were analyzed descriptively to determine the basic football skill levels of athletes aged 10–13 years at SSB Tanjung Balai United. The results were categorized into five levels based on normative standards: very poor, poor, moderate, good, and very good.

A total of 33 athletes participated in the testing process. Each athlete completed six components of the football skills test, which included dribbling, short passing, throw-in, running with the ball, heading, and shooting.

Table 1. Classification of Basic Football Skill Levels

No.	Classification	T-Score Range	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Very Poor	≤ 245	0	0%
2	Poor	246 – 322	14	42.40%
3	Moderate	323 – 400	19	57.60%
4	Good	401 – 478	0	0%
5	Very Good	≥ 479	0	0%
Total			33	100%

The data in Table 1 show that none of the athletes were classified as very poor, good, or very good. A total of 14 athletes (42.4 %) were classified in the poor category, while 19 athletes (57.6 %) fell into the moderate category. These data indicate that most athletes were positioned at the moderate level of basic football skills.

Discussion

The data obtained in this study revealed that the cohort of athletes aged 10–13 years exhibited predominantly moderate basic football technical skill levels, with a substantial portion falling into the poor category, and none achieving good or very good levels. This outcome signals a meaningful gap in technical competence at this developmental stage.

These findings align with the literature showing that youth football players often present only moderate technical proficiency during early phases of training (Koopmann et al., 2020). Moreover, the result resonates with observations that younger players (U8-U12) demonstrate less frequent technical actions in varied game formats compared to older youth groups (Brito et al., 2024). Therefore, the present study reinforces the assertion that age-appropriate training and assessment remain critical.

However, the data also reveal a novel nuance: despite a structured football-school environment, the absence of participants in the highest skill categories suggests that merely participating in a training environment does not guarantee advanced technical attainment. This extends findings by Grygus et al. (2024) who emphasized that age-specific methodologies are required for optimal motor-skill development, not simply generic club-based programs.

In contrast to those prior works, the current study's detailed categorisation into five levels provides finer granularity in the distribution of skill status, thereby contributing new empirical baseline data for the specific Indonesian youth-football context.

From a theoretical standpoint, the result may be interpreted through an ecological-dynamics lens. The work by Brito et al. (2024) suggested that younger age groups playing smaller-sided games experience variations in technical volume and context, which influences skill development. In the present case, the clustering of players in the moderate/poor categories may be symptomatic of insufficient exposure to diverse game formats, inadequate decision-making opportunities, or limited technical variation in training. The review by Kopmann and colleagues (2020) suggests that assessment tools and training methods may lack sensitivity to discriminating higher levels in youth samples. This suggests that the observed distribution in this study may reflect both training gaps and measurement realities.

Another relevant dimension is the interplay between technical skill acquisition and broader developmental factors. For example, Duncan et al. (2024) found that

fundamental movement skills substantially contributed to soccer technical skill among grassroots youth.

This implies that the moderate technical status observed may not solely be a matter of football-specific drills but also a function of general motor development. Accordingly, the results implicate the need for integrated physical-technical training in youth football programmes.

In terms of practical implications, the study suggests that coaches and programme designers should prioritise early--stage technical development through structured, context-rich, and game-based stimuli rather than relying solely on traditional drill-based training. The research by Coutinho et al. (2023) on tasks with different decision-making demands supports this view: richer decision contexts improve ball control and passing performance in youth players.

Moreover, Kolovelonis et al. (2022) advocated for integrating cognitive elements into soccer drills to concurrently advance motor, technical and cognitive skills. Hence, the present findings reinforce the argument that youth technical-skill training should be multi-dimensional.

Nevertheless, several limitations of the current study should be acknowledged. First, the sample comprised athletes from a single football school in one region; therefore, generalisability to broader youth-football populations may be restricted. Second, the descriptive method employed, while suitable for profiling current skill levels, does not establish causal links between training practices and outcomes. Third, although a standardised test battery was applied, the instrument may have limitations in capturing dynamic, match-representative technical behaviours, as emphasised by the review of technical-skill assessment tools (Koopmann et., 2020). A future longitudinal or intervention-based design would strengthen inference about development trajectories and training effects.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study show that most athletes aged 10–13 years at SSB Tanjung Balai United have a moderate level of basic football skills, while a smaller number are categorized as poor, and none have reached good or very good levels. These findings indicate that although the athletes possess fundamental abilities in playing football, their mastery of basic techniques has not yet reached an optimal standard. The outcome also reflects the need for more systematic and structured training programs that focus on improving fundamental technical skills such as dribbling, passing, and shooting from an early age. This research provides valuable baseline data for coaches and football schools to design more effective training methods suited to young athletes' developmental stages. Overall, the study emphasizes the importance of consistent, well-planned, and age-appropriate training to enhance the technical competence and future performance potential of youth football players.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Clearly explain whether there are any conflicts of interest related to the reported research.

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