



Attention, motivation, and volitional traits in amateur youth soccer players: diagnosis and proposal for psycho-pedagogical intervention

Atención, motivación y rasgos volitivos en futbolistas juveniles amateurs: diagnóstico y propuesta de intervención psico-pedagógica

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Summary

Introduction: In this study, a comprehensive sociopsychological assessment was conducted on 38 male youth soccer players (under-21 category) belonging to an amateur environment. **Objective:** To evaluate, from a cognitive-behavioral standpoint, their levels of concentrated attention, motivational profile, and development of volitional qualities. **Methodology:** Three validated tests were administered: the Toulouse-Piéron Test, the 10 Wishes Test, and the Volitional Traits Test, along with a content analysis of the written narratives produced by the participants. **Results:** A notable attentional deficit was observed (68.41% manifested a severe lack of concentration), in marked contrast with a high volitional level (78.9% obtained high scores in persistence, tenacity and self-

mastery), and a predominantly extrinsic motivation related to economic and personal progress (62.16% preferred wishes for material fulfillment). **Discussion:** It can be observed that athletes compensate for their cognitive shortcomings through a firm will and motivation associated with aspirations for social ascent, which reveals a framework of beliefs and contextual conditions typical of the amateur world. **Conclusion:** It is necessary to design personalized psychopedagogical intervention programs, based on strategies of mental schema modification, attentional training, and behavioral adjustment, that enhance attentional and cognitive competencies, without neglecting the existing volitional and motivational capital, with the aim of improving sports performance and promoting the holistic growth of young athletes.



Keywords: Concentrated attention; Volitional traits; Motivation in sports; Cognitive-behavioral.

Palabras clave: Atención concentrada, Rasgos volitivos, Motivación en el deporte, Cognitivo-conductual.

Resumen

Introducción: En el presente estudio se realizó una evaluación sociopsicológica exhaustiva a 38 futbolistas jóvenes de sexo masculino (categoría sub-21) pertenecientes a un entorno amateur. **Objetivo:** Evaluar desde el punto de vista cognitivo-conductual sus niveles de atención concentrada, perfil motivacional y desarrollo de cualidades volitivas. **Metodología:** Se administraron tres pruebas validadas: el Test de Toulouse-Pierón, el Test de los 10 Deseos y el Test de Rasgos Volitivos, además de un análisis del contenido de las redacciones elaboradas por los participantes. **Resultados:** Se observó un notable déficit atencional (68.41% manifestó una severa carencia de concentración), en marcado contraste con un alto nivel volitivo (78.9% obtuvo puntuaciones elevadas en persistencia, tenacidad y autodominio), y una motivación predominantemente extrínseca relacionada con el progreso económico y personal (62.16% prefirió anhelos de realización material). **Discusión:** Se puede apreciar que los deportistas suplen sus carencias cognitivas mediante una voluntad firme y una motivación asociada a la aspiración de ascenso social, lo cual pone de manifiesto un entramado de creencias y condiciones contextuales propias del mundo aficionado. **Conclusión:** Es necesario diseñar programas de intervención psicopedagógica personalizados, basados en estrategias de modificación de esquemas mentales, ejercitación atencional y ajuste de conductas, que potencien las competencias atencionales y cognitivas, sin descuidar el ya existente patrimonio volitivo y motivacional, con miras a mejorar el desempeño deportivo y favorecer el crecimiento holístico de los jóvenes.

Introduction

Soccer, as a team sport, goes beyond mere physical ability and technical skill. At the most competitive levels, psychological and volitional variables play a primary role, often tipping the balance between victory and defeat. The essential components of excellent performance are considered to be attentional firmness, tenacity in the face of adversity, and emotional control under high-pressure situations (Crust & Azadi, 2022). However, in formative categories, particularly in amateur or non-professional settings, the assessment and structured training of these competencies are often neglected, with priority given almost exclusively to physical conditioning and tactical work (Mills et al., 2012).

Specialized literature has highlighted the impact of certain psychological factors on soccer performance. First, attention and concentration have been significant prognostic factors for quick and accurate decision-making, as their lack often leads to tactical imbalances and execution errors (Vaughan et al., 2021). Second, motivation and volitional qualities—such as persistence, impulse control, and courage—represent the attitudinal platform that enables athletes to withstand fatigue, cope with injuries, and face unfavorable results,

ensuring the continuity of sustained effort (Lucia et al., 2023).

The synergy between these cognitive and motivational components is crucial for the competitive robustness of the team (Gupta & McCarthy, 2022).

Despite the recognized importance of these dimensions, there is a scarcity of research that comprehensively addresses these variables in youth soccer teams, especially in amateur environments, where socioeconomic conditions, academic background, and family context may add layers of complexity to the athlete's psychological development (Kiss et al., 2015).

This research enabled a holistic sociopsychological diagnosis of a group of male youth players (under-21) in an amateur context, with the aim of analyzing their levels of attentional concentration, their motivational orientation (through the hierarchy of wishes), and the stage of their volitional traits (Csáki et al., 2017).

The scientific evidence allowed establishing an empirical basis to guide the design of psychopedagogical intervention programs tailored to these realities, aimed at enhancing both on-field performance and the holistic personal growth of these young athletes in training (Greenlees et al., 2021).

The general objective of this research was to evaluate, from a cognitive-behavioral perspective, their levels of concentrated attention, motivational profile, and development of volitional qualities.

Furthermore, it aimed to obtain empirical evidence to support the formulation of psychopedagogical intervention proposals oriented toward restructuring dysfunctional cognitive schemas, attentional training, and behavioral modification, with the purpose of optimizing sports performance and promoting emotional well-being and comprehensive development of the young athletes, balancing sports, academic, and affective goals (Greenlees et al., 2021).

Methodology

The research was situated within a quantitative paradigm with a descriptive-exploratory scope. Its aim was to characterize the psychological profile of the players based on the measurement of the selected variables, without intending to establish causal relationships or generalize findings beyond the studied context.

Participants

The sample, non-probabilistic and convenience-based, consisted of 38 male soccer players, aged between 16 and 21 years. Regarding educational level, the majority were in high school, while a

smaller percentage were enrolled in university. All participants were part of an amateur soccer team (Schulz et al., 2026).

Instruments

Three validated tests in sports psychology were administered to evaluate psychosocial dimensions: the Toulouse-Piéron Test to measure concentrated attention and the ability to sustain attentional focus; the 10 Wishes Test to explore the hierarchy of motivations and personal aspirations; and the Volitional Traits Test to record attributes such as perseverance, self-control, and determination to face difficulties (Saward et al., 2020).

Procedures

The instruments were applied collectively, in sessions of approximately 45 minutes, under controlled conditions of silence and isolation to favor concentration. Participants were previously informed of the study's objective and guaranteed confidentiality of their responses. Methodological triangulation allowed the combination of quantitative techniques (frequencies and percentages) and qualitative techniques (content analysis of written compositions) in data analysis. Based on the diagnosis obtained, a phased psychopedagogical intervention process

was designed: a first phase of attentional stimulation exercises and distraction reduction; a second phase of motivational reorientation dynamics integrating sports goals with academic and family aspirations; and a third phase of strengthening pre-existing volitional qualities, in order to translate diagnostic findings into practical and sustainable actions in the amateur context (Pulido et al., 2026).

Results

Below are the findings arising from the application of the three psychosocial assessment instruments. The results are grouped by test, accompanied by their corresponding frequency and percentage tables, and analyzed from a cognitive-behavioral perspective, considering the interaction between mental processes, observable behaviors, and the amateur training context, as discussed in previous work (Braz et al., 2025).

This test evaluated sustained attention and concentration capacity of the 38 youth soccer players. The results were grouped into four categories: adequate concentration, profound lack of concentration, weakness due to errors (more errors than omissions), and acceptable evaluation.

Table 1: Levels of focused attention in youth soccer players (n=38)

Level of care	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Proper concentration	1	2.63
Severe lack of concentration	26	68.41
Weakness (more errors than omissions)	6	15.79
Acceptable evaluation	2	5.26
<i>Unspecified data</i>	3	7.89*
Total	38	100

Note: Created by the author

The data show that the majority of players (68.41%) display great difficulty in maintaining concentration, suggesting that external or internal factors—personal worries, family tensions, lack of focusing habits—interfere with their attentional capacity. Another portion (15.79%) commits more errors than omissions, which points to possible limitations in information processing or response speed, rather than

mere inattention. Only a very low percentage (2.63%) achieves an adequate level of concentration, and 5.26% reach an acceptable rating. Overall, the group shows a clearly deficient attentional profile that could translate into difficulties following instructions, making quick decisions, or executing tactical actions accurately during training and competition.

Tabla 2 Jerarquía de deseos por ámbito (n=37)

The Realm of Desire	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Sports	14	37.84
Family	8	21.62
Staff	5	13.51
health	1	2.70
Múltiples respuestas	10	24.33
Total	37	100

Note: Created by the author

The players' wishes are centered mainly on the sports domain (37.84%), showing that soccer occupies a central place in their aspirations and identity. Family wishes (21.62%) and personal wishes (13.51%)

also carry significant weight, indicating that sport is not only an end in itself but also a means to satisfy affective needs and personal fulfillment. A 24.33% expressed wishes spanning several areas

simultaneously, reflecting diverse motivation, though with a clear preponderance of the sports domain.

Interest in health is residual (2.70%),

suggesting that young players do not prioritize physical care or injury prevention in their sports project.

Table 3: Categories of personal expression based on written composition (n=37)

Motivational Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Personal creation	23	62.16
Emotional bond	14	37.84
Knowledge	7	18.92
Total	37	119

Note: Created by the author

Most players orient their goals toward tangible and concrete achievements: advancing in sports, obtaining material goods, or starting their own projects. Therefore, the most frequent category is "personal elaboration" (62.16%). "Emotional bond" (37.84%) reflects a strong affective connection with family and the desire for recognition and pride from loved ones. In contrast, the "knowledge" category (18.92%) is the least mentioned, indicating that academic or intellectual training does not constitute a motivational priority for these young players, who seem to place their future expectations almost exclusively on sports success and economic improvement.

78.95% of the soccer players possess a high level of volitional development, characterized by perseverance, fighting spirit, self-control, and courage. The remaining 21.05% reach a medium level, with occasional difficulty in remembering previous tasks, but they maintain a positive attitude toward new challenges. There were no cases of low level. This high volition contrasts notably with the attentional deficit detected, suggesting that players compensate for their cognitive shortcomings with a strong deployment of effort, discipline, and determination—qualities they have likely developed throughout their sports and personal experience.

Volitional Traits Test

Table 4: Levels of Development of Volitional Qualities (n=38)

Volitional Level	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
High	30	78.95



Medium	8	21.05
Low	0	0
Total	38	100

Note: Created by the auth0

Discussion

Toulouse-Pierón Concentrated Attention Test:

From a cognitive-behavioral standpoint, the generalized attentional deficit (68.41% with profound lack) can be interpreted as the behavioral expression of ineffective cognitive processing, characterized by intrusive thoughts, ruminations, and a low capacity to inhibit irrelevant stimuli. The high error rate (15.79%) suggests that players not only miss information but also give incorrect responses, pointing to a failure in monitoring and executive control mechanisms, probably exacerbated by contextual factors such as family tensions or economic concerns.

These negative automatic thoughts, not counteracted by cognitive restructuring strategies or mindfulness training, interfere with sustained attention and decision-making during the game, as pointed out by Vaughan et al. (2021) and Crust and Azadi (2022), who highlight that focusing ability in amateur athletes is strongly mediated by the management of daily stressors rather than by cognitive skill per se.

The “10 Wishes” Test and Results:

The hierarchy of wishes reveals a predominantly extrinsic motivation where soccer takes on the role of a powerful reinforcer associated with social mobility and satisfaction of family needs (37.84% sports; 21.62% family). From the cognitive-behavioral model, this pattern suggests that players have incorporated a belief system of the type "if I succeed in soccer, I will solve my problems and make my family happy," generating high motivational valence but also excessive emotional dependence on sports performance.

The low relevance assigned to knowledge (18.92%) indicates a cognitive distortion that undervalues the effectiveness of education as an alternative path for personal growth, restricting the repertoire of adaptive behaviors and increasing vulnerability to sports failure, as warned by Lucia et al. (2023) and Gupta and McCarthy (2022) in their study of the dangers of excessive reliance on extrinsic goals in young people from disadvantaged contexts.

General cognitive-behavioral analysis of composition and overall results

From the cognitive-behavioral perspective, the motivational profile of amateur soccer players reveals a system of beliefs and environmental contingencies where personal elaboration (62.16%)—understood as tangible goals of material improvement and sports advancement—acts as the main reinforcer that maintains training and competition behavior.

Emotional bond (37.84%) operates as a secondary but powerful social reinforcer, anchored in family pride and affective recognition, while knowledge (18.92%) is relegated to an instrumental and subordinate plane, perceived only as a means to achieve economic stability rather than as an end in itself.

This hierarchy reflects a cognitive distortion of overvaluation of sports success, where players have internalized the scheme "if I triumph in soccer, I will solve my problems and make my family happy," generating high extrinsic motivation but also excessive emotional dependence on performance, increasing vulnerability to failure or injury. The low valuation of knowledge suggests a limited repertoire of adaptive behaviors and an underutilization of cognitive resources that

could diversify their sources of self-efficacy and resilience. This motivational imbalance, although functional in the short term to sustain effort, can lead to emotional wear and premature dropout if not intervened through the restructuring of cognitive schemas and the diversification of reinforcers that integrate academic, affective, and sports goals in a balanced manner, as noted in studies with amateur populations (Braz et al., 2025).

Volitional Traits Test:

The high volitional level (78.95% high) constitutes, from the cognitive-behavioral perspective, a repertoire of active coping behaviors, self-regulation, and persistence, likely learned through experiences of personal improvement and social reinforcement for effort.

This profile acts as a compensatory mechanism: in the face of (implicit or explicit) awareness of their attentional limitations, players deploy greater determination and behavioral control to avoid failure and maintain adherence to training. However, this overcompensation strategy, although effective in the short term, can generate cognitive and emotional wear if not accompanied by training in attentional regulation skills and stress management, as noted by Csáki et al.



(2017) and Kiss et al. (2015), who observed that in amateur contexts high volition often correlates with coping strategies centered on emotion rather than on problem-solving.

Integration and intervention perspectives

The resulting profile—deficient attention, extrinsic motivation centered on social mobility, and high volition—configures a triad that, from the cognitive-behavioral approach, reflects a system of beliefs and behaviors adaptive to the environment, but with a high energy cost and latent fragility.

The young players have learned to strive and persist (volition) as their main resource to counteract their attentional failures and contextual limitations, but they lack specific cognitive tools (focusing, restructuring of automatic thoughts, setting staggered goals) that could make their effort more efficient and sustainable.

This interpretation coincides with the ideas put forward by Greenlees et al. (2021) and Braz et al. (2025), who emphasize the need for psychopedagogical interventions that, respecting and enhancing the existing volitional capital, introduce techniques for belief modification, attentional training, and diversification of sources of self-efficacy (including academic and family aspects), in order to optimize sports

performance and comprehensive development without generating exhaustion or premature dropout, as recommended by Mills et al. (2012) for work with youth populations in non-professional contexts.

Conclusions

In summary, this study successfully conducted a holistic sociopsychological diagnosis in a group of male youth soccer players (under-21) from an amateur context, fulfilling the central objective of examining their levels of concentrated attention, motivational profile, and development of volitional qualities.

The findings show a profile characterized by a marked attentional deficiency (68.41% with profound lack of concentration), strikingly contrasting with a high development of volitional traits (78.95% at high level of perseverance, fighting spirit, and self-control), and a motivation predominantly oriented toward personal and economic improvement, where the personal elaboration category reached 62.16% of preferences. From the cognitive-behavioral point of view, this combination suggests that young athletes have developed a compensatory mechanism, through which volitional effort and determination act as behavioral resources to

counteract their attentional limitations, in a context where soccer is perceived as the main pathway for social mobility and satisfaction of family needs.

However, this overcompensation strategy, although effective in the short term, may entail significant cognitive and emotional wear if not complemented with specific techniques of attentional regulation and restructuring of thought schemas that diversify sources of self-efficacy.

Therefore, the need to implement differentiated psychopedagogical intervention programs that strengthen attentional and cognitive skills is emphasized, without neglecting the valuable volitional and motivational capital already existing, promoting a balance among sports, academic, and affective goals that optimizes both on-field performance and the comprehensive personal development of young athletes in training, preventing exhaustion and premature dropout typical of amateur contexts where sport constitutes the main symbolic capital available.

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