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# The Effect of Small Side Games Training with Different Field Sizes on Improving Dribbling Skills in 15-Year-Old Football Players

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## Abstract

This study aims to analyze the effect of small-sided games training with different field sizes on the dribbling skills of 15-year-old soccer athletes. The study used a quantitative approach with a pretest–posttest control group experimental design. The study subjects were 20 15-year-old soccer athletes who were randomly divided into an experimental group and a control group with an equal number. The experimental group was given small-sided games training with varying field sizes, while the control group underwent small-sided games training without varying field sizes. Dribbling skills were measured using a zig-zag dribbling test at the pretest and posttest stages. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics as well as prerequisite tests and independent t-tests. The results showed that small-sided games training with different field sizes provided more effective dribbling skill improvements than training without varying field sizes. Variations in field sizes created more diverse technical and situational demands, thus encouraging more optimal adaptation of ball control, agility, and player decision-making. These findings confirm that field size adjustment is an important factor in the application of small-sided games in the development of adolescent soccer athletes.

## How to Cite

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## INTRODUCTION

Football is a sport that requires optimal mastery of basic technical skills to support playing performance, one of which is dribbling skills (Bangsbo et al., 2015; Luxbacher, 2014). Dribbling plays an important role in maintaining possession of the ball, passing opponents, and creating attacking opportunities in various game situations (Ali, 2011; Williams & Hodges, 2019). In the development phase of adolescent athletes, dribbling skill development needs to be carried out through training methods that are appropriate to the characteristics of the athlete›s physical, motoric, and cognitive development (Bompa & Buzzichelli, 2019; Malina et al., 2015).

One of the training methods that is widely applied in modern football coaching is small-sided games, which is a form of game that is modified by reducing the number of players and adjusting the size of the field (Clemente, 2016; Hill-Haas, 2018). Small-sided games can increase the frequency of ball touches, the intensity of the game, and the active involvement of players during the training process (Clemente, 2020; Sarmento, 2018). In addition, small-sided games provide a training context that resembles a match situation, making them effective in improving young players› technical and decision-making skills (Davids, 2017; Ometto, 2018).

However, the implementation of small-sided games in coaching practice often does not take into account the optimal variation in field size (Clemente, 2020; Praça, 2021). The use of a relatively fixed field size has the potential to limit training stimulus, especially in the development of dribbling skills which are greatly influenced by playing space and opponent pressure (Gonçalves, 2020; Sarmento, 2018). The variation in field size in small-sided games is believed to create different technical and tactical demands, thus encouraging a more comprehensive adaptation of dribbling skills (Ferreira-Ruiz et al., 2022; Setyawan et al., 2023).

Previous research generally shows that small-sided games are effective in improving general soccer playing skills, both from a technical and physical aspect (Mubarok & Mudzakir, 2020). However, studies that specifically discuss the influence of differences in field size in small-sided games on the dribbling skills of adolescent athletes are still relatively limited, especially in the context of developing 15-year-old athletes (Hamdani et al., 2022). In addition, some studies have not directly compared the effectiveness of small-sided games training with and without varying field sizes on improving dribbling skills (Bintang Abrori et al., 2023).

Based on these problems, the novelty of this research lies in the study of the influence of small-sided games training with different field sizes on improving the dribbling skills of 15-year-old soccer athletes (Ferreira-Ruiz et al., 2022). This study not only confirms the effectiveness of small-sided games as a training method, but also emphasizes the importance of field size and arrangement as a strategic factor in designing more effective and contextual dribbling technique training (Davids, 2017). The results of this study are expected to provide practical contributions for coaches in developing training programs that are appropriate to the development needs of adolescent soccer athletes (Malina et al., 2015).

## METHOD

This study uses a quantitative approach with a pretest–posttest control group experimental design to test the effect of small-sided games training with different field sizes on the dribbling skills of 15-year-old soccer athletes (Audi Yahya & Arifin, 2022). The research subjects were 20 soccer athletes who were selected purposively according to the research criteria, then randomly divided into an experimental group and a control group with equal numbers (Sugiyono, 2020).

The experimental group was given small-sided games training with variations in field size, while the control group was given small-sided games training without variations in field size during the training period that had been determined according to the regular training schedule (Clemente, 2016; Hill-Haas, 2018). The dribbling skill measurement instrument was carried out through a zig-zag dribbling test at the pretest and posttest stages (Fauzi, 2009). then the data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, normality tests, homogeneity tests, and independent t-tests to determine differences in results between groups (Fadluloh et al., 2024).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Shows that in the experimental group, the pretest score had a minimum of 9.44, a maximum of 12.50, and an average of 11.06, indicating that the athletes' initial dribbling ability was still relatively low due to the longer travel time. After being given the small-sided games training treatment, the posttest score showed a minimum of 8.00, a maximum of 9.83, and an average of 9.03, which means there was an increase in dribbling skills as indicated by faster travel time.

In the control group, the pretest score had a minimum of 9.44, a maximum of 12.32, and an average of 10.93, while the posttest score had a minimum of 8.93, a maximum of 11.96, and an average of 10.25. The decrease in the average score indicates an increase in dribbling ability, but the increase was not as significant as in the experimental group.

The results of the normality test showed that all data were normally distributed, with Shapiro–Wilk significance values in the pretest and posttest of the experimental group of 0.256 and 0.143, respectively, and in the control group of 0.328 and 0.543 (Sig. > 0.05).

The homogeneity of variance test shows a significance value Based on Mean of 0.092 (Sig. > 0.05), so that the data of both groups is declared homogeneous.

The independent t-test results showed a significance value of 0.004 ($p < 0.05$), indicating a significant difference between the experimental and control groups after treatment. The average difference of -1.21 indicates that the experimental group had a faster dribbling time than the control group. Thus, small-sided games training with different field sizes has proven effective in improving the dribbling skills of 15-year-old soccer athletes.

The results of this study indicate that small-sided games training with varying field sizes can improve the dribbling skills of 15-year-old soccer athletes more effectively than training without varying field sizes. These findings reinforce the view that modifying the playing space in small-sided games plays a crucial role in optimizing the development of young players' fundamental technical skills.

The implementation of small-sided games with varying pitch sizes creates different technical and tactical demands for players. Narrower pitches encourage players to improve ball control, agility, and quick decision-making skills under pressure from opponents, while larger pitches provide opportunities to develop dribbling speed and spatial utilization. These varied training conditions allow players to adapt to various game situations, thus developing dribbling skills more comprehensively (Ferreira-Ruiz et al., 2022).

This finding is in line with previous research which stated that small-sided games are effective in improving basic football technical skills because they provide a high frequency of ball touches, increased game intensity, and a training context that is close to a real match situation (Bintang Abrori et al., 2023; Mubarok & Mudzakir, 2020). In addition, small-sided games also contribute to improving players' motor skills, coordination, and decision-making, which are important components of dribbling skills (Hamdani et al., 2022; Irfan et al., 2020).

Although the control group also showed improvement in dribbling skills, the improvement was relatively limited. This indicates that small-sided games training without varying court sizes does not provide the optimal training stimulus to encourage technique adaptation and maximize spatial understanding. Therefore, varying court sizes is a crucial supporting factor in increasing the effectiveness of small-sided games, particularly during the development phase of adolescent athletes.

Overall, the results of this study not only reinforce previous findings regarding the effectiveness of small-sided games, but also emphasize that field layout and variation are strategic elements in designing training programs. Therefore, small-sided games training with varying field sizes can be recommended as a practical and effective training approach for improving the dribbling skills of 15-year-old soccer athletes.

However, this study found that differences in players' motivation, attendance consistency, and initial skill levels may influence training outcomes. In addition, the small sample size, short training duration, and focus solely on dribbling skills represent limitations that may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Future research is suggested to involve larger samples, longer intervention periods, and different age groups, as well as to examine the impact of field size variation on other technical, tactical, physical, and psychological aspects of soccer performance.

## CONCLUSION

Small-sided games with varying field sizes have been shown to be more effective in improving dribbling skills in 15-year-old soccer athletes than training without varying field sizes. The variety of playing space in small-sided games provides optimal training stimulus for mastering techniques and adapting to game situations, making it worthy of recommendation as a training method for developing adolescent soccer players.

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