

## Original Article Research

**Formation of Football Talents in the Education System of Germany**

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to examine the key aspects of the talent development process in youth football within the educational system of Germany. Germany is renowned for its high educational standards and remarkable achievements of its athletes on the international stage. In order to accomplish this objective, a comprehensive set of interconnected methods, including analysis, synthesis, and generalization of scientific information pertaining to the specific issue, as well as educational and methodological literature and internet sources, were employed. The study reveals that a successful football career is the outcome of the interaction between two pedagogical systems: one that reflects an individual's educational endeavors and the other which relates to their sporting accomplishments. The step-by-step construction of the educational and sports systems, their common orientation, which enables constant multifaceted control and support of each young talent, optimally coordinates all areas of his life, promotes further harmonious development. It has been proven that the German model provides comprehensive support of the chosen professional path, the opportunity to study in the institutions that correspond to the preferences, aspirations and abilities of the individual.

**Keywords:** Education system, sports training, football, young talents

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Continuous geopolitical shifts, which are still taking place in the world today, cause drastic changes in various aspects of life in many countries, primarily in the states with developing economies. It is obvious that in these countries it is still necessary to review the functioning of all social institutions and structures, including the education system, laying a reliable foundation for the development of the state, raising the standard of living of the population, and improving health and well-being of people. At the same time, the quality and intensity of modernization of education improves significantly in case it is carried out taking into account the best world experience, the most modern achievements and developments (Shkarlet, 2022).

The education system of Germany can be viewed as a potential model that upholds high educational standards and stands out for its diverse range of educational institutions. It fosters an environment conducive to the holistic development of individuals by considering their interests, abilities, and needs. This system aims to create comfortable and favorable conditions that support the overall growth of each individual within the educational framework. The assets and experience of this European country testify to a highly effective education system, which not only adequately solves its own tasks and contributes to the rapid adaptation of young people to the today's realities, increasing their flexibility and mobility, but also reflects the main modern trends in education, i.e. "technological trends in teaching and learning, soft skills training: a major trend in higher education, student trend: decreasing attention spans, facilitating learning versus teaching, life-long learning trend" (Debétaz, 2022). This directly applies to the field of sports, where the full realization of the personality and the achievement of the planned results require many years of purposeful training, which begins in childhood and continues throughout the entire period of compulsory education.

Today, it is difficult to imagine a turbulent modern life without sports, and in particular, without football, the most widespread and most beloved game of all times and peoples. After all, football is art and struggle, economy and politics, history and future, personality and dream. In the scientific and educational realm, football is widely regarded as a universal catalyst for the comprehensive and harmonious development of an individual's personality. Its value lies in its capacity for active and simultaneous influence on both the psychophysiological and motor domains of human beings (Light & Harvey, 2019; Naumchuk, 2019; Serra-Olivares, 2018). Football's pedagogical potential is closely linked to the spiritual, moral, and physical enhancement of individuals, as well as the cultivation of humanistic and value-based orientations (Araújo & Davids, 2016; Light et al., 2015; Pill, 2020).

The specifics of football, like any other game, is that it, based on the individual's universal need for self-realization, arises from the contradiction between the complexity of the social system and the insufficient subject's level of potential to enter its sphere (Ilyasov, 2006). It is quite natural that as soon as a young person connects his future with this sport and starts preparing to conquer football peaks, he needs fundamental help and support, the creation of proper conditions for achieving the planned goals (read the resolution of the above contradiction), which can only be provided by a certain multi-level system. Since we are talking about children and teenagers, i.e. football players of school age, and the process itself is complex and multifaceted, it is appropriate to consider this problem in the context of the functioning of not one, but two pedagogical systems – educational and sports. The pedagogical system reflects the results of a young person's educational activities, and the sports one is already connected with his sports

achievements. These two systems complement and reinforce each other. While each system has its own sphere of influence in the formation of young football players, the implementation of both systems is ultimately geared towards the holistic and harmonious development of the individual's personality.

Within the context of comprehensively understanding football as a potent pedagogical tool, the pursuit of new and optimal approaches to foster the harmonious development of football talents and enable their full potential and personal self-realization in both educational and sports endeavors emerges as a pressing scientific issue. Resolving this challenge entails identifying existing effective models that can serve as valuable guides in the creation and enhancement of diverse pedagogical systems. By exploring and refining such models, we can pave the way for the advancement and continuous improvement of the holistic development of football talents, providing them with the necessary support and guidance for their journey towards success.

The objective of this article is to share the findings of a research study focused on the formation process of young football talents within the education system of Germany. Addressing this research objective necessitated an exploration of the structure of the German education system, an examination of the content and characteristics of educational and training institutions involved in the purposeful development of young football players, and an investigation into the nature of support provided to children and youth in their journey towards professional and sports development.

## **2. METHOD**

The study was conducted in accordance with a predefined research plan of the Department of Theoretical Foundations and Methods of Physical Education in Ternopil Volodymyr Hnatiuk National Pedagogical University on the topic: "Professional and pedagogical training of future specialists for the formation of schoolchildren's physical culture" (State registration number: 0120U103906).

### **2.1 Participants**

Within the research, the category of students in educational institutions who actively participate in football was examined. The age range of young football players aligned with the criteria set by the program for the promotion of young talents in Germany, spanning from 6-7 to 18-19 years old. The research encompassed both boys and girls.

### **2.2 Research Design**

To accomplish the task, a combination of interconnected methods was employed, including analysis, synthesis, and generalization of scientific information pertaining to the research problem. The study relied on a thorough review of educational and methodological literature, as well as relevant online sources.

The research plan encompassed several key steps. Initially, the foundational aspects of the education system in Germany were examined. Subsequently, the focus shifted towards investigating the organizational and pedagogical conditions surrounding the sports training of young football players. This involved exploring the specific requirements and distinctive features of the program designed to foster the development and promotion of young football talents.

### 2.3 Procedures

Data collection was conducted in a manner that involved gathering information on key issues from multiple sources. Data from various printed publications were collected and compared with information obtained from other sources, including relevant web portals. This process of verification and cross-referencing aided in thoroughly examining the problem and effectively accomplishing our research objectives.

### 2.4 Data Analysis

All scientific information utilized in this study was obtained from publicly available sources such as books, journal articles, dissertations, conference materials, and reports that address the research problem. We also referenced information from educational portals in Germany and other European Union countries, the German Football Association (DFB), football academies, and elite schools.

## 3. RESULTS

The analysis of the modern German education system shows that the federal states with their minor differences are responsible for educational policy in the country. In general, according to B. Fink (2021), it is customary in Germany to distinguish five levels of education that accompany a person throughout his life: primary level – *Primarbereich*, incomplete secondary education – *Sekundarbereich I*, upper secondary education – *Sekundarbereich II* and higher education, which is two-level and consists of tertiary – *Tertiärbereich* and quaternary sectors – *Quartärbereich*.

The first level corresponds to primary school, which is compulsory for all children aged 6-7 (Edelstein, 2013). Primary education in Germany lasts 4 years, and only children in Berlin and Brandenburg attend these schools for 6 years. In most federal states, during the first two years of education, pupils are not divided into classes and are not evaluated. A general description of his/her performance where the pupil's strengths and weaknesses are noted during the study of separate subjects is compiled for each child.

After completing primary school, pupils are transferred to secondary comprehensive schools of the first level – *Sekundarbereich I*. Children and their parents choose the type of the educational institution according to pupils' preferences, interests and abilities. It can be the main, real, general, special school or gymnasium, which has, as a rule, 6 grades. Already at the first stage of education in such a school or gymnasium, the process of professional orientation begins, and the pupil's professional future depends on his/her choice: in which educational institution he will receive professional education, whether the pupil will have the opportunity to study at a higher school, etc. (Köller et al., 2019).

In general, secondary education at the first stage is identified with the "orientation phase" of schoolchildren's training, where each pupil decides on further professional intentions, including sports activities. It is then continued for another three years at the next level of *Sekundarbereich II* – in vocational schools and gymnasiums, specialized vocational, special and additional schools, secondary special vocational educational institutions, as well as schools providing one-year pre-vocational training or one-year basic vocational training (Reintjes et al., 2021). The necessary requirement for admission here is a certificate of secondary education with the right to attend senior secondary school. In the compulsory education system of Germany, this

level is the final one, and the professional training process itself ends with the final Abitur examination.

The tertiary sector of higher education involves obtaining an academic degree at a university, vocational or technical academy and equivalent institutions of higher education, i.e. institutions under the control of the federal states (with the exception of a few private, in particular church and military institutions of higher education of the Bundeswehr). Vocational and technical academies play a crucial role in offering a blend of theoretical and practical components in professional training through dual study courses (Hippach-Schneider, 2017). This particular sector of higher education enables students to pursue internationally recognized and comparable bachelor's and master's degrees.

The fifth level of the German education system – the quaternary sector includes all forms of further and additional education. They are aimed at continuing or resuming organized training after passing previous levels of education of different durations. Important components here are informal education and formal professional development, which are implemented in the general, professional and political spheres (Dreyer, 2011). In general, individuals who have not yet retired have the opportunity to continue their professional or academic education.

The education systems in Austria and Switzerland, European, mainly German-speaking countries, are very similar to the German one. The main differences between the educational structures of these countries and the German one lie in the separation of another level of education – primary one, which precedes elementary, as well as in the one-level structure of higher education (Structure of the education system in Austria, 2022; EuroEducation.net, 2022). The primary level of education in Austria and Switzerland is associated with the functioning of preschool institutions, such as nurseries, kindergartens, after-school care centers and covers the activities of nannies and educators in children's groups and playgroups. Since pre-school education is not compulsory in these countries, some federal states and cantons encourage kindergarten attendance before primary school, which stimulates children's development and social skills and is a good way for foreign children to learn the language (Bhaumik, 2022).

The promotion and development of young football talents in Germany is facilitated through a strong collaboration between various key entities. This includes close cooperation among the German Football Association (DFB), the German Football League (DFL), regional associations, clubs, training centres, and other partner institutions in competitive sports, such as the Deutsche Sporthilfe Foundation. Educational and training centres, elite football schools, coach training bases and other structures successfully interact with one another in accordance with the program of promoting young talents, which was launched in the 2002/2003 season. Its implementation made it possible to provide targeted support to young athletes. The prospective goal of the program was to increase the potential of future competitive players for teams of the German Football Association, as well as professional and amateur top-level football clubs. Achieving this goal involves solving a set of objectives, the main of which are:

- high-quality selection and diverse promotion of as many football talents as possible in each region;
- additional comprehensive individual support of talented players as a supplement to their club educational and training classes;
- stimulation of motivation, provision of practical advice on purposeful sports training

and self-education of talented football players;

- proper training, methodical and scientific and information support for coaches of regional clubs;

- conducting recurrent events of various types regarding the professional development of football specialists.

The program for the promotion of young talents is an important component of their targeted support in the overall structure of the training of highly-qualified football players. It covers 366 football bases throughout Germany, which form a single nationwide network for intensive monitoring and support of young players (GFA, 2022a). About 1,300 qualified coaches perform a thorough analysis of the educational and sports results of regional talents and optimal individual support. 29 coordinators ensure effective cooperation and interaction between all training centers, clubs, regional associations, and the German Football Association. (GFA, 2022a).

The implementation of the program involves high-quality cooperation of its institutions at every level of support for young talents (Ivegesh et al., 2022). The interaction and coordination of all participants in this purposeful process with the ordering and detailing of various aspects of activity is ensured on the basis of the following pedagogical rules:

- the process of sports training involves not only football training, but also personality development;

- young talents are identified and supported at all stages of education and upbringing;

- training activities are balanced with the game;

- purposeful influence is integrated into each player's sports training, taking into careful consideration the sensitive periods.;

- all types of activities, primarily educational and sports, are cyclical and coordinated.

The first level of support for young talents in German football is related to the entire spectrum of work with children regarding their sports development on the basis of clubs. It also includes the formation of a connection between the clubs' activities and the training of the best athletes in educational and training centers, elite football schools and in regional associations.

For example, training at the base of the German Football Association provides that talented players in the age group U11 and above can attend classes at the top level once a week as an additional club training. That is how the necessary conditions for training and players' competitive activities in mixed teams are created. Promising young players "benefit" from an accelerated transition to the next level of football education. The main feature of training is individual support for each individual talent. Junior boys receive such assistance up to U15 at the bases of the German Football Association, junior girls can use this right up to U16 (Schneise, 2009).

The program's motivational strategy focuses on ensuring that every player is closely monitored by a regional selector, with the aim of facilitating substantial progress through targeted support, individualized training, and coaching. Regardless of the region in Germany where a young football player currently resides and plays, the program aims to make the intended goals tangible and attainable for each individual. This approach serves as a powerful

motivator for ambitious individuals.

The activities of educational and training centres align with the second level of support for young talents. According to the licensing statute, 36 clubs of the top league of the German football championship – the Bundesliga and the second Bundesliga – are obliged to maintain training centres for young talents in accordance with the specified criteria. Clubs in the Third Football League and regional leagues also have the right to establish such training centres (Wieschemann, 2016). Today, there are 56 training centres in Germany and more clubs are seeking to fulfil the licensing requirements in order to create their own training centres, which act as a leading indicator of the quality of work with children and youth.

Improving the quality of training of young, promising players in German football is largely the result of the intensive and carefully balanced work of training centers. The quality management of educational and training centers currently includes 8 areas in which the team of one or another center works, providing the framework requirements for the functioning of clubs and creating the necessary conditions for supporting young talents, in particular: 1) licensing; 2) individual analysis; 3) education, prevention and accommodation of players; 4) professional development and service portals; 5) innovations and new developments; 6) incentives and rewards; 7) communication; 8) authorities and expert groups.

*Licensing* ensures that clubs comply with the framework conditions for the activity of educational and training centres. According to the affiliation of clubs to a certain league, adapted norms serve as a guarantee of the quality of the functioning of educational and training centres and form the basis for stimulating pupils. *Individual analysis* is aimed at the most open and profitable exchange of players between clubs and associations. The German Football Association and the German Football League “see themselves” as the supervisors and supporters of the clubs in their further development. Comprehensive systems such as the "Elite School of Football" or direct cooperation agreements between clubs and educational institutions with dual training provide *education, prevention, and accommodation services*. The players and employees of training centres always pay attention to important topics related to child protection, game manipulation, gambling addiction, doping, racism, discrimination, etc. Accommodation of players in each football school is carried out in accordance with the established rules. Systematic conducting of *training activities* for target groups in various fields additionally creates a platform for inter-club exchange, activates cooperation between experts of educational and training centres. *The service portals* of clubs form a central base of knowledge and information from all educational and training centres and are available to their employees. *Innovations and new developments* are subject to the fastest possible recognition and implementation with the accelerated transfer of this information to educational and training centres. *Incentives and rewards* should ensure that clubs increasingly invest in their own training centres. *Communication* with the younger generation is fixed with the help of constant, regular and recognizable communication in the public perception with the use of qualitatively supportive elements, such as a personal logo. *Authorities and expert groups*: The German Football League Commission is the central body that manages training centres as an advisory expert group to the German Football League Presidium, consisting of nine representatives from the club, the German Football League and the German Football Association.

Being an important sports coordination point for young regional talents, educational and training centres contribute to their sports development, help pupils to reveal their abilities and

opportunities, and open the prospect of becoming professional players. A highly professional environment enables high-quality training of talented young players for further improvement in football.

The third level of support for young talents primarily comes from elite football schools. These institutions effectively assist young talents in overcoming the dual challenge of balancing professional training with demanding and intense sports activities. By creating favourable conditions for personal and professional growth, along with providing many opportunities to pursue a football career, these schools lay a solid and reliable foundation for shaping the future of individuals.

Elite football schools coordinate the time- and workload-intensive sports requirements with school or professional training (dual career planning). Being uncertain about football prospects, pupils always have all the opportunities to build a professional career (Emrich et al., 2009). In addition to significant training and competitive regimes in their clubs, players receive additional workloads in tournaments with teams from regional associations and the German Football Association. In order to solve this problem and overcome the constant “twine” between school and football in the best way, 38 elite football schools in Germany have formed a nationwide network of elite institutions for education and promotion of football talents.

It should be noted that the indicated number of elite schools has now increased to 11 institutions that train and develop female football talents (GFA, 2022b). Since the clubs of the women’s federal leagues are in no way connected with their own training centers for boys, the elite football schools for girls take over their functions together with regional associations.

Important principles of activity of elite sport schools are such principles as:

- preserving and strengthening the health of schoolchildren with the help of mass sports, physical education and other social activities;
- formation of students’ positive motivation, their personal qualities and soft skills;
- purposeful support of sports improvement with simultaneous enhancing school and professional training;
- active involvement of schoolchildren in all educational processes, development of their creativity and initiative;
- ensuring constant comprehensive control of various aspects of the pedagogical process, systematic adjustment of the individual development plan of each personality.

The implementation of these principles to a large extent determines the peculiarities of the organization of pupils’ sports training:

- creating an optimal educational, and sports environment for each student;
- individual assistance to young talents in their sports growth and improvement through various support programs;
- rational planning of the training process with the pupils’ involvement in group classes of higher sports qualification;
- coordination of educational, upbringing, health-improving tasks with the content of sports training, compliance of the training process with the specific requirements of competitive



activity;

- purposeful use of special means and methods for the formation and development of various aspects of sports readiness, as well as compensation for the coordination pupils' deficit;

- ensuring the continuity and succession of the pedagogical process, flexible control terms.

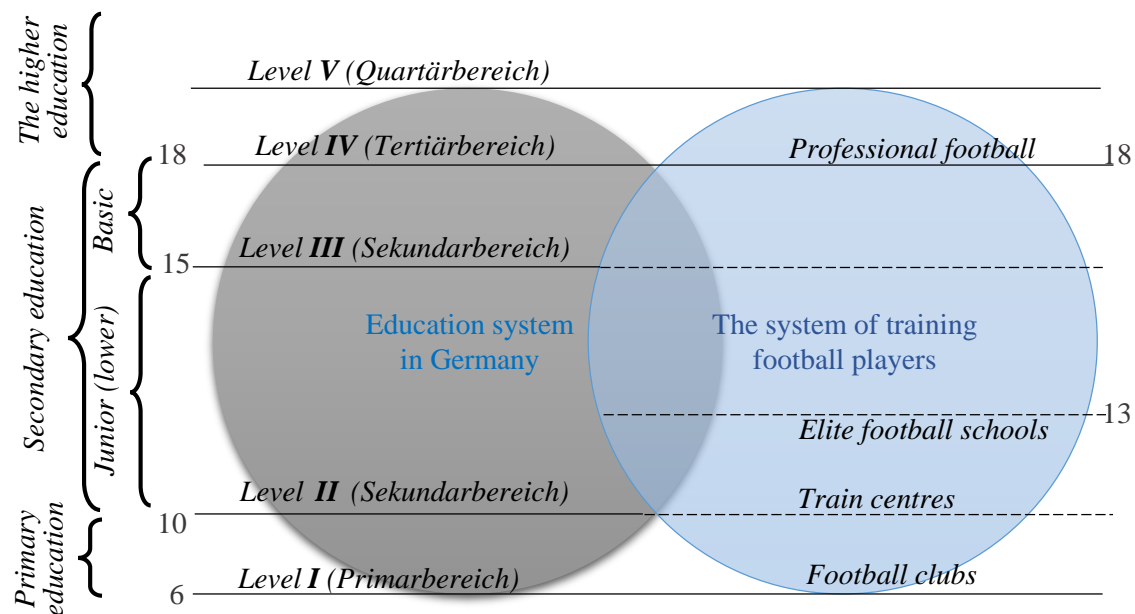
#### 4. DISCUSSIONS

Thus, the education system in Germany is a complex entity with an open integrative structure. It includes several educational levels with a variety of educational institutions where an individual can obtain relevant educational qualifications. Within the system, secondary education is compulsory and typically spans from 10-12 to 18-19 years of age. If we project the specified age period on the model-scheme of multi-year training of athletes proposed by V. Platonov (2005), it will fully correspond to the previous basic and specialized basic stages of the process of sports training, which ensure the formation of a stable interest in purposeful sports improvement, the development of versatile physical body capabilities, mastering motor actions of the chosen sports specialization, forming the necessary functional, potential and psychological characteristics, i.e. all the necessary prerequisites are created for achieving the planned level of sports mastery in the future.

Secondary school education is significant. This period is of great value on the way to the top football (Naumchuk, 2018; Williams & Reilly, 2000), which is clearly demonstrated in Figure 1. In the age range of secondary education, the interaction of two pedagogical systems, educational and sports training, is integrated with the aim of the comprehensive and harmonious development of a young football player's personality and proves to be absolutely natural and the most effective.

**Figure 1.**

*Pedagogical systems that ensure the formation of football talents in Germany.*



In Germany, football academies and elite schools are established and effectively operate in order to provide optimal conditions for the development of talented youth and to effectively balance school education with sports training (Wieschemann, 2016). These institutions are closely interconnected and form a comprehensive system. Most elite sports institutions in Germany are designed as complex systems, incorporating different types of schools, educational and training centers, regional football associations, and clubs (BFA, 2022; Warubi-Sports, 2022). Such a system ensures optimal coordination of all its structural components and directions of their functioning, which accompany the young football talent and contribute to his development. The proper functioning of the specified network enables constant multifaceted monitoring and support of each young talent, optimally coordinates all directions of his life activities, promotes harmonious development of the personality (Naglo, 2020).

The functioning and proper interaction of football academies and elite schools ensures young players' individual educational and sports needs. The comprehensive assistance and services of the comprehensive sports institutions for the parallel promotion of sports and academic careers are implemented through additional educational blocks in morning classes, as well as in homework support, private lessons, flexible exam dates, etc. (Wieschemann, 2016). Simultaneously, special mechanisms are employed to manage and coordinate the dual academic load imposed by the educational and sports requirements for students (Eichendorff School, 2022). These mechanisms facilitate the individualization and differentiation of the pedagogical process, ensuring precise influence on each individual. By integrating sports goals and tasks into the broader pedagogical concept, the simultaneous development of students' social, academic, sports, and professional qualities is fostered.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

The education system in Germany is a complex entity with an open integrative structure. It includes several educational levels with various educational institutions where you can get the relevant educational qualifications and acquire skills in football. Thanks to the current educational model, pupils, starting from the primary level, have the opportunity to choose their sports path and study in schools of the type that corresponds to their preferences, aspirations and abilities.

The study of the process of formation of football talents requires a holistic approach, since a football player's successful career is the result of the interaction of at least two pedagogical systems, one of which reflects the results of the pupils' educational activities, and the other is related to their sports achievements.

To meet the demands of professional football, the training foundation for future players emphasizes systematic, purposeful, and innovative support for young talents within a conducive sports environment, primarily through football academies and elite schools. The German program for fostering young football talents is integrated with the educational process and aims to provide comprehensive assistance to each student, considering their individual characteristics and needs, with the ultimate goal of achieving optimal results in sports training.

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