

INPLASY2025100104
doi: 10.37766/inplasy2025.10.0104
Received: 26 October 2025
Published: 26 October 2025

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ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Support - None.

Review Stage at time of this submission - Piloting of the study selection process.

Conflicts of interest - None declared.

INPLASY registration number: INPLASY2025100104

Amendments - This protocol was registered with the International Platform of Registered Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Protocols (INPLASY) on 26 October 2025 and was last updated on 26 October 2025.

INTRODUCTION

Review question / Objective Main Objective: To systematically review and synthesize existing research on football (soccer) coach decision-making processes, identifying key frameworks, methodologies, influencing factors, and research gaps.
Research Questions:
What methodological approaches have been used to study coach decision-making?
What theoretical frameworks guide understanding of coach decision-making processes?
In what contexts (training, preparation, competition) have coach decisions been studied?
What factors influence coach decision-making processes?
What are the current research gaps and future priorities?

Rationale Coaching in football involves dynamic and context-sensitive decision-making under pressure. Understanding how coaches make these

decisions—during training, preparation, and competition—is crucial for improving player development and team performance. Although research on decision-making exists, no comprehensive synthesis currently consolidates the theoretical, methodological, and practical perspectives. This systematic review will fill this gap by providing an evidence-based understanding of football coach decision-making processes.

Condition being studied The review focuses on decision-making processes of football (soccer) coaches rather than medical or health-related conditions. The “condition” in this context is the systemic and cognitive process of making coaching decisions in performance contexts.

METHODS

Search strategy Comprehensive database searches were conducted on October , 2025, across:

Key Searches:

SciSpace: 3 searches (100 papers each)
 Google Scholar: 2 searches (20 papers each)
 PubMed: 1 advanced search (15 papers)
 arXiv: 1 search (0 relevant papers)
 Supplementary Searches:
 SPORTDiscus: 0 records retrieved
 DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals): 0 records retrieved
 Web of Science: 0 records retrieved
 PsycINFO: 0 records retrieved
 CORE: 0 records retrieved
 PLOS: 0 records retrieved
 IEEE XPLORE: 0 records retrieved
 Medline: 0 records retrieved
 BASE: 0 records retrieved
 Scopus: 0 records retrieved
 ScienceDirect: 0 records retrieved
 Oxford Bibliographies: 0 records retrieved
 Search terms combined Boolean operators for ("football" OR "soccer") AND ("coach" OR "coaching") AND ("coach decision-making" OR "coaching process" OR "coach decision-making process" OR "football coach decision-making process" OR "soccer coach decision-making process")
 Full search strings and Boolean logic are reported in Appendix A. All search results were imported into SCISPACE reference management software by performing the following actions: a) duplicate records were removed; b) independent reviewer screened titles and abstracts for relevance; c) potentially eligible studies were retrieved in full text and assessed according to inclusion/exclusion criteria; and d) study selection was documented using a PRISMA 2020 flow diagram.

Participant or population Target population: Football/soccer coaches at any competitive level (elite, professional, academy, youth, or recreational).

Inclusion:

Studies involving coaches making decisions in training, preparation, or competition contexts.

Exclusion:

Studies focused solely on player decision-making or unrelated management processes.

Intervention Not applicable. This review does not investigate an intervention but synthesizes evidence on decision-making processes among coaches.

Comparator Not applicable.

No comparator interventions are included, as the review aims to describe and analyze conceptual and methodological variations.

Study designs to be included Eligible study designs include: Qualitative studies (e.g., interviews, thematic analyses) Observational studies Experimental designs Computational modeling studies Mixed-methods research Systematic reviews and meta-analyses on related topics will also be considered for synthesis.

Eligibility criteria Inclusion Criteria:

Studies on football/soccer coaches' decision-making processes

Published between 2000–2025

English-language studies

Peer-reviewed articles, systematic reviews, and empirical research

Research addressing decisions during training, preparation, or matches

Exclusion Criteria:

Studies on players' decision-making only

Non-peer-reviewed materials (e.g., theses, conference abstracts)

Studies on physical training without cognitive/decision elements

Fewer than 5 participants with no generalizable findings.

Information sources Databases and platforms searched: SciSpace, Google Scholar, PubMed, arXiv. Supplementary Searches: SPORTDiscus, DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals), Web of Science, PsycINFO, CORE, PLOS, IEEE XPLORE, Medline, BASE, Scopus, ScienceDirect, Oxford Bibliographies. No manual searches or grey literature were included at this stage.

Main outcome(s)**Primary outcomes:**

Theoretical frameworks applied (e.g., NDM, ecological dynamics, game theory)

Decision-making contexts (training, preparation, competition)

Methodological trends

Influencing factors (cognitive, contextual, technological, environmental).

Additional outcome(s)**Secondary outcomes include:**

Practical recommendations for coach education

Identification of research gaps and future research priorities.

Data management Two reviewers will independently screen, extract, and validate data using a standardized extraction form (Appendix D). Disagreements will be resolved through discussion or a third reviewer.

Software used: SCISPACE.

Quality assessment / Risk of bias analysis

Tools applied based on study type:

CASP for qualitative studies

MMAT for mixed-methods studies

Newcastle–Ottawa Scale for observational studies

Detailed assessments are summarized in Appendix B.

Strategy of data synthesis A thematic synthesis approach will be used.

Quantitative results will be summarized descriptively.

No meta-analysis will be conducted due to heterogeneity in designs.

Subgroup analysis

Subgroup analyses will explore variations by:

Coaching level (elite vs. youth vs. amateur)

Study design (qualitative vs. quantitative)

Geographic region.

Sensitivity analysis

Not applicable for qualitative synthesis.

However, sensitivity will be addressed through comparison of high- vs. moderate-quality studies.

Language restriction Only studies published in English will be included.

Country(ies) involved Portugal - Department of Sport Science/Beira Interior University, Covilhã, Portugal.

Keywords Football; soccer; coach; decision making; coaching process; decision-making process, coach decision-making process, football coach decision-making process, soccer coach decision-making process.

Dissemination plans Results will be disseminated through peer-reviewed publication, conference presentations, and open-access repositories.

Contributions of each author

Author 1 - Pedro Sousa - conceiving the review, data extraction, analysis, writing.

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