



Talent Development Environments in the CAF African Schools Football Championship

A Talent Development Environment (TDE) represents the entire ecosystem from coaching philosophy to psychological support that surrounds an athlete from grassroots or youth levels to elite professional status. Rather than focusing on early results, optimal TDEs emphasize long term player development, robust support networks, and integrated communication.

In line with the CAF Research Hub's vision to generate insights that are relevant to all stakeholders in African football, we conducted a survey on talent development environments within the African Schools Football Championship ecosystem. The questionnaires were offered to all players, technical personnel, and administrators participating in the 2025/2026 edition of the Zonal Union level of the CAF U15 African Schools Football Championships.



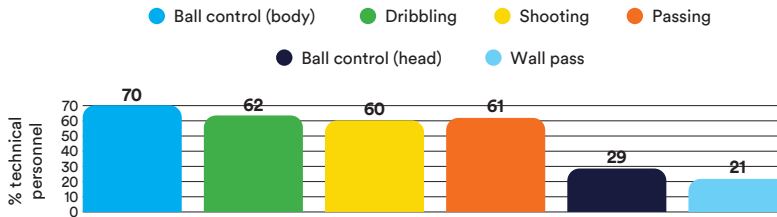
Strategic Insights of the TDEs in the CAF African Schools Football Championship

Talent Identification: Prioritizing Technical and Behavioural attributes

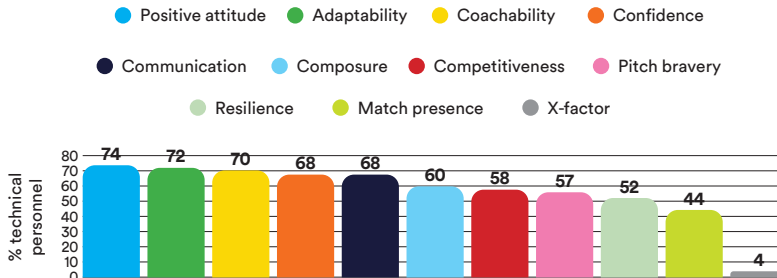
Coaches and technical staff recognise the importance of multidimensional criteria, including physical, tactical, performance and educational attributes, but place the greatest emphasis on Technical (64%) and Behavioural (63%) qualities.

Players view the tournament as a strategic platform for long-term growth. By prioritizing developmental processes over immediate results, coaches establish a “psychologically safe” environment where errors are treated as learning opportunities.

Technical attributes



Technical attributes



KEY:

Overall

Girls

Boys

91% 88% 93%

Spend most of their time at CAF U15 African Schools Football Championship developing skills they will need if they want to compete successfully at the elite level

89% 91% 88%

Believe their coaches at the CAF U15 African Schools Football Championship allow them to learn through making mistakes

Evaluating the support Ecosystem of the CAF African Schools Football Championship

A Team Working Together for the Players

The CAF U15 African Schools Football Championship (ASFC) offers a strong support network, which is a key part of growing as a player. Everyone is on the same page: players feel that their coaches and support staff talk to each other and share the same goals.

KEY:

Overall

Girls

Boys

79% **78%** **79%**

Believe that their coaches at the CAF U15 African Schools Football Championship communicate their football development goals with their support personnel

78% **79%** **77%**

Have access to different professionals such as physiotherapists at the CAF U15 African Schools Football Championship

The Holistic quality Gap

According to player feedback, the tournament's holistic quality received a notably low rating, revealing a disconnect between professional football standards and the psychosocial needs of young athletes.

46% **45%** **47%**

Get help developing mental toughness in football at the CAF U15 African Schools Football Championship

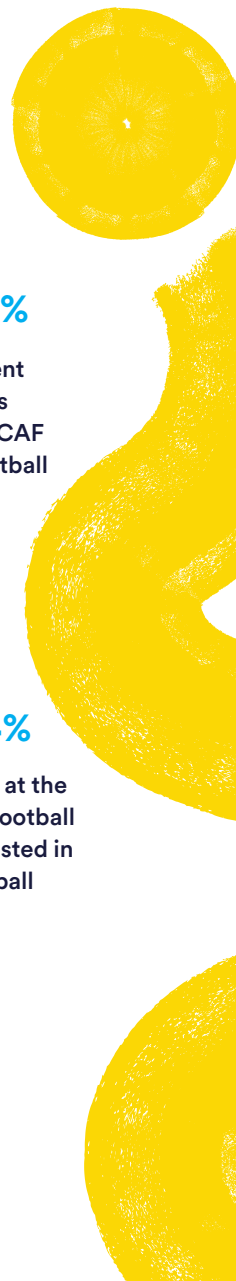
40% **46%** **34%**

Believe that their coaches at the CAF U15 African Schools Football Championship were interested in their lives outside football

Furthermore, a deficit in guidance regarding mental resilience and recovery protocols increases the risk of injury, burnout, and overall safety concerns.

24% **22%** **26%**

Often talked about their health and well-being with their coaches at the CAF U15 African Schools Football Championship



Impact of the CAF African Schools Football Championship on youth Football development

Elite Talent Identification:

We provide Member Associations with a prime window to identify, select, and fast-track players into National Youth teams.

Growth at Every Level:

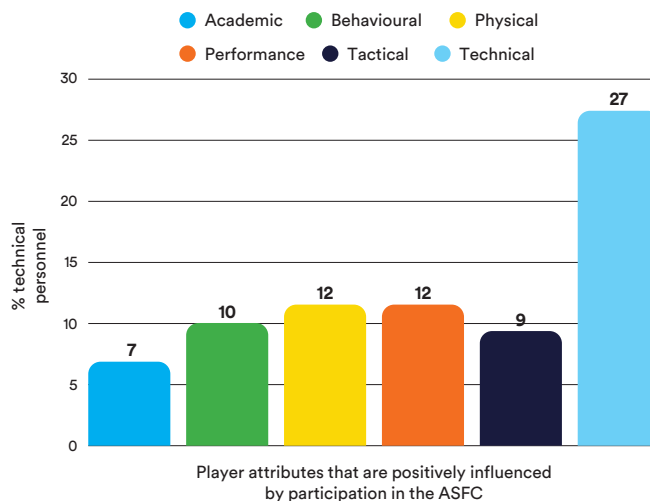
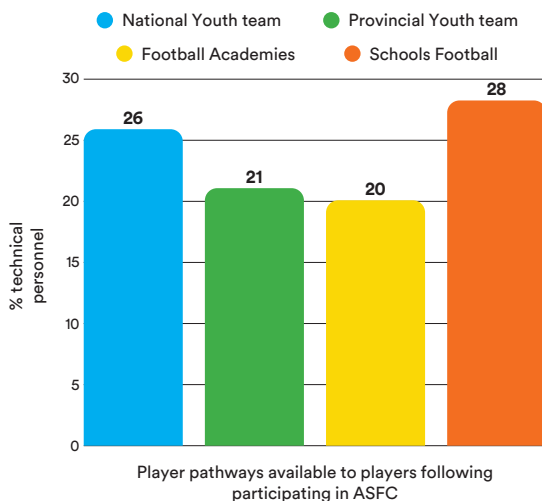
While players sharpen their attributes on the pitch, coaches evolve their methods.

Elevating the Game:

Participation doesn't just improve player performance; it refines coaching practices and sets a new benchmark for youth football across the continent.

86%

coaches and technical personnel believe the CAF U15 African Schools Football Championship has a **positive impact on player attributes**



Recommendations:

- **Emphasise future-focused objectives**, shifting perceptions from immediate tournament success to long-term player development.
- **Reinforce long-term coaching principles** through capacity-building courses and workshops for youth coaches and technical personnel.
- **Encourage coaches and technical staff** to use a multidimensional approach to talent identification, looking beyond technical, tactical and physical attributes.
- **Improve training for key youth-football stakeholders** on goal-setting, planning and other tools that support player development.
- **Develop resources to help players** and their support networks manage dual career demands in school and football.
- **Reinforce holistic health and wellbeing principles** in youth coach education and capacity-building programmes so coaches can support players more fully.
- **Strengthen collaboration between youth coaches and players' support systems** to help players balance football and life outside the game.



Overall, we achieved a positive response rate and in total: 81% (857) of players participating at the Zonal Union tournaments completed the player survey (48% girls) 46% (81) of technical personnel and administrators completed the talent identification survey (31% women) Data from 33 Member Associations (73% of 45 MAs that had participated in the Zonal Union tournaments at the time of writing) are presented in this preliminary report. Throughout the report, when reference is made to a percentage of players or personnel, it refers to the percentage of the participants that answered that specific question, not the percentage of the 857 players and 81 technical personnel that completed the surveys.



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