

**Sport Based Life Skill Development:  
The Explicit Development of Life Skills Within the New Zealand Football Junior Framework**

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## Abstract

Over the past decade in New Zealand, there has been a consistent trend of declining youth sport participation. Termed the ‘youth drop-off’, this refers to a certain age group of youth who stop participating in organised sport and physical activity, often for life. To counteract this decline, Sport New Zealand (Sport NZ) has developed various campaigns, provided funds, and created initiatives to encourage the wider sports industry to focus more resources on enhancing the youth sport experience. Yet very few of these campaigns, funds, or initiatives are structured around the development of life skills for youth participants. Life skills can be learned, practiced, and refined through sports to become personal assets or skills that help individuals succeed in many different life contexts (Martin & Camire 2020). New Zealand Football (NZF), as a National Sport Organisation (NSO) and the largest participation sport in New Zealand, has aligned its strategic priorities and messaging with Sport NZ (New Zealand Football, 2024). In doing so, NZF has embarked on a journey to further safeguard the experiences of young footballers across the country. This thesis examines the NZF Junior Framework, an existing youth development structure within NZF, focusing specifically on junior football coaches and their ability to explicitly promote the development of life skills within junior football. It aims to further the understanding of explicit life skill development within youth sports, specifically football, and to create greater awareness of the holistic developmental outcomes that youth can obtain through sport. These efforts may counteract the current negative experiences leading to significant youth drop-off.

The research investigates whether explicit approaches to life skill development have a significant influence on the players, coaches, and parents involved. Given the challenges of measuring intangible outcomes such as life skills, a pragmatic approach to the research design was adopted, enabling the use of a multi-methods strategy to collect and analyse data. Data collection involved the analysis of existing strategic and operational documents, the implementation of a life skill development intervention alongside focus group interviews, and the administration of pre- and

post-intervention parental surveys. Data were analysed through both content and thematic analysis for qualitative elements, as well as statistical analysis for the quantitative findings.

The results demonstrated that explicit approaches to life skill development not only increased player engagement, but also enhanced coaches' focus on holistic youth development through sport. Furthermore, it improved the self-awareness of players, coaches, and parents regarding the influential role they play in shaping the experiences of young athletes. A particularly surprising finding was that explicit approaches also fostered positive behavioural modelling by coaches and parents, who increasingly discussed and demonstrated good behaviours and life skills with their players and children.

The findings from this research offer tangible solutions for enhancing holistic development within the NZF Junior Framework. By specifically targeting explicit life skill development, the framework can provide greater care, attention, and understanding to participants, contributing to improved youth experiences of sport. This aligns with NZF's goals and presents an opportunity to introduce age- and stage-specific developmental outcomes, further strengthening the framework to help mitigate the youth drop-off issue in New Zealand.

Future research should continue to develop an increased understanding of age- and stage-specific life skills, improving how life skills can be aligned to specific frameworks or development pathways within sports. Replicating this study across a range of sports, both team-based and individual, would add to the broader knowledge base around life skill development. In addition, longitudinal research that compares implicit and explicit life skill development techniques would offer valuable insights into their respective impacts on long-term youth sport participation and development.

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**Attestation of Authorship**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where

explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), not used artificial intelligence tools to generative artificial intelligence tools (unless it is clearly stated, and referenced, along with the purpose of use), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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To the readers, sport-based life skill development is a topic that I am very passionate about. I believe that through the explicit development of life skills in sports, we will be able to further

support the development of young people in New Zealand, potentially changing the philosophy and approach to junior and youth sport in New Zealand.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### 1.1 Background

Sports are among the most common extracurricular activities for young people worldwide, with most youth engaging in sporting activities (Dorsch et al., 2020; Hulteen et al., 2017). On average, more than 40% of youth participate in organized sport, with a higher percentage of participation in higher-income countries such as Australia (75%) (Vella et al., 2020). In recent years, research into the holistic benefits of sport participation has helped sport organisations to increasingly view sport as a vehicle that can positively influence youth through the development of life skills (Bean et al., 2018; Newman et al., 2021). Sport is a microcosm of challenges and demands and due to its popularity among youth, sport can be designed, adapted, and developed to meet the growing needs of participants (Kendellen et al., 2017; Nascimento et al., 2021). As such a large amount of youth participate in sport, and the recognition that only a very small number of these youth will advance to elite competition, it has been argued that sport organisations should take a holistic approach when considering youth sport development programmes. A holistic approach refers to one in which considers the whole community in relation to the whole child (Damon, 2004), addressing the many different variables in youth development to create not only ‘good athletes’ but also ‘good people’ who are more equipped to deal with life challenges (Cronin et al., 2017; Hodge et al., 2012).

Sport provides an environment that is multi-faceted as it has a variety of different and important features or elements. It provides complex tasks and is unique in how it is structured, with many ways in which people can be involved that are not easily replicated in other areas of life (Evans et al., 2015). Alongside this, sport has the capacity to create a multitude of teaching and learning opportunities which may be explicitly designed to promote positive developmental outcomes for those involved (Newman et al., 2021). It is within these teaching and learning opportunities where developing ‘life skills’ may shift the focus away from ‘results-driven’ outcomes and instead become a ‘moral laboratory’ where youth can develop and practice their life

skills (Lee et al., 2017). Life skills are commonly defined as skills which enable individuals to deal with challenges from environments in which they live, such as home, school, sports teams, and communities (Allen, et al., 2015; Allen & Rhind, 2019; Bean et al., 2020; Bowley et al., 2018; Camire et al., 2022; Cronin et al., 2022). As previously mentioned, life skills can be learned, practiced, and refined through sports to become personal assets or skills that help individuals succeed in many different life contexts (Martin & Camire 2020).

The development of life skills through youth sport capitalises on the appeal of sport and aims to leverage and promote widespread positive developmental outcomes for those participating (Martin & Camiré, 2020). These positive developmental outcomes can be evidenced in a range of life skills that help participants to develop psychological, cognitive, physical, and behavioural competencies (Hodge et al., 2017). With this view, life skills are described as personal assets that support individuals to cope with the demands and challenges of everyday life that enable people to thrive in different areas of their lives such as school, home, and the wider community (Bean, Kendellen, & Forneris, 2016; Hemphill, Gordon, & Wright, 2019).

Governing sport entities, such as government agencies and National Sport Organisations (NSOs), have shown increased awareness in their need to support and educate those groups that deliver youth sport programmes regarding the development of youth through sport. However, although there is an increased awareness and responsibility of youth sport experiences, these youth development approaches tend to largely focus on sport specific development outcomes and measuring success within sport through physical development, technical and tactical improvements, and winning.

There is very limited guidance for NSOs on how sport can holistically develop youth behaviours, focusing on the development of life skills for youth participants that helps them to thrive both within and outside of the sporting environments. Global examples include the Australian Sports Commission (the government agency for sport in Australia), who demonstrate a significant focus on youth development and participation with connection to life skill development (Australian Sports Commission, n.d.; Australian Sports Commission, n.d.-b). Similarly, in Canada, the

Government funds the Sport Information Research Centre which researches the wellbeing of athletes and promotes athlete centred coaching, encouraging participants to develop life skills such as increased independence, self-reliance, and self-control, along with prioritising personal goals and development over winning (The Sport Information Resource Centre, 2019; The Sport Information Resource Centre, 2025). In New Zealand, the government agency for sport, Sport New Zealand, have worked with the sports industry to develop an overarching philosophy for youth sport which guides sport organisations on how to provide quality youth sport experiences further promoting youth development (Sport New Zealand, n.d.). Whilst these government-led youth development approaches are beneficial for youth, and the wider sport system, they often lack an explicit focus on the development of life skills for youth participants. Instead of promoting the many ways in which youth can benefit from taking part in sport, highlighting the development of youth both inside and outside of sport, they tend to focus more on sport related skill development rather than life skill development (Dorsch et al., 2020).

Coaches play a crucial role within the youth sport environment and thus are key facilitators in the development of life skills. Freire et al. (2023) highlighted the crucial role of coaches in promoting youth life skills development by demonstrating autonomy-supportive behaviours which refers to the ways in which coaches can structure their training sessions, providing athletes with options, recognition of feelings, perspectives, goals, and providing opportunities for initiative and independence. Further research has indicated that when coaches take an intentional and explicit approach to life skill development in their coaching sessions, they are able to create challenging environments where youth can learn to overcome difficult or stressful situations, practice complex interpersonal skills, and reflect on the understanding, development, and transfer of life skills in a safe learning environment (Bean et al., 2018; Newman et al., 2021). Conversely, when implicit approaches to life skill development are relied on by coaches, the development of these skills is left up to chance and thus rely on youth participants to be responsible for their own development, learning, and awareness of life skills (Allen & Rhind, 2019; Super et al., 2018). Subsequently, an implicit approach focuses solely on sport specific skills and denotes the responsibility or need to

facilitate any development of life skills onto the youth participants (Camire et al., 2022; Mossman et al., 2021; Williams et al., 2020). Therefore, it is suggested that to effectively develop the life skills of youth within the sport environment, coaches should not leave the development of these skills up to chance, but rather ought to be provided with support, strategies and education on how to explicitly design sessions that teach and develop the life skills of participants to help them inside and outside of their sporting environments (Jacobs & Wright 2018; Pierce et al., 2018).

Youth sport development research has shifted from a traditionally narrow focused deficit-based understanding of youth sport, focusing on perceived weaknesses, issues, and problems towards a much more holistic understanding and asset-building approach, leveraging existing strengths to address challenges and achieve goals (Gould & Carson, 2008). Bowley et al. (2018) suggest that as life skill development is only likely to occur if explicit interventions are offered, there is an opportunity to conduct research with a focus on sport as the vehicle to explicitly develop youth life skills. However, there is a need for the appropriate education of coaches regarding explicit strategies to facilitate youth life skill development and support the transfer of these life skills outside of the sporting environment. Subsequently, research that focuses on explicit life skill development in sport has been utilised by some sport organisations, who have recognised the importance of explicitly integrating life skills within their youth sport programmes, bridging the gap between research and practice across youth sport (MacDonald et al., 2020). In addition, it has been argued that sport organisations must consider their moral responsibility in the wider holistic development of individuals (Bowley et al., 2018), as it is unlikely that many children participating in grassroots sport will continue into the professional ranks.

Given the significant role that sport plays in youth development, and the participation numbers of youth that play football in New Zealand, this research examines the New Zealand Football (NZF) Junior Framework. It aims to explore the extent to which life skills are being developed through the NZF Junior Framework, the nature in which youth football coaches develop life skills within the NZF Junior Framework and provide evidence-based recommendations to NZF on how to integrate player life skill development within their Junior Framework. Through adopting

a management approach, this research seeks to inform policy and system adaptations within the NZF Junior Framework, ultimately maximising its impact on participants and ensuring long-term development benefits to youth.

## **1.2. Research Context**

### ***1.2.1 Youth Sport In New Zealand***

In New Zealand, 95% of young people participate in sport and physical activity for an average of 11 hours per week, with 98% of young people aged 12 to 14 participating for an average of 12.5 hours per week (Sport New Zealand, 2023 - b). Therefore, due to the popularity of sport participation for New Zealand youth, organised sport has a unique opportunity to significantly influence the development of young people (Sport New Zealand, 2023). Although youth participation in sport in New Zealand peaks between the ages of 12-14 years old, market insights over the past decade have reported a steady decline in sport participation from the age of 15 years old, which has caused significant concern around the future and sustainability of sport nationally (Sport New Zealand, 2023). There are various factors which have been linked to this reduction in youth participation, such as lack of time, lack of motivation, lack of energy, academic pressure, optional physical education in schools, and the increase in technological past-times, such as gaming (Sport New Zealand, n.d.; Sport New Zealand, 2023; Sport New Zealand, 2023 – c; Sport New Zealand 2023 – d; Sport New Zealand, 2024 - b). Alongside these factors that influence youth sport participation are additional barriers such as socio-economic status, socio-cultural interest in sport, technological and environmental barriers (Sport New Zealand, n.d.; Sport New Zealand, 2024 - b). Subsequently, a key focus for Sport New Zealand (Sport NZ) is to ensure that young people develop a life-long love of sport and continue to participate in sport and recreation into adulthood (Sport New Zealand, n.d.).

To address this decline in participation in youth sport, Sport NZ has been educating and supporting the wider sporting sector in New Zealand in relation to youth development best practices through various initiatives (Sport New Zealand, 2016). Through increased awareness, strategic direction, and financial incentives related to youth sport development, Sport NZ has supported

many national sport organisations to align their strategic and operational planning to follow a similar approach to Sport NZ. However, there is limited evidence that intentional and explicit approaches to the development of youth life skills are being included in the coaching resources of these NSOs. Instead, sport organisations within New Zealand tend to rely on implicit approaches to the development of life skills within youth sport delivery, which puts the responsibility onto youth participants to develop their own learning processes and not rely on key adults in leadership positions, such as coaches (Allen & Rhind, 2019).

### ***1.2.2 New Zealand Football Junior Framework***

Football is the most popular youth team sport in New Zealand with over 170,000 registered players in 2024 (New Zealand Football, 2024). The sport's popularity has further been boosted by New Zealand co-hosting of the Women's FIFA World Cup in 2023 leading to a 27% growth in female participation, as well as a 14% rise in engagement among Māori, Pasifika, and Asian youth (New Zealand Football, 2024). Beyond participation, football is widely recognised in research for its role in youth development, particularly in fostering life skills such as teamwork, leadership and resilience. Due to its global reach, football is one of the most frequently studied sports in life skill development research (e.g. Allen et al., 2015; Bowley et al., 2018; Cronin, & Allen, 2018; Jacobs & Wright, 2021; Kendellen & Camiré, 2020; Lee et al., 2017; Martin & Camiré 2020; Mossman et al., 2021; Nascimento Junior et al., 2019; Nascimento Junior et al., 2021; Newman et al., 2021; Sabourin et al., 2020; Vella et al., 2013; Vella et al., 2020). Subsequently, football in New Zealand provides an ideal context in which to explore the development of life skills within youth sport coaching sessions.

As the governing body for football in New Zealand, NZ Football (NZF) are responsible for the governance and development of their sport nationally. In 2011, NZF released the 'Whole of Football (WoF)' plan which provided a unified pathway for football players, coaches, referees, and administrators to provide high quality experiences designed to meet the needs of participants (New Zealand Football, 2024 -b). The WoF plan is split into Junior and Youth frameworks that are designed to align football development in New Zealand through age-appropriate games,

standardised playing formats, and training recommendations for each stage of a player 's development (New Zealand Football, n.d.-b). The Junior Framework starts for players that are four years old and is split into three age specific formats: 1) First Kicks Football for 4-6 years old, 2) Fun Football for 7-8 years old, and 3) Mini Football for 9-12 years old. Similarly, the Youth Football Framework is split into two stages; 1) 13-15 years old, and 2) 16-19 years olds (New Zealand Football, n.d.-b). These age and stage-based frameworks seek to provide coaches and players with a natural progression through each stage, to ensure effective development of football players in New Zealand.

Within the NZF structure, Northern Regional Football (NRF) is one of six regional federations. The role of each federation is to provide football competitions, coach and referee education and support to all clubs within their region. NRF is the largest federation in NZ, consisting of 78 member clubs, and it governs football from South Auckland to the top of the North Island (Northern Region Football, 2024). NRF is selected as the context in which life skill development is explored in this research due to its close alignment with NZF Junior Framework, and thus appropriate environment to explore the explicit development of life skills within the NZF Junior Framework.

### **1.3 Research Aim and Design**

This research aims to examine how life skill development is integrated and applied within the NZF Junior Framework. These insights will provide further knowledge to help understand life skill development in sport coaching in New Zealand, specifically within NZF and their junior and youth development programmes. The following are the key research questions that this study aims to answer:

1. To what extent does life skill development take place within the New Zealand Football Junior Framework?
2. How is life skill development understood and facilitated within the New Zealand Football Junior Framework?

3. What modifications can be made to the New Zealand Football Junior Framework to explicitly promote life skill development among youth football players?

To answer these questions, a pragmatic mixed-methods approach was taken (Creswell & Creswell 2017), which provided an overarching framework for the research, underpinned by both qualitative and quantitative research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Firstly, a content analysis of publicly available reports and documents from Sport NZ, NZF, and NRF that related to youth sport and the development of life skills was conducted. Data was thematically analysed with key themes and results identified and discussed. Secondly an eight week 'life-skills in football' intervention was carried out with junior football coaches operating within the NRF region and this was followed up with focus group interviews with the coaches. Each interview was transcribed, and the data was thematically analysed (Braun & Clark, 2006). Finally, pre and post intervention surveys were distributed to the parents of the participating junior football players. Statistical analysis of the surveys was conducted using SPSS (IBM Corp, 2023).

#### **1.4. Thesis Structure**

The current study is organised into the following chapters:

Chapter 2 provides a critical review of current literature as it relates to sport for youth development, the theoretical foundation of life skill development, integration of life skill development within youth sport, the structure of life skill programs and methods of assessing life skills development. This chapter provides a comprehensive insight into the research context of the current study and highlights any gaps in current literature.

Chapter 3 presents the overarching research design and framework, including discussion of the pragmatic paradigm and mixed-methods approach used to underpin the study. This is followed by an explanation of the chosen methods used to collect, analyse, and interpret the data.

Chapter 4 provides an overview of the findings from the content analysis of documents from Sport NZ, NZF and NRF, focus groups with junior coaches, and surveys of parents of junior football participants to answer each of the research questions.

Chapter 5 synthesises and discusses the findings from the research, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the study. This section also summarises key recommendations and limitations, and highlights areas for future research.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

The following chapter introduces the theoretical grounds for the current study and aims to explore scholarly literature relating to life skill development in youth sport, to understand how life skill development can be integrated and applied within the New Zealand Football (NZF) Junior Framework. The literature review is organised into sections exploring the following topics: sport for youth development, positive youth development, the integration of life skills development in youth sport, theoretical foundations of life skill development, development of life skills, the structure of life skill development programs, and how to measure life skill development. The following sections provide a critical synthesis of the scholarly research that underpins life skill development in youth sport in order to provide a foundation to explore the extent in which life skill development takes

place within the NZF Junior Framework, how life skill development is understood and facilitated within the framework, and what modifications can be made to the framework to explicitly promote the life skill development of youth football players.

## **2.2 Sport for Youth Development**

It is commonly suggested that 'sport builds character' and whilst this may be true to some degree, the question remains - what type of character? (Wells & Arthur-Banning, 2008). Using sport for youth development depicts sport as a unique social context that provides naturally occurring 'teachable moments' which can lead to the promotion of life skills and youth development (Vella, Oades, & Crowe 2013). This view of sport for youth development presents sport as an environment that promotes youth development through lived experiences and opportunities that can lead to positive psychosocial outcomes such as life skills (Holt et al., 2016; Pierce et al., 2018). These positive psychosocial outcomes can be developed through the many different obstacles and challenges that sport creates which can shape the development of individuals and their 'character'. Sport has the potential to lead youth towards healthy physical and moral development, yet as sport experiences are not always positive, there is also potential for negative experiences and negative developmental outcomes to occur through sport participation (Sabourin et al, 2020; Vella, Oades, & Crowe 2013; Wells, et al., 2005). Due to the impact that sport can have on both positive and negative youth development outcomes there has been an influx of research occurring globally that aims to further understand the impact that life skills developed through sport can have on youth development. When designed appropriately sport can be used as a vehicle to facilitate the learning and development of youth participants (Allen & Rhind, 2019). It is believed that sport possesses intrinsic value, and if structured well, can provide opportunities for youth to learn some of life's lessons (Perkins & Noam, 2007). This perspective portrays sport as a much less competitive environment and instead portrays sport as a more development focused environment.

Sport is an engaging environment to youth, which can be further leveraged to promote the myriads of benefits that sport can have on youth and in the wider community. Youth participation in sport has been linked to multiple indicators of development, such as identity development,

initiative, cultivating social connections, social skills, and improved cognition and physical skills (Vella, Oades, & Crowe, 2013). Other aspects of sport that contribute to the positive physical, psychological, and social development are traits such as fair play, ethical awareness, honesty, respect, and leadership (Kwauk, 2014). It is argued that the more assets a young person can develop and possess, the more likely they are to positively manage challenging or difficult situations when they occur (Bean, Kendellen, & Forneris 2016; Wells & Arthur-Banning, 2008). As sport is a naturally competitive environment it creates levels of psychological resilience developing behaviours, which build on personal assets and protect individuals from potential negative outcomes of sport (Vella et al., 2020).

Although the youth sport environment can be shaped and moulded to promote explicit development opportunities, often when sport is not designed appropriately it can begin to promote undesirable youth behaviours such as increased stress and anxiety (Sabourin et al., 2020). There are many contextual factors of sport that contribute to youth development, such as the type of sport and the constraints that promote different skills, the focus and care of the coach (e.g., winning focus versus athlete development), age of youth participants, and the level of competition (e.g., competitive or recreational) (Bean et al., 2021). Each of these contextual factors change throughout the lives of a young person and can have significant influence on their development. However, there is an underlying historical perspective that youth need to be managed with discipline, when instead they should be viewed as individuals who can be developed overtime so that they become more capable, aware, and begin to contribute to society (Camire et al., 2022). It is through the positive youth development perspective that the focus becomes about building assets and strength-based approaches to develop youth over time. This approach emphasises youth as resources to be developed, promoting competencies, including values and skills as opposed to eliminating undesirable behaviours (Bowley et al., 2018; Camire et al., 2022; Newman et al., 2021; Sabourin et al, 2020).

Enjoyment and the ability to learn new skills are the most important factors for youth sport involvement and participation, and these factors need to be considered when designing any

approaches to explicitly equip youth with psychosocial skills that are developed alongside the sport, to help youth deal with challenges in their lives outside of sport (Kendellen & Camire 2019; Mossman & Cronin, 2019). To support the structuring of youth development programs, Bean et al., (2018) identifies three inherent demands of sport being:

- 1) Competition is a core element of sport and exposes participants to influences that can develop life skills.
- 2) Sport is a skill-building activity which requires participants to develop physically, technically and tactically.
- 3) Sport is a social environment which enables participants to interact with a range of different stakeholders (e.g. coaches, parents, teammates, and referees).

It is through the awareness and satisfaction across these three inherent demands where the development of youth can be hindered or prosper. Sabourin et al., (2020) argues that although participation in sport is often viewed positively, the inherent demands must be considered and assessed as there is also the potential for negative experiences to occur across the three inherent demands. These three inherent demands highlight the many facets of youth sport where learning can occur. Sport in this view becomes an environment where youth can face challenges and learn to overcome them, reflect on and practice complex interpersonal skills, and to develop and transfer life skills to other life domains (Bean et al., 2018; Newman et al., 2021). Due to the popularity of sport among youth, and when structured appropriately, sport becomes a useful tool for life skill development, such as the development of social, emotional, competitive and interactive skills of youth participants (Cronin & Allen, 2017; Mossman et al., 2021). Therefore, when sport activities and programs are structured appropriately, they can stimulate youth to become catalysts in their own development and promote youth to participate in sport not only as a recreational past time but also a means for personal development (Kwauk, 2014; Super et al., 2018).

### **2.3 Positive Youth Development**

Positive Youth Development (PYD) is a term that is frequently used in youth development and life skill development research that focuses on youth experiences, engagement and mutually influential relationships that can influence beneficial outcomes (Bean et al., 2021). PYD is a theoretical framework that promotes the development of strengths and personal assets at a stage of high developmental plasticity so that youth obtain and retain life skills (Benson, 2007; Damon 2004; Lerner et al., 2005; Vella, Oades, & Crowe 2013). The PYD approach has emerged from the field of positive psychology to counteract the negative stereotypes that commonly occur such as the exaggeration that youth are rebellious, irresponsible and immature (Sabourin et al, 2020). Within sport there is an increased focus to formalise PYD programs that empower youth, ensuring that practices are intentional and actively involve youth in the learning processes (Bowley et al., 2018; Camiré et al., 2014). However, an intentional approach to youth development requires coaches and coordinators to take the time to understand the learners and their motivations, moving away from a narrow-minded approach that tries to punish misbehaving youth. Merely, participating in sport does not inherently promote PYD experiences, yet to improve PYD outcomes and future program creation, Bean et al., (2021) states that further research into the quality of sports programs and frameworks is needed to understand youth experiences and to optimize and promote youth development.

Over the last few decades, there have been many attempts to develop an over-arching PYD framework and measures for youth program design (Newman et al., 2021). This continued development and evolution across life skill development models highlights the difficulty researchers have had when trying to conceptualise a model to best measure, understand, and capture youth development within sports programs. Due to the difficulty in measuring PYD outcomes and approaches, pre-existing development pathways support researchers to reduce the many interdependent variables that can influence the development for youth, such as interpersonal and intrapersonal influences, multilevel models that target an individual's behaviours or characteristics, and influence from club environment and administrators who contribute to the experience (Vella et

al., 2020). Therefore, a youth development pathway such as NZ Football's (NZF) Whole of Football Plan and the NZF Junior Framework, provide a foundation for sport-based youth development integration as the delivery is divided into ages and stages of development and provides a standardised delivered to football clubs across the country.

These PYD approaches to youth sport are designed to consider the whole community in relation to the whole child, to prepare youth for challenges in society such as establishing social relationships, dealing with a lack of opportunities, and providing support and recognition (Damon, 2004; Hawkins et al., 2015; Newman et al., 2021). Therefore, PYD programs can influence youth in a variety of ways, some of which do not translate to observable change, indicating that behavioural outcomes should not be the only measure in PYD programs (Jacobs & Wright, 2021). As the structure of youth sport programs plays a key role in positive or negative youth development outcomes, program quality has become one of the best predictors of developmental outcomes for youth (Bean et al., 2018). Yet program design and structure continue to be an ongoing issue for PYD research in sport, as sport programs or interventions are often lacking structure and can be delivered poorly which can undermine the full learning potential of participants (Allen & Rhind 2019). It is through the experiences and processes of adult-supervised sport programs that enable youth to acquire personal and social skills alongside physical competencies and promotes a foundational understanding of life skills among adolescents (Hemphill, Gordon, & Wright 2019; Holt, Deal, & Smyth, 2016).

#### **2.4 The Role of Coaches in Positive Youth Development**

Although there have been numerous studies which have proven that youth are able to develop a range of life skills through sports (e.g., Bowley et al., 2018; Chartier et al., 2021; Hayden et al., 2014; Legg, 2021; Mossman & Cronin, 2019; Nascimento Jr et al., 2022), one of the biggest influences on PYD is the coach. The relationship that coaches have with participants can be positively or negatively associated with the development of life skills (Cronin & Allen 2018; Nascimento et al, 2021). Therefore, the coach-athlete relationship is important and education

regarding ideal coaching can further support youth engagement, well-being, and mental toughness (Cronin et al., 2022).

As PYD sport programmes are still in their infancy and continuing to develop, further understanding is needed on how life skills can be explicitly developed (Bowley et al., 2018). Life skills are commonly defined as skills which enable individuals to deal with challenge from environments in which they live, such as home, school, sports teams, and communities (Allen, et al., 2015; Allen & Rhind, 2019; Bean et al., 2020; Bowley et al., 2018; Camire et al., 2022; Cronin et al., 2022). Life skills can be learned, practiced, and refined through sports to become personal assets, or skills that help individuals succeed in many different life contexts (Martin & Camire 2020). Danish et al. (2004) and Gould and Carson (2008) provide two of the most cited definitions of life skills, suggesting that to be considered a *'life skill'* it must be skills that enable individuals to succeed in different environments, demonstrating behavioural, cognitive, interpersonal and intrapersonal skills which can also be transferable to other life domains.

It is therefore important that life skill development interventions consider the development of physical ability, as well as the emotional and social maturity of participants (Yuen et al., 2010). Therefore, as the development of life skills increase over time, this reaffirms a natural stacking, or 'pile up' process, of life skills that support the application of learned skills to different contexts in everyday life (Nascimento et al, 2021). There may be a systematic manner that life skills can be taught for skills to be better understood and acquired by participants. However, there is often a lot of emphasis and responsibility placed on youth coaches who often have little formal life skill education, which can leave coaches feeling unprepared for such a key role in the development of youth (Bowley et al., 2018; Geidne et al., 2013).

Youth sport coaches are important figures for life skill development, and it is crucial that they are educated to support and promote development opportunities so that they can positively influence the sporting environment for the participants. Yet, the current reality is that many junior and youth sports coaches lack formal coach education, and although they believe they can promote positive youth development outcomes, they lack the extensive knowledge on how to foster suitable

environments for youth development (Camire, et al., 2011). This outlines the importance of coach education, as coaches who have had no formal training are often unable to explicitly and consistently facilitate youth development (Bowley, et al., 2018; Cope et al., 2017)

There are many different roles a coach can have such as being an instructor, teacher, motivator, disciplinarian, friend, substitute parent, manager, and administrator (Geidne et al., 2013). Yet most coach education programs do not prepare or raise awareness of such a diversity of roles that coaches can have on youth, instead focusing heavily on the technical and tactical approaches to coaching the sport. Coaches that are developing relationships with athletes should consider the internal assets of participants (e.g. life skills they already possess, personal attributes, and physical abilities) as well as their external assets (e.g. family background, experiences with previous coaches, and socio-economic status) (Camire et al., 2011).

A sport-based youth development program is only as good as the implementation. This is why junior, and youth coaches are invaluable and an important component of youth sport, as they are responsible for creating social conditions and safe motivational environments where youth are presented with opportunities for life skill development (Bean et al., 2021; Super et al., 2018). Therefore, sport-based education and design features that support coaches to facilitate life skill development include devoting time for group reflection and life skill discussion, supporting adults who encourage the use of life skills, and providing opportunities for participants to practice the use of life skills in sports (Jacobs & Wright 2018). Results have indicated that PYD trained sport coaches are able to increase positive developmental outcomes for participants (Conroy & Coatsworth 2009; MacDonald, Cote', and Deakin 2010; Smoll et al. 2003; Vella, Oades, & Crowe 2013). Additionally, coaches who have completed PYD educational courses felt more capable of fostering youth development and as a result many coaches adapted their coaching behaviours (MacDonald et al., 2020). Other levels of coach support could be to create multiple levels of intervention with club leaders, coaches, parents, and athletes so that the knowledge and philosophy is shared (Vella et al., 2020), as often coaches return to what they are comfortable with and neglect PYD material (MacDonald et al., 2020).

## **2.5 Theoretical Underpinning of Life Skill Development**

As it is difficult to analyse and capture the unique differences between coaches and their behaviours, there has been a shift in research towards a multifaceted approach which begins exploring the cognition, knowledge, and motivation of coaches' (Allan et al., 2018). There have been several studies which have shown that youth are able to develop a range of skills through sports which can be transferred or used within their everyday lives (Bowley et al., 2018; Chartier et al., 2021; Hayden et al., 2014; Legg, 2021; Mossman & Cronin, 2019; Nascimento Jr et al., 2022). Yet, the term 'life skills' includes specific learning outcomes, behaviours, attitudes, and etiquette (Buchert, 2014). In youth sport specifically, the coach is a key figure who can help foster the social environment to support athlete's life skill development (Cronin et al., 2022; Martin & Camiré, 2020; Pierce et al., 2018). Therefore, the following sections will analyse the more prevalent theories within sport-based life skill development research such as Self Determination Theory, and Basic Needs Theory and their relation to coaching youth sport and the influence on youth participants.

### **2.5.1 *Self-Determination Theory***

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is frequently used within research to assist with analysing the consequences of coaches' behaviours on athletes' outcomes (Allan et al., 2018; Conroy & Coatsworth, 2006; Duda, 2013). SDT is a theory of human motivation and well-being, which offers a deeper understanding of personality and social behaviours through the satisfaction of basic psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2017). SDT is often used in life skill development research due to the positive influence motivations can have on developmental outcomes in many domains including sports (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Therefore, SDT can assist researchers by understanding the consequences of coaches' behaviours on athletes' motivational outcomes. (Allan et al., 2018; Conroy & Coatsworth, 2006; Duda, 2013). Part of SDT is that it relies on three key aspects:

- 1) Coach autonomy support
- 2) Participant satisfaction of three basic psychological needs (autonomy support, competence, and relatedness)

### 3) Specific motivations for athletes in their sport (Hodge et al., 2016; Nascimento et al, 2021)

Nascimento et al., (2019) explored the differences in motivational outcomes of youth sport participants and whether more self-determined forms of motivation (i.e., intrinsic motivation, integrated motivation, and identified motivation) have a positive influence on life skills, as compared to forms of motivation which are less self-determined and can have a negative influence on life skills (i.e., external regulation, introjected regulation, and motivation). Their findings suggested that self-determined motivations had a positive correlation with the development of life skills. This means that by managing the motivations of participants to become more self-determined, ultimately influenced the participants ability to also develop life skills through sports. SDT can therefore, further support researchers to understand and explain coaching behaviours and the development of coach autonomy supportive behaviours, specific motivations for individuals in their sport, and the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs.

Both Hodge et al., (2017) and Ryan and Deci, (2017) argue that SDT can be used when examining life skill development in youth sport, and is dependent on whether coaches meet, or do not meet, the psychological needs of their participants leaving participants either satisfied or frustrated (Cronin et al., 2022). However, within SDT, certain social and environmental conditions such as supportive coach behaviour and awareness of the holistic benefits of sport are required to optimise youth development. Therefore, raising awareness and understanding of SDT within youth sport is crucial to prioritise the ongoing development of life skills for participants that is required from a coaches' culture (Hodge et al., 2012).

#### ***2.5.2 Basic Needs Theory***

Basic needs theory (BNT) is a sub-theory within SDT, which refers to the coaches who can develop a satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness for participants (Hodge et al., 2012; Nascimento et al, 2021). BNT represents the internalisation of values and self-regulation as psychological needs are progressively satisfied (Hodge et al., 2012). A significant part of BNT in relation to youth sport is autonomy support, which refers to intentionally structuring sessions or

practices to provide athletes with a raft of psychological challenges such as choices, recognition of their feelings, goals and differing perspectives, and the promotion of initiative and independence (Freire et al., 2023). Therefore, BNT theory requires the coach to adopt a learners perspective, providing participants with supportive behaviours, that promote freedom of choice, choice of activities and opportunities for decision making, sharing justification and reasoning behind tasks, and creating opportunities for independence and initiative, as well as summarizing sessions with feedback specific to life skills of athletes (Cronin et al., 2017; Freire et al., 2023; Nascimento et al., 2021). Through BNT, coaches often become role models to an athlete's behaviour and inspire the development of individuals through an understanding of them and their needs.

Previous sport-based youth development research has highlighted certain aspects of BNT such as autonomy support, empowerment, independence, and role modelling good behaviour as outcomes that are prevalent within youth sport coaching environments (Cronin & Allen, 2018). By taking the time to understand young athletes, promoting and facilitating the development of life skills, and providing quality sports experiences, coaches can demonstrate autonomy supportive behaviours that can optimally promote the development of youth participants in sport (Freire et al., 2023). Therefore, BNT begins to draw a correlation between autonomy supportive coaching behaviours and the development of life skills, through the satisfaction of all three psychological needs (Cronin et al., 2022).

Coaches and coaching environments are not homogenous and there is no one-size-fits-all approach. The youth sport landscape can be challenging to navigate for community-based coaches who have limited time, education, or support to then also focus on the development of life skills alongside a sport can be challenging. Therefore, SDT and BNT provide a theoretical starting point for researchers to further investigate and understand a coaches' ability to promote the development of life skills (Cronin et al., 2022). However, placing additional expectations of balancing autonomous behaviour, exemplary values, and juggling an array of socio-cultural challenges that are specific to each individual, community, and sport, can leave youth coaches feeling overwhelmed. This awareness and understanding of the expectation placed on coaches provides

more reason as to why sport organisations have been called to lead youth development by educating coaches on autonomy related behaviours that support the development of youth participants, including the development of life skills.

## **2.6 Development of Life Skills Through Youth Sport**

It is suggested that a crucial step in youth development relates to the practice and development of life skills that help youth to overcome the challenges, demands, and risks of their lives, helping them to become more capable and contributing members of society (Agnew et al., 2019; Bates et al., 2021; Bowley et al., 2018; Mossman & Cronin 2019). Therefore, when promoting youth sport participation there is a social responsibility to ensure positive environments for all participants. This has resulted in an increase demand for youth sport-based life skill development (SB-LSD) programmes which target the development of life skills for youth as they are transitioning from childhood, a relatively dependent life stage, and beginning to develop their understanding of physical, emotional, and psychological behaviours (Bates et al., 2021; Yuen et al., 2021). The development of life skills can then be used to promote health, academic achievements, and occupational success for young people (Cronin et al., 2022).

In contemporary youth sport development, implicit and explicit approaches are two differing strategies for facilitating life skill transfer within sporting environments (Bean et al., 2016). The implicit approach focuses largely on sport specific skills and denotes the need to facilitate life skill development and transfer (Camire et al., 2022; Mossman et al., 2021; Williams et al., 2020). It is through the implicit approach that the learning and transfer of life skills is left up to chance (Bean et al., 2018). Implicit coaching does not prioritise holistic development and instead chooses to rely on experiential learning, leaving youth to be responsible for their own life skill development without any conscious effort from coaches on the acquisition and transfer of life skills (Bean et al., 2018; Super et al., 2018). In comparison, an explicit approach is purposely structured and refers to coaches who use deliberate strategies to integrate the teaching of life skills (Camire et al., 2022; Mossman et al., 2021; Williams et al, 2020). Coaches who are explicit in life skill development provide opportunities for youth to discuss and practice life skills both in and out of the sporting

context, raising awareness of learning and transfer so that it becomes a more conscious habit for youth (Martin & Camire 2020). It is suggested that to optimise the holistic development of athletes, coaches should deliberately and systematically integrate life skill development and transfer strategies within their coaching sessions (Bean et al., 2018). Coaches and program leaders who adopt an explicit approach to the development and transfer of life skills do so using intentional coaching strategies that provide opportunities for life skills to be practiced, learned, and transferred to different life domains (Allen & Rhind, 2019; Bean et al., 2016).

It is argued that the development of life skills should be prioritized and be equal to the development of physical skills. Therefore, sports organisations that promote youth participation and development should increase their focus on explicit approaches to life skill development within their sport that supports coaches to create teachable moments that are designed to develop specific life skills within sport (Pierce et al., 2018). Through understanding explicit and implicit approaches to life skill development, it is important that coaches are encouraged and supported to explicitly develop life skills by addressing situational circumstances and creating challenges for their teams that may influence the extent of life skill development and transfer for participants (Bean et al., 2018). Therefore, well-structured and youth-driven programs or pathways are essential to provide youth with opportunities to engage in their own development (Bean et al., 2016).

The ‘pile up effect’ was first proposed by Benson (2007) to highlight the idea that the more life skills a young person has acquired and practiced in sport, the more likely they are to perform well in a range of other situations (Cronin & Allen, 2018). Therefore, sport programs should be intentional with their curriculums, supporting the ‘pile up’ effect as it is through quality program design and implementation that provides a foundation and positive learning environments where life skills can be learned and developed through sport (Hemphill et al., 2019). This aligns with the philosophy that life skills are ‘taught rather than caught’ through intentional program design, highlighting the importance for sport organisations to understand how participants can take learned skills from sport and apply them outside of the sports context (Jacobs & Wright 2018; MacDonald et al., 2020).

### ***2.6.1 Influence of Parents on the Development of Life Skills***

Parents have a significant influence on sports participation, as they initiate their children's involvement in sport and provide them with the resources and support (i.e. practical, emotional, and financial) necessary to participate (Côté, 1999; Harwood & Knight, 2015). For a child, support from their family can be provided in a variety of ways such as practical support (logistical and financial), emotional support (understanding and unconditional love), and informational support which has been linked to enhanced self-confidence and perceived competence, all of which can play a critical role in the development of youth athletes (Baker et al., 2003; Leff & Hoyle, 1995; Power & Woolger, 1994). Parents also play a critical role in interpreting and promoting values for youth participants (Burke et al., 2021; Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). Therefore, structured and organised sport activities that generate positive developmental opportunities should consider the involvement of parents, or home life, so that any retention and transference of life skills may also be reinforced by parents and family support (Hodge et al., 2017).

It is understandable that, in most cases parents have a lot to focus on such as on modifying the behaviour of their child, developing ethical and moral stances and awareness of behaviours, emotions, and feelings (Kremer-Sadlik & Kim, 2007). Yet, parent engagement often only occurs when parents identify undesirable behaviour or attitudes from their child displaying unsportsmanlike behaviour (Kremer-Sadlik & Kim, 2007). However, parental pressure is very common in adolescent sport and one of the largest unique contributors to a player's perceived development whether that's positive or negative (Mossman & Cronin, 2019). This shows that family influence, or lack of influence, can have both a positive and negative impact on youth sport, and despite their best intentions, many parents are unaware of how to optimally support their children in sports (Burke et al., 2021; Hodge et al., 2017).

To change the traditional view of what success looks like such as the focus on results and winning, sport-based youth development research suggests that sport organisations and coaches should be communicating maximum effort, improving skills, and having positive interpersonal

interactions, with the players and parents (Smoll and Smith 2005; Vella, Oades, & Crowe, 2013). Camire et al., (2011) found that coaches who shared their coaching philosophy, shared outcomes and the intended direction behind the coaching approach with parents at the beginning of the season, resulted in more positive support from parents. This approach was reaffirmed by Mossman and Cronin, (2019), who found that parents who were able to focus on self-improvement and maximum effort were able to reduce the anxiety of sport participation in their children. This demonstrates that the acquisition and development of life skills can be reinforced in sport by parental reinforcement of life skills at home, and positive interactions with coaches and parents (Freire et al., 2021; Kendellen & Camiré, 2019; Mossman et al., 2021). For youth, life skills are most likely developed when they are taught by caring, competent adults who have knowledge of both direct and indirect teaching strategies (Gould, 2018). Therefore, the development of life skills is a collective effort and the shared responsibility of parents, coaches, the child, teachers, peers and other family members (Bowley et al., 2018).

## **2.7 Life Skill Development Programs**

When designing a life skill development framework, it is important to be aware of the culture and expectations of participants (Bowley et al., 2018). Life skill development programs that are intentional and systematic in design could enhance the health and well-being of youth (Hodge et al., 2017). The trends in life skill research tend to focus predominantly on youth as they begin to shift from a more behavioural focus in childhood to a wider range of life skills acquisition for adolescents (Lenzen et al., 2023). This would suggest that biological maturation also supports the development of several life skills and needs to be accounted for in program or framework designs. Findings from Nascimento et al., (2021) suggested that players who were older and had more years of experience in their sport were more equipped with life skill knowledge and capabilities, identifying that age has a significant influence on the perception and development of life skills increased (Freire et al., 2021; 2023).

Previous research has shown that youth sport programs and frameworks have key characteristics which can positively influence the development of life skills for adolescents such as

having clear goals and building consensus with those involved, establishing a firm but flexible structure, and specific teaching strategies used by coaches to reinforce the messaging (Lee et al., 2017). By satisfying the learners needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness the development of life skills is promoted and supported (Cronin et al., 2017). The size of a community also influences the ways in which sport is designed, delivered and the values that are placed on positive social outcomes by organisations, coaches, and parents. Therefore, sports organisations must be aware of their influence within their wider community to leverage their position and improve their efforts to educate coaches, broaden their reach on participants, and share the intended vision of youth development, community development, and social change (Martin & Camire, 2020).

Creating environments in which youth feel supported, safe, and comfortable is an important component of a successful SB-LSD programme. Research from Super et al., (2018) found that sport programmes that create environments where youth felt appreciated and understood furthers their engagement in the sport, providing emphasis on the importance of creating meaningful experiences, that enable youth participants to forget the stressors and problems of everyday life. This example demonstrates that sport can foster positive youth development if the adults responsible for the sport programme are deliberate in their actions, explicit in their life skill designs, and establish clear goals to create a positive sport environment with intentional learning experiences for youth development (Perkins & Noam, 2007).

## **2.8 Transfer of Life Skills**

To positively influence young people who regularly participate in sport, a life skills development focus provides opportunities to practice and develop skills within the sporting context that can transfer to other life domains (Allen & Rhind, 2019; Bean et al., 2018; Bean et al., 2020; Jacobs & Wright 2018; Kendellen and Camiré 2017; Kendellen & Camiré 2020). The concept of transferring life skills is based on the understanding that youth are in a continuous process of socialisation that influences their thoughts, behaviours, and their ability to transfer learned skills from one context to another (Jacobs & Wright 2021). Pierce et al. (2018) defines life skill transfer as, “The ongoing process by which an individual further develops or learns and internalizes a

personal asset (i.e. psychosocial skill, knowledge, disposition, identity construction, or transformation) and then experiences personal change through the application of the asset in one or more life domains beyond the context where it was originally learned” (p. 194). Therefore, it is argued that when referring to the transfer of life skills to link both the learning and the application together as they are both inherently connected; transfer is simply the process of learning and refining skills and then applying the learned skills outside of a sporting context (Kendellen & Camiré, 2020; Martin & Camire, 2020). It is through this process where youth can experience personal change and growth by applying skills outside of the context that they were learnt.

The acquisition and transfer of life skills is seen as essential for youth development, and although there is a high degree of responsibility on coaches to promote life skill transfer for youth participants, they should not be solely responsible (Hodge et al., 2017). Coaches should instead be part of a wider cooperative system within the entire sporting community who have a shared interest in the promotion and development of youth (Martin & Camire, 2020). This change in perspective would promote the transfer of life skills within youth sport and provide unique opportunities for youth to learn, develop, and practice habits within sport that can assist with the transition into adulthood (Jacobs & Wright, 2021).

There are several deliberate strategies in life skills development that have been identified as important for coaches to promote the development and transfer of life skills (Hayden et al., 2014). Some examples are including youth in discussions and selection of life skills that they wish to focus on, providing individualised feedback, building strong coach-athlete relationships (Hayden et al., 2014), role modelling life skills (Cronin & Allen 2018), peer evaluations, and providing opportunities for youth to display skills, creating family-centred events or take home tasks that facilitate family involvement (Hodge et al., 2017), and a more in-depth investigation into the transfer of life skill research such as interviewing, charting, time-lining, and journaling (Kendellen & Camiré, 2020). Each of these examples provides sports organisations and coaches with a range of techniques and skills that support them to be more explicit in the development, promotion, and support to learn and transfer life skills. Community coaches may face a diverse range of

developmental contexts, yet clear communication and explaining their coaching philosophy is crucial when building a consensus and navigating a myriad of deliberate life skill development coaching strategies (Lee et al., 2017). Participants who have a clear understanding of what different life skills are and how to apply them are better placed to develop and transfer life skills to other life context (Bean et al., 2018). The overarching key feature when looking at the transfer of life skills is that youth must understand and perceive the relevance of learned life skill when they are transferring skills between other life domains.

## **2.9 Measuring Life Skill Development**

Previous research has found that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to the theoretical foundations and techniques for designing and implementing effective SB-LSD programs or interventions in sports research (Allan et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2020). However, the measurement of life skill development through sport is less contentious. The Life Skill Scale for Sport (LSSS) which was developed by Cronin and Allen (2017), is a well-established self-reporting measure to assesses eight key life skills that can be developed and practiced through sport (teamwork, social skills, interpersonal communication, emotional skills, problem-solving and decision-making, goal setting, time management, and leadership). The LSSS uses a five-point Likert scale across 43 items relating to the eight key life skills and has provided researchers with valid measures that can be replicated for sports programs and frameworks (Nascimento et al., 2019). Life skill development researchers such as Cronin et al., (2017), Cronin, and Allen (2018), and Freire et al., (2021), have all utilised the LSSS in their life skill research, and due to its validity, the LSSS has been used globally and even translated into different languages such as Portuguese (Nascimento Junior et al., 2019), and French (Sabourin et al., 2020).

In more recent years, the LSSS has been expanded on by Mossman et al., (2021) who developed a transfer scale (LSSS-TS) to assess the same eight life skills in relation to other life domains such as school/education, home/family, community, employment/chores, and social settings. Within the LSSS-TS, participants are required to self-report using a five-point Likert scale to recall their awareness and application of life skills in sport just as they would for the LSSS.

However, it is worth highlighting that self-reporting can be influenced by memory recall and social desirability (Brenner & DeLamater, 2014; Cronin et al., 2022).

Although the development of life skills helps adolescents grow as a people and aids their transition through life, promotes their health and well-being, and supports participants to succeed in education, employment, and (Mossman et al., 2021). There is a large amount of alternative life skills identified throughout literature which do not have measures or scales such as mental resilience (Silva et al., 2022), empathy, companionship, creativity (Freire et al., 2021), emotional control, self-esteem (Bean et al., 2018), honesty, focus (Newman et al., 2021), loyalty, competitiveness, ingenuity (Kremer-Sadlik & Kim, 2007), and work ethic (Martin et al., 2022). Jacobs and Wright (2018) argue that although self-esteem and self-confidence can be improved through sports, they do not classify them as life skills due to them being personal qualities which are not easily taught, practiced, or learnt. Similarly, Yuen et al., (2010) stated that some 'skills' are more related to attitudes and mindsets such as resilience, effort, optimism, empathy, responsibility, respect, initiative, and integrity. Ronkainen et al., (2021) suggests that by only focusing on functional, teachable, and economically productive life skills, research literature has prematurely narrowed or limited their focus on life skills. Stating that researchers should not be so quick to judge what is and what is not a skill based on teachability and what skills are or aren't productive.

Due to the nature of SB-LSD and the many variables that can positively or negatively influence the development of life skills, underpinning research with theory provides opportunities for future researchers to also test hypotheses and develop a greater understanding of behavioural influences in line with that theory (Williams et al., 2020). Life skill development research in sport is still in its infancy and therefore narrowing a perspective could be detrimental to future findings. Therefore, for researchers, sport leaders, and coaches to have the most influence on life skill development they must ensure that the learning context is an environment where rules are clearly communication and consistently enforced in a fair manner enabling athletes to clearly understand through lived experiences to influence their understanding and development of life skills (Bean et al., 2018). Whilst there is an overall lack of validated theory measures in SB-LSD research to

specifically examine the influences of coaches, parents, peers, behaviour and attitudes (Burke et al., 2021). This lack of consistency across SB-LSD and coach education research would suggest that there is no dominant theory used in behaviour change and SB-LSD research (Allan et al., 2018).

## **2.10 Chapter Summary**

In summary, the literature highlights the potential of youth sport, particularly when grounded in frameworks such as PYD and supported by theoretical models like Self-Determination Theory and Basic Needs Theory, to foster meaningful life skill development. However, the effectiveness of this development is highly dependent on the intentionality of coaching practices, structural design of sport programs, and the influence of surrounding social agents such as parents and the sporting community. Despite increasing global interest in life skill development through sport, there remains limited research specifically examining how these principles are understood, applied, and measured within the New Zealand Football Junior Framework. Therefore, the following chapter outlines the methodological approach adopted to explore the extent to which life skill development is integrated into the NZF Junior Framework, how it is facilitated by coaches, and what strategies may enhance its application in youth football environments.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methods**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The aim of this research is to explore the use of life skill development within the New Zealand Football (NZF) Junior Framework. Three research questions underpin this exploration:

1. To what extent does life skill development take place within NZF Junior Framework?
2. How is life skill development understood and facilitated within the NZF Junior Framework?

3. What modifications can be made to the NZF Junior Framework to explicitly promote life skill development among youth football players?

This chapter provides an overview of the research framework used to underpin this thesis, including the theoretical paradigm, methodological approaches taken, and methods.

### **3.2 Research Paradigm**

Research paradigms can be described as a set of general philosophical assumptions about the nature of the world, how it is understood, and often form the foundation from which research is undertaken (Davies & Fisher, 2017). Pragmatism is not committed to any one system of philosophy and reality, instead researchers have freedom of choice, looking at the ‘what’ and ‘how’ to research based on the intended research direction (Creswell & Creswell, 2014). In allowing multiple truths to exist and be considered, the research questions are bound within a context. Having a pragmatic philosophical position differs to the views of paradigm purists who often argue the traditions of qualitative and quantitative research through the incompatibility between the epistemological (how we know), and ontological (nature of reality) (Lincoln & Guba, 1988). These opposing views of research traditions can be seen when compared to one another. For example, problems studied by positivists/post-positivists hold a deterministic philosophy which reflects the need to identify and assess causes that influence outcomes (Creswell & Creswell, 2014). Whereas constructivists are typically associated with qualitative research and believe that individuals seek understanding of their world by developing subjective meanings of their experiences, meanings are often varied or have multiple meanings leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views (Creswell & Creswell, 2014). In contrast to the philosophical perspectives of both positivism/post-positivism and constructivism paradigms, a pragmatic stance offers a view which remains open to all possibilities, where the researcher emphasises the research problem. In this instance, the pragmatic approach enabled the researcher to gain a better understanding of the use of life skill development in the NZF Junior Framework, and to what extent life skill development is understood and facilitated by junior football coaches. Therefore, the pragmatic approach was best suited for this research as it is a practical and applied research philosophy which focuses specifically on the

consequences of action and the process of inquiry which can provide insight on the use of life skill development within football in New Zealand.

### **3.3 Research Design**

Following the pragmatic approach, a multi-methods research (MMR) design was utilized to explore life skill development within the NZF Junior Framework. MMR is a research design method which upholds pragmatic philosophical assumptions by combining data-gathering and analysing techniques from two or more methodological traditions (Seawright, 2016). Therefore, MMR enables the researcher to combine both quantitative and qualitative research methods, which is well suited to the pragmatic approach, as it enables the researcher to combine any methods of inquiry to most effectively answer the research questions. The understanding and measurement of life skill development is known to be complex due to the variety of ways it is enacted and observed (Jacobs & Wright, 2018); Therefore, an MMR approach is appropriate to effectively explore the research questions. MMR supports different methods or approaches to be used in parallel or sequence but are not integrated until inferences are being made (Johnson et al., 2007). Therefore, using an MMR approach has enabled the researcher to choose different methodological analysis, such as two qualitative research methods and one quantitative method (Kasirye, 2021). To gather the results of MMR and further enhance the understanding of life skill development within the NZF Junior Framework, a convergent design supported the research where both qualitative and quantitative data sets were collected and analysed separately (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). In all research, the protection and safeguarding of researchers and participants is important and something all researchers must consider through the application of appropriate ethical principles. As the researcher is conducting research at Auckland University of Technology (AUT), the researcher received ethical approval August 2022, by sharing ethical considerations of existing risks to the AUT Ethics Committee, reference 2254 (Appendix A).

#### **3.3.1 Content Analysis**

Firstly, content analysis was used as a method to gain a foundational understanding of the information related to youth football and development that have been disseminated publicly by key

organisations involved in youth football in New Zealand. A basic inductive content analysis supported the research, by identifying themes, patterns and biases, which is suggested as suited when studying a phenomenon where prior knowledge is fragmented (Kyngäs, 2020). Therefore, the purpose of a basic inductive content analysis is to aid the researcher in making inferences from texts and other meaningful documents that are rich in data and provide valuable information about phenomena (Gheyle & Jacobs 2017; Kleinheksel et al., 2020). Content analysis is well-established as an appropriate method used within MMR (White & Marsh, 2006) and is a data method that supports researchers to develop a deeper understanding of a particular phenomenon, often providing structure to large amounts of textual data through systematic interpretation processes (Kleinheksel et al., 2020). The inductive content analysis was used to further the understanding of the research topic and what information is currently available to draw inferences and understanding related to the research questions (Mayring, 2014). Content analysis is a flexible research method that can be applied to many problems either by itself or in collaboration with other methods to address the potential impact of the content (White & Marsh, 2006).

During the content analysis phase of the research, publicly available online documents from Sport New Zealand (Sport NZ), NZF, and Northern Region Football (NRF) that related to the development of life skills and youth sport were collected to be analysed. The content analysis included the reviewing of annual reports, strategic documents, and any other additional documents and reports in relation to the development of life skills in youth sport. Sport NZ, NZF, and NRF are important stakeholders in leadership, guidance and information regarding life skill development within junior football, and represent governmental, national and regional levels of the governance and development of the sport in New Zealand. Documents that were reviewed are listed in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1: Life Skill Development Content in New Zealand Sport Pathways**

Organisation	Documents Reviewed
Sport New Zealand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="614 1899 1093 1937">• Sport NZ Annual Report 2020/21</li> <li data-bbox="614 1955 1093 1993">• Sport NZ Annual Report 2021/22</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sport NZ Annual Report 2022/23</li> <li>• Sport NZ Statement of Performance Expectations 2022/23</li> <li>• Sport NZ Statement of Performance Expectations 2023/24</li> <li>• Active NZ: Changes in Participation</li> <li>• Balance is Better</li> <li>• Voice of Participant – Club Experience Survey/Report</li> <li>• Voice of Rangatahi Survey/Report</li> <li>• Active Participant Survey</li> <li>• Sport NZ Talent Plan 2016-2020</li> <li>• Sport NZ Kia Hīanga</li> </ul>
New Zealand Football	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual Report 2022/23</li> <li>• Strategic Plan 2020 – 2026</li> <li>• Junior Framework Review 2018</li> <li>• New Zealand Football Junior Framework</li> <li>• NZF Junior Framework Game Day Review</li> <li>• New Zealand Football Youth Framework</li> <li>• New Zealand Football, Coach Education</li> </ul>
Northern Region Football	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual Report 2021/22</li> <li>• Annual Report 2022/23</li> <li>• Strategic Direction 2022-2026</li> <li>• NRF Junior Football Handbook</li> <li>• GoodSports Guide for Coaches</li> </ul>

For this research, a latent inductive content analysis was undertaken, enabling the research to look beyond direct statements, exploring holistic youth development information in relation to the phenomena of life skill development. Latent content analysis acknowledges that the researcher is intimately involved in the analytical processes, therefore it is their role to actively use mental schema, lenses, and theories to interpret and understand data (Kleinheksel et al., 2020). The researcher immersed themselves in the textual data noting anything important which was then collected. The research then assigned codes and highlighted colours to specific words, or lines of

text (Drisko & Maschi, 2015). Codes were subsequently organized into themes using an approach aligned with thematic analysis. Given the methodological overlap with content analysis, particularly in identifying patterns of similarity and difference across responses, this process facilitated the development of themes that directly addressed the research questions (Terry et al., 2017).

### ***3.3.2 Participant Selection***

Seven junior football coaches within the NRF region were selected to participate in the research via purposive sampling. This required coaches to have read the Coaching Information Sheet (Appendix B) which was distributed to clubs via an NRF newsletter. The seven coaches contacted the researcher expressing their interest and only those that met the needs of the research criteria were selected. There were two phases of research conducted due to low participation numbers in phase one (N=2 coaches, August 2022). Phase one began ten weeks into the 2022 NRF junior football season which was over half-way through the season, and the second research phase (N=5 coaches, June 2023) was conducted two weeks into the 2023 NRF junior football season, which resulted in greater uptake in participants.

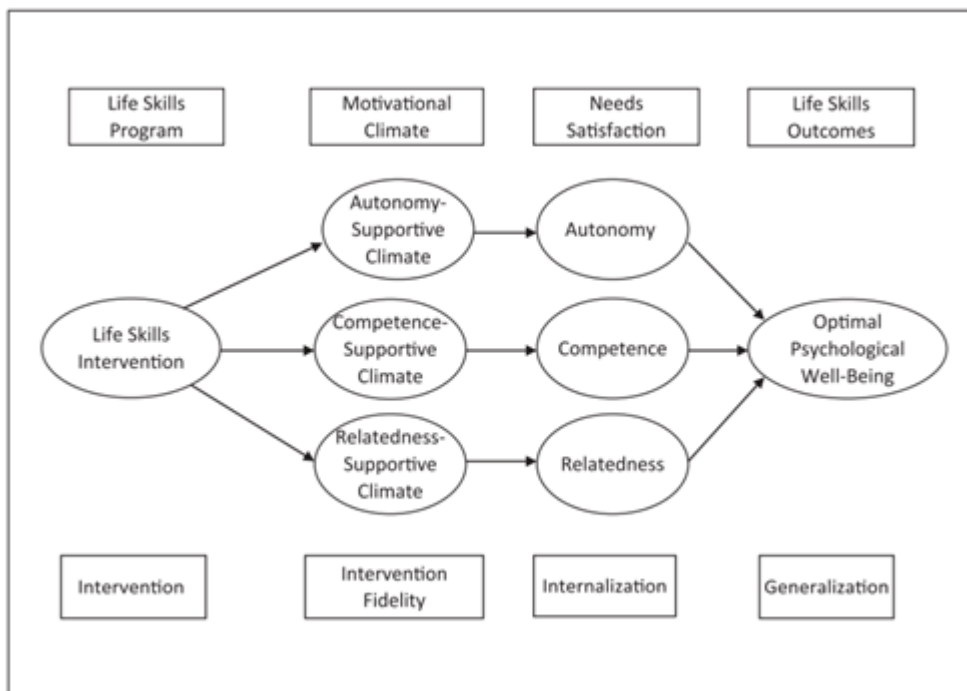
Following the intervention, participating coaches were tasked with sharing an invitation to parents of the youth football players in their team which explained the research and invited them to participate in a survey via an online link. A Participant Information Sheet was included at the beginning of the survey (Appendix C). 12 parents completed the pre-intervention survey. Another invitation was then sent after the eight-week intervention period to re-survey parents to explore any observational changes made in their children related to life skills. 15 parents complete the post-intervention survey.

### ***3.3.3 Research Intervention and Focus Groups***

The research intervention was designed using guidance from Allan et al. (2018), Bowley et al. (2018), and Hodge Danish, & Martin (2012). In doing so, the researcher was able to combine the approaches of life skill development intervention into the research design to deliver an appropriate intervention to the coach participants. Firstly, coaches and coaching contexts are not homogenous;

there is no one-size-fits-all approach and any intervention designs must consider the contextual factors (e.g. strategies for elite level coaches would differ considerably in comparison to volunteer youth coaches) (Allan et al., 2018). The specific goal of any life skill development intervention is to increase the likelihood of success by enhancing personal competence (Hodge Danish & Martin, 2012). According to conceptual models of life skill development interventions, a life skill development intervention will be more successful if the instructor/leaders are able to satisfy the three basic psychological needs of their learners (see Figure 3.1). Therefore, it was important for the coaches to provide opportunities for their players to learn life skills that would help satisfy their needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness

**Figure 3.1: Conceptual Model for Life Skill Development Interventions**



*(Hodge Danish & Martin, 2012)*

The research began with an intervention which was conducted via online focus group which involved discussions related to life skill awareness in junior football, providing and discussing strategies for positive reinforcement of life skills, as well as steps for coaches to be more explicit in their approaches to life skill development. Interventions within research refers to a specific action, or set of actions, implemented by the researcher to influence an outcome or to test a hypothesis

(Creswell et al., 2009). Interventions have been used on previous studies involving life skill development and coaches, where the interventions are designed by the researcher to target specific coach behaviours to enhance the observational accuracy, increase supportive behaviours, and instruct coaches on useful techniques to support the development of their players (Allan et al., 2018). The intervention enacted in the focus groups concentrated on defining and discussing four key life skills (teamwork, communication, problem solving and decision making, and goal setting). Bowley et al.'s (2018) six steps to explicitly develop life skills was used as a foundation to structure the intervention. These steps included; 1) gaining an understanding of the coaches awareness and knowledge of life skill development, 2) asking the coaches to define and identify life skills that could be specifically developed through football, 3) highlighting the role and influence that coaches, parents, and peers can have on youth and how they contribute to the development of life skills, 4) emphasising the learning expectations that players and parents expect to obtain through football, 5) educating the coaches on life skill integration strategies, and 6) educating the coaches on the three steps for life skill development. Bowley et al.'s (2018) three step process to promote life skill development was also used within the intervention as a tool for coaches to explicitly develop life skills within their activities. The three-step process included:

- 1) presenting the message of life skills at the beginning of the session
- 2) continuing to reinforce the message throughout the session
- 3) initiating discussions regarding the transfer of life skills enhancing the players

understanding of the skill and how it relates to experiences outside of sport.

Typically, research interventions are developed with the intent of achieving changes in outcomes in knowledge or behaviours (Blankenship et al., 2006). Therefore, to further support the coaches following the intervention, coaches were provided with a life skill information sheet (Appendix D) which included the definition of each of the four focused life skills, the strategies for integration, and the three steps to promote life skill development. Participants were also offered an optional follow up session with the researcher, where they could review training session plans and discussed different ways to promote, identify, and explicitly include life skill development within

their plans. Both coaches from the first research phase took part in the follow-up session, and one coach from the second research phase took part in the follow-up session.

Following the research intervention, the coaches were given an eight-week coaching window to implement the planned life skill development integration within their training sessions. This period provided the coaches with a suitable amount of time to embed explicit approaches to the development of life skills within their training sessions and games to observe any potential changes. Following this period, the coaches participated in a post-intervention focus group to discuss their observations and experiences related to the explicit development of life skills within their team, the NZF Junior Framework, and recommendations for future life skill development approaches within the NZF Junior Framework.

Each focus group was conducted online to help reduce any geographical constraints of attempting to assemble all participants into one place and ensured that all the coaches had an opportunity to provide feedback on their experiences. Each of the focus group interviews lasted between 60 to 90 minutes in duration. The focus groups were conducted on Microsoft Teams to allow for easy recording. The recordings were later transcribed by the primary researcher. Focus group discussions are another form of qualitative research, where participants are asked specific questions about the research topic with the added dimension of interactions among members (Wong, 2008). Focus groups are a commonly used research method that offers a platform for participants to discuss their views in a group environment, facilitates interactional dynamics and the chance to elaborate on experiences and perceptions (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2017).

In this instance, focus groups were conducted to gather in-depth qualitative data from the coaches regarding the development of life skills within the NZF Junior Framework. The focus group questions were semi-structured in nature with open ended questions to encourage the coaches to discuss their experiences in-depth. The informal and flexible structure of focus group interviews helps to make participants more comfortable resulting in greater depth on their insights and experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data derived from the focus group interviews.

Thematic analysis is a very common technique used in qualitative research, as it involves the identification of reoccurring patterns within qualitative data that are presented as ‘themes’ (Lochmiller, 2021). In using thematic analysis within research, the aim is to consider how the reported information addresses specific research questions, or improves new conceptual or theoretical understandings, researchers are engaged with the data, strengthening the researchers position and developing a high degree of confidence about the reliability and trustworthiness of the reported (Lochmiller, 2021; Terry & Hayfield, 2021).

Within thematic analysis, there are three integral concepts which support qualitative analysis being reflexive, coding reliability, and codebook (Braun et al., 2019). Given the researcher’s pragmatic position for MMR, coding reliability was best suited for the thematic analysis to reduce the researchers bias by emphasizing the procedures for ensuring objectivity, reliability, and accuracy of coding (Braun & Clark, 2022). Thematic analysis can be either inductive ‘bottom-up’ or deductive ‘top-down’, where deductive attempts to fit data into predefined themes, theories, or codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Whereas, inductive is a more open approach to generating themes, following a well-established six-stage approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Proudfoot, 2022). Within the research, an inductive approach was taken, supported by Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis steps.

Table 3.2 provides an overview of the six-steps taken by the researcher to identify themes and sub-themes from the focus group transcripts using Braun and Clark’s (2006) thematic analysis model. Firstly, the researcher familiarized themselves with the data, by relistening to the recorded interviews and reading the transcriptions. Secondly, the researcher trawled through the transcriptions, highlighting, coding, and identifying any interesting or relevant text that emerged from the reading transcriptions and relistening to the focus group interviews. Thirdly, the codes and highlighted text were collated to begin identifying any potential patterns or significant themes. The broad themes were then reviewed in relation to the research questions. Lastly, the researcher named and defined each theme to reflect the focus and scope of the research in relation to the research

questions, codes, data, and overall analysis. The key themes from the data were synthesized and examined in Chapter 4. Throughout the analysis, the researcher regularly reviewed focus group transcripts, themes, codes, and notes to ensure accuracy and contextual relevance.

**Table 3.2: Thematic Analysis Approach (Braun & Clark, 2006)**

<p><b>1. Familiarisation with the data</b></p>	<p>This phase involves reading and re-reading the data, to become immersed and intimately familiar with its content.</p>
<p><b>2. Coding</b></p>	<p>This phase involves generating succinct labels (codes) that identify important features of the data that might be relevant to answering the research question. It involves coding the entire dataset, and after that, collating all the codes and all relevant data extracts, together for later stages of analysis.</p>
<p><b>3. Generating initial themes</b></p>	<p>This phase involves examining the codes and collated data to identify significant broader patterns of meaning (potential themes). It then involves collating data relevant to each candidate theme, so that you can work with the data and review the viability of each candidate theme.</p>
<p><b>4. Reviewing themes</b></p>	<p>This phase involves checking the candidate themes against the dataset, to determine that they tell a convincing story of the data, and one that answers the research question. In this phase, themes are typically refined, which sometimes involves them being split, combined, or discarded. In our TA approach, themes are defined as pattern of shared meaning underpinned by a central concept or idea.</p>
<p><b>5. Defining and naming themes</b></p>	<p>This phase involves developing a detailed analysis of each theme, working out the scope and focus of each theme, determining the ‘story’ of each. It also involves deciding on an informative name for each theme.</p>
<p><b>6. Writing up</b></p>	<p>This final phase involves weaving together the analytic narrative and data extracts, and contextualising the analysis in relation to existing literature</p>

### 3.3.4 Surveys

The final research method within the MMR design included surveying the parents of youth football players to explore their observations regarding the development of their child’s life skills through their participation in football. As parents have a significant influence on their child’s development and retention of life skills and are well placed to witness any changes that may occur, it was important to gain their perspective in this research (Kendellen & Camiré, 2019).

The Life Skill Survey for Sport – Transfer Scale (LSSS-TS) (Mossman et al., 2021) is a framework to measure the extent in which life skills are present within sport to further understand how life skills can be explicitly facilitated. The LSSS-TS has been frequently used in sport-based life skill development research as a self-assessment tool for the development of life skills in sports as well as their transfer to other life domains (Mossman et al., 2021). Therefore, the 40-item scale from the LSSS-TS were utilised in this research to provide an opportunity for the parents of junior football players to rate perceived behaviour change of their children before and after the coaching intervention.

The LSSS-TS assesses eight of the most observed life skills developed through youth sports. The LSSS-TS also assesses the transfer of the same eight predominant life skills in sport, related to five different domains including: school, home/family, community, employment/chores, and social settings. The 40 items assessing life skills were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, (1=Not at all, 5=Very much) (Table 3.3).

**Table 3.3: Parents Pre/Post Intervention Survey**

Life Skill	Item
<b>Teamwork</b> <i>“How well does your child...”</i>	Works well with a team?
	Help a teammate with a task?
	Accepts suggestions for improvement?
	Work with others for the good of the team?
	Build team spirit?
	Suggest team members how they can improve?
	Change the way they perform for the benefit of the team?
	Use teamwork in school?
	Use teamwork at home?
	Use teamwork within the community?
	Use teamwork when helping out/doing chores?
Use teamwork in relationships with others?	

<b>Communication</b> <i>“How well does your child...”</i>	Speak clearly to others?
	Pay attention to what someone is saying?
	Pay attention to people’s body language?
	Communicate well with others?
	Use communication skills in school?
	Use communication skills within community?
	Use communication skills when helping out/ doing chores?
	Use communication skills in relationships?
<b>Goal Setting</b> <i>“How well does your child...”</i>	Set goals to continue improving?
	Set challenging goals?
	Check progress towards their goals?
	Set short-term goals to achieve long-term goals?
	Remain committed to their goals?
	Set goals for practice?
	Set specific goals?
	Use teamwork in school?
	Use goal setting at home?
	Use goal setting at home?
	Use goal setting within community?
	Use goal setting when helping out/ doing chores?
Use goal setting in relationships with others?	
<b>Social Skills</b> <i>“How well does your child...”</i>	Start a conversation?
	Interact in various social settings?
	Help others without them asking for help?
	Get involved in group activities?
	Maintain close friendships?
	Use social skills in school?

	Use social skills at home?
	Use social skills within community?
	Use social skills when helping out/ doing chores?
	Use social skills in relationships with others?
<b>Problem Solving and Decision Making</b> <i>“How well does your child...”</i>	Think carefully about a problem?
	Compare possible solutions to find the best one?
	Create as many solutions as possible to a problem?
	Evaluate a solution to a problem?
	Use problem solving and decision making in school?
	Use problem solving and decision making at home?
	Use problem solving and decision making within community?
	Use problem solving and decision making when helping out/ doing chores?
	Use problem solving and decision making in relationships with others?
<b>Emotional Skills</b> <i>“How well does your child...”</i>	Know how to deal with their emotions?
	Use their emotions to stay focused?
	Understand that they behave differently when emotional?
	Notice how they feel?
	Use emotional skills in school?
	Use emotional skills at home?
	Use emotional skills within community?
	Use emotional skills when helping out/ doing chores?
	Use emotional skills in relationships with others?
<b>Time Management</b> <i>“How well does your child...”</i>	Manage their time?
	Assess how much time they spend on activities?
	Control how they use their time?
	Set goals to use their time effectively?
	Use time management in school?

	Use time management at home?
	Use time management within community?
	Use time management when helping out/ doing chores?
	Use time management in relationships with others?
<b>Leadership</b> <i>“How well does your child...”</i>	Know how to positively influence a group of individuals?
	Organise team members to work together?
	Know how to motivate others?
	Help others solve their performance problems?
	Consider the individual options of each team member?
	Be a good role model for others?
	Set high standards for the team?
	Recognise other people’s achievements?
	Use leadership skills in school?
	Use leadership skills at home?
	Use leadership skills within community?
	Use leadership skills when helping out/ doing chores?
	Use leadership skills in relationships with others?

The LSSS-TS survey was created using Qualtrics XM to enable online distribution. The survey remained open for two weeks at each phase of data collection. Upon closure of the survey, results were exported onto an Excel spreadsheet. The data on the spreadsheet was then cleaned to ensure data accuracy prior to coding. Prior to the statistical analysis, the responses were categorized into ‘phase 1’ and ‘phase 2’ to represent the pre and post intervention phases of the survey distribution.

Statistical analysis was conducted using the IBM SPSS software platform to simplify large amounts of quantitative data and present results in a more accessible and comprehensive manner (Thrane, 2022). A large sample size more accurately reflects the target population (Verma &

Verma, 2020), and it enables the use of inferential statistics, leading to more reliable findings (Columb & Atkinson, 2016).

In this study, the sample size for the parent surveys was moderate (N = 27). Descriptive, and chi-square tests were conducted on the pre- and post-survey data.

### **3.4 Chapter Summary**

This chapter provides an overview of the design of this research which intends to investigate life skill development within the NZF Junior Framework. The research is underpinned by pragmatic research paradigm that supports a multi-method approach to the research, combining both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. The data is collected using content analysis, focus group interviews, and pre / post surveys to best understand the phenomenon that is life skill development within the NZF Junior Framework. Throughout the chapter, the researcher's position and justification were supported and in line with the research methodology, data collection and data analysis ensuring consistency from data generation to interpretation. This chapter establishes a clear methodological framework that supports the contribution to knowledge within sport-based life skill development and provides validity to the research. The focus of the next chapter presents the results of the multi-method analysis.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

As this research uses an exploratory sequential multi-methods design to explore life skill development within the New Zealand Football (NZF) Junior Framework, this chapter is divided into the three sections of results based on each method of data collection. It is through these three sections in which the aim is to provide insight into the extent that life skill development takes place within the NZF Junior Framework, how life skill development is understood and facilitated within the NZF Junior Framework, and what modification can be made to the NZF Junior Framework to explicitly promote life skill development. Firstly, the results from, content analysis were used by the researcher to gain a general understanding of life skill development within New Zealand sport, through the reviewing of relevant documents from Sport New Zealand (Sport NZ), NZF, and Northern Region Football (NRF) are presented. Next, the use of life skill development in football in New Zealand was further explored through focus groups with coaches of junior football within the NRF catchment. Finally, the results from the parents' online survey, where they responded to questions related to their children's development of life skills, pre and post coach intervention, are reported.

#### **4.2 Content Analysis**

The purpose behind the content analysis of Sport NZ, NZF and NRF documents was to identify and explore key messages and themes in relation to youth development and the development of life skills. The content that was analysed in this research was publicly available reports and documents that related to youth sport and the development of life skills. Within the content analysis Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework was used to identify three key themes within the explored documents; 1) the vision for youth sport, 2) operationalising youth development, and 3) strategic and operational disconnect.

##### ***4.2.1 The Vision for Youth Sport***

Across all three organisation's documents examined, there is a clear emphasis on the development of youth sport. Each organisation shares a similar approach in wanting to further promote their vision for youth sport through the use key terms such as 'empowerment', 'education', 'strengthening', and 'support' for their sporting community. Whilst their overall visions toward youth sport share various similarities, there are differences evident in how they communicate and promote their visions to their stakeholders.

For Sport NZ, developing a love of sport and recreation for youth participants, along with life-long participation, are key visions for Sport NZ (Sport New Zealand, 2022; 2023; 2024). They identify that due to its culture, size and connectivity, New Zealand has a unique opportunity to significantly influence the understanding and implementation of youth development pathways within sports that follow good practice, provide youth development opportunities at the right time with the right support (Sport New Zealand, 2016). As the government agency for sport, the way in which Sport NZ has approached their vision of youth sport is to share the responsibility across the industry, through educating sport organisations about the importance of youth development and empowering them to provide development opportunities. The rationale behind this vision is linked closely to their concern with the trends regarding youth sport participation levels across New Zealand. Youth sport participation concerns have been reported by Sport NZ since 2017, and continue to be addressed in their latest strategic plan stating that:

*“Rangatahi (Youth) participation levels decrease between ages 12-17 and often do not recover over the course of their lives due to a range of contributing factors”*

*(Sport New Zealand, 2024 - b).*

These youth participation insights and current strategic direction have been strengthened over the years as research from Sport NZ has indicated that participation in physical activity peaks between ages 12-14 years old and then begins to decline steeply from 15 years old (Sport New Zealand, 2021). They identified that there are a range of factors which contribute to the decline in youth sport participation, such as sport being no longer mandatory in schools from year 11 (15–18 years old), and an increasing emphasis on competitive sport as young people grow older. In the

latest Sport NZ 2023/2024 annual report, it was reported that youth participation trends have continued to decline. Although concerns were initially addressed seven years prior, the latest annual report continues to focus on improving physical literacy and activity for Tamariki (5–11-year-olds) and Rangatahi (12–17-year-olds), with an intent to reduce teenage participation drop off, especially among 15–17-year-olds (Sport New Zealand, 2024).

The Sport NZ documents analysed indicate that they have been measuring youth participation rates over several years and are concerned over the decline in participation, particularly of older youth. They are also aware of their role, as the government agency for sport in New Zealand, to address this decline, and subsequently have included youth participation and development as a key vision of the organisation to develop life-long participation in sport.

Similar to Sport NZ, NZF's vision for football within New Zealand is closely linked to the development of youth. NZF's 'Strategic Direction 2020-2026' highlights strategic priorities linked to youth such as 'enriching lives through football' and 'strengthening capability and leadership across football' (New Zealand Football, 2020). Within these strategic priorities, NZF identifies actions to promote youth development through football in NZ, including:

*“Promote the game, role models within football values and the benefits to families and whanau”*

*“Facilitate youth pathways that meet participant needs with an emphasis on partnerships between clubs and schools”*

*“Work to ensure family-friendly environments where children engage with the game”*

*(New Zealand Football, 2020).*

Whilst there is no direct mention of life skills for youth development within NZF's vision, there are numerous actions within their strategic documents which are focused on the junior and youth sporting experience through the promotion of role models, updating pathways to meet participants needs, and providing education and support on how to provide quality experiences for participants across the sport. This demonstrates a clear intent from NZF to promote and improve the junior and youth football experience by raising collective awareness across the sport.

For NRF, their vision in relation to youth sport is less clear. Whilst their vision indicates intent to promote positive experiences, connect communities and enrich lives, it is broad:

*“To enrich lives and connect people through positive experiences to build strong communities.”*

*(Northern Region Football, 2024)*

Although NRF’s vision for football within their region is very broad, their strategic priorities indicate a connection to youth development with an intention to promote ‘growth in targeted youth participation’ and prioritise ‘positive sports experiences’ (Northern Region Football, 2024). Although the vision statement from NRF has a slight focus on youth development, there is a lack of guidance and direction from governing organisations, NZF and Sport NZ, on how regional and community sport organisations can make sporting experiences more meaningful to youth participants.

#### ***4.2.2 Operationalising Youth Development***

Sport NZ, NZF and NRF focus on providing opportunities for youth athletes to develop their psychosocial and technical skills within sport. Together these organisations work collaboratively to ensure youth are improving their sporting abilities and developing skills that will support their development in other life domains. However, given that each organisation plays a different role and contributes to a different governance tier in the ecosystem of sport in New Zealand, the actions related to youth development differs across each of the organisations.

It is evident within Sport NZ’s documents that they are taking a comprehensive approach to youth participation by addressing the sport system and their contribution to decreasing participation numbers. The goal of life-long participation in sport for all New Zealanders is echoed throughout Sport NZ’s documents, with the decline in youth participation rates recognised as a critical impediment to this goal. By developing several youth sport initiatives, Sport NZ indicate a willingness to adapt and challenge traditional delivery methods and continue to work alongside sports to gather further insights and understanding on youth sport participation within NZ.

Although Sport NZ do not directly deliver sport, their approach seems to be to educate and invest in youth sport to address the declining youth participation trends (Sport New Zealand, 2024). As part

of this, Sport NZ have developed a range of initiatives that are designed to incentivize and support sport organisations in New Zealand to improve their delivery and development of youth sport, promoting quality experiences and the development of youth participants (see Table 4.1).

**Table 4.1: Sport New Zealand Youth Initiatives**

SNZ– Youth Initiatives	Initiative Overview
Balance is Better	First launched in 2016, Balance is Better is the philosophy that underpins Sport NZ’s approach to youth sport. Focusing on young people staying involved in sports and realising their potential at the right time through quality experiences for all regardless of motivations, needs, and ability. (Sport New Zealand, 2023 – b)
Big Wins Promotion	Launched in 2023, the big wins promotion focuses on the holistic benefits youth can gain from participating in sport such as, friendship and relationship skills, resilience, problem solving and decision making, and the opportunity to connect and give back to communities all of which can be built through sport. (Sport New Zealand, 2023 -b)
Coaching for Impact - Pilot	Launched in 2021, the Coaching for Impact pilot was a two-year program with 60 youth coaches deepened the knowledge of youth coaching and working with youth in New Zealand. (Sport New Zealand, 2022 - b)
Individual Hardship Fund	Piloted in 2021 and launched in 2023, the initiatives provide financial support for tamariki and rangatahi in the context of whānau who are experiencing financial hardship and missing out on physical activity opportunities. (Sport New Zealand, 2022 - b; 2023 - b)
Keep Up With the Play	Launched in 2020, Keep Up With the Play was a public awareness campaign based on B.I.B philosophies to raise awareness for sport administrators, coaches, teachers, and parents as to why we are losing young people from sport and how to counteract it. (Sport New Zealand, 2023 – b)
Good Sports	Good Sports first developed by Aktive - Auckland, has now been rolled out nationwide as a culture change initiative to educating and supporting key adult influencers to create positive sporting experiences for youth (in particular coaches and parents). The Good Sport Spine highlights and identifies the differences in climate of performance vs climate of development for parents, coaches, and sports administrators. (Sport New Zealand, n.d.)
The Play Plan - Kia Hīanga, Healthy Active Learning and Tapuwaekura	Kia Hīanga is the internal play work plan for Sport NZ2022-25, which aims to support all tamariki to have equal opportunities to achieve their goals and aspirations, fulfilling their potential because of a connected system working together. (Sport New Zealand, 2022 - b)

Tū Manawa Active Aotearoa	Launched in 2020, Tū Manawa Active Aotearoa is a fund administered by Regional Sports Trusts with the intention behind the fund being to provide physical activity opportunities for youth who are less active or missing out on opportunities for play, active recreation, and sport. (Sport New Zealand, 2021)
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The purpose of each Sport NZ initiative differs to ensure that multiple components of support and investment into youth sport is embraced. Some of Sport NZ’s initiatives focus on promoting physical activity for youth that are less active or face financial barriers to participation, such as the The Play Plan, Tū Manawa Active Aotearoa Fund, and Individual Hardship Funds. These initiatives are designed to target youth participation through supporting those that are missing out on sport or physical activities. Comparatively, other Sport NZ initiatives are focused on the promotion of youth development and positive sporting experiences, such as the Big Wins Promotion, Coaching for Impact, and Good Sports. Balance is Better is Sport NZ’s approach to supporting the sport system within New Zealand and address the youth participation decline, underpinned by a philosophy that intends to create quality experiences for all young people (Sport New Zealand, n.d.). Therefore, these initiatives align to Sport NZ’s ‘Balance is Better’ philosophy. The promotion of the ‘Balance is Better’ philosophy and principles has provided an emphasis for sports organisations within New Zealand to focus on the youth sport experience, as stated by Sport NZ:

*“The Balance is Better philosophy has been developed by the New Zealand sport system (e.g. sport organisations, leaders and administrators, schools, clubs, coaches, parents and volunteers) to support the culture change needed to provide quality sport opportunities for tamariki (5-11) and rangatahi (12-18). Sport NZ’s current focus is on rangatahi, given the decline we are seeing in teenage participation.” (Sport New Zealand, n.d.).*

Additionally, within Sport NZ’s Statement of Performance Expectations 2023/24 it is stated that all national and regional partners are beginning to adopt Balance is Better through the investment approach and aim to support the principles through regional and local levels of sport stating that:

*“Sport NZ’s goal is to work more closely with selected partners who have not only committed to Balance is Better at an executive level but have also committed to drive greater change towards the principles of Balance is Better through regional and local activities.” (Sport New Zealand, 2023-c).*

It is through this focus on a ‘Balance is Better’ approach to youth sport that Sport NZ have utilised investment strategies to entice national sport organisations (NSO’s) to subscribe to the philosophy and its practices within their youth sport programmes. NZF was one of the first NSO’s to sign the Balance is Better statement of intent in 2019, stating:

*“We’ve long been advocates of the Balance is Better philosophy. From launching the award-winning Whole of Football Plan back in 2011, to aligning with Balance is Better in 2019, we’re continually evolving how we run Junior and Youth Football to ensure all young people playing football and futsal have quality experiences no matter what level they’re involved in.”*

*(New Zealand Football. (n.d.).*

However, following the signing of the ‘Balance is Better’ statement of intent, NZF then had to begin looking inwards at their current delivery and education regarding junior and youth sport. In doing so, NZF were able to create their own ‘Balance is Better’ statement of intent or the wider football community, stating:

*“We’re asking all our parents, whānau, coaches, managers, and volunteers involved with football and futsal to remember that young people play sport to have fun, be challenged, develop and improve, be part of a team or group, and enjoy time with friends.” (New Zealand Football, n.d.)*

It is through NZF’s ‘Whole of Football’ plan where they are most aligned operationally to the ‘Balance is Better’ approach, providing a plan for youth development in football which includes both the junior (U4-U12) and youth (U13-U19) frameworks, providing an age and stage appropriate structure for junior and youth footballers in New Zealand. The NSO have operationalised these strategic aims supporting clubs and coaches to deliver their ‘Whole of Football’ plan since 2011, continuing to update the Whole of Football plan to meet the needs of participants, and supporting clubs through the likes of coach education, and provision of junior and youth coaching packs.

Within the NZF Junior Framework, there are also five principles which underpin junior football in New Zealand; 1) Accumulating touches on the ball, 2) Early engagement, 3) Recognition of development age, 4) Physical competency, and 5) the Four Corners approach (technical and tactical, mental, physical, social and emotional) (New Zealand Football, n.d.). Each of these principles demonstrates a football related development outcome aligned to the ages and stages design of the NZF Junior Framework, however, there is no mention of the life skills that can be developed and obtained through the framework. Aside from football specific development outcomes, the NZF Junior Framework addresses the holistic needs of each age and stage of the framework, however, there are minimal links to guidance and support for holistic youth development and instead tend to promote the technical and tactical youth development outcomes.

Although NZF have demonstrated an intent to promote and align youth development in football through the Junior and Youth frameworks, the holistic development intent and outcomes are not very clear. There is a brief mention of life skills throughout the framework, such as problem solving and decision making, teamwork, and goal setting, yet there is no explicit guidance on how coaches can actively operationalise these skills into junior football (New Zealand Football, n.d.). This lack of operational holistic youth development is again reflected in the training steps for each age and stage, which have a comprehensive focus on physical, technical, and tactical guidance for each age and stage, but minimal guidance on how coaches can promote the social, emotional, and mental aspects of youth development within football (New Zealand Football, n.d.).

As NRF work directly with clubs at the grassroots level, they provide operational guidance to their clubs through the 'Junior Football Handbook' (Northern Region Football, n.d.). The handbook is used to support clubs and coaches, explaining the purpose of junior football, key on-field details from the NZF Junior Framework, and holistic guidance for junior sport from the 'Balance is Better' and Good Sports initiatives (Northern Region Football, n.d.). NRF's responsibility as a regional football organisation is to support clubs in their region to deliver the 'Whole of Football' plan, and subsequently the NZF Junior Framework, ensuring that there is a coordinated approach to junior and youth football delivery in the region. Therefore, to support and

improve the education of junior football delivery standards, NRF produced the ‘Junior Football Handbook’ which summarises the NZF Junior Framework into an easy-to-read document for clubs, that aims to educate clubs, coaches, and parents on the impact that adult-led behaviour can have on the junior football experience and provide operational support for best practices in youth development.

#### ***4.2.3 Strategic and Operational Disconnect***

Through the analysis of Sport NZ, NZF and NRF documents it is evident that whilst there is a unanimous general intent to promote youth development from a strategic standpoint, there is limited information that focuses specifically on operationalizing youth development and ways in which these organisations can support grassroots levels of youth sport. Therefore, to bridge the gap between strategic intent and operational guidance and support, Sport NZ have conducted youth orientated market research, such as the Voice of Participant Survey, Changes in Participation Survey (CoP) and the School Age Review to develop a deeper understanding of youth sport participation to further improve youth sport participation moving forwards. The CoP survey shows a decreasing trend in the development of essential life skills that youth are learning and as a result, weakening the relationship with organised sport participation (Sport New Zealand, 2022). Additionally, the School Age Review have identified that there is a loss of resilience and soft skills developed through sports, as well as a need for development of skills outside of sports (Sport New Zealand, 2019). The School Age Review reports:

*“Young people are looking for meaningful experiences they can use as a way of having fun, developing social and physical skills, and developing their fitness.*

*A psychosocial factor influencing exercise participation is the meaning of the exercise experience for that person. When that experience is viewed as meaningful, a person will be more motivated to participate in that activity.” (Sport New Zealand, 2019)*

It is within these meaningful experiences of sport, where youth are exposed to the many psychosocial benefits that can occur from sport, such as developing life skills, developing social skills, and enjoying the experience of sport beyond the acquisition and development of physical and

tactical skills. Balance is Better is designed to support quality sport experiences for youth to stay involved in sport for life exposing youth to the multitude of benefits that come from sport and has opened the door for youth development discussions, providing an overarching philosophy and development of initiatives that promote youth development in sport across New Zealand (Sport New Zealand, 2024).

Despite the positive messaging and incentives linked to funding from Sport NZ, the delivery and structure of youth sport experiences fall upon national, regional and community sports organisations that are often understaffed and under resourced. As a result, the responsibility and onus of the youth sport experience is often then placed on community coaches, volunteers, and parents. Whilst investment strategies have been used to promote and incentivise the support from sport organisations to promote positive youth development and raise awareness of the current issues with youth sport, there are still very few tangible outcomes that sports organisations can implement to make the youth sport experience more meaningful. This lack of tangible outcomes is visible throughout NZF and NRF. Although there is strategic emphasis placed on youth development, the explicitness of approaches varies and there is still a heavy focus on physical development outcomes with little or no evidence of tangible support for how clubs, coaches, and parents can explicitly promote youth development within football. This suggests a strategic and operational disconnect within sports organisations and how they can become more explicit with approaches to youth development.

In reviewing the strategic and operational documents from Sport NZ, NZF, and NRF within the content analysis, several themes are apparent: the vision for youth sport, the operationalising of youth sport, and the strategic and operational disconnect. The findings suggest that there is a strong emphasis on youth participation and physical activity, however, there is a notable disconnect between strategic vision and the operational implementation which lacked clarity and measurable outcomes to support the strategic direction. This disconnect suggests a need for a more cohesive approach between strategic planning and explicit execution to ensure that youth-focused approaches

are sustainable and impactful.

### **4.3 Focus Groups**

Following the eight-week coaching block post intervention, three focus groups were conducted with the junior football coaches who participated in the research, which enabled the coaches to share their perspectives of explicit life skill development approaches within the NZF Junior Framework, and what modifications could be made to the NZF Junior Framework to further promote life skill development to youth football players. Within the groups, coaches were asked a series of open-ended questions that sought to enable the coaches to reflect upon the development of life skills within the NZF Junior Framework and provide responses based on their lived experiences. Using thematic analysis, three key themes were evident: 1) recognising the impact of life skills, 2) benefits of teaching life skills, and 3) the integration of life skills into football coaching.

#### ***4.3.1 Recognising the Impact of Life Skill Development***

Overall, the coaches within the focus groups identified the benefit that explicit life skill development in junior football could have on football in New Zealand, and future participation in the sport. In general, the coaches demonstrated a clear understanding of life skill development in football and how it can be applied within training sessions and games. The coaches within the research understood the importance of explicitly teaching life skills and were able to shift their thinking from a general implicit approach of life skill development, to instead a much more explicit approach, promoting and raising the awareness of life skills for youth footballers in their teams. In doing so, the coaches provided responses within the focus groups which demonstrated the impact that an explicit approach to life skill development can have on players, coaches, parents, and clubs as key stakeholders in junior football.

##### **4.3.1.1 Impact on Players**

Throughout the focus groups the coaches reflected upon the impact that explicitly focusing on the development of life skills can have within their football trainings and games. Additionally, the coaches were able to discuss the positive impact that explicit approaches had on the players

within in their teams. For example, one coach spoke about teamwork, and observed an increased in their players confidence and willingness to work together, stating:

*“The more they talked to each other, the more confident they felt as a group, the more they actually attempted to play, as opposed to just kicking the ball or dribbling through everyone.” – Coach 2*

Similarly, Coach 5 identified an increased standard of play and accountability from the team. To add to their observations, they also found a vast improvement to their players contribution and involvement within a mixed team, mentioning.

*“They held each other accountable for standards that they would often talk about the standards and what they would want them to achieve. We saw a really, really big jump from the girls in the team, because we have a mixed team. And they actually started to involve themselves more, and by that they became more confident players on the pitch.” – Coach 5*

Through the explicit focus on life skills such as teamwork, another coach found that the team became more cooperative and willing to help in all aspects of the training more than just football related elements, stating:

*“My players are helping a bit more, like, packing up gear. And I don't know if that's because when we are working on teamwork, you know reminding them at the end of the session we've all got to help pack up the gear, but I feel like I now don't need to be always telling them to pack up the gear, instead they all kind of help out and all chip in, which has come from trying to implement more teamwork.” – Coach 6*

These observations from the coaches regarding the impact of explicit life skill development on junior footballers demonstrates that youth can grasp the concept of life skills and their application within sports. In doing so, the participants within the research have shown a willingness to learn and implement skills that contribute towards the team and practice what those certain life skills look like in a safe learning environment.

#### 4.3.1.2 Impact on Coaching

It was evident that as the coaches were using explicit coaching approaches to life skill development for their teams, the coaches were also able to reflect on their own awareness of life

skills and what impact this explicit approach had on their coaching. The intervention required the coaches to reflect on their coaching style prior to the intervention and then reflect on what had changed or develop post intervention within their coaching approaches. For example, one coach found that they became more aware of skills and outside of the sport:

*“I feel like outside of football, it makes, makes you more aware, like thinking about how people are thinking and what their confidence is with communication.”- Coach 7*

In addition, through taking a more explicit approach to life skill development in coaching, Coach 3 reflected that there were several transferable skills between their work and coaching and became more self-aware to begin implementing those skills with their teams.

*“I realized a lot of that stuff I’d already been using at work, so it didn’t change how I viewed or experienced things, but it did make me realise that there were a lot of skills that I was learning through work that I probably should have applied to football and general life a lot earlier. It makes sense to do it on the football field and that’s something I hadn’t been doing.” – Coach 3*

Both Coach 3 and Coach 7 ultimately became more self-aware of life skills outside of sport and how they relate to coaching football. These reflections begin to highlight an understanding of the further impact that explicit approaches to life skill development could have on coaches as well as players. Coach 7 reflected on the impact that relationships and confidence can have within the team and in their games.

*“It kind of made me realize how relationships in the team actually impact the game. And I realized as a player as well, thinking about that stuff and how it impacts people’s mindsets, their confidence and how they play.”– Coach 7*

Through these focus group reflections, the coaches demonstrated a deeper understanding of explicit life skill development and the influence that it can also have on their coaching. Through their reflections it is evident they were able to look beyond junior football and how learned skills can be carried over to other life domains to help support and the confidence, communication and mindsets of junior football players within their teams.

### 4.3.1.3 Impact on Parents

In addition to coaches, parents are important stakeholders in youth sport and youth development. The home lives of youth outside of school and sport significantly shapes youth behaviour and some coaches were able to involve parents in the development of life skills. This has highlighted that an explicit life skills focus could have an impact that goes beyond just the coach and players. Within the focus groups, coaches were able to share how they involved parents in the life skill development of their children. For example, Coach 2 stated that:

*“After the game and the training sessions, having those conversations about life skills with the parents close, and them being a part of the wrap up, listening and understanding what we're talking about made a huge difference in the number of kids that would be whisked away straight after training and to the parents that began getting on board with what we're trying to do.” - Coach 2*

Similarly, Coach 5 found that by involving the parents of junior football players in discussions around explicit life skill approaches, the attitude and behaviours of the parents changed, becoming less competitive and focused more on positive role modelling behaviour for their children. *“A lot of our parents overcommit themselves, so it was really interesting to see the overcommitment levels on families, so we had a bit of a sit down with parents and said, hey, you know, we're actually trying to teach them some life lessons as well. I think that kind of resonated with our parents. So, you saw the ones that weren't often there, suddenly they were there all the time and suddenly their attitude to sport changed a little bit. They are less competitive, but more receptive to stuff. It was really cool actually.” - Coach 5*

By having parents aligned with the coaches' explicit development of life skills some of the coaches found a positive impact on the team environment. For example, Coach 4 reported that the parents of their players began arriving to training and games early and improving their communication with the coach.

*“In our 4- to 11-year-old teams, the parents actually kind of started to step up and turning up earlier. They were being really communicative with us because we were stressing how important communication was on and off the pitch.” – Coach 4*

Based on the coaches' reflections an explicit focus on life skills within football from the coaches also prompted parents to self-reflect on their involvement in the development of youth life skills and enticed parents to role model good behaviours and support the development of positive life skills with their children. These insights provided from the coaches within the research confirm the influential role that an explicit life skill development focus could be on the wider sporting community and overall holistic development of within junior football in New Zealand.

#### **4.3.2 Perceived Benefits of Teaching Life Skills**

The second theme identified through thematic analysis is the perceived benefits of teaching life skills in the context of youth football. The coaches were able to portray the perceived benefits of life skills beyond football coaching, discussing the influence that explicit approaches can have on individuals as well as a wider societal impact. For example, Coach 1, mentioned that in developing the life skills of individuals in football, they become more 'well-rounded' across aspects of personal development that relate to both in football and in life, stating:

*"I think, you know, so like you talked about a more well-rounded player. It's also a more well-rounded individual, you know, full stop, you know."* – Coach 1

In a similar perspective, Coach 4 was also able to see the benefits that an explicit life skill development approach can have in developing good people, as well as those that can contribute to a team environment, stating:

*"I think that'd be extremely beneficial for kids, you know, sort of skills that make them not only like good people, but they'd also be good players within a, a team aspect because they have all these skills that make them all work together and excel together because they've had that sort of, that grounding and foundation from when they were, juniors and first kick players."* – Coach 4

Coaches also addressed the perceived benefits of life skill development and how it can also have a much broader impact on society. For example, one coach reflected on the potential of a greater explicit development of life skills within the NZF Junior Framework, stating that:

*"There's an even wider societal impact as well, where we can develop more understanding and empathetic kids, who are going to grow into understanding empathetic teenagers, who are going to*

*grow into understanding empathetic adults. And I think it would have a huge impact on society full stop.” – Coach 1*

Coach 4 shared a similar perspective, addressing the wider societal impact focusing on improving the lives of participants and shifting the focus away from winning by mentioning that. *“Overall, as a society it creates better people, that have learnt from life experiences and are more equipped to tackle things as they go through life, whether that's in sports or work or just life in general. ultimately it shifts the focus away from needing to win all the time. Taking a whole lot of pressure off the kids.” -Coach 4*

Overall, the coaches were able to provide a perspective on life skill development which focuses on promoting well-rounded players through a solid life skill development foundation such as NZF Junior Framework, and how it could continue to set young football players in New Zealand up for success, improving on areas of social and interpersonal development as well as the much wider impact that life skill development could have on society.

### ***4.3.3 Integrating Life Skill Development in Football***

When discussing the integration of life skill development within football, the coaches identified an understanding that life skill development is complex and thus requires many stakeholders of junior and youth football to subscribe to taking an explicit approach to development to be most effective. The coaches discussed shared responsibility across NZF, the member federations, clubs, coaches, parents and players in the integrating life skills in football. The following themes provides an overview of the current integration of life skills within junior football and includes suggestions from coaches involved in the research regarding certain aspects of life skill development integration for junior football in New Zealand.

#### ***4.3.3.1 Coach Development and Support***

The integration and promotion of life skills in sport is often left to coaches with limited education or awareness of how to explicitly promote life skills. Currently, the NZF Junior Framework provides comprehensive information and guidance on physical, technical, and tactical elements, but there is very limited support into the psychological life skill elements of junior

football and how they can be explicitly developed. Coaches within the focus groups reflected on their coaching journeys so far and discussed the courses that are heavily technically based, with limited links to holistic development within the education and courses they have been involved with. For example, one coach stated:

*“Just thinking about when I did my advanced coaching courses, there was no mention of it. But I think if you would like to coach in higher environments, I don't see what the harm is in having these sort of life skills-based workshops maybe mental skills, life skills, that tells us how to deal with certain situations such as pressure environments, or team culture might not be right and help provide guidance on the little things you can do as a coach to work on that. But I also think that the club approach maybe first and then into the coaching network and education. I don't see any reason not to put it within the coaching courses, I think it'd be quite beneficial.” – Coach 4*

Coaches in the focus groups reported on the limited guidance, information, or knowledge to support coaches in the holistic development of junior and youth football players within the current NZF Junior Framework and coaching courses. One coach suggested that the inclusion of explicit life skill development practices need to be top-down and led by NZF, stating:

*“It should be a top-down movement, not a bottom-up movement. It would be really cool to see that when we go to the likes of these coaching courses, to have a bit of an aspect to make them a better coach through life skills, talking about life skills and incorporating them into the framework would be really cool in that space.” – Coach 5*

Coach 5 also suggested that coaching courses are another means where life skill development in football can be promoted and discussed with coaches. Another coach provided an alternative approach to supporting coaches to take an explicit approach to development life skills, stating:

*“Get all the coaches in a room or online and go through life skills, let them talk about a couple of things, then I think what that does is provides that consistency across the age groups and lets coaches, if they're not sure about something, ask another coach because they know that they've all been to that same session and had the same exposure and stuff.” – Coach 3*

#### 4.3.3.2 Consistency across a National Framework

When exploring the integration and responsibility for promoting life skills in football, it is evident in the focus group discussions that although there could be opportunities for clubs to promote the development of life skills through football, a collective effort is needed if there is to be significant change. For example, Coach 3 proposed a club-based approach which works with clubs who are willing to educate and promote life skill development, stating:

*“There could be football clubs in NZ wanting to be the first clubs explicitly promoting life skills and then hopefully with the popularity of it, it would spread to more and more clubs. And however, many years down the track it's widespread across different sports clubs in New Zealand who are also implementing similar sort of life skill-based frameworks.” – Coach 3*

The vision from Coach 3 looks at a future where football clubs in New Zealand take the lead in youth development and continue the promotion of youth development and life skill development within football. Whilst there are a multitude of positive life skill development opportunities in youth football, Coach 3 provided their feedback about the potential negative implications if the integration of life skills is just one or two clubs promoting it, as opposed to a wider approach, could result in players leaving and undermining the process, stating:

*“If it's what we are all doing and trying to work towards, that is good. But if it's just one coach or once club doing it, and a parent disagrees or gets the pip then they can just change clubs which ends up undermining the process and undermining the club.” – Coach 3*

Coach 2 raised the potential issues regarding integration and if the reinforcement of life skills is done haphazardly, rather than a more consistent wider approach.

*“Ultimately, it's game wide, if one part of the cog decides they don't want to get involved with it, it makes it very difficult to, to push it through. But if everyone has a similar understanding of what we're trying to achieve. We're going to get much better results at a quicker pace.” – Coach 2*

Most coaches within the focus groups were able to highlight potential issues which could arise from inconsistency in messaging or inconsistent approaches to life skill development integration in junior football. Therefore, they believed that if life skill development is to be included

in junior football, it would be best to follow a game-wide approach, led by NZF to have the most impact or influence on clubs' other stakeholders of junior and youth football.

#### 4.3.3.3 Age-Appropriate Implementation

The NZF Junior Framework is an age and stage structured football development pathway, and it provides a foundation that could be further developed to include explicit approaches to life skill development. However, within the research one of the coaches reflected upon instances where the players in their teams struggled to comprehend or understand the life skills that were being introduced and suggested that age may have been a determining factor, stating that:

*“I think for me, it's the age of the kids I work with, like sometimes you get them to think about the life skills and talk to the person next to them but then sometimes they would like talk about random things like school or start mucking around.” - Coach 6*

In a similar perspective, Coach 3 shared how goal setting was a life skill which they had difficulty integrating into their sessions. Although the difficulty integrating life skills into sessions could be due to a range of reasons, such as coach delivery and explanation, age of participants, timing or technique of life skill integration, Coach 6 mentioned:

*“A couple of them have talked about goals, but their goal was just to score more goals. I'm not sure if the concept of goal setting is there at this age for them yet or whether I got that across and maybe it's around setting goals differently like within games or within a drill. What's the goal or that sort of stuff. I think it's probably good to have it in there. It's just the one that I found the trickier of the four life skills to get across.” – Coach 3*

The reflections from Coach 6 and Coach 3 suggest that life skills may be more relevant to certain age groups and easier for youth to conceptualise and obtain as they progress through certain stages of development. However, Coach 2 found that by simplifying and explaining the life skills and aligning the purpose of the session to those skills along with the steps to discuss life skills with the players was the most beneficial, stating it has become part of their normal coaching practice for juniors as well as older age groups.

*“So, for me, breaking down what each life skill was and how it could potentially be integrated just became part of my planning process the sessions that I designed. It's even continuing through to the sessions I'm designing now for older age groups too” – Coach 2*

Coach 2 also reflected positively regarding explicit life skill integrations into their football coaching, which they can use with older age groups in football. This suggests that explicit life skill development approaches such as the steps for explicit life skill development and reinforcement strategies have supported coaches to become more explicit in their coaching and promotion of life skill development through football. Reaffirming that the positive messaging regarding the development of life skills provides more clarity and support for coaches to become more aware and explicit in the promotion and development of life skills.

#### 4.3.3.4 Parental Involvement and Reinforcement

The involvement of parents was a reoccurring theme across the focus group discussions. It was identified that parents have important roles to play in continuing the awareness and promotion of life skills outside of sporting environments. The coaches reflected on how football could involve parents in the awareness and development of life skills. For example, Coach 2 stated:

*“I think it's going to create a positive environment around development of the players in those situations, but also the parents and peers on the sideline. If they start seeing someone that's going a bit overboard and is shifting the focus away from why their kids are there to develop and play football in the first place the issues can be managed with a conversation from peers pulling them in line because it doesn't reflect with what they, the, the team is trying to do and the environment that the team is trying to create.” – Coach 2*

Additionally, when reflecting on changes in behaviour and attitudes pre and post intervention, Coach 2 reflected on seeing parents becoming more interested and involved in their child's football.

*“Having those conversations with the parents close, and them being a part of the wrap up and actually listening in and understanding what we're talking about made a huge difference as to the*

*one, the number of kids that would be whisked away straight after training and to the parents that were getting on board with what we're trying to do.” – Coach 2*

Coach 2 found that by involving the parents in the life skill discussions helped to improve the emphasis placed on junior football, the explicit focus on life skills also improved their own awareness and understanding of life skills which also helped the parents in role modelling good behaviours and supporting the integration of life skills. Adding to this, parent-child relationships became more positive through the awareness of life skills as parents began to understand their role in reinforcing the messaging of positive life skills, as alluded to by Coach 1 who stated:

*“Totally agree, that buy-in, I think it also does build that positive relationship between the child and the parent as well, where the parent goes, Oh, fantastic, I love the way you spoke to your brother just then, you know, sort of any positive reinforcement that this brings about within the home environment has got to be a good thing.” – Coach 1*

Coaches within the focus groups were able to demonstrate how parents can be positively involved in life skill development in sports through the reinforcement of messaging and awareness of skills that are not only present in sports but also everyday lives. This reinforcement of messaging supports parents to promote life skills and continue highlighting the importance of understanding, practicing, and developing such skills to their children. One coach suggested to actively help parents to support the integration of life skills were for clubs to host parent information evenings focused on education of life skill development and the coaching approach.

*“We do an information evening for academy parents and for community parents as well. I think touching base and actually mentioning the life skills that we're going to teach within that and having that as part of our curriculum that does hit the players and the parents.” – Coach 2*

Additionally, Coach 1 mentioned a much less formal approach by using online group chats with parents to communicate specific life skills that are being developed that week during training.

*“You can, every now and again, pop a question through to the parents and just say, hey, can you watch out for when Bobby did this? And then, you know, at the next session, you could invite all the*

*parents in, addressing what your parents have noticed. Then it really does become a positive relationship builder for the parent and the child as well.” – Coach 1*

Coaches were able to identify way to include parents in the integration of life skills, enabling them to also support the promotion and development of life skills for their children. This shows that there are many ways in which clubs, coaches, and the sport can further involve parents to support the development of junior and youth participants on and off the field.

The holistic approach of life skill development within junior football has the potential to significantly influence more than just the players. However, it is evident throughout the focus groups that whilst coaches are passionate about developing life skills, the ways in which development occurs can vary from coach to coach. It is largely agreed by the coaches that given the impact that an explicit life skill development focus can have on players, coaches, parents, and other stakeholders, a change in philosophy and change in culture needs to be led from the top down. A top-down approach would use the NZF Junior Framework to align the structure and football development pathway to explicitly develop life skills across the ages and stages of the framework. The alignment with the framework, can provide life skill messaging reinforcement which then shares the responsibility across all stakeholders involved in junior football. The involvement and education of key stakeholders, such as parents, across the junior football pathway was seen as essential as it helps to align the positive development messaging around junior football players.

#### **4.4 Surveys**

This section presents quantitative results to answer the research question ‘To what extent does life skill development take place within New Zealand Football Junior Framework?’ The following results derive from responses from parents of junior football players within the NRF region. Twelve parents participated in the pre-intervention survey, and fifteen parents participated in the post-intervention survey.

The Life Skills Survey for Sport - Transfer Scale (LSSS-TS) was used adapted for the survey to gain an understanding of eight key life skills developed through sport and the parents’ perceived awareness of life skill development within their children who participate in the NZF

Junior Framework. Respondents were asked to rate the degree of how well their child demonstrates or implements each life skill through a series of questions across the eight life skills: teamwork, communication, problem solving and decision making, goal setting, social skills, emotional skills, time management, and leadership.

Participants responded (N = 27) using the survey's 5-point Likert scale (1-not at all, 5-very much). IBM SPSS software (version 27) was used to conduct the analysis. Specifically, to determine associations pre and post the intervention using chi-square tests.

The results from the survey related to the life skill 'teamwork' indicate some positive perceived changes in the player's teamwork abilities following the intervention, though changes were not statistically significant across any items (see Table 4.2). The distribution of descriptive responses suggests that parents perceived modest improvements in teamwork related behaviours such as helping a teammate with a task.

**Table 4.2 Teamwork**

<b>Teamwork</b> <i>How well does your child...</i>	<b>Intervention phase</b>	<b>Not at all</b>	<b>A little</b>	<b>Some</b>	<b>A lot</b>	<b>Very Much</b>	<b>p</b>
Work well in a team	Pre	0.0%	8.3%	8.3%	41.7%	41.7%	.690
	Post	0.0%	0.0%	6.7%	53.3%	40%	
Help a teammate with a task	Pre	0.0%	0.0%	41.7%	25.0%	33.3%	.638
	Post	0.0%	0.0%	26.7%	40%	33.3%	
Accept suggestions for improvement	Pre	0.0%	0.0%	50%	33.3%	16.7%	.660
	Post	0.0%	6.7%	33.3%	46.7%	13.3%	
Work with others for the good of the team	Pre	0.0%	0.0%	16.7%	41.7%	41.7%	.627
	Post	0.0%	0.0%	13.3%	60%	26.7%	
Build team spirit	Pre	0.0%	0.0%	25%	33.3%	41.7%	.203
	Post	0.0%	13.3%	46.7%	26.7%	13.3%	
Suggest to team members how they can improve	Pre	16.7%	33.3%	16.7%	25%	8.3%	.713
	Post	13.3%	26.7%	33.3%	26.7%	0.0%	
Change the way they perform to benefit the team	Pre	0.0%	16.7%	16.7%	58.3%	8.3%	.486
	Post	0.0%	6.7%	40%	40%	13.3%	
Use teamwork in school	Pre	0.0%	8.3%	16.7%	58.3%	16.7%	.702
	Post	0.0%	0.0%	20%	66.7%	13.3%	
Use teamwork at home	Pre	0.0%	8.3%	58.3%	25.0%	8.3%	.513
	Post	0.0%	6.7%	46.7%	46.7%	0.0%	
Use teamwork within community (Sports)	Pre	0.0%	8.3%	25.0%	41.7%	25.0%	.871
	Post	0.0%	6.7%	13.3%	53.3%	26.7%	
Use teamwork when helping out/ doing chores	Pre	0.0%	25.0%	50.0%	16.7%	8.3%	.951
	Post	0.0%	26.7%	40.0%	20.0%	13.3%	
Use teamwork in relationships with others	Pre	0.0%	8.3%	25.0%	33.3%	33.3%	.541
	Post	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	46.7%	20.0%	

The results from the survey related to the life skill ‘communication’ indicate that parents perceive that there was some positive association in the player’s communication abilities following the intervention. The results show that the item asking parents to report ‘Use communication skills when helping out / doing chores’ indicates a statistically significant association  $X^2(3, 27) = 14.05, p = .013$ . Yet, changes were not statistically significant across the items (see Table 4.3). Overall, the distribution of responses suggests improvements in perceived communication related behaviours, items such as paying attention to what someone is saying, communicating within community, and communicating when helping had a positive trend.

**Table 4.3 Communication**

<b>Communication</b> <i>How well does your child...</i>	<b>Intervention phase</b>	<b>Not at all</b>	<b>A little</b>	<b>Some</b>	<b>A lot</b>	<b>Very Much</b>	<b>p</b>
Speak clearly to others	Pre	0.0%	0.0%	30%	40%	30%	.213
	Post	0.0%	0.0%	13.3%	66.7%	20.0%	
Pay attention to what someone is saying	Pre	0.0%	10%	50%	30%	10%	.123
	Post	0.0%	0.0%	20.0%	60.0%	20.0%	
Pay attention to people’s body language	Pre	0.0%	30%	50%	10%	10%	.141
	Post	0.0%	13.3%	26.7%	46.7%	13.3%	
Communicate well with others	Pre	0.0%	0.0%	30%	50%	20%	.283
	Post	0.0%	0.0%	20.0%	40.0%	40.0%	
Use communication skills in school	Pre	0.0%	10%	30%	40%	20%	.253
	Post	0.0%	6.7%	6.7%	53.3%	33.3%	
Use communication skills at home	Pre	0.0%	0.0%	30%	40%	30%	.210
	Post	0.0%	6.7%	6.7%	73.3%	13.3%	
Use communication skills within community (Sports)	Pre	0.0%	20%	30%	30%	20%	.174
	Post	0.0%	0.0%	26.7%	53.3%	20.0%	
Use communication skills when helping out/ doing chores	Pre	20%	30%	10%	20%	20%	.013*
	Post	0.0%	0.0%	46.7%	46.7%	6.7%	
Use communication skills in relationships with others	Pre	0.0%	0.0%	50%	30%	20%	.228
	Post	0.0%	0.0%	26.7%	33.3%	40.0%	

\* $p < 0.05$

The results from the survey related to the life skill ‘problem solving and decision making’ indicated a perceived positive change in the player’s problem solving and decision-making abilities following the intervention. The results suggested that the item asking parents to report ‘how well their child used problem solving and decision making at home’ indicated a statistically significant association  $X^2(3, 27) = 14.05, p = .003$ . This suggests that when problem solving and decision-making is explicitly developed within the football environment, there is perceived transference of

this life skill to their behaviour in their home lives. However, although there were modest improvements and positive changes to each of the other problem solving and decision-making related behaviours, the chi-square results report that these were not statistically significant (see Table 4.4).

**Table 4.4 Problem Solving and Decision Making**

<b>Problem Solving and Decision Making</b> <i>How well does your child...</i>	<b>Intervention phase</b>	<b>Not at all</b>	<b>A little</b>	<b>Some</b>	<b>A lot</b>	<b>Very Much</b>	<b>p</b>
Think carefully about a problem	Pre	0.0%	0.0%	54.5%	36.4%	9.1%	.315
	Post	0.0%	6.7%	33.3%	60.0%	0.0%	
Compare possible solutions to find the best one	Pre	0.0%	18.2%	54.5%	27.3%	0.0%	.307
	Post	0.0%	40.0%	26.7%	33.3%	0.0%	
Create as many solutions as possible to a problem	Pre	0.0%	27.3%	9.1%	54.5%	9.1%	.120
	Post	0.0%	13.3%	40.0%	20.0%	26.7%	
Evaluate a solution to a problem	Pre	0.0%	9.1%	18.2%	36.4%	36.4%	.808
	Post	0.0%	6.7%	13.3%	46.7%	33.3%	
Use problem solving and decision making in school	Pre	0.0%	18.2	36.4%	45.5%	0.0%	.208
	Post	0.0%	20.0%	6.7%	60.0%	13.3%	
Use problem solving and decision making at home	Pre	0.0%	0.0%	90.9%	9.1%	0.0%	.003*
	Post	0.0%	26.7%	20.0%	53.3%	0.0%	
Use problem solving and decision making within community	Pre	0.0%	18.2%	36.4%	45.5%	0.0%	.339
	Post	0.0%	26.7%	20.0%	33.3%	20.0%	
Use problem solving and decision making when helping out/ doing chores	Pre	9.1%	27.3%	45.5%	18.2%	0.0%	.603
	Post	0.0%	0.0%	26.7%	53.3%	20.0%	
Use problem solving and decision making in relationships with others	Pre	0.0%	9.1%	63.6%	18.2%	9.1%	.678
	Post	0.0%	13.3%	46.7%	33.3%	6.7%	

\* $p < 0.05$

Within the survey results for ‘goal setting’ there were some positive perceived changes in the players abilities to set goals following the intervention. However, none of these changes were statistically significant across any of the items (see Table 4.5). The results suggest parents perceived a slight improvement to the player’s ability to set goals for items such as setting short term goals to achieve long term goals, and goals in relationships with others.

**Table 4.5 Goal Setting**

<b>Goal Setting</b> <i>How well does your child...</i>	<b>Intervention phase</b>	<b>Not at all</b>	<b>A little</b>	<b>Some</b>	<b>A lot</b>	<b>Very Much</b>	<b>p</b>
Set goals to continue improving	Pre	9.1%	27.3%	45.5%	0.0%	18.2%	.055
	Post	0.0%	20.0%	33.3%	46.7%	0.0%	

Set challenging goals	Pre	9.1%	45.5%	27.3%	9.1%	9.1%	.396
	Post	13.3%	20.0%	53.3%	13.3%	0.0%	
Check progress towards their goals	Pre	9.1%	45.5%	18.2%	18.2%	9.1%	.480
	Post	6.7%	26.7%	40.0%	26.7%	0.0%	
Set short-term goals to achieve long-term goals	Pre	27.3%	9.1%	45.5%	9.1%	9.1%	.096
	Post	0.0%	33.3%	40.0%	26.7%	0.0%	
Remain committed to their goals	Pre	9.1%	27.3%	36.4%	9.1%	18.2%	.329
	Post	6.7%	13.3%	26.7%	46.7%	6.7%	
Set goals for practice	Pre	9.1%	27.3%	27.3%	18.2%	18.2%	.460
	Post	6.7%	26.7%	33.3%	33.3%	0.0%	
Set specific goals	Pre	9.1%	27.3%	45.5%	9.1%	9.1%	.547
	Post	0.0%	33.3%	33.3%	26.7%	6.7%	
Use goal setting in school	Pre	9.1%	9.1%	45.5%	9.1%	27.3%	.523
	Post	6.7%	13.3%	46.7%	26.7%	6.7%	
Use goal setting at home	Pre	18.2%	36.4%	27.3%	18.2%	0.0%	.609
	Post	6.7%	26.7%	40.0%	26.7%	0.0%	
Use goal setting within community (Sports)	Pre	9.1%	9.1%	45.5%	27.3%	9.1%	.807
	Post	6.7%	6.7%	33.3%	46.7%	6.7%	
Use goal setting when helping out/ doing chores	Pre	18.2%	45.5%	18.2%	18.2%	0.0%	.801
	Post	13.3%	40.0%	26.7%	20.0%	0.0%	
Use goal setting in relationships with others	Pre	18.2%	27.3%	27.3%	27.3%	0.0%	.360
	Post	0.0%	26.7%	20.0%	46.7%	6.7%	

When focusing on the ‘social skills’ results from the survey, the results continue the trend of changes in perceived positive social skills between pre and post measures, yet none of these changes were statistically significant (see Table 4.6). Descriptive changes were identified in items such as getting involved with group activities, and social skills in relationships with others.

**Table 4.6 Social Skills**

<b>Social Skills</b> <i>How well does your child...</i>	<b>Intervention phase</b>	<b>Not at all</b>	<b>A little</b>	<b>Some</b>	<b>A lot</b>	<b>Very Much</b>	<b>p</b>
Start a conversation	Pre	0.0%	0.0%	36.4%	27.3%	36.4%	.223
	Post	0.0%	0.0%	26.7%	60.0%	13.3%	
Interact in various social settings	Pre	0.0%	0.0%	18.2%	45.5%	36.4%	.294
	Post	0.0%	0.0%	40.0%	46.7%	13.3%	
Hel others without them asking for help	Pre	0.0%	9.1%	18.2%	54.5%	18.2%	.273
	Post	0.0%	13.3%	40.0%	46.7%	0.0%	
Get involved in group activities	Pre	0.0%	9.1%	27.3%	45.5%	18.2%	.547
	Post	0.0%	0.0%	20.0%	53.3%	26.7%	
Maintain close friendships	Pre	9.1%	0.0%	18.2%	36.4%	36.4%	.350
	Post	0.0%	0.0%	13.3%	66.7%	20.0%	
Use social skills in school	Pre	0.0%	9.1%	9.1%	45.5%	36.4%	.391
	Post	0.0%	0.0%	6.7%	73.3%	20.0%	
Use social skills at home	Pre	0.0%	9.1%	18.2%	36.4%	36.4%	.242
	Post	0.0%	0.0%	6.7%	73.3%	20.0%	
Use social skills within community (Sports)	Pre	0.0%	9.1%	18.2%	27.3%	45.5%	.276
	Post	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	46.7%	20.0%	
	Pre	0.0%	9.1%	36.4%	36.4%	18.2%	.348

Use social skills when helping out/ doing chores	Post	0.0%	6.7%	53.3%	40.0%	0.0%	
Use social skills in relationships with others	Pre	0.0%	9.1%	18.2%	54.5%	18.2%	.609
	Post	0.0%	0.0%	20.0%	60.0%	20.0%	
Start a conversation	Pre	0.0%	0.0%	36.4%	27.3%	36.4%	.223
	Post	0.0%	0.0%	26.7%	60.0%	13.3%	
Interact in various social settings	Pre	0.0%	0.0%	18.2%	45.5%	36.4%	.294
	Post	0.0%	0.0%	40.0%	46.7%	13.3%	

The result from the survey related to the life skill ‘emotional skills’ indicate that parents perceived improvements in their child’s development and awareness of their emotional abilities following the intervention. However, these changes were not statistically significant across any items (see Table 4.7). Overall, the distribution of responses suggests improved perceived behaviours in relation to emotional skills across items such as using emotions to stay focused and understanding they behave differently when emotional each having positive increases between pre and post survey.

**Table 4.7 Emotional Skills**

<b>Emotional Skills</b> <i>How well does your child...</i>	<b>Intervention phase</b>	<b>Not at all</b>	<b>A little</b>	<b>Some</b>	<b>A lot</b>	<b>Very Much</b>	<b>p</b>
Know how to deal with their emotions	Pre	9.1%	0.0%	36.4%	45.5%	9.1%	.497
	Post	0.0%	0.0%	53.3%	33.3%	13.3%	
Use their emotions to stay focused	Pre	0.0%	18.2%	9.1%	36.4%	36.4%	.360
	Post	0.0%	0.0%	6.7%	46.7%	46.7%	
Understand that they behave differently when emotional	Pre	9.1%	18.2%	18.2%	36.4%	18.2%	.582
	Post	0.0%	6.7%	20.0%	53.3%	20.0%	
Notice how they feel	Pre	0.0%	9.1%	9.1%	72.7%	9.1%	.438
	Post	0.0%	0.0%	20.0%	60.0%	20.0%	
Use emotional skills in school	Pre	9.1%	9.1%	27.3%	27.3%	27.3%	.335
	Post	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	53.3%	13.3%	
Use emotional skills at home	Pre	0.0%	0.0%	36.4%	54.5%	9.1%	.590
	Post	0.0%	6.7%	33.3%	40.0%	20.0%	
Use emotional skills within community (Sports)	Pre	0.0%	9.1%	45.5%	36.4%	9.1%	.629
	Post	0.0%	6.7%	40.0%	26.7%	26.7%	
Use emotional skills when helping out/ doing chores	Pre	18.2%	18.2%	18.2%	45.5%	0.0%	.402
	Post	0.0%	7.1%	0.0%	35.7%	57.1%	
Use emotional skills in relationships with others	Pre	0.0%	9.1%	45.5%	36.4%	9.1%	.461
	Post	0.0%	7.1%	14.3%	50%	28.6%	

The results from the survey related to the life skill ‘time management’ indicate moderate perceived changes in the player’s ability to manage their time following the intervention. There was

one item, ‘how well does your child manage their time’ which was statistically significant,  $X^2(5, 27) = 11.88, p = .036$ . This suggests parents perceived an improved time management associated with the intervention. However, the remaining survey items had modest improvements and were not statistically significant (see Table 4.8).

**Table 4.8 Time Management**

<b>Time Management</b> <i>How well does your child...</i>	<b>Intervention phase</b>	<b>Not at all</b>	<b>A little</b>	<b>Some</b>	<b>A lot</b>	<b>Very Much</b>	<b>p</b>
Manage their time	Pre	20%	10%	20%	40%	10%	.036*
	Post	0.0%	33.3%	53.3%	6.7%	6.7%	
Assess how much time they spend on activities	Pre	20%	40%	20%	20%	0.0%	.589
	Post	13.3%	46.7%	20.0%	13.3%	6.7%	
Control how they use their time	Pre	22.2%	11.1%	44.4%	22.2%	0.0%	.085
	Post	0.0%	40.0%	33.3%	20.0%	6.7%	
Set goals to use their time effectively	Pre	30%	20%	40%	10%	0.0%	.239
	Post	0.0%	6.7%	20.0%	66.7%	6.7%	
Use time management in school	Pre	10%	20%	20%	40%	10%	.575
	Post	6.7%	13.3%	40.0%	33.3%	6.7%	
Use time management at home	Pre	20%	20%	30%	30%	0.0%	.219
	Post	6.7%	26.7%	53.3%	6.7%	6.7%	
Use time management within community (Sports)	Pre	20%	10%	20%	50%	0.0%	.406
	Post	0.0%	6.7%	13.3%	33.3%	46.7%	
Use time management when helping out/ doing chores	Pre	30%	20%	40%	10%	0.0%	.415
	Post	0.0%	13.3%	33.3%	40.0%	13.3%	
Use time management in relationships with others	Pre	10%	10%	60%	20%	0.0%	.286
	Post	0.0%	26.7%	40.0%	26.7%	6.7%	

\* $p < 0.05$

In the final life skill assessed, the result from the survey related to the life skill ‘leadership’ indicate some perceived changes in the player’s leadership abilities following the intervention. One item, ‘knowing how to positively influence a group of individuals’ indicates a statistically significant positive change between pre and post measures,  $X^2(5, 27) = 11.43, p = .044$ . Other items showed descriptively positive improvements such as being a good role model for others. Yet, the chi-square results report these changes were not statistically significant (see Table 4.9).

**Table 4.9 Leadership**

<b>Leadership</b> <i>How well does your child...</i>	<b>Intervention phase</b>	<b>Not at all</b>	<b>A little</b>	<b>Some</b>	<b>A lot</b>	<b>Very Much</b>	<b>p</b>
Know how to positively influence a group of individuals	Pre	10%	10%	50%	20%	10%	.044*
	Post	0.0%	20.0%	13.3%	66.7%	0.0%	
	Pre	10%	10%	30%	40%	10%	.463

Organise team members to work together	Post	6.7%	20.0%	33.3%	40.0%	0.0%	
Know how to motivate others	Pre	0.0%	10%	60.0%	10%	20%	.293
	Post	6.7%	20.0%	26.7%	26.7%	20.0%	
Help others solve their performance problems	Pre	10%	10%	40%	30%	10%	.191
	Post	0.0%	20.0%	13.3%	60.0%	6.7%	
Consider the individual options of each team member	Pre	10%	20%	40%	20%	10%	.151
	Post	0.0%	6.7%	40.0%	53.3%	0.0%	
Be a good role model for others	Pre	10%	0.0%	20%	40%	30%	.317
	Post	0.0%	0.0%	13.3%	40.0%	46.7%	
Set high standards for the team	Pre	10%	10%	40%	20%	20%	.233
	Post	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	46.7%	20.0%	
Recognise other people's achievements	Pre	0.0%	0.0%	20%	50%	30%	.231
	Post	0.0%	0.0%	6.7%	73.3%	20.0%	
Use leadership skills in school	Pre	10%	20%	20%	30%	20%	.468
	Post	0.0%	26.7%	13.3%	40.0%	20.0%	
Use leadership skills at home	Pre	10%	30%	20%	30%	10%	.095
	Post	0.0%	6.7%	53.3%	40.0%	0.0%	
Use leadership skills within community (Sports)	Pre	20%	20%	20%	20%	20%	.272
	Post	0.0%	13.3%	26.7%	33.3%	26.7%	
Use leadership skills when helping out/ doing chores	Pre	20%	30%	30%	10%	10%	.312
	Post	6.7%	13.3%	40.0%	33.3%	6.7%	
Use leadership skills in relationships with others	Pre	10%	20%	40%	20%	10%	.280
	Post	0.0%	6.7%	33.3%	33.3%	26.7%	

*\*p < 0.05*

The LSSS-TS was used to assess the perceived changes to life skills by parents of junior football players when life skills are explicitly taught by coaches. Chi-squared tests were conducted to analyse the differences between life skill application pre and post intervention. The results showed four statistically significant outcomes across the life skills of communication, problem solving and decision making, time management, and leadership. Whilst the other items across the eight life skills were not statistically significant. The research may have lacked statistical power to detect meaningful effect due to the small sample size or the short length of time between survey responses. Subsequently, these findings should be interpreted carefully and further research with a much larger sample size, and a longer time frame for explicit life skill development to take place is recommended to provide further insights into the transferable life skills in the NZF Junior Framework using the LSSS-TS.

#### 4.5 Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 presented both qualitative and quantitative analysis results to explore the extent that life skill development takes place within the NZF Junior Framework, how life skill development is perceived and facilitated within the NZF Junior Framework, and how NZF can adapt Junior Framework in future to explicitly promote life skill development among youth football players. In doing so, the content analysis identified a strategic and operational disconnect of youth sport initiatives and incentives by key football stakeholders in New Zealand. Although the strategy and messaging largely promote the youth sport experience, there are very few specific actions, or support, to the community clubs of youth sport on ‘how’ they can adapt or improve their operations to enhance life skills. Similarly, the coaches interviewed in the research found that incorporating life skill development into their sessions extenuated the purpose of the coaches’ role in youth development. The research results also indicated that by promoting life skills within football, the active engagement of the players and parents with the coaching increased. Thus, enabling coaches to shift the focus to development of psychosocial skills as well as physical and technical outcomes. Lastly, the analysis of the perceived behaviours and post survey, completed by the parents indicated small improvements across several life skills, when life skills were explicitly developed by coaches within their sessions across eight-weeks. However, caution should be applied due to the limited sample size.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

The aim of the research was to explore the extent that life skill development occurs within the New Zealand Football (NZF) Junior Framework, and how NZF can adapt their current framework to explicitly develop the life skills of junior football players. A pragmatic multi-methods approach was conducted using content analysis, focus group interviews, and pre and post intervention surveys. The aim of the research to explore the extent that life skill development takes

place within the New Zealand Football (NZF) Junior Framework as well as how NZF can adapt their current framework to explicitly develop the life skills of junior football players. The following section discusses the results and themes of the data collection in relation to the research questions.

## **5.2 Research Question 1:**

*To what extent does life skill development take place within New Zealand Football Junior Framework?*

### **5.2.1 Vision for Youth Sport**

When reviewing the vision for youth sport in New Zealand from Sport New Zealand (Sport NZ), NZF, and Northern Region Football (NRF), there were similarities and differences identified within their strategic and operational documents. Sport NZ and NZF shared a strong vision to promote the continued growth of youth sport participation, and the youth sport experience. NRF, however, had much less of a strategic focus on junior and youth football. Therefore, due to the differences between the strategic or operational documents regarding junior and youth sport, each organisation has a different approach in how they promote and communicate junior and youth sport to their wider stakeholders.

Firstly, Sport NZ, a national governing agency for sport have developed initiatives, funds, or strategic directives that specifically target youth sport and youth sport experiences. However, the most significant development from Sport NZ has been Balance is Better (BIB). BIB is an overarching philosophy for youth sport in New Zealand which has increased the awareness of common youth sport experiences to further entice sports organisations to adapt or improve their operations to protect the youth sport experience. The BIB messaging and philosophy from Sport NZ shares the responsibility of declining youth sport participation across the wider sports industry in New Zealand, for sport, nationally, regionally, and at club level with the aim to collectively improve youth experiences of sport in New Zealand. Unfortunately, whilst the messaging and promotion from Sport NZ is great, there lacks any real tangible guidance for how sports organisations can improve their operations, as there are many variables, similarities, and differences between the demands of different individual or team sports and different National Sports

Organizations (NSO). Therefore, whilst one overarching philosophy may sound great, it can prove to be not specific to all sports, or even out of reach for the current realities of sports organisations within New Zealand that are often, understaffed, overstretched, and under resourced.

New Zealand Football, provides clear messaging within their strategic and operational documents which align with the BIB philosophy through their strategic directives such as the promotion of role models, updating pathways to meet participants needs, and providing education and support on how to provide quality experiences for participants across the sport. Additionally, as football is the biggest participation sport in New Zealand, both the Junior and Youth frameworks intentionally focus on development and provide a nationally aligned and coordinated approach to the development of junior and youth football players in New Zealand. However, the NZF Junior Frameworks is predominantly focused on the technical and tactical football development of participants and not the holistic development of participants. This suggests that whilst the messaging and structure for youth development are present within NZF, the tangible and explicit guidance for youth development through football participation is less clear.

For Northern Region Football, there is a lack of guidance from Sport NZ or NZF regarding how Regional Sport Organisations (RSO) and clubs can make sporting experiences more meaningful to youth participants. Fortunately, as NRF are an RSO, that sits within the NZF structure, it is a requirement that clubs within the region deliver the Whole of Football (WoF) plan and respective frameworks. So, whilst their vision for youth sport is less clear, the foundation and operations for youth football development are in place throughout the Northern Region as clubs are delivering football in line with the junior and youth football frameworks.

### **5.2.2 Operationalising Youth Development**

There is substantial research indicating that life skill development can occur implicitly through sports participation. Yet, many youth sport programs focus largely on sports specific physical outcomes that can be measured and leave the development of life skills up to chance, which then relies on youth to be responsible for their own development (Bean et al., 2018; Camire et al., 2022; Mossman et al., 2021; Super et al., 2018). The research would suggest that there is life

skill development occurring within the NZF Junior Framework, to a degree. Yet, the current approach to life skill development will vary from coach to coach and will often remain implicit. However, when coaches explicitly integrated life skill development into their activities, there was a significant increase in the awareness of its positive impact across players, parents, and the coaches themselves. This suggests that whilst life skills may be cultivated within the NZF Junior Framework, all stakeholders would benefit from a more explicit focus on the holistic development of youth participants through the ‘explicit’ promotion of life skills that football can develop.

As each organisation plays a differing role in the New Zealand sport ecosystem, their operational direction and perspective of youth development have differing intentions. For Sport NZ, it is not feasible to deliver sport across the entire country and across all sports. Therefore, the role Sport NZ plays is to educate and empower the wider sporting industry in New Zealand of best practice regarding youth development through sports. Youth sport-related research conducted by Sport NZ has furthered the understanding of youth and their sporting experiences. As a result of the research, Sport NZ were able to develop initiatives, funds, and more recently the BIB philosophy to entice more NSOs and RSOs to improve their awareness of youth experiences within sport. However, the messaging highlighting the declining youth sport participation from Sport NZ has been consistent over the past decade, therefore, Sport NZ’s leadership is important to ensure that initiatives are developed and designed to promote physical activity of youth across the many different socio-cultural and socio-economic demographics in New Zealand.

For Sport NZ, their continued messaging of youth sport engagement is clear throughout their strategic documents. The development of BIB as the overarching philosophy provides Sport NZ with an operational platform where resources, stories, examples, and ideas of how sports can or have adapted and improved their youth sport delivery. This platform of knowledge and experiences on youth sport delivery can also further support within the wider sports industry in New Zealand who also be navigating the complex youth sport environment. Although, BIB is an all-encompassing approach to raise awareness of youth sport experiences. There is yet to have any tangible directives, objectives, or outcomes that guide NSO in how they can promote the youth

sport experience and support RSO's and clubs to improve their delivery and awareness of youth sport experiences.

Since 2011, NZF have demonstrated a significant focus on the development of youth through the creation of the WoF plan and respective Junior and Youth football frameworks. Additionally, NZF's alignment to BIB has increased the promotion and guidance of junior and youth sport experiences through the development of their own team formation and grading guidelines which guides clubs on how to best manage junior and youth team grading and selections processes. When looking at youth development operationally within NZF, they do provide regions and clubs with development frameworks and team selection guides. However, this guidance and support remains in the physical, technical, and tactical element of football, and continues to skim over the holistic developmental benefits that are present and such as the development of life skills. Fortunately, NZF have signaled that they are planning to update the current WoF plan and respective frameworks in which this research may provide further guidance on how to improve the holistic development offerings of junior and youth football through the explicit development of life skills in football.

NRF are an RSO that sits within the NZF structure, supporting clubs within the Auckland and Northland region. Operationally, NRF provides support to clubs through the scheduling and management competitions, coach education courses, and officials development courses. NRF are therefore in a position where they can also educate and empower clubs in the region to improve the youth sport experience and provide best practice delivery of junior and youth football. However, as mentioned earlier, within the WoF Plan and respective frameworks, there is limited guidance for how clubs and coaches can further promote youth development outside of the technical, tactical, and physical outcomes of the sport. Whilst there is limited guidance within the Junior and Youth frameworks, on the holistic development of youth through football. NRF have developed a Junior Football Handbook which has collected best practice youth sport guidance and provides operational support and understanding for coaches and parents. The Junior Football Handbook has gathered information from the NZF Junior Framework, the NZF Team Formation and Grading guidelines,

GoodSports and BIB to provide operational and educational support that reinforces the positive messaging regarding youth sport experiences.

To further support and provide guidance for junior football, NRF have developed the Junior Football Handbook to promote the structure, messaging, and purpose of junior football to support clubs, coaches, and parents across the region to ensure positive experiences for all junior football players. Although there is no direct mention of life skills, the inclusion of GoodSports and BIB begin to address the potential holistic development of participants through sports. Therefore, the NRF Junior Football Handbook provides a good operational document that coaches and parents can refer to and, in the future, this could potentially include specific guidance and support for how coaches can integrate life skills into the junior football trainings and games. The development and transfer of life skills is not automatic, and it is therefore important that coaches feel supported and encouraged to discuss and develop life skills with their players. Currently, life skill development within the NZF Junior Framework is implicit, yet through the inclusion of life skills, NZF could further align to Sport NZ and BIB principles, actions, and outcomes to make the sport a more enticing environment for players in New Zealand.

### **5.2.3 Strategic and Operational Disconnect**

Within New Zealand, there is a general intent to raise the awareness and importance of the youth sport experience which is Sport NZ are leading and partnered by NSO's. However, as identified through the content analysis, there is little guidance that connects the strategic directives of organisations such as Sport NZ and NZF to the day-to-day operations of those organisations responsible for structuring and delivering youth sports such as RSO's and clubs. Youth sport related surveys have furthered Sport NZs understanding of the wants and needs of youth sport participants such as identifying meaningful experiences and developing psychosocial skills alongside physical outcomes. These findings from Sport NZ would suggest that for youth, the development of physical skills, tactical skills, life skills, social skills, and enjoyment all contribute to making sport experience more meaningful to youth participants. The Sport NZ youth initiatives are often short-term and tend to focus on engaging in-active communities or targeting certain in-active

demographics. Additionally, these Sport NZ youth sport initiatives can lead to funding or grant opportunities which can further entice NSO's, RSO's and clubs to begin delivering or promoting certain short-term initiatives over more long-term youth and life skill development initiatives. However, the heavy reliance on funded initiatives to create action or change in youth sport experiences begins to highlight just how understaffed and under-resourced the wider NSO, RSO, and club network is within New Zealand,

Often RSOs and clubs are tasked with supporting all age groups of grassroots and community sport, and therefore when the added responsibility for youth sport experiences and initiatives is placed on RSOs or clubs, this added responsibility either becomes too difficult and is not implemented, or that it then falls onto operational employees or volunteers who often have limited time, education, awareness, or understanding of how to practically implement sustainable youth sport specific outcomes. Therefore, RSOs and clubs tend to have different strategic or operational priorities compared to national agencies and NSOs which then leads to the continued mirroring or replication of messaging regarding the youth sport experience and the holistic development of youth through sport without any of the organisations providing any tangible objectives or outcomes as to how the youth experiences within sport can be improved.

This flow on effect of continued strategic messaging and incentives without any operational support or direction is one reason life skill development within sport can have a considerable influence on youth sport. Life skill development and the explicit promotion of life skills within youth sports provides a simple yet effective solution for how NSOs, RSOs, and clubs can begin to further improve on youth development offerings within their sport without having to shift, change, or adapt current operations. For football specifically, the WoF plan and respective frameworks provide a suitable foundation for youth development which could then look to include the explicit promotion of life skills to align their operations with the strategic incentives from Sport NZ and BIB.

The NZF Junior Framework is divided into ages and stages of development and includes a 'four corners' approach to coaching, which raises the awareness of technical/tactical, physical,

mental, and social/emotional outcomes that derive from participation in football. Whilst there is a brief mention of life skills within the NZF Junior Framework, hidden within the ‘four corners’ approach under the headings, mental and social/emotional. As expected, within such a robust and detailed document, there might be mention of life skills but there is minimal guidance as to how coaches can begin to explicitly teach and develop life skills with their sessions. The coaches within the research reaffirmed that there was no real tangible advice, guidance, or education regarding the development of life skills and how coaches can explicitly promote and develop life skills for youth through football. Interestingly, Bowley et al., (2018) mentioned that a lack of appropriate education around the development of life skills within sport can leave coaches unaware and unprepared for the role they have in youth development.

### **5.3 Research Question 2:**

#### How is life skill development understood and facilitated within the New Zealand Football Junior Framework?

The vision and messaging from Sport NZ and NZF regarding youth sport and the promotion of youth sport initiatives was evident, yet there were little operational support or strategic directives that aligned to the development of life skills within sports. As mentioned, the NZF Junior Framework is a good foundation which provides guidance and support for the technical and tactical elements of football yet has minimal guidance on the holistic benefits of football, and how coaches can promote holistic development and outcomes alongside physical development outcomes.

Understandably, physical, technical, and tactical developments in sport have occurred sooner as the results and outcomes are more definitive and easier to measure in comparison to the development of life skills which have internal and intangible outcomes that are much harder to measure. Pierce et al., (2018), suggested that the intentional development of life skills should be a priority and equal to the development of physical skills. Therefore, the research intervention provided coaches with steps and strategies, which support the coaches to explicitly create teachable situations for the development of specific life skills. Sport is a unique environment which has the ability to promote the development of life skills if the adults responsible for the sport are all deliberate in their actions,

explicit in their life skill designs, and establish clear goals to create a sporting environment with intentional learning experiences for youth development (Perkins & Noam, 2007).

### **5.3.1 Recognising the Impact of Life Skill Development**

Life skills provide clubs, coaches, and parents with an avenue to practically implement and promote the holistic development of participants through sports. Sport Based Life Skill Development (SB-LSD) begins to shift the sole focus away from physical outcomes of success such as results and winning games, to instead a much broader perspective of what success can look like. The development of life skills could begin to change the focus or objectives behind junior and youth football in New Zealand, further promoting the development of youth while at the same time shifting the overall culture and philosophy of youth football development in New Zealand. This stance was reinforced by Coach 4, who mentioned that by promoting life skills through football, the focus on developing youth is extenuated, where football helps youth to develop skills that can support themselves to become good people and contributing members to their team and in society. This impact that an explicit focus on life skill development within football has had on players, coaches, and parents has provided a much greater insight into just how impactful life skill development within the NZF Junior Framework could be.

#### ***5.3.1.1 Impact on Players***

Through an explicit approach to the development of life skills within the NZF Junior Framework, coaches reported increased signs of confidence and communication, where their junior players began grasping the concept of life skills and were able to demonstrate this through their ability to work together and communicate with each other for the benefit of the team. Using explicit approaches to life skill development, the coaches found that players also became more accountable for their own learning and their own development. Additionally, players became more attentive and involved in the training sessions and were able to discuss, practice, and develop life skills within football training and games. This positive impact on players that an explicit life skill development can have furthers the correlation between improved youth experiences of sport and the explicit development of life skills within sports.

### ***5.3.1.2 Impact on Coaching***

For the coaches involved in the research, they were able to reflect on their coaching journeys and identified that life skills were not a focus point within their coaching, nor were they explicitly discussed within coaching courses or the NZF Junior and Youth Frameworks. Through the explicit approach to life skill development coaches became more aware of the life skills that are present within football and their everyday lives. Their increased self-awareness helped the coaches to identify a range of life skills that are present within sports and improved their own ability to role model life skills for their players. The impact that an explicit approach to life skill development had on coaches was overall positive, coaches also then began reflecting on other life domains such as their home or working lives where they began to identify life skills that they were using implicitly that were also beneficial to coaching and vice versa. However, this would suggest that most junior football coaches throughout NZ are unaware of life skills and therefore, implicit approaches to the development of life skills are occurring within the sport, but this will vary as it is dependent on the coach, the club, and coaching environment. Interesting, this would suggest that through explicit approaches to life skill development, coaches became more aware of their role in youth development and improved on their self-awareness of life skills that are prevalent within sport but also the other parts of their lives such as at home or at work.

### ***5.3.1.3 Impact on Parents***

The reflections from the coaches within the focus groups would suggest that through an explicit approach to the development of life skills within football, parents also became more engaged and involved in their child's development through football. Coaches that were able to involve parents in discussions about the research found that their explicit approaches to life skill development made the parents also became more self-aware of the life skills present in football and were able to help influence and role model exemplary behaviours for their children. Parents then began to change, adapt or adjust their behaviour and interactions with the club and coaches as they became more aware of the life skill focus, providing a means to positively role model life skills in front of their children. Through these explicit approaches to life skill development, coaches that

included parents in the discussions were then able to reinforce and remind the children of life skills and how they integrate to other environments such as schools or at home where parents could begin to reinforce the messaging and promotion of life skills with their children outside of football.

### **5.3.2 Life Skill Survey for Sport – Transfer Scale (LSSS-TS)**

Through the adaption of the Life Skill Survey for Sport – Transfer Scale (LSSS-TS), the research was able to include the observations of parents in their child’s perceived development of life skills in football as well as other life domains. The structure of the LSSS-TS provides participants with self-report questions on a 5-point Likert scale which assessed eight of the most cited life skills (teamwork, communication, problem solving and decision making, social skills, emotional skills, goal setting, time management, and leadership). The distribution of the surveys took place online at the beginning of the research intervention and then again eight weeks later which provided the research with quantifiable research data aligning with the multi-methods research approach. Although the sample size of participants was significantly low, there were four items which produced statistically significant results across four different life skills being, communication, time management, problem solving and decision making, and leadership.

#### ***5.3.2.1 Time Management***

Football provides specific situations where children must be more aware of how to manage their own time. Examples of this are: waking up with enough time to prepare, making sure they have eaten, arriving at the training or game on time, etcetera. Although parents often have a significant role in their child’s sport preparation, each of these situations can help children to further their awareness of time management, providing opportunities for youth to practice and develop their own time management skills. However, parents that are wanting to help or be supportive of their child in sport tend to do the opposite and end up doing everything for their child, which as a result can negatively influence their child’s development as they themselves have taken learning opportunities away from their child.

Fortunately, of the eight life skills researched, a statistically significant result was shown within the life skill of time management, specifically the item “how well does your child manage

their time?” which produced a chi-squared result of,  $X^2(5, 27) = 11.88, p = .036$ . This shows that through self-report measures, parents were able to notice and improvement in how players managed their time between the pre-intervention and post-intervention which lasted a total of eight weeks. Although time management was not one of the four explicit life skills discussed during the coaching intervention, parents were able to report on their child’s behaviour and noticed an improvement in time management because of the explicit focus on life skill development. This would then suggest that the life skill of time management is present and currently exists within the NZF Junior Framework.

### ***5.3.2.2 Problem Solving and Decision Making***

Football creates a multitude of situations that require young people to solve problems and make decisions pre, post, and during their training or games to further their knowledge, awareness, and understanding of the sport. Coaches were able to create situations within training environments which cause problems and require the players to develop practical solutions to achieve their intended goals. Added to this, problem solving and decision making was one of the four life skills identified and explicitly taught to the coaches during the research intervention and integrated into their training sessions (Appendix D). However, low pre/post responses from parents meant that there were very few statistically significant outcomes. Yet, the item, “how well does your child problem solve, and decision make at home?” produced a statistically significant chi squared result of  $X^2(3, 27) = 14.05, p = .003$ . which provides an interesting insight suggesting that parents were able to identify an improvement in their child’s problem solving and decision-making skills at home.

### ***5.3.2.3 Communication***

Communication is a life skill that is prevalent within football across a range of different situations, scenarios, and environments. Communication for junior players can also be formal or information, one on one with peers, coaches, parents, as well as in games, in groups, or in pre, post, or during training debriefs. This awareness of communication highlights that for children, sport or football can create opportunities to practice and develop communication and the confidence in

communicating their own wants and needs whether that is formally or informally. Communication was also one of the life skills which coaches were tasked with explicitly integrating into their training sessions, where coaches found that the junior players were able to grasp the benefits of communication as a team and began to improve on their communication skills as a team and individually with the coaches.

Fortunately, within the research, parents were also able to identify and observe an improvement in the communication skills of their children as show within the LSSS-TS, specifically the item “How well does your child use communication skills when helping out / doing chores?” which was found to have a statistical significance of  $X^2(3, 27) = 14.05, p = .013$ . This statistically significant chi-squared result has demonstrated that parents were able to notice improvements in their child’s ability to communicate when helping out / doing chores. Suggesting that through football and using explicit approaches to raise awareness and discuss the benefits of communication, that junior participants developed a better understanding for communication and were able to apply the same skill into other life domains such as when helping out / doing chores. Additionally, through the explicit promotion of life skills, coaches also found the parents started to become much more communicative and began role modelling what effective communication skills looked like for their children.

#### ***5.3.2.4 Leadership***

The last statistically significant finding was for the life skill of leadership, which is surprising as leadership is a more advanced life skill to grasp. Again, leadership was also not one of four explicitly taught life skills. However, the item, “How well does your child know how to positively influence a group of individuals?” has returned a chi-squared score of  $X^2(5, 27) = 11.43, p = .044$ . which suggests that there was an improvement in junior football players as observed by their parents in relation to leadership. For children u9 – u12, leadership is a diverse and difficult concept to grasp, additionally at this age there is limited opportunities for children to develop and practice leadership. Sports provide a range of opportunities for youth to understand, develop, and practice leadership in a sporting environment. Such as team captains, players leading the warmups,

small-sided games communicating tactics and strategies, and holding peers accountable for set up and pack-downs.

These statistically significant results show that players were able to have a positive influence on individuals, potentially through developing life skills. Which suggests that an explicit focus on life skill development within the NZF Junior Framework could help junior football coaches to provide safe learning environments for players where youth were willing to practice, develop, and continue learning life skills through football. Experienced coaches that are successful in the development of life skills tend to have well-defined coaching philosophies, an ability to form strong relationships, and a variety of strategies that promote the development of life skills learning for participants (Geidne et al., 2013). It is through these skills that coaches become more explicit and intentional in the overall development of each individual player, through football, rather than a football and game specific results focus.

#### **5.4 Research Question 3:**

What modifications can be made to the New Zealand Football Junior Framework to explicitly promote life skill development among youth football players?

Sport is an environment that when structured appropriately can promote youth development and the learning of life skills (Kendellen & Camire, 2019). Yet, the structure and design of SB-LSD programs and interventions continue to be an ongoing discussion within research, as many SB-LSD interventions are poorly structured and undermine the potential learning and development of life skills for youth participants (Allen & Rhind, 2019; Danish et al., 2004; Hodge, Danish, & Martin 2012; Turnnidge, Côté, & Hancock 2014). However, through the inclusion of explicit life skill development, sports organisations could begin to change the view of youth development within sports to further align their operations to Sport NZ's strategic directives and the BIB philosophy without having to drastically change or adapt their current operations. Therefore, NZF have a unique opportunity to lead youth development in New Zealand by adapting the NZF Junior Framework to include explicit life skill development. Doing so could change the philosophy of junior and youth sport in New Zealand and promote a positive culture change within football.

### **5.4.1 Perceived Benefits of Teaching Life Skills**

Coaches were able to discuss the perceived benefits of teaching life skills and the potential future integration of life skills within the NZF Junior Framework. In doing so, the coaches were able to reflect on whether there would be any further benefits or important things that NZF should look to include. A thematic analysis of focus group results identified the following sub-themes that lead to the following discussion.

#### ***5.4.1.1 Coach Development and Support***

Most junior and youth football coaches within New Zealand are volunteers that have little or no formal coaching education. Therefore, the WoF Plan and Junior and Youth Frameworks provide structure and support for beginner coaches as to what and how structure training and game environments to achieve the physical, technical, and tactical objectives of the NZF Junior Framework. Whilst coaches are also able to further their coaching development through NZF coaching courses, the coaches who had been involved in these courses highlighted very few discussions or links made to the holistic development of youth through football.

Therefore, when the junior football coaches took part in the intervention promoting the explicit development of life skills within football, they were able to reflect upon both implicit and explicit approaches. The current national approach tends to be more implicit, and although there is mention of the holistic development benefits of football, there is little to no guidance on how to achieve this. Alternatively, the explicit integration of life skills into junior football provided coaches with strategies for reinforcement and steps to promote life skill development discussions (see appendix D). The explicit focus on life skills within football helped the coaches to realise that they have a significant influence on the development of players within their teams which further promotes sports as a safe learning environment where coaches and youth participants are able to discuss, learn, comprehend, practice, develop life skills within football and how they relate to other life domains.

Interestingly, the coaches found that an explicit focus on life skills gave them a new-found purpose and helped to redefine their role as a football coach in youth development outside of

football specific development outcomes. Reflection from the coaches within the focus groups found that the reinforcement and steps to integrate life skills (Appendix D) provided them with guidance that they could tie their messaging to when trying to get their points across. Other suggestions were the inclusion of life skill development education in the NZF coach education courses, increased social media promotion and awareness in messaging from professionals on the benefits of life skill development, and the creation of working groups with club-based Directors of Football across the country to set age-appropriate benchmarks to monitor progressive development of life skills for junior football players. It is worth highlighting that following the research one of the coaches has already made plans to continue the explicit implementation of life skill development within their club.

*“Each age group and coach is going to have a pack, detailing how they can incorporate, targeted life skills. So, for the first 4–8-year-olds, we are just going to be talking about teamwork and the reinforcement of fun, what it is to have fun. Then for the 9–10-year-olds, we’re going to be talking about problem solving and communication and then for our elevens to thirteens, we’re going to go really target problem solving and communication and then for our youth coaches, we’re going to be doing, leadership, commitment, teamwork, and rope all of those ones that they’ve learned through the pathway. We believe that the coaches should be driving this change, and the clubs’ values and aspirations should guide the direction and outcomes” – Coach 5*

This explicit approach to life skill development provides coaching support for the holistic development of players, and by aligning life skills to the age and stage of teams within their club, coaches have full season to focus on one or two specific life skills and continuing to build on those life skills developed as they progress through the stages of the NZF Junior Framework.

#### **5.4.1.2 Consistency across a National Framework**

Discussions from the coaches within the focus groups raised the point that for life skills to become explicitly integrated into football, there is a need for consistency that NZF can provide. A national stance and integration of life skills that is rolled out, communicated, and distributed to all clubs and coaches within New Zealand provides consistency across the sport, both externally and

internally for NZF, ensuring that life skills would become integrated and included in coach education as well as the NZF Junior Framework. Coaches within the focus groups reflected on their own coaching journeys and identified that there have been little to no discussions or guidance regarding the holistic development of youth participants and how football clubs and coaches can successfully promote holistic development outcomes within football. Fortunately, the coaches within the research found that the life skills reinforcement strategies and steps to promote life skills development discussed within the intervention helped them to be more explicit in their approaches to life skill development, and in-turn the coaches became more aware of the life skills that are present within football and holistic benefits that football can have on youth participants. Although there is inclusion of holistic development within the NZF Junior Framework there lacks any tangible guidance or outcomes as to how coaches can integrate holistic development into football coaching to become more obtainable youth football players. Similarly, the NRF Junior Handbook reinforces the messaging around youth sport experiences through GoodSports and Balance is Better, yet this document also lacks any practical advice, guidance, and support of how coaches can further promote positive youth sport environments and experiences.

Whilst the NZF Junior Framework provides a development pathway, the coaches were adamant that NZF should be integrating life skills into the NZF Junior Framework at a minimum, to provide coaches with alternative focus points and outcomes for junior and youth development in football. The intervention steps in this research were found to support coaches in how to be explicit and how to reinforce the life skill development messaging, Yet, the overarching messaging from the coaches was that to get any traction for life skill development, that the promotion and guidance for explicit approaches to holistic youth development should be led from the NSO so that there will be more uptake from member federations, clubs, and the wider community.

#### ***5.4.1.3 Age-Appropriate Implementation***

As part of the integration of life skills within the NZF Junior Framework the coaches found that youth participants were very receptive to the discussions and promotion of life skills, yet it was identified that the age of the participants could be a significant influence in their ability to

comprehend certain life skills. Therefore, the coaches were able to draw a correlation between ages of the participants, the stages of the NZF Junior Framework, and suitable or more attainable life skills depending on the age of participants. The age and cognitive maturity of participants was also identified as it can affect the development of life skills, as younger participants are less likely to be exposed to different learning contexts and may have more difficulty discussing or explaining transfer experiences (Bean et al., 2020; Camiré et al., 2022). Therefore, age-appropriate life skills, paired alongside the ages and stages already outlined in the NZF Junior Framework could help to maximise the potential development of participants.

Coaches were also able to identify that the development of life skills should progress or stack overtime as participants move through the stages of the NZF Junior Framework. The age-appropriate implementation of life skills is a concept that has been less regularly studied in SB-LSD research, yet the coaches provided examples of natural progression such as beginning with fun and teamwork, building in communication and so forth, through to more complex and advanced life skills as participants get older such as goal setting and leadership which are difficult life skills to comprehend and acquire for junior and youth participants.

#### ***5.4.1.4 Parental Involvement and Support***

Often parents are unsure how to best support their children within sports, yet the explicit approach to life skill development included parents so that they participated and were engaged in the development of their child's life skills. Parents play a significant role in interpreting values and communicating life and sports skills to their children (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004; Burke et al., 2021), the exposure that the explicit development of life skills had on parents was also seen as beneficial to the players and the sport in general. Life skills provide parents with awareness of skills that can be reinforced and monitored outside of the sporting environment to further support the reinforcement, awareness, and development of their child's life skills. Examples of the impact the explicit life skill development had on parents were that they began turning up on-time, staying around for team debriefs, communicating clearly with coaches, and overall role modelling good behaviour for their children. Within all junior and youth sports, sideline behaviour of parents, coaches, and adults can

have a negative influence on the youth sport experience for participants. However, if life skills are explicitly developed within junior and youth sport, there is potential that parents will become more aware or self-aware of the adult-led behaviours that can negatively influence the experience of sport for youth participants. Ultimately, making more adults accountable for the role they play in their child's development through sports.

## **5.5 Implications of the Research**

There has been a proliferation of life skill development research conducted over the past decade which promotes explicit approaches to life skill development, and the holistic benefits that can come from this for youth participants. However, much of the previous life skill development research focuses on one-off activations, school-based physical education, or youth camps compared structured or organised sport. As a result, there is limited research that guides governing sport entities, national sport organisations (NSOs), regional sport organisations, clubs, and coaches on how they can support youth through the promotion and development of life skills within organised sport. Whilst there is culture change research, specific to junior and youth sport in New Zealand, such as Walters et al., (2022), there is limited sport-based life skill development research conducted in New Zealand. Within life skill development and youth development research, one very important starting point is to adopt a philosophy that places youth development at the centre of activities and outcomes (Bowley et al., 2018). This research helps to further the understanding of positive youth development outcomes within sport research and promotes the explicit development of life skills to keep youth engaged and participating in sport.

Whilst there is a lot of strategic directives and initiative regarding youth sport participation and experiences, there are very few tangible outcomes as to what and how this can be achieved and implemented operationally at grassroots level. Previous youth research conducted by Sport NZ has predominantly focused on understanding youth experiences, with limited research that supports the initiatives, funds, or strategic directives that are in place. Additionally, there is limited research that

focuses on tangible outcomes that counteract the declining youth participation trends in New Zealand. Therefore, this research looks to provide a starting point for how sport organisations could begin to implement an explicit approach to the development of life skills within youth sport programmes. It is through these explicit approaches that aim to improve the holistic development of youth and support lifelong participation and involvement in sport.

Life skills development is an assumed part of sport and present within the NZF Junior Framework, albeit relying largely on an implicit approach. The research found that when coaches took an explicit approach to the development of life skills, their youth players became much more engaged and responsible for their personal development. There are three inherent demands of organised sport; 1) competition and learning how to compete, 2) development of physical, technical, and tactical skills, and 3) social environment where participants interact with a range of different stakeholders (e.g., coaches, parents, teammates, and referees) (Bean et al., 2018). It is through these three inherent demands that within organized sport that youth can acquire personal and social skills alongside the physical competencies (Holt, Deal, & Smyth., 2016). Therefore, whilst Sport NZ continues to promote youth participation and the youth sport experience year after year, through their messaging, initiatives, and funds. Without any proper guidance or support for how coaches can begin to be more explicit in their coaching and increase the awareness of life skill development through sports, the third inherent demand and social environments is left unstructured and up to chance which leads to the continued trend in declining youth sport participation.

Similarly, for NZF, there is much guidance and support for technical and tactical outcomes as part of the NZ Junior Framework, however, there is limited awareness and support for how coaches can begin to promote life skill development and become more explicit in their approach to the development of life skills through football. Therefore, if coaches do not have the requisite education and awareness to successfully promote and develop life skills within football, then the development of life skills of participants is left up to chance and less likely to occur. The

implications of this would see continued omission of the holistic development of junior and youth football leading to potentially continued decline of youth participation within the sport.

Alongside the addition of life skills to the NZF Junior Framework, it was suggested, that NZF or NRF work with Directors of Football (DoFs) within football clubs to collectively identify and agree upon skills that are important to certain stages of the pathway and align with the NZF Junior Framework. A collective leadership approach which involves DoFs in the planning is likely to get more involvement from the clubs as they have been involved in the decision-making processes. Additionally, through the addition of life skills, NZF could use this as an opportunity to shape or change the culture or messaging of football in the country by selecting specific life skills which translate to outcomes that are conducive to optimal youth and successful football related outcomes.

## **5.6 Limitations of the Research**

As the research focused on youth life skill development in sport, the researcher identified that the topic at hand is not easily measured or captured compared to physical outcomes. Life skill development occurs over prolonged periods of time and instead focusses on the development of internal or intangible outcomes and skills that rely on either self-report measures or coach / parent observations. Therefore, a pragmatic stance set the tone of the research, supporting the research to use any methods that would provide substantial research inferences. A multi-method approach collected of both qualitative and quantitative data, being quantitative surveys for the parents involved and qualitative content analysis and focus group interviews with the coaches.

Another limitation to the research was the sample size of participants. There is potential that New Zealand's lockdown response to the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the data collection phases as it coincided with the final lockdown that was placed on Auckland. As the research took place following the lockdowns, junior players, parents, and coaches may have been hesitant in returning to larger groups or gatherings, and thus trainings, games, and involvement in research were

impacted. Consequently, the limited responses to pre and post surveys by parents, and the number of coaches participating in the research was less than initially desired.

Due to COVID-19 lock downs impacting the research, the research was conducted in two phases across two different junior football seasons. The first phase of research involved two coaches and was conducted at the last eight weeks of the junior football season (2022). Whereas the second phase of research was conducted at the beginning of the junior football season the following year (2023). Having research conducted across two different seasons resulted in having two interventions and multiple focus group summaries which inevitably there may have been slight variations between the two interventions. Additionally, whilst the parents' surveys remained anonymous, the coaches, were selected for the research via purposive sampling and suitable research criteria. Research diversity is important, and as all the coaches who took part in the research were all males, this may have impacted their insights. However, there was a varying range of ethnicities, socio-cultural background, socio-economic backgrounds, biological age, and coaching experience within the group.

## **5.7 Future Research**

This research provides insights into junior football coaching and the explicit approach to life skill development within the NZF Junior Framework. As part of the research, coaches of junior football coaches within NRF catchment were educated on how to be more explicit in their approach to life skill development, and both coaches and parents reported on changes to their child's or players development across an eight-week period. Based on the findings, there are several practical recommendations that could support future life skill development research moving forwards.

To thoroughly assess the benefits of life skill development, a longitudinal approach to the research would help to improve the efficacy and provide much larger sample sizes to base the research off. In addition, a wider sample size taking a nationwide approach would be beneficial. It may not only increase the research participants, but also potentially establish some life skill

development findings specific to age, gender, coaching dynamics, differing delivery models, and locational variations within New Zealand. Furthering this research over a longer period could also begin to understand potential benefits in relation to youth sport participation and enjoyment.

Similarly, future research could begin to compare implicit and explicit approaches to life skill development, using implicit and explicit groups as well as control groups to further examine just how impactful an explicit approach to life skill development can be. Research on implicit or explicit approaches would provide useful information on certain explicit approaches to life skill development, as well as variables of educated or uneducated coaches. Finding from future implicit or explicit comparison research could begin to understand how receptive youth are to certain coaching mechanisms, which could help set the direction for frameworks, parents' education, and coaching courses moving forwards.

Due to the array of potential life skills that can be developed within sports, future research could begin to look at certain age appropriateness for life skills, furthering the knowledge and understanding of how capable participants are at grasping certain concepts and life skills relevant to their developmental age. The additional awareness of age and stage-based life skills helps to support sports and developmental frameworks moving forwards. An alignment of certain life skills being developed across age groups could help to align strategic direction and messaging from governing agencies, NSO's and RSO's with operations to create a more cohesive and substantial attempt at youth development through sports. Including a focus on life skills, creates a clear focus on youth development and provides coaches with alternative outcomes within sport that can be viewed as successful. If future research can develop age and stage-based life skills within sports, leading to the stacking of life skills over time, may result in a change in philosophy and culture from players, coaches, and parents becoming more accountable for negative adult-led behaviours in youth sports.

Lastly, as within most sport-based life skill development research, it is suggested that to expand or replicate the research approach into different organised sports to assess whether different

sports can promote and utilize different life skills, furthering the contribution and understanding of sport-based life skill development research and potential nuances of life skill development between certain sports.

## **5.8 Chapter Summary**

This research highlights how explicit approaches to life skill development within the NZF Junior Framework can influence the development of life skills for youth participants, as well as improving the awareness of life skills for coaches, parents, and players to improve and provide tangible outcomes for the holistic development of youth both on and off the field. The coaches within the research not only developed a greater understanding of life skills and how they can be implemented and promoted within football, but they also reported that junior football players became more responsive and engaged in the training sessions, discussions, and ultimately the promotion of life skills that were integrated into their training sessions and games. The coaches' reflections also showed that through an explicit focus on life skills, their focus on youth development became a lot clearer, and enabled coaches to provide consistency in their coaching and messaging to the players. Additionally, through the promotion of explicit life skills, coaches and parents became more self-aware of their influence on development and became more involved and aware of role modelling good behaviours for youth.

Overall, the research may further NZF's awareness of the holistic development benefits within the NZF Junior Framework, as well as align football with the strategic direction and messaging from Sport NZ's BIB initiative, providing an operational outcome that stakeholders can work towards. In doing so, life skill development helps to further promote youth sport participation and safeguarding the youth experiences in sport.

The nationwide promotion of life skills alongside the NZF Junior Framework could provide further advancements for life skill development research in organised sports. Aligning life skill development within an existing development framework provides operational support and outcomes for regions, clubs, and coaches regarding positive youth sport experiences for all involved.

The research was also able to further the existing knowledge of SB-LSD in New Zealand which aids Sport NZ in their youth development led philosophy. Through the increased awareness of explicit life skill development within youth sports helps to promote BIB, generating a ‘why’ young people should be involved in sports, which is to learn a range of different skills, physically, mentally, and emotionally. Additionally, the research also provides NZF and NRF with a better understanding of junior football coaching and the explicit development of life skills within the NZF Junior Framework and ways in which the NZF Junior Framework, and junior coaching courses, could be adapted to become more explicit regarding the inclusion life skills in junior and youth football.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A – Ethics Approval



1 August 2022

Melody Johnston

Faculty of Business Economics and Law

Dear Melody

Re Ethics Application:

**22/54 Explicit Development of Life Skills Within the New Zealand Football Junior Framework**

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEK).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 1 August 2025.

**Standard Conditions of Approval**

1. The research is to be undertaken in accordance with the Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for Research and as approved by AUTEK in this application.
2. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using the EA2 form.
3. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using the EA3 form.
4. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEK prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form.
5. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTEK Secretariat as a matter of priority.
6. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTEK Secretariat as a matter of priority.
7. It is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations is of a high standard and that all the dates on the documents are updated.
8. AUTEK grants ethical approval only. You are responsible for obtaining management approval for access for your research from any institution or organisation at which your research is being conducted and you need to meet all ethical, legal, public health, and locality obligations or requirements for the jurisdictions in which the research is being undertaken.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

For any enquiries, please contact [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz). The forms mentioned above are available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>

(This is a computer-generated letter for which no signature is required)

The AUTEK Secretariat

**Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee**

Cc: [markatkins03@icloud.com](mailto:markatkins03@icloud.com); [kirsten.spencer@aut.ac.nz](mailto:kirsten.spencer@aut.ac.nz)

## Appendix B: Coach Participant Information Sheet



### Coaching Participant Information Sheet

#### Date Information Sheet Produced

12 July 2021

#### Project Title

Explicit Development of Life Skills Within the New Zealand Football Junior Framework

#### An Invitation

Kia ora,

My name is Mark Atkins, and I am completing this study as part of my thesis, a requirement for the Master of Business, Sport Leadership and Management in which I am undertaking at Auckland University of Technology.

I am interested in gaining insight into the development of transferable life skills in junior sport. Specifically, junior football coaches within the NZF Junior Framework. This insight will provide a deeper understanding into how life skills can be explicitly developed by other junior coaches, and whether junior players, parents, and coaches feel that life skills have and can be developed within the NZF Junior Framework.

Any clubs or coaches that are involved in junior football across the NRF region and would like to participate in the research can contact the researcher directly to expressing their interest to be involved. Participation is voluntary, and participants may withdraw at any time prior to the completion of data collection (August/September 2022).

#### What is the purpose of this research?

As mentioned, the aim of this research is to investigate the development of life skills in sports and their impact within the NZF Junior Framework. The secondary purpose of this research is to fulfil the thesis requirements for the Master of Business, Sport Leadership and Management.

#### How can I participate in this research?

Those considered for this study are junior football coaches who are involved in the New Zealand Football Junior Framework. Coaches wanting to participate in the research will need to

contact the researcher on the details shown below expressing their interest and informing the researcher which club and junior team they are coaching (e.g. Waikato United U10 Wallabies). Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You are able to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

### **Researcher Contact Details:**

**Name:** Mark Atkins

**Email:** [nyh0209@autuni.ac.nz](mailto:nyh0209@autuni.ac.nz)

Participants that contact the primary researcher and fit the criteria will be required to sign a Consent Form and return it to the research agreeing to participate in the research.

### **How will my privacy be protected?**

All coaching participants will be deidentified in the written report. Any material paraphrased or quoted from transcripts will only be identified with a pseudonym label, for example 'Coach 1, 2, 3, or 4'.

Parents and junior players will also remain completely anonymous throughout the study. The only personal information collected will be the age and gender of junior football players.

### **What will happen in this research?**

Junior coaches will participate in an intervention, followed by an online focus group four weeks post the intervention.

The coaching intervention will be held online, coaches will spend approximately, an hour and a half in the intervention session. The intervention will consist of the researcher discussing and defining life skills with the coaches, as well as providing coaches with methods that they can use to explicitly integrate a life skill development focus into their coaching session. This will be done through the use of pre-training group discussions, mid-session identification, and post-training peer/group discussion and transfer.

The focus group interview held four weeks post intervention will also take approximately, an hour and a half. Coaches will be asked to share their experiences, observations, and insights of how their explicit approach to life skills development went within their team / sessions post the intervention.

For coaches to be selected for the research they will need enough parents of junior football players, and junior football players within their teams to also nominate themselves for the research. Parents of junior football players in their team will be able to contact the researcher directly if they are also willing to participate in the research. The involvement of parents and players will include completing two anonymous online questionnaires four weeks apart (pre intervention and post intervention)

Data will only be used for the purpose in which it is collected.

### **What are the benefits?**

The aim of this study is significant in today's sport climate and would positively contribute to the future development of New Zealand Footballs Junior Framework, as well as aligning with Sport New Zealand's 'Coaching for Character' pilot study. The study will provide recommendations to New Zealand Football to help them further understand which life skills are present within the junior framework, as well as how they can explicitly be developed by coaches of junior football. For participants, this research provides an opportunity to confidentially share and reflect upon their experiences and insights. The wider sporting

community will benefit from the research as it will provide a method to assess life skills that can be implemented into other organisations and sports, as well as create a deeper understanding of transferrable life skills and how they can be developed in football. Furthermore, this research will also enable the researcher to fulfil the requirements of their qualification.

### **What are the costs of participating in this research?**

The cost of participating in this research is time. The coaches will be required to give up a total of three hours of their time across two different days. Coaches will participate in an intervention which will take approximately an hour and a half. Then four weeks later, coaches will participate in a focus group interview which will also take approximately an hour and a half (maximum).

### **What are the discomforts and risks?**

A low level of discomfort and risk to participants may occur in this study. Participants may experience a low level of discomfort or embarrassment if they are not accustomed to voicing their experiences and insights.

### **How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?**

In order to alleviate these discomforts and risks, your identity will remain confidential and will not be disclosed in the final written report. In the focus group interview, only appropriate questions will be asked, and you are not required to answer questions if you do not feel comfortable. You will also have the opportunity to provide feedback to the researcher if you wish to extract or remove any parts of the conversation.

### **What opportunity do I have to consider my involvement in this research?**

The research will be advertised for a total of three weeks. After the initial internal advertisement from your club, participants will have an additional two weeks to consider whether they are willing to participate in the research.

### **Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?**

Yes, findings of the study will be accessible via a URL on the Northern Region Football and NZ Football websites.

### **What do I do if I have concerns about this research?**

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Melody Johnston, [melody.johnston@aut.ac.nz](mailto:melody.johnston@aut.ac.nz)  
Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTECH [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz), 921 9999 ext. 6038

### **Who do I contact for further information about this research?**

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

#### **Researcher Contact Details:**

- Mark Atkins, [nyh0209@autuni.ac.nz](mailto:nyh0209@autuni.ac.nz)

#### **Project Supervisor Contact Details:**

- Melody Johnston, [melody.johnston@aut.ac.nz](mailto:melody.johnston@aut.ac.nz)

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on August 2022,  
AUTEC Reference number 2254.**

**Appendix C: Parent/Guardian Participant Information Sheet**



**Parent/Guardian Participant Information Sheet**

## **Date Information Sheet Produced**

12 July 2022

## **Project Title**

Explicit Development of Life Skills Within the New Zealand Football Junior Framework

## **An Invitation**

Kia ora,

My name is Mark Atkins, and I am completing this study as part of my thesis, a requirement for the Master of Business, Sport Leadership and Management in which I am undertaking at Auckland University of Technology.

I am interested in gaining insight into the development of transferable life skills in junior sport. Specifically, junior football coaches within the NZF Junior Framework. This insight will provide a deeper understanding into how life skills can be explicitly developed by other junior coaches, and whether junior players, parents, and coaches feel that life skills have and can be developed within the NZF Junior Framework.

Any clubs or coaches that are involved in junior football across the NRF region and would like to participate in the research can contact the researcher directly to expressing their interest to be involved. Participation is voluntary, and participants may withdraw at any time prior to the completion of data collection (August/September 2022).

## **What is the purpose of this research?**

As mentioned, the aim of this research is to investigate the development of life skills in sports and their impact within the NZF Junior Framework. The secondary purpose of this research is to fulfil the thesis requirements for the Master of Business, Sport Leadership and Management.

## **How can I participate in this research?**

Those considered for this study are junior football parent/guardians whose children are involved in the New Zealand Football Junior Framework. Coaches, and parents wanting to participate in the research will need to contact the researcher on the details shown below expressing their interest and informing the researcher which club and junior team their child plays in (e.g. Waikato United U10 Wallabies).

For coaches to be selected for the research, parents of junior football players within their team will also need to nominate themselves for the research. Parents of junior football players in their team will then be able to contact the researcher directly if they are also willing to participate in the research. Parents/guardians will also need to assent to their child being involved in the research.

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. Due to the anonymity of the research,

once the anonymous survey has been completed participants will be unable to withdraw their data.

**Researcher Contact Details:**

**Name:** Mark Atkins

**Email:** [nyh0209@autuni.ac.nz](mailto:nyh0209@autuni.ac.nz)

**How will my privacy be protected?**

All participants will remain anonymous, identities will not be disclosed in the written report. Parents and junior players will remain completely anonymous throughout the study. The only personal information collected will be which team you are associated with.

**What will happen in this research?**

Parents/guardians participating in this research will be asked to complete two anonymous surveys at both pre-season and post season. You will be asked to complete an online anonymous questionnaire. This process will then occur again four weeks later where you will again fill out an anonymous online questionnaire.

Parents/guardians will also be responsible to provide assent for their child to participate in the research. Once you have completed your online questionnaire there will be a link which will take you into the next questionnaire for your child to then complete.

Data will only be used for the purpose in which it is collected.

**What are the benefits?**

The aim of this study is significant in today's sport climate and would positively contribute to the future development of New Zealand Footballs Junior Framework, as well as aligning with Sport New Zealand's 'Coaching for Character' pilot study. The study will provide recommendations to New Zealand Football to help them further understand which life skills are present within the junior framework, as well as how they can explicitly be developed by coaches of junior football. For participants, this research provides an opportunity to confidentially share and reflect upon their experiences and insights. The wider sporting community will benefit from the research as it will provide a method to assess life skills that can be implemented into other organisations and sports, as well as create a deeper understanding of transferrable life skills and how they can be developed in football. Furthermore, this research will enable the researcher to fulfil the requirements of their qualification.

**What are the costs of participating in this research?**

The cost of participating in this research is time. Pre/post surveys for both the junior players and parents should take approximately ten minutes each time, accounting to twenty minutes total.

**What are the discomforts and risks?**

A low level of discomfort and risk to participants may occur in this study. Participants may experience a low level of discomfort or embarrassment if they are not accustomed to rating their experiences and insights.

**How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?**

In order to alleviate these discomforts and risks, your identity will remain confidential and will not be disclosed in the final written report.

**What opportunity do I have to consider my involvement in this research?**

The research will be advertised for a total of three weeks. After the initial internal advertisement from your club, participants will have an additional two weeks to consider whether they are willing to participate in the research.

**Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?**

Yes, findings of the study will be accessible via a URL on the Northern Region Football and NZ Football websites.

**What do I do if I have concerns about this research?**

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Melody Johnston, [melody.johnston@au.ac.nz](mailto:melody.johnston@au.ac.nz). Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEK [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz), 921 9999 ext. 6038

**Who do I contact for further information about this research?**

Please keep this Information Sheet for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

**Researcher Contact Details:**

- Mark Atkins, [nyh0209@autuni.ac.nz](mailto:nyh0209@autuni.ac.nz)

**Project Supervisor Contact Details:**

- Melody Johnston, [melody.johnston@aut.ac.nz](mailto:melody.johnston@aut.ac.nz)

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on August 2022,  
AUTEK Reference number 2254.**

**Appendix D: Life Skill Information Sheet**

**Life Skill Definitions**

**Teamwork:**

The combined action of a group, especially when effective and efficient.

**Goal Setting:**

The process of identifying something you want to accomplish and establishing measurable objectives and timeframes to help achieve it.

**Communication:**

The imparting or exchanging of information by speaking, writing, or using some other medium (e.g. hand signals)

**Problem Solving & Decision Making:**

The process of finding solutions to difficult or complex issues.

The action or process of making important decisions.

**Strategies to integrate life skills**

1. Reinforcing the message based on observation of successful application
2. Reinforcing the message with individual players
3. Reinforcing the message through group work or in pairs
4. Reinforcing the message with the whole group
5. Using challenges.

**3 Steps for Life Skill Development & Transfer**

**First**, the message is presented by the coach at the start of the session through the introduction of the life skill focus for the session.

**Second**, the coach continually reinforces the message throughout the session, using the five intervention techniques.

**The third**, involves the reflection and transfer of the life skill away from football to other environments (e.g. home, school, with friends, community groups).

Note: Pre / Post Discussions can be held in whole team, in small groups, and in peers.

- Changing the way discussions are held allows more children to actively discuss, share, and comprehend how life skills impact them as an individual as well as other peers' experiences of life skills.