



The Effect of Small-Sided Games Training on the Passing Skills of Talagoray U18 Football School Players

¹Gema Lineker, ²Naluri Denay*, ³Ardo Okilanda, ⁴Bram Sujadesman

¹⁻⁴Universitas Negeri Padang, Indonesia

Abstrac: This study aimed to determine the effect of Small-Sided Games training on the passing ability of U-18 SSB Talagoray players. This research employed a quantitative pre-experimental method using a one-group pretest-posttest design. The participants consisted of 19 U-18 players selected using total sampling. Passing ability was measured using the Short Passing Test before and after 16 sessions of Small-Sided Games training. Data were analyzed using the Shapiro-Wilk normality test and a paired sample t-test with SPSS. The results showed that the mean passing score increased from 97.47 in the pretest to 111.42 in the posttest. Statistical analysis indicated a significant improvement after the intervention ($p < 0.05$), demonstrating that Small-Sided Games training effectively enhanced players' passing ability. It is concluded that Small-Sided Games can be recommended as an effective training method to improve passing performance among youth football players and support overall team performance.

Keyword: Football, Passing Skills, Small-Sided Games, Training

Address Correspondence: Universitas Negeri Padang

*Email: naluri@fik.unp.ac.id

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INTRODUCTION

Sports play an important role in efforts to improve the quality of human resources because they contribute to the balanced development of both physical and mental aspects (Denay et al., 2025). Through planned physical activities, sports aim not only to maintain and improve fitness but also to instill moral values and sportsmanship, as well as to develop individuals' physical and mental potential (Okilanda et al., 2023). In addition to being enjoyed by all segments of society regardless of age or background as a form of recreation, sports continue to evolve alongside advancements in the field of sports. In line with this, Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 11 of 2022 on Sports affirms that sports aim to improve health, physical fitness, performance, intelligence, human quality, moral values, unity, and national dignity. Thus, one of the primary objectives of organizing sports is to enhance performance across various sports disciplines.

Competitive sports are sports activities organized in a planned, phased, and sustained manner to train and develop athletes so they can achieve optimal performance through the support of sports science and technology (Silviah, 2025; Denay, 2019). Success in competitive sports is influenced by internal factors such as technique, tactics, physical condition, and mental state as well as external factors, including nutrition, psychological well-being, family support, coaches, facilities and infrastructure, the environment, and the training programs implemented. Sports coaching and development begin with an introductory phase, followed by talent monitoring and identification, and then coaching through targeted training to develop athletes' potential until they achieve optimal performance. In addition to aiming to improve performance, sports development also plays a role in enhancing physical and mental health, fostering discipline and sportsmanship, and cultivating a sense of national pride. Sports have become an integral part of society that can be enjoyed by people from all walks of life; therefore, development efforts are carried out across various sports, including soccer, which is one of the most popular sports in Indonesia (Sujadesman et al., 2025). This is in line with Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 3 of 2005, which stipulates that the promotion and development of sports are carried out through the stages of sports introduction, monitoring, talent development, and performance enhancement.

Soccer is one of the most popular sports and is enjoyed by people of all ages, from children to adults, both as players and spectators (Andibowo et al., 2024). In addition to serving as a form of physical activity, soccer also plays a role in shaping character traits such as honesty, sportsmanship, responsibility, and the courage to make decisions (Pennington, 2017). The game is played by two teams, each consisting of eleven players, with the goal of scoring as many goals as possible against the opponent while defending their own goal. In soccer, there are three main phases: attack, defense, and transition; therefore, every player is required to master basic techniques such as passing, dribbling, shooting, ball control, and heading (Okilanda et al., 2020). The popularity of soccer in Indonesia has continued to rise since its introduction during the Dutch East Indies period around 1914; it then developed rapidly until the formation of the All-Indonesia Soccer Association (PSSI) on April 19, 1930, in Yogyakarta, marking the beginning of national soccer development (Aulia, 2025).

The development of soccer in West Sumatra Province continues to make progress, as evidenced by the growing number of clubs and soccer schools (SSB) that serve as training grounds for athletes ranging from young children to teenagers. One such program is the Talagoray SSB in Sungai Pua Subdistrict, Agam Regency, which has participated in various tournaments ranging from the subdistrict to the provincial level. Although the team has achieved notable success in the past, the performance of its U-18 team has declined over the past two years, necessitating more effective development efforts to improve the players' skills. In soccer, mastering basic skills such as passing, dribbling, shooting, and heading is crucial to the game. Among these skills, passing plays a particularly important role because it forms the foundation for building teamwork, maintaining possession, and creating scoring opportunities. Therefore, improving passing skills is one of the key areas that requires attention in the development of the U-18 players at SSB Talagoray.

Passing is a fundamental technique in soccer that aims to move the ball between players to maintain possession and build teamwork. Good passing skills require proper, structured training and optimal physical conditioning, as passing accuracy is crucial for the flow of the game,

the execution of tactics, and the creation of scoring opportunities (Putra, 2026). One training method that can be used to improve passing skills is small-sided games—a form of training that simulates match situations with fewer players and a smaller field, thereby developing technical and tactical skills and physical conditioning simultaneously while honing players' decision-making abilities (Putra et al., 2022; Sucipto et al., 2026).

Several previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of small-sided games in improving soccer performance. Putra et al. (2022) reported that small-sided games significantly enhanced players' technical performance by increasing the frequency of ball contact and providing more opportunities to execute passing and decision-making under game-like conditions. Similarly, Sucipto et al. (2026) found that small-sided games improved players' technical skills and overall physical performance through training that closely simulated competitive match situations. However, these studies primarily focused on the general effects of small-sided games on technical performance and involved different participant characteristics without specifically examining inside-of-the-foot passing ability among youth players at the U-18 level. In contrast, the present study specifically investigates the effect of small-sided games on improving inside-of-the-foot passing skills among U-18 players at Talagoray Soccer School (SSB Talagoray), a population that has received limited attention in previous research. This study therefore contributes new empirical evidence regarding the application of small-sided games in the context of youth soccer development in West Sumatra, particularly as an alternative training approach to address deficiencies in passing accuracy and execution under local coaching conditions.

Improved performance in soccer is influenced by four main, interrelated components: physical conditioning, technique, tactics, and mental preparation. Physical conditioning serves as the foundation for mastering techniques and implementing game strategies (Okilanda et al., 2020), while mastery of basic techniques such as passing, dribbling, shooting, and heading is a key requirement for achieving success (Mohammed, 2024). Furthermore, the application of appropriate tactics during a match determines a team's success in achieving its game objectives. Mental factors also play a crucial role, as they help players maintain focus, manage their emotions, and perform with confidence during matches (Singh et al., 2024). Therefore, coaches must design training programs that are well-planned, varied, and engaging to keep players motivated and enable them to optimize their skill development. Achievement motivation is an internal drive that encourages athletes to strive for the best results and continuously improve their performance (Masrun, 2019).

Based on observations and interviews with the Talagoray SSB coach, the U-18 players' passing skills are still relatively poor. Common mistakes include poor passing accuracy, passes that lack the necessary power and are easily intercepted by opponents, and a lack of variety in passing drills. These conditions are influenced by several factors, such as limited facilities and infrastructure, physical condition, mental aspects, player motivation, and the suboptimal training program currently in place. Therefore, the implementation of small-sided games as an alternative training method is necessary to improve the inside-of-the-foot passing skills of SSB Talagoray players.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative approach using an experimental method to examine the effect of small-sided games training on inside-of-the-foot passing ability among U-18 players at Talagoray Soccer School (SSB Talagoray). The study adopted a One-Group Pretest–Posttest Design, in which a single group of participants was assessed before and after receiving the intervention. In this design, participants first completed a pretest to measure their initial passing ability, followed by a structured small-sided games training program, and finally completed a posttest using the same instrument. The difference between the pretest and posttest scores was used to determine the effectiveness of the training program.

Participants

The study was conducted at the Talagoray Soccer School (SSB Talagoray) training field located in Sungai Pua Subdistrict, Agam Regency, West Sumatra Province, Indonesia. The population consisted of all 19 registered U-18 players actively participating in the club's regular training program during the research period. Because the population was relatively small and homogeneous, total sampling was employed, meaning that all members of the population were included as research participants. This sampling technique minimizes sampling bias and allows the findings to represent the characteristics of the entire target population. The independent variable in this study was the small-sided games training program, whereas the dependent variable was inside-of-the-foot passing ability.

Instruments

The research instrument used was the Short Passing Test, which aims to measure passing ability based on the players' accuracy and speed in completing a series of tests (Widodo, 2019). This instrument evaluates players' passing performance based on accuracy and completion speed while executing a standardized series of passing tasks. The test has been widely used in soccer coaching and research to assess short-passing proficiency because it provides objective and quantifiable measurements of technical performance. To ensure measurement quality, the instrument had previously undergone validity and reliability testing. Content validity was established through expert evaluation by soccer coaching specialists, while the standardized testing procedures improved measurement consistency. During both pretest and posttest, identical equipment, field dimensions, testing procedures, and evaluators were used to maintain measurement reliability and reduce testing bias.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted in two stages: pretest and posttest. During the pretest, all participants completed the Short Passing Test to determine their baseline passing ability before receiving the intervention. The intervention consisted of a small-sided games training program implemented over 16 training sessions, conducted four times per week. Each session involved modified soccer games with fewer players and reduced playing areas to increase players' involvement, frequency of ball touches, passing repetitions, decision-making opportunities, and game-related movement patterns. The training program was progressively implemented throughout the intervention period while maintaining training intensity appropriate for U-18 athletes. Following completion of the intervention, participants performed the posttest using the same Short Passing Test under identical testing conditions.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Descriptive statistics, including the mean, standard deviation, minimum score, maximum score, frequency, and percentage, were calculated to describe participants' passing performance before and after the intervention. Prior to hypothesis testing, data normality was examined using the Shapiro-Wilk test, as this test is recommended for relatively small sample sizes ($n < 50$). A significance value greater than 0.05 indicated that the data were normally distributed, thereby satisfying the assumption for parametric analysis.

The research hypothesis was tested using a Paired Sample t-test at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between pretest and posttest passing scores following the small-sided games training program. To facilitate interpretation, the passing scores were also classified into performance categories based on the assessment norms provided in the Short Passing Test manual (Widodo, 2019). The categorization was established according to the standardized score intervals specified by the instrument developer, enabling participants' passing abilities to be interpreted objectively as part of the descriptive analysis.

RESULT

Descriptive Data Analysis

Table 1. Frequency Distribution Of Pretest and Posttest Data

Internal	Category	Pretest		Posttest	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
> 124	Very Good	0	0	4	21,05%
104-123	Good	6	31,58%	11	57,89%
85-103	Fair	11	57,89%	4	21,05%
65-84	Poor	2	10,53%	0	0
< 64	Very Poor	0	0	0	0
Total		19	100%	19	100%

Based on the table above, the pretest results showed that none of the players were classified in the very good or very poor categories. Most players were in the moderate category (57.89%), followed by the good category (31.58%) and the poor category (10.53%), indicating that their passing ability had not yet reached an optimal level before the implementation of the Small-Sided Games training program. After the intervention, the posttest results demonstrated a clear improvement in passing performance. No players remained in the poor or very poor categories, while the proportion of players in the very good and good categories increased to 21.05% and 57.89%, respectively, with the remaining 21.05% classified as moderate. These findings indicate that Small-Sided Games training effectively improved the passing ability of SSB Talagoray players.

Normality Test

Normality testing was conducted as a prerequisite before hypothesis testing using the paired sample t-test. The Shapiro–Wilk test was performed with SPSS software. Data were considered normally distributed if the significance value (Sig.) was greater than 0.05; otherwise, they were considered not normally distributed. The results of the normality test are presented in the following table.

Table 2. Normality Test Results

Variable	Group	Significant	Description
The Effect of Small-Sided Games on Passing Skills	Pre Test	0,195	Normal
	Post Test	0,838	

As shown in the table, the Shapiro–Wilk significance values were 0.195 for the pretest and 0.838 for the posttest. Since both values exceeded 0.05, the data were normally distributed and met the assumption for parametric analysis.

Homogeneity Test

Homogeneity testing was conducted to determine whether the data had equal variances. The test was performed using SPSS software, with data considered homogeneous when the significance value (Sig.) was greater than 0.05. The homogeneity test results are presented in the following table.

Table 3. Homogeneity Test Results

Variable	F _{calculate}	Significant	Description
Pretest-Posttest	1.170	0.287	Homogen

The homogeneity test produced an F value of 1.170 with a significance value of 0.287. Since the significance value was greater than 0.05, the pretest and posttest data were considered homogeneous, indicating that the data met the assumption for hypothesis testing.

Independent T-Test

Table 4. Hypothesis Test Results

Variable		Average	N	T _{calculate}	T _{table}	Description
Passing Ability	Pretest	97,47	19	6,182	2,101	Significant
	Posttest	111,42	19			

The paired sample t-test results indicated that Small-Sided Games training had a significant effect on the passing ability of SSB Talagoray players. The mean passing score increased from 97.47 in the pretest to 111.42 in the posttest. Furthermore, the calculated t-value (6.182) exceeded the critical t-value (1.740) at the 0.05 significance level, leading to the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis (H_a) and rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0). These findings confirm that Small-Sided Games training significantly improved the players' passing ability.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to examine the effect of Small-Sided Games (SSG) training on the inside-of-the-foot passing ability of U-18 players at Talagoray Soccer School (SSB Talagoray). The findings demonstrated a significant improvement in passing ability after participants completed the 16-session SSG training program. Rather than merely indicating that the intervention was effective, these results suggest that repeated exposure to game-based situations enabled players to develop technical proficiency in an environment that closely resembled actual match conditions. Unlike isolated passing drills, SSG requires players to execute passing while simultaneously perceiving teammates' movements, anticipating opponents' actions, making rapid decisions, and adjusting body positioning under time pressure. This combination of technical execution and cognitive demands enhances skill acquisition and facilitates the transfer of learning from training to competition ([Sujudesman, 2025](#); [Clemente et al., 2022](#)).

The improvement in passing ability can be explained through the principle of training specificity, which states that physiological and motor adaptations are greatest when training closely replicates the demands of competition ([Bompa & Buzzichelli, 2019](#)). In SSG, players repeatedly perform match-specific actions, including passing, receiving, supporting teammates, and moving into space, within realistic tactical contexts. Such repeated exposure strengthens neuromuscular coordination and improves movement efficiency, allowing players to perform passing actions with greater precision and consistency. This explanation is further supported by the Law of Exercise proposed by [Rahyubi \(2012\)](#), which emphasizes that repeated practice strengthens stimulus-response connections, resulting in improved motor skill performance over time.

Besides the characteristics of the training method, several supporting factors may also have contributed to the improvement observed in this study. First, the participants were U-18 players, an age category characterized by continued development of technical mastery, tactical understanding, and decision-making ability. At this developmental stage, athletes generally demonstrate greater responsiveness to integrated training methods that combine technical and tactical components. Second, the intervention was implemented consistently over 16 training sessions, allowing sufficient repetition to facilitate motor learning and skill consolidation. Third, the competitive nature of SSG creates a more enjoyable and motivating learning environment, encouraging active participation, communication, teamwork, and sustained engagement throughout the training process. Previous studies have shown that enjoyable and representative learning environments increase players' intrinsic motivation and improve learning effectiveness ([Clemente et al., 2022](#); [Singh et al., 2024](#)).

However, the improvement in passing performance may also have been influenced by several external factors beyond the intervention itself. Individual differences in physical fitness, prior playing experience, attendance during training sessions, motivation, and psychological readiness could have affected the magnitude of improvement among participants. Environmental conditions, such as weather, field quality, and training facilities, may also have influenced training effectiveness. Although coaches attempted to maintain consistent training conditions throughout

the intervention, these factors could not be completely controlled and should therefore be considered when interpreting the findings.

The findings are consistent with previous research reporting that SSG is an effective approach for improving technical performance in soccer. [Aprianto et al. \(2021\)](#) found that SSG significantly improved players' passing accuracy, while [Manalu et al. \(2026\)](#) reported increases in ball touches, passing frequency, decision-making quality, and training intensity because players were more actively involved during practice. Similarly, [Clemente et al. \(2022\)](#) concluded that SSG simultaneously develops technical, tactical, and physical performance through representative learning environments that closely simulate actual competition. Nevertheless, the present study contributes additional evidence by specifically investigating inside-of-the-foot passing ability among U-18 players at SSB Talagoray, a population and training context that has received limited attention in previous studies. Consequently, the findings expand existing evidence regarding the effectiveness of SSG within youth soccer development programs in Indonesia. From a practical perspective, the results suggest that coaches should consider incorporating SSG as a core component of youth soccer training because it simultaneously develops technical skills, tactical awareness, physical conditioning, communication, and decision-making. Coaches are encouraged to modify the number of players, field dimensions, game rules, and task constraints according to players' age, ability level, and training objectives to maximize learning outcomes while maintaining players' motivation and engagement.

Despite these promising findings, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, this study employed a One-Group Pretest–Posttest Design without a control group, making it difficult to attribute all observed improvements exclusively to the SSG intervention. Second, the sample consisted of only 19 players from a single soccer school, limiting the generalizability of the findings to broader populations. Third, the intervention lasted 16 training sessions, so the long-term retention of passing improvements was not examined. Finally, the study focused exclusively on inside-of-the-foot passing ability and did not evaluate other technical, tactical, or physical performance variables that may also be influenced by SSG. Future studies are therefore recommended to include larger and more diverse samples, employ randomized controlled experimental designs, extend the intervention period, and investigate additional performance indicators to provide more comprehensive evidence regarding the effectiveness of Small-Sided Games training.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that Small-Sided Games (SSG) training has a significant positive effect on improving the inside-of-the-foot passing ability of U-18 players at SSB Talagoray. The implementation of a 16-session SSG training program enabled players to improve passing accuracy, ball control, decision-making, and teamwork through game situations that closely resembled actual match conditions. These findings confirm that SSG is an effective game-based training method because it simultaneously develops technical, tactical, physical, and cognitive aspects of performance. Therefore, SSG can be recommended as an alternative training approach for youth soccer development programs, particularly for improving fundamental passing skills and enhancing overall game performance.

The findings of this study have practical implications for soccer coaches by providing empirical evidence that SSG can be integrated into regular training programs to create more effective and engaging learning environments for youth players. In addition, this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge regarding the application of game-based training methods in Indonesian youth soccer. However, the findings should be interpreted in light of the study's limitations, including the absence of a control group, the relatively small sample size, and the short intervention period. Therefore, future research is recommended to employ more rigorous experimental designs, involve larger and more diverse samples, extend the duration of the intervention, and examine the effects of SSG on other performance variables, such as dribbling, shooting, tactical decision-making, and physical fitness, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of its effectiveness.

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