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**Beyond the Game: The Right to High-Quality Education for
European Football Players**

Research Team

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1. Executive Summary

1.1. Academic contribution

This project investigated the dual career experiences of male and female football players across Europe, with a particular focus on Portuguese players. It addressed a significant gap in the literature, as football remains one of the sports in which the effective integration of education within high-performance pathways is still weakly structured and under-researched.

Adopting a cross-sectional mixed-methods design, the study combined quantitative data collected across some European contexts with an in-depth qualitative exploration of Portuguese players' lived experiences. The project focused on established theoretical frameworks in Dual Career research and employed validated instruments to assess players' competencies, experiences, and contextual support systems. By explicitly examining national context and gender as structuring factors, the research aimed to advance theoretical understanding of how Dual Careers are shaped within football-specific ecosystems.

1.2. Practical relevance for UEFA and European football

The project was designed to produce evidence directly relevant to UEFA and its stakeholders. By identifying barriers and facilitators to education within football pathways, this study supports the development of more sustainable, equitable and context-sensitive Dual Career models.

This study included close collaboration with the Portuguese Football Federation, the Portuguese Professional Footballers' Syndicate, FIFPro, and several European football associations and clubs. These partnerships allowed the initial access to key player populations and enhanced the applicability of the project's future recommendations for European football governance and policy.

2. Introduction

The concept of a Dual Career, wherein athletes balance their sporting commitments with academic or professional development, has gained significant attention in European policy discourse. The European Commission's 2012 White

Paper underscored the necessity of supporting athletes in pursuing both education and high-performance sports to ensure their long-term well-being and career adaptability. While this principle has been effectively applied in several sports, football presents distinctive challenges that hinder the successful implementation of dual career models.

Football academies often emphasize athletic excellence at the expense of formal education, creating a system in which young players face significant educational compromises. Unlike other sports where structured academic support is integrated into training programs, football remains largely unregulated in this aspect, resulting in high dropout rates and limited academic qualifications among players. Consequently, many footballers experience difficulties transitioning into alternative careers post-retirement, leading to financial instability and psychosocial challenges.

Additionally, gender plays a significant role in shaping Dual Career pathways. Male and female players navigate distinct realities within the football ecosystem, as professionalization in men's football enables greater financial security, reducing the perceived urgency for educational qualifications. Conversely, female footballers, given the lower financial incentives and shorter career longevity in the sport, often place a higher emphasis on education. However, the limited resources and support available to women's football further complicate their ability to successfully balance both domains.

This study aimed to address these gaps by investigating the Dual Career experiences of football players across key European nations and examining the specific challenges faced by Portuguese players. By identifying existing barriers and proposing evidence-based solutions, this research seeks to foster a more balanced approach to player development that ensures long-term career sustainability beyond the sport, with particular attention to gendered differences in dual career trajectories.

3. Research Questions

This study is driven by the following primary research questions: 1) What are the dual career experiences and competencies of male and female football players in

Europe?; 2) How do national football cultures influence the integration of education within player development systems?; 3) What are the specific dual career challenges faced by Portuguese football players, and how can sustainable educational pathways be established for them?; 4) How does gender influence the experiences, opportunities, and obstacles faced by male and female footballers in their dual career development?.

Based on these questions, the study formulates the following hypotheses:

- H1: Football players in countries with established Dual Career policies will demonstrate higher educational attainment and enhanced competencies and experiences compared to those in countries with weaker Dual Career structures;
- H2: Portuguese football players face distinct Dual Career challenges due to a lack of formal academic support within club academies and limited institutional recognition of dual career pathways;
- H3: Female football players will demonstrate enhanced Dual Career competencies and a stronger commitment to academic development, but weaker experiences compared to their male counterparts, as a strategic response to the lower financial security of women's professional football;

4. Literature Review

The concept of Dual Careers refers to the simultaneous pursuit of high-performance sport alongside education or vocational development, requiring athletes to reconcile demanding training and competition schedules with academic or professional commitments (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2015; Stambulova et al., 2024). Within the European context, Dual Careers have become a strategic policy priority, reflecting growing concern for athletes' holistic development, employability, and long-term well-being beyond their sporting careers.

The European Commission formally introduced the Dual Career framework through the White Paper on Sport (2007), later consolidated by the EU Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes (2012). These policy instruments emphasise the responsibility of Member States, sport governing bodies, and educational institutions to create coordinated and supportive environments that enable

athletes to combine elite sport with education or work. The overarching objective is to prevent early dropout from education, reduce post-retirement vulnerability, and promote sustainable career trajectories across the lifespan (European Commission, 2012).

Theoretical and Conceptual Developments in Dual Career Research

Dual career research has evolved into a multidisciplinary field, strongly influenced by sport psychology, education, and sociology. Early conceptual models framed athlete development as a multidimensional and transitional process, involving athletic, academic, psychosocial, and vocational domains (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004; Stambulova, 2010). These approaches highlighted the cumulative nature of transitions and the risks associated with unmanaged dual demands, such as burnout, identity conflict, and disengagement from education.

Subsequent research adopted a holistic and ecological perspective, recognising that Dual Career success depends not only on individual coping resources but also on the quality of the surrounding environments, including sport organisations, educational institutions, family, and peer networks (Henriksen et al., 2010; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019). The cultural praxis of athletes' careers paradigm further contributed to this shift by emphasising the role of sociocultural and institutional contexts in shaping athletes' experiences and opportunities across different national systems (Stambulova & Ryba, 2013, 2014).

More recently, the FEPSAC Position Statement on athletes' Dual Careers synthesised contemporary European research and reinforced the need for integrated, context-sensitive dual career ecosystems that align policy, institutional practice, and psychosocial support (Stambulova et al., 2024). This body of work underscores that Dual Careers should not be approached as exceptional arrangements for a minority of athletes, but rather as structured and legitimised pathways embedded within education and sport systems.

Barriers to Dual Career Development

Despite strong policy endorsement, the implementation of Dual Career frameworks across Europe remains uneven and fragmented. The literature consistently

identifies multiple and interrelated barriers that hinder athletes' ability to successfully combine sport and education. Structural barriers include rigid curricula, inflexible assessment schedules, limited recognition of athletes' dual status, and weak coordination between sport organisations and educational institutions (Aquilina, 2013; López de Subijana et al., 2015).

Time constraints and workload overload emerge as central challenges, often exacerbated by intensive training demands and frequent travel for competitions (Brown et al., 2015; Cosh & Tully, 2015). These pressures contribute to chronic stress, fatigue, and difficulties in maintaining academic engagement. Psychological and social barriers have also been widely documented, including role conflict, reduced sense of belonging in educational settings, and identity tensions between athletic and student roles (Picamilho et al., 2021; Mateo-Orcajada et al., 2022).

Financial insecurity and limited access to scholarships or tailored support services further compound these challenges, particularly in countries where Dual Career policies rely on institutional goodwill rather than binding regulatory frameworks (Capranica & Guidotti, 2016). Comparative studies reveal persistent discrepancies between institutional perceptions of dual career provision and athletes' lived experiences, with athletes often reporting lower levels of support than those perceived by university or sport administrators (Izzicupo et al., 2025).

Facilitators and Support Mechanisms

Alongside these barriers, the literature identifies a range of facilitators that significantly enhance Dual Career sustainability. At the individual level, self-regulation skills, intrinsic motivation, goal orientation, and time-management competence are critical resources that enable athletes to navigate competing demands (De Brandt et al., 2018; Picamilho et al., 2021). However, individual attributes alone are insufficient without appropriate institutional and social support structures.

Institutional facilitators include curriculum flexibility, personalised study plans, access to distance or blended learning, and formal recognition of athletes' dual status (Capranica et al., 2022). Social support networks, involving family members, peers, coaches, and academic staff, play a crucial buffering role against stress and dropout risk. In this context, mentoring has emerged as a particularly

effective mechanism, providing academic guidance, emotional support, and mediation between sport and education systems (Kelly & Dixon, 2014; López-Flores et al., 2021).

Several Erasmus+ funded projects have operationalised these facilitators into practical frameworks and tools. Initiatives such as GEES, B-WISER, ECO-DC, More Than Gold, and YODA Mentors have contributed to the development of competency-based models, mentoring programmes, and ecological approaches to Dual Career support (De Brandt et al., 2018; Capranica et al., 2022). Although these projects represent important advances, the literature highlights the need for further empirical validation and systematic integration within national and institutional structures.

Pedagogical Gaps and Emerging Directions

While psychological and organisational dimensions of Dual Careers are relatively well established, the pedagogical dimension remains comparatively underdeveloped. Research increasingly suggests that Dual Career success depends not only on administrative flexibility but also on inclusive and learner-centred pedagogical practices that accommodate diverse learning trajectories (Hallmann & Weustenfeld, 2025). Nevertheless, many educational institutions continue to rely on ad hoc accommodations rather than embedding Dual Career principles into curriculum design, assessment strategies, and faculty development (Izzicupo et al., 2025).

Digital technologies and blended learning modalities have expanded opportunities for flexibility, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic, yet their pedagogical potential remains underutilised in Dual Career contexts (Izzicupo et al., 2022). The literature therefore calls for a shift from reactive support models toward integrated educational ecosystems that combine policy alignment, pedagogical innovation, mentoring, and cross-sector cooperation.

Dual Careers in Football: Specific Challenges

Despite the growing body of literature on athletes' Dual Careers, research focusing specifically on football remains limited and fragmented when compared to other

sports contexts. Football presents distinctive structural, cultural, and organisational characteristics that create unique challenges for the effective integration of education within high-performance development pathways. While Dual Career principles have been progressively embedded in several Olympic and individual sports, football academies across Europe have traditionally prioritised athletic excellence over formal education, often at the expense of players' long-term academic and professional development (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019; Stambulova et al., 2024).

Existing evidence indicates that football development systems, particularly at youth and academy levels, are frequently characterised by intensive training schedules, early specialisation, and strong performance-driven cultures (Coutinho et al., 2016). These environments tend to normalise educational compromise as a necessary cost of pursuing elite performance, resulting in reduced academic engagement, early school dropout, and limited attainment of formal qualifications among young players. Unlike structured Dual Career models found in other sports or elite sport schools, football academies often operate with minimal regulation regarding educational provision, leading to highly inconsistent support across countries and clubs (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019; Stambulova et al., 2024).

Research addressing football-specific Dual Career environments suggests that when educational support does exist, it is frequently informal, fragmented, and dependent on individual club initiatives rather than embedded within coherent national or federation-led frameworks (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019; Vidal-Vilaplana et al., 2022). This lack of institutionalised academic support significantly constrains players' ability to develop transferable skills and prepare for career transitions following retirement, injury, or deselection. Consequently, former football players are disproportionately exposed to financial instability, psychosocial adjustment difficulties, and constrained employability after their sporting careers end.

Empirical studies remain scarce, but available findings highlight important contextual factors influencing dual career experiences in football. For example, analyses of school-based and academy-based dual career environments reveal that although some systems offer academic flexibility and logistical

accommodations, they often fail to promote holistic development or to integrate educational aspirations meaningfully into player development philosophies. This reinforces a narrow athletic identity and weakens players' long-term adaptability beyond sport (Vidal-Vilaplana et al., 2022).

Gender emerges as a particularly salient dimension in football dual career research (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019; Stambulova et al., 2024). The professionalisation and financial rewards of men's football reduce the perceived urgency of educational investment, often encouraging young male players to prioritise sport exclusively during formative years. In contrast, female football players, operating within less professionalised and financially secure systems, tend to place greater strategic value on education as a means of ensuring post-sport career sustainability. However, the structural underinvestment in women's football, coupled with limited access to scholarships, tailored academic support, and career transition programmes, further complicates their ability to balance sport and education effectively.

Cross-national comparisons suggest that countries with more established Dual Career policies and stronger integration between sport and education systems provide more favourable conditions for football players' academic engagement (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019; Stambulova et al., 2024; Vidal-Vilaplana et al., 2022). Nevertheless, even in these contexts, football often lags behind other sports in the systematic implementation of Dual Career frameworks. In countries where formal Dual Career structures are weaker or absent football players face additional barriers due to limited institutional recognition of their dual status and insufficient collaboration between clubs, federations, and educational institutions.

Overall, the literature indicates a substantial gap in football-specific Dual Career research, particularly regarding comprehensive analyses that consider competencies, experiences, and long-term outcomes for both male and female players across different European contexts. The dominance of performance-oriented development models, combined with weak educational regulation, positions football as a critical and underexplored domain within the broader Dual Career discourse. Addressing these gaps requires sport-specific evidence capable of informing targeted policy interventions and supporting the development of

sustainable, education-inclusive football pathways at both national and European levels.

5. Research Design and Methodology

5.1. Research design

A cross-sectional mixed-methods design (Creswell, 2014), combining quantitative and qualitative approaches across two complementary phases was adopted. This design was selected to enable both a broad mapping of dual career experiences and competencies across European football contexts and an in-depth exploration of contextual mechanisms within a specific national setting.

Phase 1 of the project comprised a quantitative approach and was applied at an European level. A cross-sectional design is particularly appropriate given the project's timeframe and objectives. It allows for the systematic comparison of players' dual career experiences and competencies across countries, genders and playing contexts at a specific point in time. This design represents a methodologically sound approach to generating comparative evidence.

Phase 2 of the project comprised a qualitative approach and focused only on Portuguese players. It is designed to complement the quantitative findings by providing contextual depth. Through semi-structured interviews, this phase aims to explore how institutional arrangements, cultural expectations and personal strategies shape players' dual career trajectories. The integration of both methods strengthens the explanatory power of the study and supports triangulation of findings.

5.2. Sample/Participants

5.2.1. Phase 1 – Sampling Strategy, Recruitment Challenges and Final Sample

Phase 1 was intended to be conducted at European level, including male and female youth national team football players from the top 8 UEFA ranking countries (i.e., England, Italy, Spain, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Belgium). It was expected to include players from U17, U19 and U21 national teams, in a total of ~1200 players (25 players from each youth national team: $25 \times 3 = 75$; male and female: $75 \times 2 = 150$; eight countries: $150 \times 8 = 1200$).

Following discussions during the kick-off meeting (20th October), this frame was strategically expanded to enhance representativeness and applied relevance. The revised sample frame therefore includes: 1) youth and senior national team players, 2) professional players, 3) former professional players, 4) players from a broader range of European countries, including contexts with less-developed football infrastructures.

Despite the extensive recruitment strategy and sustained communication efforts undertaken throughout the data collection period, the response rate from several European contexts remained substantially lower than initially anticipated. Multiple contacts were established with national football associations across Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, England, France, Germany, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, and Spain. In all cases, the associations actively collaborated by disseminating the survey link to eligible players within their respective national team structures. Follow-up communications and reminders were also repeatedly conducted to maximise participation.

Nevertheless, the main limitation encountered was associated not with institutional access or dissemination procedures, but rather with the voluntary availability and engagement of players to complete the questionnaire within highly demanding sporting and academic schedules. This challenge appears consistent with the practical difficulties frequently reported in research involving elite and high-performance athlete populations, particularly within international and youth national team contexts characterised by dense competitive calendars, training camps, travel demands, and restricted access windows.

Consequently, **the final sample included 49 players from three European countries (Iceland = 5 (female); Czechia = 13 (female); the Netherlands = 31 (17 female, 14 male)) and 106 Portuguese players (60 female; 46 male)**. Although the originally projected sample size was not achieved, the study nevertheless secured participation from athletes representing distinct football systems and sociocultural contexts, allowing exploratory cross-contextual insights into dual career experiences in youth football. Importantly, the Portuguese sample provided substantial depth and ecological validity, given the structured collaboration established with the Portuguese Football Federation and the direct access to youth

national team environments. As such, the dataset remains scientifically valuable in generating context-sensitive evidence regarding the educational and sporting demands experienced by elite youth football players, while simultaneously highlighting the methodological and logistical complexities inherent to large-scale international research involving high-performance sport populations.

5.2.2. Phase 2 – Participants

Phase 2 was conducted at national level and focused exclusively on the Portuguese context, involving male and female youth national team football players, alongside key institutional actors directly involved in the pedagogical and organisational management of dual career processes. In contrast to the broader survey-oriented logic underpinning Phase 1, the qualitative phase adopted an intentionally information-rich sampling strategy aimed at generating contextualised, experience-based, and analytically dense accounts of how dual career demands are perceived, negotiated, and operationalised within elite youth football environments (Patton, 2015).

Participants were purposively selected from the Portuguese sample following qualitative sampling principles centred on relevance, experiential richness, and the capacity to provide reflective and articulate accounts of the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2015). Availability, willingness to participate, and the ability to verbally express and critically reflect upon educational and sporting experiences constituted key inclusion criteria. This approach sought not statistical representativeness, but rather interpretive depth and the production of nuanced understandings capable of illuminating the complexities underpinning dual career management within high-performance football contexts.

The player sample included athletes from the Portuguese U17 and U19 national teams across four professional football clubs. **A total of 24 players participated in the study**, comprising six players from each club (three male and three female athletes), thereby ensuring gender representation and diversity of developmental experiences across elite football pathways. In addition to players, **the study included the pedagogical coordinators/interlocutors responsible for**

dual career support within each club (N = 4), as well as the Portuguese Football Federation's National Technical Director and National Pedagogical Coordinator. The inclusion of these institutional actors was considered essential to capture the structural, pedagogical, and organisational dimensions shaping dual career policies and practices within Portuguese football.

The purposive sampling strategy was further guided by the intention to ensure heterogeneity across several dimensions considered theoretically and pedagogically relevant to Dual Career research, including: (i) gender; (ii) age and competitive level; (iii) educational background and school pathways; and (iv) individual Dual Career trajectories and experiences. Such diversity was intentionally sought to capture convergences, divergences, tensions, and contextual variations in how educational and sporting demands are experienced and managed across different elite youth football contexts.

This sampling rationale aligns with established qualitative methodological standards, where analytical significance derives from depth, contextual richness, and interpretive complexity rather than numerical representativeness (Patton, 2015). Consequently, the qualitative phase was designed to privilege situated meanings, experiential interpretation, and multi-perspective triangulation across players and institutional stakeholders, thereby strengthening the ecological validity and contextual sensitivity of the findings.

5.3. Data collection

The data collection approach is grounded in established Dual Career research frameworks and assumes that dual career development is a multidimensional and context-dependent process influenced by individual, institutional and cultural factors.

Phase 1 – quantitative data collection

Phase 1 comprised gathering data on: a) socio-demographic characteristics; b) sports and university engagement; c) awareness of available legislation; d) the role of personal, sport, and academic entourages; e) dual career competencies (career management, career planning, emotional awareness, and social

intelligence and adaptability), and f) dual career experiences (barriers/benefits, positive/negative experiences, support). Data was collected through the completion of online adapted questionnaires: the International FISU-EAS Survey (Condello et al., 2019), the Dual Career Competency Questionnaire for Athletes (DCCQ-A) (De Brandt et al., 2018), and the Dual Career Experiences Scale (DCES) (De Brandt et al., 2022).

They are validated instruments widely used in Dual Career research, ensuring conceptual consistency and comparability with existing studies. These instruments capture not only observable outcomes (e.g. educational engagement) but also underlying competencies and subjective experiences, reflecting the assumption that successful dual careers depend on both structural conditions and personal resources. Considering that gender and national context are key structuring variables in this study, these instruments were adapted to allow meaningful comparison across dimensions. To address linguistic and cultural diversity across Europe, the questionnaires were translated into multiple languages, with the aim of maximising comprehension and reducing measurement bias.

The questionnaires were administered online through a secure digital platform, enabling remote and asynchronous participation according to players' availability and sporting schedules. Access to the survey was provided via a direct link disseminated by national football associations and institutional contacts previously established. Prior to participation, respondents received detailed information regarding the aims of the study, voluntary participation, confidentiality procedures, and ethical data management, with informed consent obtained electronically before completion.

The survey required approximately 10 minutes to complete. The online format was considered particularly appropriate given the geographically dispersed nature of the intended sample and the logistical demands inherent to international research involving high-performance youth football players. Furthermore, the use of multilingual adapted versions aimed to maximise conceptual clarity and minimise potential linguistic and cultural bias across national contexts. Data collection occurred over an extended period (from October to April) and involved

repeated dissemination and follow-up procedures through institutional intermediaries to maximise participation.

Phase 2 – Qualitative data collection

Phase 2 involved gathering in-depth qualitative data through semi-structured interviews aimed at exploring the nuanced experiences, perceptions, and contextual factors underpinning participants' dual career journeys. This approach enabled a richer understanding of the interplay between socio-demographic factors, dual career competencies, and the broader social, academic, and sporting environments shaping athletes' developmental trajectories. Semi-structured interviews followed a predetermined set of guiding questions to ensure procedural consistency while maintaining sufficient flexibility to explore emergent themes and participant-driven insights.

Data collection was conducted through online and face-to-face interviews according to participants' availability and institutional schedules. Focus group interviews were conducted with players to facilitate interaction, shared reflection, and the co-construction of meaning around common dual career experiences within elite football environments. Individual interviews were conducted with pedagogical coordinators and Portuguese Football Federation representatives to allow deeper exploration of institutional, organisational, and pedagogical perspectives regarding dual career support structures and practices. Interviews lasted approximately one hour and were audio-recorded with participants' consent for subsequent verbatim transcription and analysis.

Prior to data collection, all participants received detailed information regarding the aims of the study, voluntary participation, confidentiality procedures, and ethical data management. The online format was considered particularly appropriate given the logistical constraints associated with elite football settings, facilitating access to geographically dispersed participants while minimising disruption to sporting and academic routines.

5.4. Data Analysis

Phase 1 – Quantitative Data

Quantitative data analysis was conducted to characterise the sample and examine associations between key categorical variables related to athletes' dual career experiences, perceptions, and contextual conditions. Descriptive statistics were computed to calculate frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviation values, providing an overall characterisation of participants' socio-demographic, educational, and sporting profiles.

Chi-square tests of independence were performed to examine potential associations between categorical variables, particularly across gender, national context, educational experiences, perceived support structures, and dual career-related perceptions. When statistically significant associations emerged, adjusted standardised residuals (AR) were examined to identify the specific cells contributing to the observed differences, with values $\geq |1.96|$ indicating frequencies significantly higher or lower than expected. Effect sizes were calculated using Cramer's V and interpreted according to established thresholds: very weak (0–0.19), weak (0.20–0.39), moderate (0.40–0.59), strong (0.60–0.79), and very strong (0.80–1.00) (Cramér, 1946). An alpha level of $p < .05$ was considered statistically significant for all analyses.

Phase 2 – Qualitative Data

Qualitative data were analysed through thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. This approach was considered particularly appropriate given the exploratory and interpretive nature of the study, allowing the identification, organisation, and interpretation of patterns of meaning across participants' accounts while preserving contextual and experiential complexity.

The analytical process involved iterative phases of data familiarisation, initial code generation, theme construction, theme review, definition and naming of themes, and final interpretive reporting. Both deductive and inductive coding procedures were employed. Deductive coding was initially guided by the project's conceptual framework and core Dual Career dimensions, while inductive analysis

enabled the identification of unanticipated meanings, tensions, and context-specific experiences emerging directly from participants' narratives.

Interview transcripts were analysed recursively and comparatively across participant groups (players, pedagogical coordinators, and federation representatives) to identify convergences, divergences, and multi-level perspectives regarding dual career management within elite youth football contexts. Throughout the analytical process, particular attention was given to preserving semantic depth, contextual nuance, and the relational interplay between educational, sporting, and organisational factors shaping participants' experiences. This interpretive approach sought not merely to categorise experiences, but to generate a theoretically informed understanding of how dual career processes are constructed, negotiated, and experienced within high-performance football environments.

To enhance the trustworthiness and methodological rigour of the qualitative analysis, several procedures consistent with established qualitative quality criteria were employed throughout the research process. The prolonged engagement with the data, recursive movement between transcripts, codes, and themes, and ongoing analytical discussions within the research team was essential to refining interpretive coherence and thematic consistency. An audit trail documenting coding decisions and theme development was maintained throughout the analysis, contributing to dependability and confirmability. Reflexive engagement was continuously sustained, with careful consideration given to the researchers' interpretive positioning and its potential influence on data interpretation. Furthermore, the inclusion of multiple stakeholder groups (players, pedagogical coordinators, and federation representatives) enabled data source triangulation, facilitating a more contextually grounded and multi-perspective understanding of Dual Career experiences within elite youth football environments. Rich contextual description was also prioritised to strengthen the transferability of findings across comparable dual career settings.

5.5. Ethical considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles for research involving human participants, ensuring respect for autonomy, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and data protection throughout all stages of the research process. Prior to participation, all participants received detailed information regarding the aims of the study, data collection procedures, confidentiality protocols, and the intended use of the data. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before participation, while parental or legal guardian consent was additionally secured for underage athletes in accordance with ethical requirements for research involving minors.

Given the involvement of elite youth football players and institutional stakeholders operating within highly identifiable performance environments, particular attention was devoted to safeguarding anonymity and minimising potential risks associated with disclosure. All data were anonymised during transcription and analysis procedures, with identifiable information removed or pseudonymised to ensure participant protection. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without consequence.

Data were securely stored and managed in accordance with applicable data protection regulations and ethical research standards. Furthermore, special care was taken during data reporting and interpretation to preserve contextual integrity while avoiding the disclosure of information that could indirectly compromise the identity of participants, clubs, or institutional actors. Collectively, these procedures sought to ensure ethically responsible research practice while fostering conditions of trust, openness, and reflective engagement throughout the study.

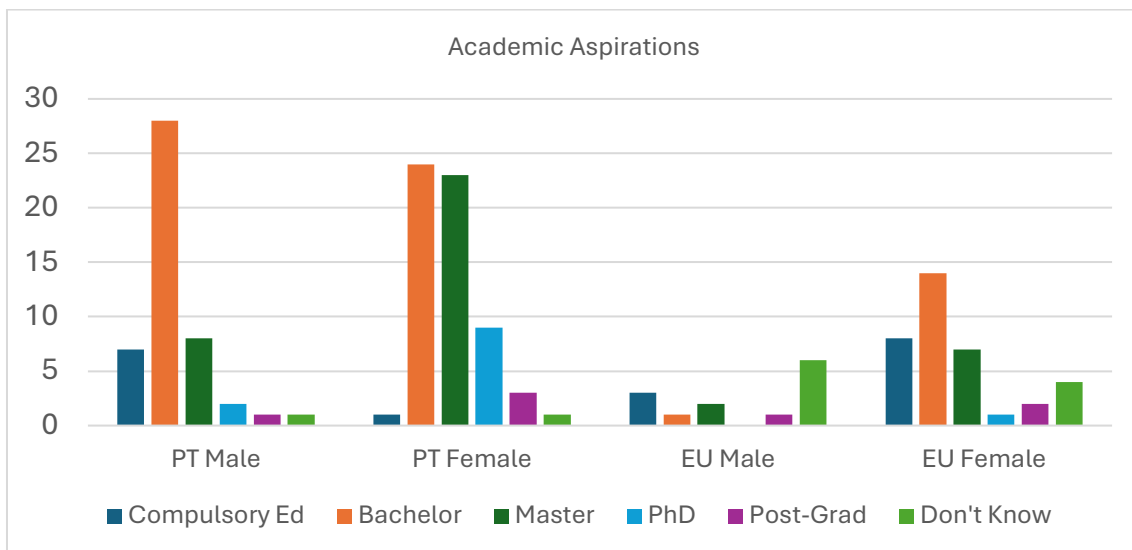
6. Research findings

6.1. Phase 1 – Quantitative results

Academic Aspirations

Significant statistical differences between the players were found concerning the academic aspirations, although with weak correlations ($\chi^2 = 68.085$; $p < 0.001$; $V =$

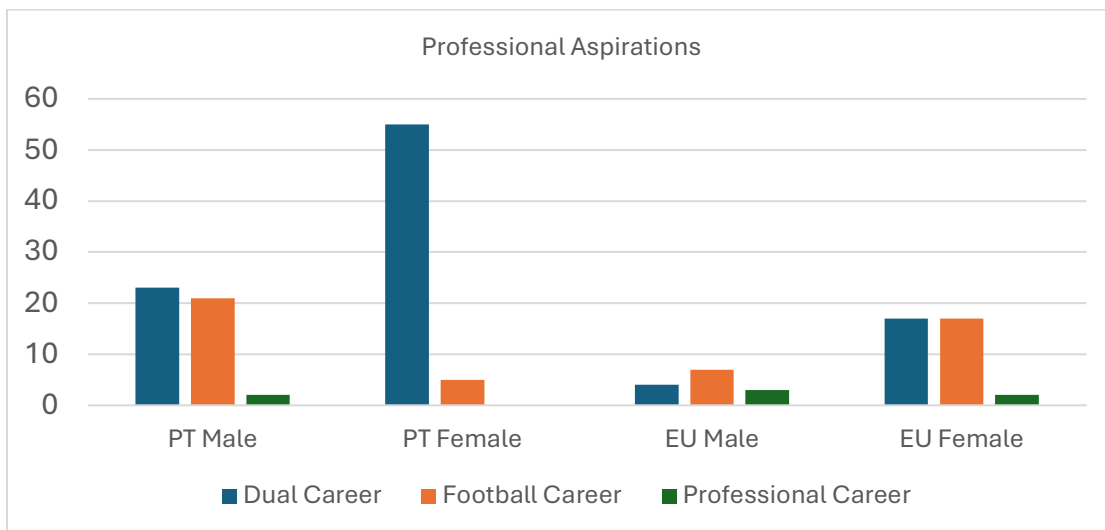
0.381). Adjusted standardized residuals revealed several meaningful distributional differences between groups. PT female players were significantly overrepresented in aspirations towards Master’s (AR = 2.7) and PhD degrees (AR = 2.7), while being underrepresented in postgraduate qualifications (AR = -3.2) and uncertainty regarding future academic aspirations (AR = -2.6). PT male players were significantly overrepresented in aspirations towards Bachelor’s degrees (AR = 2.9) and underrepresented in the “don’t know” category (AR = -2.1). In contrast, EU female players were significantly more likely to aspire towards postgraduate qualifications (AR = 2.1). The strongest deviation from expected frequencies emerged among EU male players, who were markedly overrepresented in the “don’t know” category (AR = 5.8) and underrepresented in aspirations towards Bachelor’s degrees (AR = -2.8). Collectively, these findings suggest substantial cross-cultural and gender-related differences in the structuring and clarity of players’ academic aspirations.



Professional Aspirations

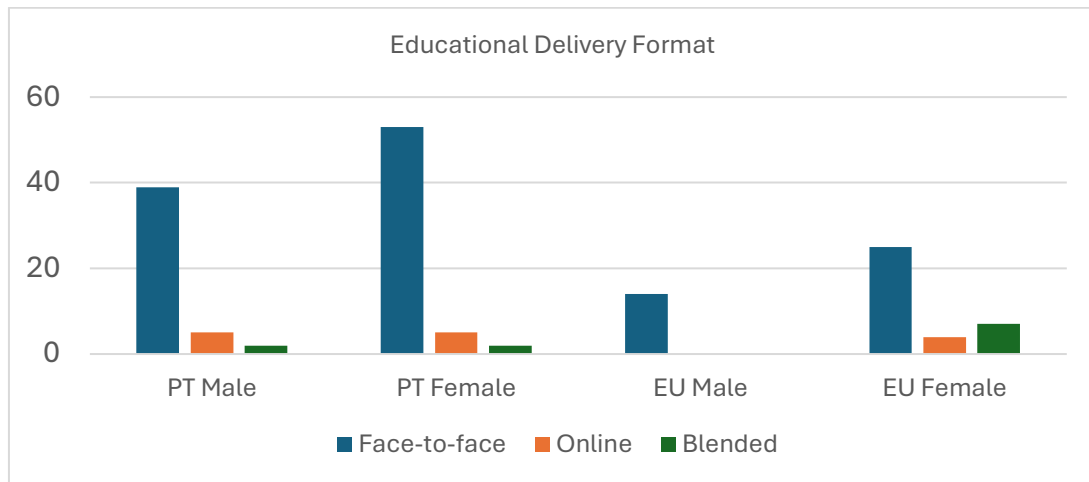
Significant statistical differences between the players were found concerning the professional aspirations, although with weak correlations ($\chi^2 = 41.935$; $p < 0.001$; $V = 0.367$). Adjusted standardized residuals revealed distinct patterns associated with gender and geographical background. PT female players were significantly overrepresented in aspirations centred on maintaining a dual career pathway, combining elite football and education (AR = 5.8), while being markedly

underrepresented in aspirations focused exclusively on football (AR = -5.0). Conversely, PT male players were significantly more likely to report aspirations towards an exclusive football career (AR = 2.4) and less likely to prioritise dual career conciliation (AR = -2.3). A similar tendency was identified among EU female players, who were likewise overrepresented in aspirations focused exclusively on football (AR = 2.2) and underrepresented in dual career-oriented aspirations (AR = -2.3). The most pronounced deviation from expected frequencies emerged among EU male players, who were significantly overrepresented in aspirations centred exclusively on a professional career outside sport (AR = 3.2), while simultaneously being underrepresented in dual career aspirations (AR = -2.8). Collectively, these findings suggest that players' professional aspirations are shaped by complex interactions between gender, cultural context, and perceived future career pathways, revealing important differences in how athletes position themselves in relation to education, football, and long-term occupational planning.



Educational delivery format

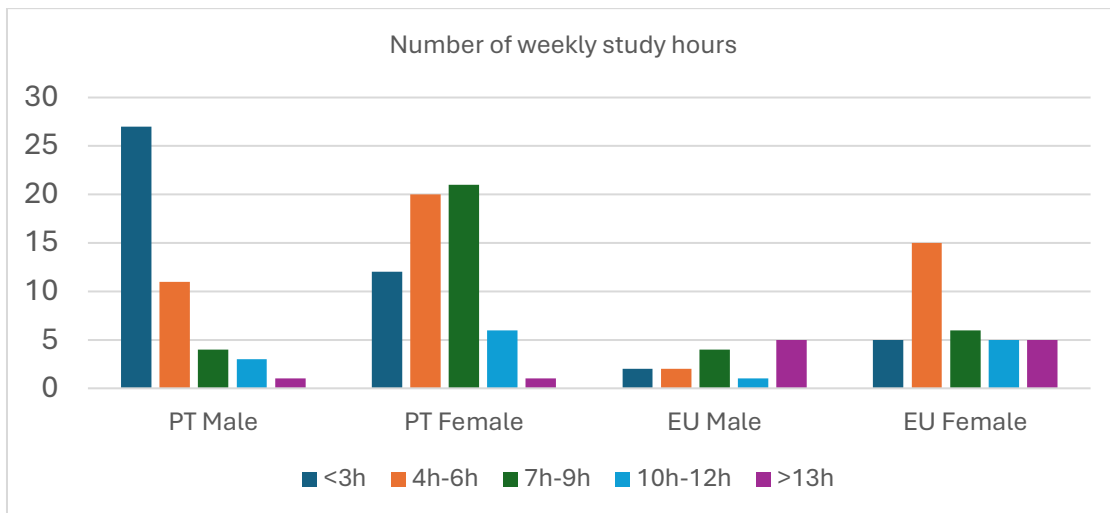
Significant statistical differences between the players were found concerning the educational delivery format, although with weak correlations ($\chi^2 = 13.605$; $p = 0.034$; $V = 0.209$). Adjusted standardized residuals revealed that EU female players were significantly more likely to engage in blended learning formats than expected (AR = 3.3), whereas participation in face-to-face educational formats was lower than expected (AR = -2.7).



Number of weekly study hours

Significant statistical differences were identified regarding the number of weekly study hours across groups, although with weak correlations ($\chi^2 = 53.507$; $p < 0.001$; $V = 0.338$). Adjusted standardized residuals revealed differentiated study engagement patterns according to gender and geographical background. PT female players were significantly overrepresented within the 7–9 hours of study category (AR = 3.0), whilst being underrepresented in both the “less than 3 hours” (AR = -2.1) and “more than 13 hours” categories (AR = -2.2). In contrast, PT male players were strongly overrepresented among players reporting fewer than 3 hours of weekly study (AR = 5.2) and underrepresented within the 7–9 hour category (AR = -2.7), suggesting comparatively lower levels of academic engagement. EU female players demonstrated a more moderate and relatively balanced distribution of study hours, with no adjusted residuals exceeding conventional significance thresholds. Conversely, EU male players were markedly overrepresented among players reporting more than 13 hours of weekly study (AR = 4.1), indicating substantially higher study engagement than would be expected. Taken collectively, these findings suggest that study behaviours among youth football players are unevenly distributed across groups and appear to reflect distinct educational engagement patterns associated with both gender and geographical context. More specifically, whilst Portuguese male players tended to report comparatively limited study investment, Portuguese female players appeared to demonstrate more moderate

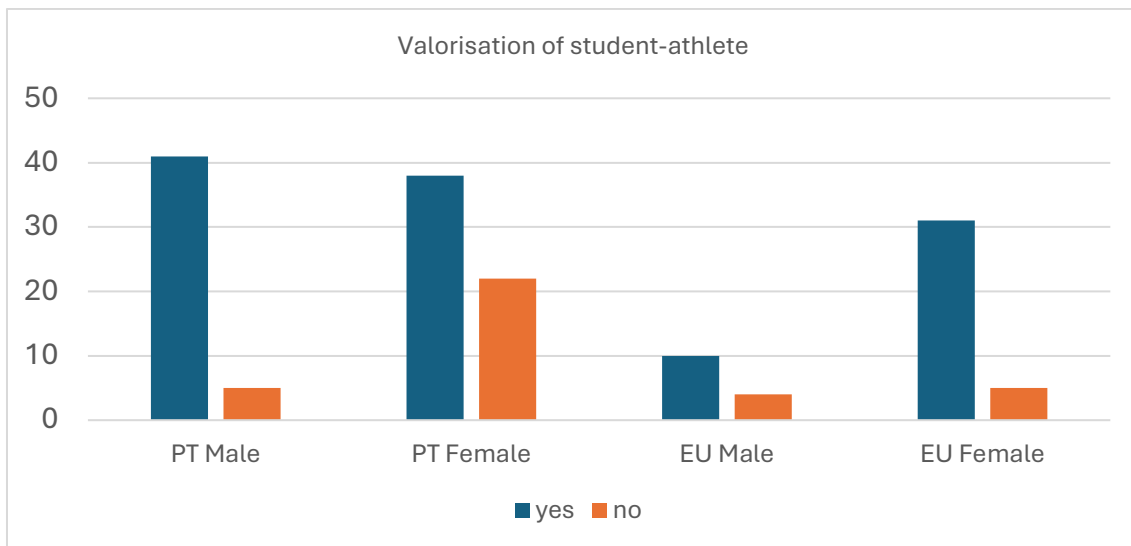
and structured study routines. In contrast, European male players displayed a tendency towards substantially greater academic time investment, potentially reflecting different educational demands, institutional expectations, or dual career support structures across national contexts.



Valorisation of student-athletes and dual career by schools

Significant statistical differences were identified regarding players' perceptions of whether school environments valued and supported their dual career engagement, although with weak correlations ($\chi^2 = 12.054$; $p = 0.007$; $V = 0.278$). Adjusted standardized residuals revealed differentiated patterns across groups, particularly between PT female and PT male players. PT female players were significantly underrepresented among those reporting that school contexts valued their sporting commitments (AR = -3.2) and, conversely, significantly overrepresented among those perceiving that school environments did not value or adequately recognise their dual career demands (AR = 3.2). In contrast, PT male players demonstrated the opposite tendency, being significantly overrepresented among those perceiving school support and recognition (AR = 2.3) and underrepresented among those reporting a lack of school valuation towards their athletic commitments (AR = -2.3). Although EU female and EU male players did not display adjusted residuals exceeding conventional significance thresholds, their distributions suggested comparatively more balanced perceptions regarding school valuation and institutional recognition. Taken collectively, these findings point towards important

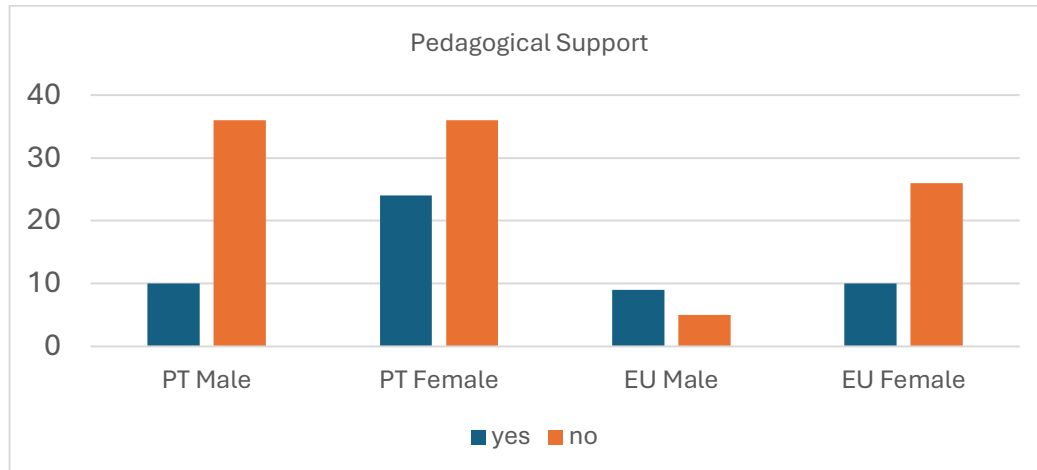
gendered disparities in how educational environments are experienced and interpreted by youth football players, particularly within the Portuguese context. More specifically, the results may suggest that female players perceive lower levels of institutional sensitivity, recognition, or accommodation towards the specific demands associated with elite football participation, whereas male players appear to experience educational environments as comparatively more supportive and legitimising of their sporting trajectories.



Pedagogical Support

Significant statistical differences were identified regarding players' perceptions of the existence of pedagogical support within their educational contexts, although the strength of the association was weak ($\chi^2 = 10.391$, $p = .016$, $V = .258$). Adjusted standardized residuals revealed differentiated perceptions across groups, particularly between PT male players and EU male players. Portuguese male players were significantly underrepresented among those reporting the existence of pedagogical support ($AR = -2.1$) and, conversely, significantly overrepresented among those perceiving an absence of such support structures ($AR = 2.1$). In contrast, EU male players demonstrated the opposite pattern, being significantly overrepresented among those perceiving the existence of pedagogical support ($AR = 2.5$) and underrepresented among those reporting its absence ($AR = -2.5$). Although PT female players and EU female players did not present adjusted

residuals exceeding conventional significance thresholds, the overall distribution nonetheless suggested important differences in how pedagogical support structures are experienced and interpreted across groups. More specifically, the findings appear to indicate that PT male players perceive lower levels of educational accompaniment, guidance, or pedagogical accommodation in relation to the demands associated with elite football participation, whereas EU male players tend to report comparatively more favourable perceptions regarding the availability of institutional and pedagogical support mechanisms. Taken collectively, these results may reflect broader differences in the organisation, accessibility, and operationalisation of dual career support structures across educational and sporting contexts. Furthermore, the findings reinforce the notion that players' experiences of pedagogical support are not uniform, but instead shaped by the interaction between gender, cultural context, and the extent to which educational institutions actively recognise and respond to the specific demands associated with high-performance youth sport participation.

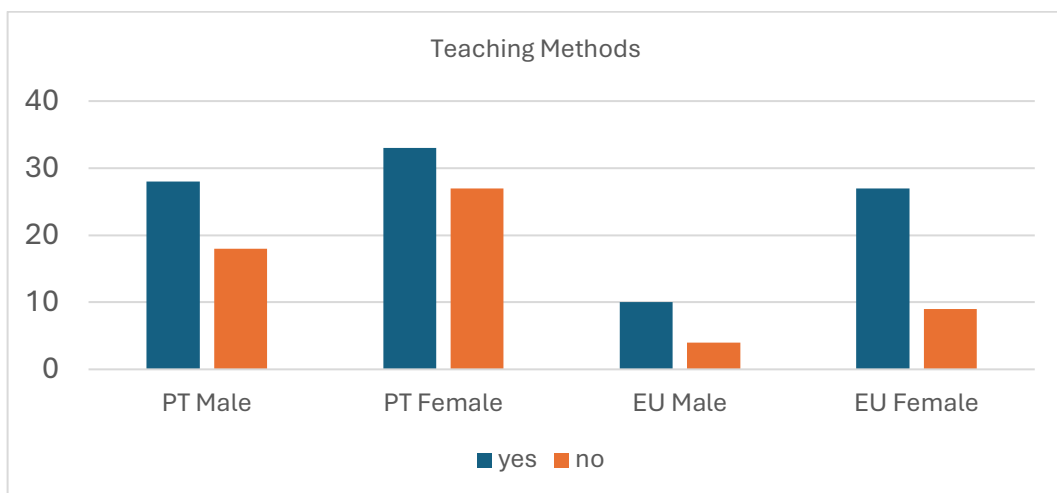


Teaching Methods

No statistically significant differences were identified regarding players' perceptions of whether the teaching methods adopted by teachers facilitated the management of their dual career pathways ($\chi^2 = 4.377$, $p = .224$, $V = .167$). Although some minor distributional variations emerged across groups, examination of

adjusted standardized residuals indicated that none exceeded conventional significance thresholds, suggesting the absence of meaningful group-specific deviations from expected frequencies. Overall, the findings indicate relatively homogeneous perceptions across PT and EU players, irrespective of gender, concerning the extent to which teaching methodologies support the conciliation of academic and sporting demands. Descriptively, PT female players demonstrated a slightly greater tendency to perceive teaching methods as facilitating their dual career engagement, whereas EU female players showed a comparatively higher representation among those reporting less facilitative pedagogical approaches. Nevertheless, these variations did not reach statistical significance and should therefore be interpreted with caution.

Taken collectively, the results suggest that perceptions regarding the pedagogical adequacy of teaching methodologies may constitute a relatively transversal experience among youth football players, rather than one strongly differentiated by gender or geographical background. At the same time, the absence of statistically significant differences should not necessarily be interpreted as evidence of pedagogical effectiveness, but rather as an indication that similar perceptions are broadly shared across groups. In this regard, the findings may point towards the persistence of structural and pedagogical challenges affecting dual career management in relatively consistent ways across different player populations.



Perceived Barriers of a Dual Career

Chi-square analyses revealed several statistically significant group differences regarding the barriers associated with dual career management, although the magnitude of the associations ranged predominantly from weak to moderate. Inspection of adjusted standardized residuals demonstrated that the distribution of perceived barriers was not homogeneous across groups, instead reflecting differentiated experiences associated with gender and geographical context.

Regarding prolonged absence from classes, significant group differences were identified ($\chi^2 = 15.168$, $p = .002$, $V = .312$). Portuguese female players were significantly overrepresented among those reporting prolonged absences from educational activities as a relevant barrier ($AR = 2.9$), whereas European male players were significantly underrepresented in this category ($AR = -3.1$). These findings suggest that Portuguese female players may experience greater educational disruption associated with the demands of elite football participation, potentially reflecting more pronounced tensions between school attendance requirements and sporting commitments.

No statistically significant differences were identified concerning missing classes due to training commitments ($\chi^2 = 2.034$, $p = .565$, $V = .114$), indicating relatively consistent perceptions across groups. Similarly, no significant group differences emerged regarding financial uncertainty ($\chi^2 = 0.882$, $p = .830$, Cramer's $V = .075$), suggesting that concerns related to financial instability may constitute a relatively transversal experience among youth football players, irrespective of gender or geographical background.

In contrast, significant differences were observed regarding missed examinations and academic assessments ($\chi^2 = 13.171$, $p = .004$, $V = .291$). Portuguese male players were significantly underrepresented among those perceiving this issue as a relevant barrier ($AR = -3.0$), whereas European female players were significantly overrepresented ($AR = 2.8$). These findings may indicate that European female players experience greater difficulties reconciling formal assessment structures with sporting participation, potentially reflecting lower institutional flexibility or greater cumulative academic pressures.

Significant differences also emerged concerning excessive academic workload ($\chi^2 = 9.181$, $p = .027$, $V = .243$). Portuguese female players were significantly overrepresented among players identifying excessive academic workload as a major barrier ($AR = 2.5$), whereas European female players were significantly underrepresented ($AR = -2.1$). Such findings suggest that Portuguese female players may experience heightened perceptions of academic overload arising from the simultaneous management of educational and sporting demands.

Although no statistically significant differences were identified regarding reduced training participation due to academic demands ($\chi^2 = 5.662$, $p = .129$, $V = .191$), descriptive tendencies nonetheless suggested comparatively greater sensitivity among European male players to the impact of educational commitments on training participation. However, these differences did not reach conventional statistical significance thresholds and should therefore be interpreted cautiously.

The most pronounced group differences emerged in relation to dual career-related overload ($\chi^2 = 22.509$, $p < .001$, $V = .380$). Portuguese female players were strongly overrepresented among those reporting experiences of overload associated with the simultaneous management of football and education ($AR = 4.4$), whereas both European male players ($AR = -2.2$) and European female players ($AR = -2.8$) were significantly underrepresented. These findings point towards substantial disparities in the subjective experience of dual career strain, with Portuguese female players appearing particularly vulnerable to cumulative academic and sporting pressures.

Finally, perceptions regarding reduced leisure time did not approach statistical significance ($\chi^2 = 7.625$, $p = .054$, $V = .221$). Although the global association did not meet conventional significance thresholds, Portuguese female players were overrepresented among those identifying limited leisure time as a relevant barrier ($AR = 2.5$), whilst European male players tended to report this barrier less frequently than expected ($AR = -1.8$). This pattern may suggest that the management of dual career demands constrains opportunities for rest, recovery, and social engagement more substantially among Portuguese female players.

Taken collectively, these findings highlight that the perceived barriers associated with dual career management are not evenly distributed across player populations, but instead appear shaped by complex interactions between gender, educational demands, and socio-cultural context. More specifically, Portuguese female players consistently emerged as the group reporting the greatest exposure to educational disruption, academic overload, and dual career-related strain, suggesting the possibility of heightened vulnerability within the process of balancing elite football participation and academic engagement. Conversely, European male players generally demonstrated lower-than-expected representation across several educationally related barriers, potentially reflecting differing institutional structures, pedagogical accommodations, or cultural approaches to dual career support.

Barrier	Group	Yes (AR)	No (AR)	χ^2	p	V
Prolonged absence	PT Male	-1.3	1.3	15.168	0.002	0.312
	PT Female	2.9	-2.9			
	EU Male	-3.1	3.1			
	EU Female	0.2	-0.2			
Missing classes	PT Male	-1.1	1.1	2.034	0.565	0.114
	PT Female	-0.2	0.2			
	EU Male	0.9	-0.9			
	EU Female	0.8	-0.8			
Missed examinations / exams	PT Male	-3.0	3.0	13.171	0.004	0.291
	PT Female	0.8	-0.8			
	EU Male	-0.6	0.6			
	EU Female	2.8	-2.8			
Excessive academic workload	PT Male	0.1	-0.1	9.181	0.027	0.243
	PT Female	2.5	-2.5			
	EU Male	-1.3	1.3			
	EU Female	-2.1	2.1			
Reduced training participation due to academic demands	PT Male	-1.9	1.9	5.662	0.129	0.191
	PT Female	-0.1	0.1			
	EU Male	1.6	-1.6			
	EU Female	1.0	-1.0			
Financial uncertainty	PT Male	-0.5	0.5	0.882	0.830	0.075
	PT Female	0.1	-0.1			
	EU Male	0.9	-0.9			
	EU Female	-0.2	0.2			

Dual career-related overload	PT Male	-0.7	0.7	22.509	<0.001	0.380
	PT Female	4.4	-4.4			
	EU Male	-2.2	2.2			
	EU Female	-2.8	2.8			
Reduced leisure time	PT Male	-0.7	0.7	7.625	0.054	0.221
	PT Female	2.5	-2.5			
	EU Male	-1.8	1.8			
	EU Female	-0.9	0.9			

Required Future Improvements

Chi-square analyses revealed a heterogeneous pattern of group differences regarding the improvements perceived as necessary to strengthen future dual career implementation and support structures. Although several dimensions did not reach conventional statistical significance thresholds, important variations nonetheless emerged across groups, reflecting differentiated perceptions concerning the structural, pedagogical, and organisational conditions required to facilitate the conciliation of elite football participation and educational engagement.

No statistically significant differences were identified regarding the perceived need for increased financial support ($\chi^2 = 7.348$, $p = .062$, $V = .217$), although the association approached statistical significance and demonstrated a small-to-moderate effect size. Inspection of adjusted standardized residuals indicated that European female players were significantly overrepresented among those identifying financial support as a necessary future improvement (AR = 2.6). This tendency may suggest heightened sensitivity among this group to the economic demands and instability associated with sustaining dual career trajectories within elite youth football contexts.

Similarly, no statistically significant differences emerged concerning the proximity of sports facilities to educational institutions ($\chi^2 = 6.149$, $p = .105$, $V = .199$). Nevertheless, European female players again demonstrated a comparatively greater tendency to perceive geographical proximity between educational and sporting environments as an important facilitating condition (AR = 2.0). Although these differences should be interpreted cautiously, they may reflect the practical

importance attributed to logistical accessibility and time management within dual career pathways.

In contrast, significant differences were identified regarding the importance attributed to academic flexibility ($\chi^2 = 14.529$, $p = .002$, $V = .305$). Portuguese female players were strongly overrepresented among those identifying academic flexibility as a necessary future improvement ($AR = 3.5$), whereas European male players were significantly underrepresented ($AR = -2.2$). These findings suggest that Portuguese female players may experience greater tensions associated with rigid academic structures, assessment demands, and institutional inflexibility, reinforcing the perceived need for more adaptive educational arrangements capable of accommodating the realities of elite sport participation.

No statistically significant differences were observed regarding the perceived importance of academic tutors within educational institutions ($\chi^2 = 5.734$, $p = .125$, $V = .192$), indicating relatively consistent perceptions across groups. However, significant group differences did emerge concerning the implementation of tutors within sports organisations ($\chi^2 = 11.866$, $p = .008$, $V = .276$). Portuguese female players were significantly overrepresented among those perceiving sport-based tutors as a necessary support mechanism ($AR = 2.9$), whereas Portuguese male players were significantly underrepresented ($AR = -2.7$). These findings may indicate that Portuguese female players perceive a greater need for institutionalised accompaniment, guidance, and mediation within sporting organisations to effectively manage dual career demands.

No statistically significant differences were identified regarding legal and regulatory frameworks ($\chi^2 = 1.615$, $p = .656$, $V = .102$), suggesting broad convergence across groups concerning the perceived relevance of legal and policy-related dimensions. Likewise, no significant differences emerged regarding the dissemination and promotion of existing initiatives ($\chi^2 = 4.737$, $p = .192$, $V = .174$), although Portuguese female players displayed a slight tendency towards valuing greater visibility and awareness of dual career initiatives.

Taken collectively, these findings suggest that perceptions regarding necessary future improvements in dual career systems are not uniformly distributed across player populations, but instead appear shaped by complex

interactions between gender, contextual experiences, and perceived institutional support needs. More specifically, Portuguese female players consistently emerged as the group most strongly advocating for enhanced structural and pedagogical flexibility, alongside more individualised support mechanisms within both educational and sporting contexts. Such findings may indicate heightened exposure to organisational constraints and dual career-related strain among this group, reinforcing the need for more integrated, flexible, and athlete-centred support structures capable of responding to the multidimensional demands associated with elite youth football participation.

Improvement	Group	Yes (AR)	No (AR)	χ^2	p	V
Financial support	PT Male	-1.5	1.5	7.348	0.062	0.217
	PT Female	-0.3	0.3			
	EU Male	-0.8	0.8			
	EU Female	2.6	-2.6			
Proximity of sports facilities to educational institutions	PT Male	-1.2	1.2	6.149	0.105	0.199
	PT Female	-1.2	1.2			
	EU Male	1.1	-1.1			
	EU Female	2.0	-2.0			
Academic flexibility	PT Male	-1.8	1.8	14.529	0.002	0.305
	PT Female	3.5	-3.5			
	EU Male	-2.2	2.2			
	EU Female	-0.6	0.6			
Academic tutor	PT Male	-1.7	1.7	5.734	0.125	0.192
	PT Female	1.0	-1.0			
	EU Male	-1.3	1.3			
	EU Female	1.5	-1.5			
Sport-based tutor	PT Male	-2.7	2.7	11.866	0.008	0.276
	PT Female	2.9	-2.9			
	EU Male	0.9	-0.9			
	EU Female	-1.0	1.0			
Legal and regulatory frameworks	PT Male	-1.0	1.0	1.615	0.656	0.102
	PT Female	1.1	-1.1			
	EU Male	0.2	-0.2			
	EU Female	-0.3	0.3			
Dissemination and promotion of existing initiatives	PT Male	0.4	-0.4	4.737	0.192	0.174
	PT Female	1.6	-1.6			
	EU Male	-1.4	1.4			
	EU Female	-1.3	1.3			

6.2. Phase 2 – Qualitative results

6.1. Dual Career as a Holistic Developmental Philosophy

Across all institutional stakeholders, dual career was not conceptualised merely as a logistical process of balancing football and education, but rather as a holistic developmental philosophy centred on the formation of the person beyond the athlete. The interviews revealed a strong and transversal discourse surrounding the idea of “integral formation”, in which educational engagement was perceived as inseparable from the developmental responsibilities of elite football organisations.

At institutional level, the Portuguese Football Federation (FPF) articulated a particularly strong commitment towards this philosophy, framing academic development as an essential dimension of player formation rather than a secondary or compensatory process. As highlighted by the National Technical Director:

“For us, in terms of the integral formation of the player, of the practitioner, of the person, it makes no sense for there to be a priority given to one aspect to the detriment of another... for us, these two pathways should be interconnected and should progress together, giving importance to both processes” (National Technical Director – FPF).

Similarly, club representatives repeatedly emphasised that the educational dimension constituted part of their social and pedagogical responsibility towards young athletes. Within SCP, the pedagogical department described Dual Career as part of the “life project” of players, explicitly moving beyond a performance-only rationale:

“For us, it is very much the players’ life project... we have given great importance to this issue of conciliation, which we are now also calling dual career” (Pedagogical Coordinator).

Likewise, FCP framed the educational pathway as an ethical and developmental responsibility of the club:

“Yes, football is important, but we internally fight for school to also be important... as a club we have the social and pedagogical responsibility to develop these young people both in school-related matters and in the creation of new pedagogical activities” (Pedagogical Coordinator).

SLB representatives similarly highlighted the historical institutionalisation of educational support structures, describing the club as one of the first in Portugal to formally establish a socio-educational department specifically dedicated to the academic monitoring of youth players:

“Benfica always had a major concern with the educational area... since the 1980s there was already a person responsible for accompanying the players’ schooling” (Pedagogical Coordinator).

Importantly, the holistic orientation towards Dual Career was not restricted to institutional rhetoric, but also emerged in players’ narratives, particularly among female athletes, who consistently demonstrated strong awareness regarding the uncertainty and temporality of football careers. Educational engagement was frequently described as a form of future protection, identity development, and long-term security. One player explained:

“Football is a career that ends very early... afterwards we still have many years ahead of us, and I think it is very important to continue studying” (Female Player).

Another participant associated educational aspirations with the unpredictability of football careers:

“A serious injury can stop us from continuing to play... and when football ends, we still need to continue having an income” (Female Player).

Such narratives suggest that players' educational engagement was not solely externally imposed by institutions or families but progressively internalised as part of broader life planning processes. Nevertheless, important variations emerged regarding how strongly education was prioritised relative to football, particularly among male players pursuing professionalisation pathways. For example, one participant acknowledged his intention to temporarily “freeze” higher education in order to dedicate himself exclusively to football:

“I believe it is possible to combine university and football, but I think entering university is a phase where I prefer to dedicate all my effort only to football” (Male Player).

Collectively, these findings indicate that Dual Career within elite Portuguese football is increasingly framed through a holistic developmental lens, in which clubs and governing bodies attempt to position educational engagement as an integral component of athlete development. However, the data simultaneously reveal persistent tensions between this holistic discourse and the realities of high-performance sporting progression, particularly as players advance towards professional pathways.

6.2. Institutional Structures Supporting Dual Career Management

6.2.1. Pedagogical departments as coordination hubs

One of the strongest themes emerging from the data concerned the progressive institutionalisation and professionalisation of pedagogical support structures within elite football organisations. Across all clubs and the FPF, pedagogical departments appeared to function as central coordination hubs responsible for mediating relationships between players, schools, families, coaches, and broader support networks.

SCP described a highly structured pedagogical department divided into pedagogical technicians and educational assistance technicians, whose

responsibilities extended beyond academic monitoring towards the daily welfare management of resident athletes:

“We have a pedagogical department that carries out all the articulation work with schools, families and players (...) and educational assistance technicians whose main mission is to ensure the daily life activities of our resident athletes” (Pedagogical Coordinator).

Similarly, FCP described a multidisciplinary pedagogical structure involving close articulation with technical staff, nutritionists, medical departments, and educational institutions:

“This is not only about monitoring grades and recording incidents... it involves communication with team managers, coaches, technical coordination, nutrition and medical departments. It is a multidisciplinary team” (Pedagogical Coordinator).

These pedagogical departments were frequently described as operating through continuous monitoring and individualised follow-up processes. Clubs highlighted regular communication with schools, attendance at school meetings, academic tracking, behavioural monitoring, and adaptation of educational pathways according to players’ sporting demands.

The scale of these structures was particularly visible within Sporting Clube de Portugal, where the club reported maintaining active articulation with 55 schools within the academy context and approximately 125 schools across broader developmental structures:

“We maintain regular contact with 55 schools in our academy... and if we include the Lisbon training centre, we are talking about approximately 125 schools” (Pedagogical Coordinator).

These findings suggest that dual career support within elite football increasingly relies upon complex organisational infrastructures requiring permanent coordination across educational and sporting systems.

6.2.2. Formal and informal support mechanisms

The interviews revealed a broad range of formal and informal support mechanisms designed to facilitate the management of dual career demands. Clubs described the implementation of tutoring systems, study centres, academic mentoring, online support sessions, private explanations, and flexible scheduling arrangements.

SCP highlighted the existence of partnerships with study centres and subject-specific tutors:

“We currently have two partnerships with study centres and one specific tutor for mathematics, physics, chemistry and biology” (Pedagogical Coordinator).

SLB similarly described the provision of additional academic support for athletes experiencing educational difficulties, including Portuguese language support for foreign players:

“All students experiencing difficulties had explanations... foreign players had Portuguese classes and cultural support regarding Portugal” (Pedagogical Coordinator).

Players themselves frequently recognised the importance of these support structures. Several athletes described receiving additional online assistance from teachers, particularly within UAARE schools (i.e. High-Performance Support Schools in Portugal):

“The teachers make themselves available to support us through Zoom, even at weekends or on holidays” (Female Player).

Another participant explained:

“There is a teacher responsible for student-athletes and she makes extra time available whenever I need support” (Female Player).

The FPF also emerged as an important pedagogical actor within national team environments. Players and institutional representatives repeatedly highlighted the implementation of supervised study hours and accompanying teachers during training camps:

“On the eve of a World Cup final, the players were having classes with Professor CL” (National Technical Director – FPF).

These mechanisms appeared to function not only as practical educational support structures, but also as symbolic forms of institutional legitimisation of academic engagement within elite football environments.

6.2.3. The strategic role of UAARE schools

UAARE schools emerged as one of the most recurrent and structurally significant themes throughout the interviews. Players, clubs, and institutional stakeholders consistently described UAARE contexts as substantially more flexible and athlete-sensitive than mainstream educational settings.

Within SCP, UAARE schools were strategically integrated into the club’s pedagogical model:

“The UAARE schools are suggested by us according to players’ area of residence and sporting pathway” (Pedagogical Coordinator).

Players repeatedly highlighted the pedagogical flexibility associated with UAARE contexts, particularly regarding assessment rescheduling, online access, additional support, and understanding from teachers. One player explained:

“Being in a UAARE school helped a lot because if I missed classes, they allowed test rescheduling and support classes” (Female Player).

Another participant stated:

“The school gives me extra support... teachers provide support sessions whenever necessary” (Female Player).

At the same time, several athletes contrasted these experiences with non-UAARE educational settings, which were often perceived as significantly less flexible and less understanding of sporting demands. One female player reported:

“My class teacher did not want me to leave early for training because football was becoming more serious” (Female Player).

These findings suggest that UAARE schools may constitute critical protective environments capable of reducing educational disruption and facilitating more sustainable dual career trajectories.

6.3. The Everyday Challenges of Balancing Elite Football and Education

6.3.1. Accumulated fatigue and time pressure

Despite the existence of extensive support structures, players consistently described Dual Career management as an extremely demanding process characterised by fatigue, time pressure, and cumulative overload.

The most recurrent challenge concerned the coexistence of intensive training schedules, competitive demands, travel requirements, and academic obligations. Players frequently described feeling physically and psychologically exhausted. One SCB male player stated:

“The biggest obstacle for me is fatigue... physical and psychological fatigue” (Male Player).

Another participant highlighted the cumulative impact of football-related demands:

“The level of football becomes increasingly demanding, and school ends up suffering because there is not enough time to dedicate to it” (Male Player).

Female players similarly emphasised the intensity of schedules and lack of recovery time:

“I have no time for anything because my life is school, training and residence” (Female Player).

These narratives reveal that Dual Career participation often involves constant negotiation between competing temporal demands, with players frequently experiencing reduced leisure time, limited recovery opportunities, and ongoing cognitive strain.

6.3.2. Missing classes and academic disruption

Academic disruption resulting from absences associated with training camps, competitions, and national team duties emerged as another central challenge. Players repeatedly described difficulties recovering missed content and re-engaging academically following periods away from school. One SCP male player explained:

“We spend weekends away and end up missing that part of school... then it becomes difficult to recover the contents we missed” (Male Player).

Similarly, female players frequently referred to prolonged absences associated with national team camps:

“In the 10th and 11th grades [secondary school] it was very difficult, especially because of the national team camps, I was always missing classes” (Female Player).

Several participants highlighted that the impact of absence was not merely quantitative, but also qualitative, involving disruption of learning continuity, concentration, and classroom integration.

6.3.3. Increasing difficulty across developmental stages

The data strongly suggested that Dual Career management became progressively more difficult as players advanced through developmental stages. Male players in particular repeatedly referred to a progressive escalation in both sporting and academic demands:

“As I progressed through school and football became more serious, I started feeling more difficulties” (Male Player).

Another participant explained:

“Sub-15 was already difficult, but now the demands are increasing more and more” (Male Player).

This progressive intensification appeared linked to: 1) greater training volumes, 2) higher competitive exposure, 3) increased travel demands, 4) academic specialisation, and 5) higher educational expectations.

The findings therefore suggest that Dual Career sustainability becomes increasingly fragile during later adolescence, particularly within transition phases towards elite performance environments.

6.3.4. Higher education as a critical transition point

One of the most salient findings concerned the transition from secondary education towards higher education, which was consistently described as a major turning point within Dual Career trajectories. Several athletes perceived universities as significantly less flexible and less adapted to the realities of elite sport participation compared to UAARE school environments. One female player competing at university level stated:

“At university there is zero flexibility... if I choose continuous assessment, I need to be physically present” (Female Player).

Another participant highlighted the incompatibility between university assessments and sporting commitments:

“Sometimes the special examination period coincides with national team camps” (Female Player).

These findings suggest that higher education may constitute a structurally vulnerable phase within Dual Career pathways, characterised by reduced pedagogical accommodation and increased conflict between academic and sporting demands.

6.4. Educational Flexibility: Between Support and Structural Rigidity

6.4.1. Flexible educational practices

Across the interviews, educational flexibility emerged as one of the most decisive factors shaping players' Dual Career experiences. Several athletes reported positive experiences involving rescheduling of tests, flexible attendance arrangements, online educational access, adapted assessment procedures, and individualised teacher support.

One male player explained:

“When I cannot be present, there is flexibility. I can take tests at another time or with adjusted content” (Male Player).

Similarly, players repeatedly highlighted teachers’ willingness to provide additional support:

“Teachers even support us during weekends or holidays” (Female Player).

These accounts suggest that educational flexibility often depends upon highly relational and informal pedagogical practices based on communication, understanding, and institutional sensitivity.

6.4.2. Institutional inflexibility and pedagogical constraints

At the same time, the data revealed important experiences of rigidity and institutional resistance. Several players described contexts in which educational institutions demonstrated limited understanding regarding the realities of elite football participation. One participant explained:

“My teachers did not want me leaving early for training” (Female Player).

Players that are at the University level described even stronger forms of institutional inflexibility:

“There is no flexibility at all” (Female Player).

Others highlighted difficulties obtaining replacement classes or adapted assessments:

“When I miss classes, there is no replacement support, so I need to study everything alone” (Female Player).

These findings suggest that Dual Career implementation remains highly inconsistent across educational contexts, with players' experiences frequently dependent upon the attitudes and practices of individual teachers or institutions.

6.5. Gendered Experiences of Dual Career Pathways

6.5.1. Education as future security among female players

Gendered differences emerged strongly throughout the dataset, particularly regarding how players conceptualised the relationship between football, education, and future professional identity. Female players consistently demonstrated greater concern regarding long-term employability, post-sport transitions, and educational attainment. One female athlete explained:

“Most football players go bankrupt a few years after retirement... I think it is very important to continue studying” (Female Player).

Another participant highlighted the importance of maintaining educational pathways due to the uncertainty of football careers:

“Football is not a long career... afterwards we still need another profession” (Female Player).

Educational aspirations among female players were frequently highly ambitious, including references to medicine, dentistry, law, management, physiotherapy, and postgraduate education.

These narratives suggest that female players may perceive educational engagement not simply as complementary, but as essential for future security and social mobility.

6.5.2. Professional football aspirations and educational prioritisation

In contrast, male players more frequently described football professionalisation as their primary short-term priority. Although many acknowledged the importance of education, several participants framed educational continuation as contingent upon football outcomes. Two players explained:

“I want to dedicate myself only to football for now” (Male Player).

“I only want to finish compulsory education and focus on football” (Male Player).

These findings do not necessarily indicate rejection of education but rather reveal differentiated temporal prioritisation strategies associated with professional football aspirations.

6.6. The Cultural Normalisation of Dual Career within Elite Football Environments

6.6.1. From performance-only models to holistic player development

A final transversal finding concerned the gradual cultural normalisation of Dual Career within elite football environments. Institutional stakeholders repeatedly described an ongoing transition from traditional performance-centred models towards more holistic developmental approaches. One coordinator explained:

“There is now much greater sensitivity towards this issue than there was previously” (Pedagogical Coordinator).

Similarly, the FPF described Dual Career as a strategic and transversal institutional priority:

“This is clearly one of the priorities we want to implement across all sectors” (FPF).

6.6.2. Professionalisation of pedagogical support structures

The data also revealed increasing professionalisation of pedagogical support within clubs. Several organisations described expansion of pedagogical departments, creation of specialised educational roles, multidisciplinary integration, and formal tutor training. One coordinator stated:

“I am certain this will become part of the certification process and clubs will eventually be required to have these structures” (Pedagogical Coordinator).

This suggests that dual career support may progressively become institutionalised as a criterion of organisational quality and legitimacy within elite football systems.

6.6.3. Persistent tensions between performance and education

Despite these advances, the interviews simultaneously revealed the persistence of important structural tensions. Players consistently described situations in which educational participation remained subordinated to performance demands, particularly during later developmental stages and transitions towards professional football. As one participant explained:

“It is difficult to fully focus on both things at the same time” (Male Player).

Another athlete stated:

“Sometimes football ends up taking priority because the demands are increasing all the time” (Male Player).

Collectively, these findings suggest that elite football environments are currently characterised by an ongoing process of negotiation between holistic developmental philosophies and the enduring pressures of high-performance sport cultures. Whilst substantial progress appears to have been made regarding the institutional recognition of Dual Career, the everyday realities experienced by

players continue to reveal important tensions, inconsistencies, and structural vulnerabilities within the process of reconciling educational engagement with elite football participation.

6.7. Relational and Social Ecosystems Surrounding Dual Career Pathways

6.7.1. Family support as a stabilising structure

Across the interviews, families emerged as one of the most influential and stabilising actors within players' Dual Career pathways. Beyond providing logistical support, families appeared to play a decisive role in shaping educational values, future-oriented thinking, emotional regulation, and long-term developmental perspectives. Several players explicitly associated their educational engagement with parental influence and family socialisation processes. One player stated:

“My parents always wanted me to continue studying... this idea did not come from yesterday; they have been teaching me this for a long time” (Male Player).

Similarly, another participant explained that his educational aspirations progressively became internalised through family influence:

“The basic idea came from them, but over time I started understanding that football is a world that can change from one day to another” (Male Player).

These narratives suggest that families frequently functioned as protective agents against exclusive athletic identity formation, encouraging athletes to maintain broader life perspectives beyond football. This role appeared particularly important within environments characterised by high professionalisation pressure and uncertainty regarding long-term sporting success.

For several female players, family support also appeared strongly associated with emotional security and adaptation processes, particularly in situations involving geographical displacement, residential transitions, or

increased training demands. One athlete described leaving her parental home in order to facilitate the management of school and football:

“This year I left my comfort zone, my parents’ house, and moved into a student residence to facilitate my personal rest and school performance” (Female Player).

Such experiences reveal the extent to which Dual Career pathways frequently involve broader family reorganisation processes, including residential adaptation, emotional negotiation, and lifestyle restructuring.

At the same time, the interviews also suggested that family influence was not exclusively protective or educationally oriented but occasionally intertwined with players’ sporting ambitions and performance aspirations. Nevertheless, across the dataset, families predominantly emerged as agents of stability, educational continuity, and future safeguarding.

6.7.2. Coaches as pedagogical gatekeepers within Dual Career environments

Although coaches were not always directly foregrounded within participants’ narratives, the interviews repeatedly suggested that coaching cultures and leadership approaches significantly shaped players’ experiences of Dual Career.

Institutional stakeholders frequently highlighted the importance of ensuring that coaches themselves actively reinforced educational values and legitimised academic engagement within high-performance environments. The FPF, in particular, emphasised the need for coaches to communicate coherent messages regarding the importance of educational participation:

“We want our coaches, within each training camp and leadership moment, to transmit this message... that academic formation must be contemplated regardless of the sporting dimension” (National Technical Director – FPF).

Similarly, club representatives described growing efforts to integrate pedagogical sensitivity into coaching cultures and organisational routines. One coordinator explained:

“There is now much greater sensitivity towards this issue than there was previously”
(Pedagogical Coordinator).

The data suggest that coaches increasingly operate not merely as performance specialists, but also as pedagogical gatekeepers capable of either facilitating or constraining the sustainability of Dual Career pathways. Their attitudes towards academic flexibility, educational absence, fatigue management, and athlete wellbeing appeared to strongly influence how players experienced the coexistence of football and education.

At the same time, several players indirectly revealed how performance cultures continued to shape educational participation. Narratives concerning fatigue, pressure, and escalating demands suggested that the prioritisation of football often remained structurally embedded within everyday training environments:

“Sometimes football ends up taking priority because the demands are increasing all the time” (Male Player).

Consequently, whilst coaches were often described as increasingly supportive of Dual Career principles, the findings simultaneously indicate that they continue to operate within highly performance-oriented systems where educational engagement may remain vulnerable to sporting pressures.

6.7.3. Professionalisation pressures, agents, and future uncertainty

Another important dimension emerging from the interviews concerned the progressive professionalisation pressures experienced by players as they advanced through elite football pathways. Although references to agents were less explicit across the dataset, players’ narratives nonetheless revealed increasing orientation towards professional football careers, particularly among male athletes approaching senior transition stages. Several participants described educational

decision-making processes being directly influenced by perceived opportunities within football. One player explained:

“I prefer to dedicate this phase of my life only to football rather than dividing my effort between football and university” (Male Player).

Another participant stated:

“I only want to finish compulsory education and focus exclusively on football” (Male Player).

Such narratives suggest that professionalisation pressures may progressively intensify processes of educational deprioritisation, particularly within contexts where players perceive proximity to professional opportunities. This appeared especially evident among male athletes integrated within highly competitive academy systems.

In contrast, female players generally demonstrated greater caution regarding the sustainability of football careers and more frequent concern regarding future employability and financial stability. One player explained:

“Football careers can end very early and afterwards we still need another profession” (Female Player).

These findings point towards important gendered differences in how future uncertainty and professionalisation pressures are experienced and negotiated within dual career pathways.

6.7.4. Peer environments and the cultural normalisation of Dual Career

The interviews additionally suggested that peer environments and academy cultures play an important role in shaping players’ perceptions of dual career participation. Within highly structured academy contexts, educational engagement appeared progressively normalised as part of everyday football culture. Players

frequently referred to collective study routines, shared experiences of fatigue and absence, and mutual understanding regarding the challenges of balancing sport and education. One player explained:

“We are all at a very high level in football and everyone understands the level of demand we experience every day” (Male Player).

The coexistence of athletes experiencing similar educational and sporting demands appeared to facilitate processes of collective adaptation and mutual legitimisation of dual career participation.

At institutional level, clubs and the FPF also appeared increasingly committed to embedding educational engagement into the symbolic culture of elite football environments. The existence of supervised study hours during national team camps, pedagogical departments within academies, and permanent articulation with schools contributed towards reinforcing the idea that academic participation constitutes a legitimate and expected dimension of elite athlete development.

However, despite this growing cultural normalisation, the findings simultaneously suggest that football performance remained the dominant symbolic axis within elite academy environments. Consequently, Dual Career participation often appeared positioned within a constant negotiation between educational legitimacy and the persistent cultural centrality of sporting performance.

Taken collectively, these findings reinforce the notion that Dual Career pathways cannot be understood solely as individual processes of time management or academic adaptation. Rather, they emerge as relationally negotiated trajectories shaped by complex social ecosystems involving families, coaches, peers, educational institutions, and broader high-performance football cultures. The sustainability of Dual Career participation therefore appears strongly dependent not only on formal support structures, but also on the quality, coherence, and educational orientation of the relational environments surrounding young elite athletes.

7. Limitations of the study

This section details the main methodological and operational limitations of the study at the interim stage, explicitly grounded in the concrete conditions under which the project has been implemented during its first months.

7.1. Quantitative data collection constraints

Within Portuguese national teams, data collection was completed due to the great effort and strategy provided by Portuguese Football Federation and the National Technical Director. From phase 1 (quantitative phase) 106 valid responses were obtained (60 female; 46 male). The only constraint was with the male U21 national team data collection since we only obtained 4 responses.

The major problem was observed in quantitative data collection of the other European countries. Despite the extensive recruitment strategy and sustained communication efforts undertaken throughout the data collection period, the response rate from several European contexts remained substantially lower than initially anticipated. Multiple contacts were established with national football associations across Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, England, France, Germany, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, and Spain. In all cases, the associations actively collaborated by disseminating the survey link to eligible players within their respective national team structures. Follow-up communications and reminders were also repeatedly conducted to maximise participation.

Nevertheless, the main limitation encountered was associated not with institutional access or dissemination procedures, but rather with the voluntary availability and engagement of players to complete the questionnaire within highly demanding sporting and academic schedules. This challenge appears consistent with the practical difficulties frequently reported in research involving elite and high-performance athlete populations, particularly within international and youth national team contexts characterised by dense competitive calendars, training camps, travel demands, and restricted access windows.

Consequently, the final sample included **49 players** from three European countries (Iceland = 5; Czechia = 13; the Netherlands = 31).

Although the originally projected sample size was not achieved, the study nevertheless secured participation from athletes representing distinct football systems and sociocultural contexts, allowing exploratory cross-contextual insights into dual career experiences in youth football. Importantly, the Portuguese sample provided substantial depth and ecological validity, given the structured collaboration established with the Portuguese Football Federation and the direct access to youth national team environments. As such, the dataset remains scientifically valuable in generating context-sensitive evidence regarding the educational and sporting demands experienced by elite youth football players, while simultaneously highlighting the methodological and logistical complexities inherent to large-scale international research involving high-performance sport populations.

7.2. Dependence on institutional gatekeepers and recruitment pathways

A key operational limitation of the study was the access to participants, which is strongly dependent on institutional gatekeepers such as associations, players' unions, clubs and technical staff.

In Portugal, access to professional players and former players is mediated primarily through the Portuguese Professional Footballers' Syndicate (SJPF). A meeting held on 11 November with Dr João Oliveira (Secretary General) resulted in full institutional support, with the SJPF actively disseminating the questionnaire among current professional players and ex-players. Despite this strong collaboration, responses from former players was very limited (only 30 responses), illustrating the structural difficulty of reaching this population even with union support. Due to the reduced rate of responses, such data was not considered in the data analysis and results of this study.

At the European level, dissemination through FIFPro and national associations has facilitated initial access but has also highlighted differences in governance structures, communication channels and institutional priorities across

countries. These factors introduce variability in recruitment speed and volume that lies largely beyond the direct control of the research team.

7.3. Sample composition, representativeness and inherent partiality

The expansion of the sample frame agreed during the kick-off meeting (particularly the inclusion of professional and former players) enhanced the applied relevance of the study but also introduced challenges related to representativeness and balance. Participation is voluntary and based on self-report, which introduces inherent partiality related to motivation, availability and individual perception. Players with stronger educational engagement or greater interest in dual career issues may be more likely to participate, potentially influencing early response patterns.

Again, despite the repeated dissemination efforts and institutional mediation, response rates within professional and former professional players were almost non-existent. This may reflect a reduced perceived relevance of Dual Career issues among athletes who are no longer directly experiencing the simultaneous demands of elite football and formal education. In the case of former players, particularly those already retired from youth development structures or formal educational pathways, Dual Career challenges may be retrospectively perceived as distant or no longer salient within their current professional and personal realities. Likewise, professional players competing in highly demanding performance environments may demonstrate limited availability or motivation to engage in research activities not directly associated with immediate sporting performance.

Consequently, the markedly lower participation of professional and former players should not be interpreted solely as a methodological limitation, but also as an indicator of how dual career concerns may lose perceived centrality once athletes transition beyond formal schooling contexts or consolidate professional sporting trajectories.

8. Impact of the research on theory, state of knowledge and practice, and implications for UEFA and football

This study indicates clear potential impact at three interconnected levels: (i) theoretical development and state of knowledge, (ii) research-informed practice within football systems, and (iii) policy and governance implications for UEFA and European football.

8.1. Contribution to theory and the state of knowledge

From a theoretical perspective, this project advances Dual Career research by positioning football as a central, rather than peripheral, analytical context. While Dual Careers have been extensively examined in Olympic and individual sports, football has often been underrepresented despite its scale, cultural influence and distinct organisational structures. By focusing explicitly on football, this research challenges implicit assumptions derived from other sports and contributes to a more context-sensitive understanding of dual career development.

The project also contributes to the literature by integrating national context and gender as structuring variables, rather than treating them as secondary descriptors. The comparative European design allows the examination of how football cultures, governance models and levels of professionalisation shape players' educational opportunities and constraints. This approach moves beyond individual-level explanations of dual career success or failure and highlights the role of institutional and systemic factors.

Furthermore, the use of validated instruments to assess both Dual Career competencies and lived experiences contributes to conceptual clarity in the field. By examining not only what players do (e.g. educational engagement) but also how they experience Dual Career pathways, the study supports a more holistic theoretical framework linking competencies, experiences and context.

8.2. Methodological and empirical relevance for future research

At the methodological level, the project demonstrates the feasibility (and challenges) of conducting cross-national Dual Career research in football. The findings underline the importance of institutional access and governance

structures in shaping research participation, an issue that is often under-theorised in the literature.

In this sense, the project contributes not only empirical data but also reflexive methodological insight that can inform future research designs in football and other highly institutionalised sports.

8.3. Implications for football practice and stakeholder engagement

From a practical perspective, the project highlights the central role of federations, clubs and players' unions in shaping both Dual Career pathways and research access. The contrast between contexts with strong institutional engagement and those relying on fragmented access routes illustrates how educational support is embedded (or neglected) within football development systems.

Results of this study demonstrated that, in many contexts, responsibility for managing education alongside football remains largely individualised, placing the burden on players rather than on institutions. This has important implications for player welfare, particularly for young athletes and those in less secure professional environments.

The project also underscores the need for gender-sensitive approaches to Dual Career support. Female players' stronger educational engagement, combined with greater structural constraints, suggests that education often functions as a compensatory strategy rather than a supported pathway. This insight challenges football organisations to move beyond rhetorical commitments to equality and to address concrete structural inequalities in scheduling, financial security and access to educational resources.

8.4. Consequences and recommendations for UEFA and European football

For UEFA, the project has several important implications. First, it reinforces the need for clear, coherent and visible Dual Career frameworks within all European Football associations. Evidence suggests that awareness of educational rights and support mechanisms remains uneven, even among elite players. UEFA is well positioned to promote minimum standards and shared principles that can guide

national associations and clubs in integrating education more systematically into football pathways.

Second, the findings highlight the value of institutionalised partnerships between football organisations, educational institutions and players' unions. UEFA could play a catalytic role in encouraging and legitimising such collaborations, particularly in contexts where dual career structures are underdeveloped.

Third, the project points to the importance of including gender as a core dimension of any dual career policy or recommendation. Given the distinct economic and organisational realities of women's football, one-size-fits-all approaches are unlikely to be effective. UEFA's ongoing investment in women's football provides a timely opportunity to embed educational support as a foundational component of sustainable development.

Finally, the project underscores the importance of evidence-informed governance. By supporting research that examines not only outcomes but also processes and institutional conditions, UEFA strengthens its capacity to design policies that are both effective and contextually grounded.

In sum, the project demonstrates significant potential to advance theoretical understanding, inform research practice and contribute to more sustainable and equitable football development models. Its emphasis on context, gender and institutional responsibility aligns closely with UEFA's strategic priorities and positions the research to deliver meaningful, actionable recommendations for European football.

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