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# Motivation for Participating to Sports Competitions in School

Cristian-Mihail RUS<sup>1</sup>, Liliana-Elisabeta RADU<sup>2</sup>, Gynett Ionel VANVU<sup>3</sup>

## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify the students' motivation for participating to sports competitions in school. For this approach, we have identified a stratified random sample made up of 515 boys and 338 girls. The questionnaire we have used has included three categories of reasons for the participation to sports actions: social motives, sports motives and health-promotion motives, intrinsic and extrinsic. The data obtained have emphasized positive results for both genders, on the three motivation directions: "fun and joy"; "the wish of being healthy"; "the wish of being part of a team". Motivations such as "the wish of being the best, of being a champion"; "the wish of being popular"; "the wish to compete" were frequent among boys, while girls have mostly social and recreational motives: making new friends, maintaining a health body, fitness. Hence, the combination of the pleasure to participate to the competition and the wish to make new friends are the ways through which we can also increase the number of girls who participate to school competitions.

*Keywords:* human performance, stereotype, social relations, sport competitions, popularity, interaction.

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## Introduction

Studies in the field have underlined that the need to participate to sports competitions is different by the subject's gender (Azzarito & Solmon, 2009; Crosnoe, 2001; Meece, Glienke, & Burg, 2006). These authors have underlined the importance of reducing gender differences and of getting the girls closer to boys' motivations. Early studies confirmed that girls have different motivations to practice sports activities in school and to increase their personal motor performances. Hence, the fields targeted by boys are exact sciences (mathematics, physics, chemistry, etc) and sport, while girls are more likely to embrace humanistic fields (social activities, foreign languages, arts, reading, etc) than sports activities (Kilpatric, Hebert, & Bartholomew, Papageorgiou, Hassandra, & Hatzi-georgiadis, 2008).

Among students of 15-16 years old, Smith *et al.* (1997) have found the level and forms of participation to extracurricular physical and sports activities to be influenced significantly and differently by gender and to a certain extent by social class. Furthermore, school – with the types of activities it provides to students – is considered a determining factor in the participation to sports competitions in school for 15-16 year-old girls. Scraton (1990) and Soares, Antunnes and Van Den Tillaar (2013) have pinpointed the boys' tendency for improvement of sports performance and the girls' tendency for developing social relations and friendships. The popularity brought by practicing these sports and the special effects of this situation influence more the personality of boys than of girls; the latter prefer appreciations for their appearance to those for personal performances or popularity. Azzarito & Solmon (2009) have stated that girls have additional pressure to put up with when they have to compete in sports labelled “*only*” for boys. The girls who had to compete on “*boys' field*” and were interrogated afterwards stated that their sports activities were meaningless. Activities with a significant social component were appreciated and preferred by girls of this age group. The authors have also found that, if girls can choose sports activities that include interactions with their colleagues, they will gladly do it. If they can choose between sports game as means to spend the time and competition as activity, most of them will choose activities combined with social actions to the detriment of those based on any kind of ranking (Prusak & Darst, 2002). Girls are motivated to participate to sports competitions for extrinsic rather than for intrinsic motives, because they see these competitions as a place to meet friends, to have fun, etc (Chantel *et al.*, 1996; Wang & Liu, 2007; Chase & Dummer, 1992). The aforementioned statements have also been confirmed by Hellandsig (1998), Lauriola *et al.* (2004) who have found that young people's motivation of participating to sports activities depends on both gender and the sports branch: boys try to get satisfaction through competition and victory, while girls through interactions with their girl friends. The influence of gender and type of sport (team or individual) upon the motivation

to participate to sport in school was also studied by Goncalves, Silva, & Cruz, (2007) who have found that boys give more importance to the “*status*” provided by the participation to competition, to “*prove they are better than their colleagues*” or “*to win or to defeat*”. At the same time, girls have formulated motivations related to competence, fair play and socialization.

Because school sport is characterized as a systematic, organized and voluntary activity, our objective is to find out whether boys and girls have the same motivations to participate to sports competitions in school and whether there is a correlation between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. The investigation could show whether boys are more likely to manifest the level of personal performance motivated by competition and popularity, while girls are more likely to be motivated by developing friendships, by aspects related to physical health and to joy. Hence, the following questions emerge – *Are there correlations between the motivations of participating to extracurricular sports activities in school as means of expressing human performance? Are correlations dependent on the subjects’ gender?*

## **Method**

The study was carried out in 46 schools that comprise elementary and secondary classes; their student population is 5,129 students aged between 10 and 18. The target group was random and stratified, standard deviation under 5% for a representative sample of 855 subjects, according to the website [www.surveysystem.com](http://www.surveysystem.com), among whom 515 boys and 338 girls who engaged in sports activities in school. The target group represents 16.6% of the school population included in the study. All the actions within this study have observed the ethical norms of a research; the subjects were informed on the protocol and the parents gave their consent for the students’ participation to the study; the investigation was approved by the County Board of Education.

### ***Procedure***

The questionnaire used for the motivation of participating to sports activities in school (Correia & Rosado, 2006) concerned three variables determined by this motivation. The first motivations – intrinsic – were as follows: *pleasure of competing, of being the first, of improving personal skills*, etc. The second category of motives – extrinsic – regarded the social dimension, related to the following: *popularity, belonging to a group, parents’ wish*. The third variable was represented by health-related extrinsic motivations.

Table 1. The questions comprising the study variables

No. of crt.	VARIABLE I Intrinsic motivations	No. of crt.	VARIABLE II Extrinsic motivations	No. of crt.	VARIABLE III Extrinsic motivations
1	I want to develop my skills	5	I want to be popular	7	On the parent's advice
2	I like to compete	6	I want to be part of the team	9	I want to be healthy
3	I want to be a champion (the best!)	8	I want to make new friends		
4	I love sport				

### Statistical analysis

In order to underline that the items of the variables are likely to measure the same thing, we have used Cronbach's coefficient alpha, generated by the software IBM SPSS (Version 20.0). The coefficient alpha has shown a good internal interdependence between the variables and the relations proposed for analysis. Hence the value obtained – 0.895 – proves a good correlation between the variable studied following the interpretation of Malhotra (1996), George & Mallery (2003) and Petrea (2013).

### Results

Generally, upon analyzing the findings, we have found that boys and girls are interested in school competitions. As it is apparent in the findings illustrated in the table below, the common motivation of both girls and boys is fun and the joy of participating to school competitions (*I love sport 97.2% of the boys and 93% of the girls*). Other representative motives from among their statements are as follows: *desire to be healthy (93.4% of the boys and 91.5% of the girls); desire to be part of a team 93.2% of the boys and 92.4% of the girls) or the wish to develop the motor skills (90.7% of the boys and 93.5% of the girls)*.

Table 2. Percentage representation of answers for each item of the questionnaire

Gender	Item 1	Item 2	Item 3	Item 4	Item 5	Item 6	Item 7	Item 8	Item 9
M	90.7	93.7	57.7	97.2	26.5	93.8	58.1	90.9	93.4
F	93.5	83.6	39.7	93	12.6	92.4	42.2	86.6	91.5

For both girls and boys, the following questions had low percentages: *the wish to be popular (26.5% of the boys and 12.6% of the girls); the wish to gain notoriety or participation on the parents' advice*. Nevertheless, there are differences between the answers provided by the girls and those by the boys, regarding

*the wish to be popular; the wish to be a champion* (57.7% of the boys and 39.7% of the girls) and *pleasure of competing* (93.7% of the boys and 83.6% of the girls); they have higher importance in the boys' answers on these directions.

Another difference in the answers provided by the girls and those by the boys regards the parents' influence upon practicing sport in school; the findings for item 7 of the questionnaire – *On parents' advice*. The percentage is higher among boys (58.1%) than among girls (42.2%). Consequently, findings show that boys are likely to prefer activities related to competition (94.5), to the desire to win (57.2) and to be popular (26.5). In their turn, girls are likely to prefer variables related to health and fitness and to the wish of making new friends; however, to the item *I want to make new friends*, boys also scored high (90.9% of the boys and 86.6% of the girls). The statistical interpretation of the answers upon analyzing the correlations has underlined interdependence between the motivations of the questionnaire subjects in five situations of strong correlations, which we present in the following lines. Hence, for questions 1 and 9, the correlation is strong, with values of  $0.951$ , close to the highest possible value of  $1$ . It is worth underlining that the two items are comprised within different variables, which makes the correlation value noteworthy. For questions 2 and 8, the values of the correlations also show a strong correlation:  $0.949$ . These questions also belong to different variables. The values of the correlation obtained for questions 3 and 7 were  $0.902$ ; they underline a strong correlation. As for questions 4, 6 and 9, a there was a strong, positive correlation between the three variables simultaneously. Hence, there is a high correlation value: (1)  $0.872$  between the question 4 and 6; (2)  $0.860$  between 4 and 9; (3)  $0.872$  between 6 and 9; (4) one last notable value of the correlation has been found between questions 6 and 1:  $0.905$ .

## Discussions

In this study, findings have shown that girls and boys have a positive opinion about sports competitions in school, there is no doubt about it. Generally, the most frequent motivations of boys and girls to participate to sports competitions in school are intrinsic, (for instance, the joy of participating and skill improvement were the most cited motivations, equally important for girls and boys regarding the participation to sports competitions in school).

These findings are similar to those of other studies, which indicate that young people are more likely to be motivated intrinsically than extrinsically, (Kilpatric, Hebert, & Bartholomew, 2005) and our study has shown that the two support each other. Similarly, the findings confirm those of other studies conducted on children and young people aged between 10 and 20, (Cruz, 1996; Cid, 2002) which have found *pleasure, joy of exercising, fitness and friendship* to be the most significant motivations for sport practicing. The same studies have confirmed that motives

such as *being important*; *being popular*; *an excuse to leave the house* are less important.

However, we have found significantly statistical results concerning gender differences for the motivations *being popular* or *wish of being a champion*. Boys have identified better with the motivations *of winning*, *of competing* and *of being popular*. The observations show that boys' extrinsic motivations have concerned *being popular* and *being a champion*. Furthermore, the motivation of *competing in sport* scored significantly higher among boys than among girls. In the study conducted by Gomes (2008), which aimed at identifying the motivations of children and young people aged from 10 to 19 for practicing sport in school, they were the following: *I want to improve my skills*; *I want to have a healthy body*; and *Participation brings me joy*.

Our findings are similar concerning those of girls, especially regarding body health and the joy of sport practicing. However, we expected to get higher percentages for the answers to *making new friends*. Kilpatric, Hebert, & Bartholomew (2005) have found that motivations such as *joy*, *physical effort* and *fitness* are the most important for girls, while boys are likely to be motivated by *joy*, *participation* and *competition*.

Other studies have found that boys are more likely to brag when they are involved in contact sports, such as rugby and football, (Scraton, 1990; Smith *et al.*, 1997) by underlining the motivation of *participation to the competition*. Girls prefer sports competitions, mostly the game-like ones, with social purposes (Hellsandig, 1998; Prusak, & Darst, 2002). Another study indicates different motivations depending on gender for the participation to extracurricular sports actions. Environment and the nature of psychosocial relationships also influence the motivations of participating to sports competitions (Phongsavan, McLean, & Bauman, 2007).

In our study, we have found no considerable difference between boys and girls concerning the motivation *I want to have a healthy body*, unlike other studies, which have found higher scores for girls, who focus on healthy body and fitness. In the initial moment of the study, we suspected we would find significant differences between girls and boys for the first and the second item of the questionnaire. We assume that the great number of subjects aged between 12 and 14 favours this lack of significant differences; in this period, the psychosocial differences are not apparent. Hastie (1998) has found no differences between the perception of physical education and sport curriculum by boys and girls. However, in sports competitions, girls are more likely to focus on responsibility and social issues, while boys are likely to be leaders, team captains, referees, etc. Hence, (Eldar, 2008) physical education and sports competition in school generate behavioural changes and they develop social skills depending on the gender of the actors within the educational field.

The physical education and sport teachers should reconsider the various motives that draw girls and boys to sports competitions in school. Several authors (Siedentop, 2002; Wallhead, & OSullivan, 2005) propose different models for training athletes on the level of school competitions by accomplishing the tasks of each practice, but they all have a common denominator, a recommendation: *The teacher must monitor the activity at all times.*

## Conclusions

School – by involving the students in school competitions – provides a part of social activity, an opportunity to make new friendships, to develop connections and social relations skills, the feeling of belonging to a group, etc. The physical education and sport teachers involved in the organization of school competitions must discover favouring situations and stimulate the increase in the number of participants to these classes, outside the curriculum. Teachers must review the social behaviour during training hours – where participation is voluntary – and during competition. They must also encourage older students, by ascribing responsibilities to them in organizing activities with younger students. Considering the aforementioned aspects, teachers must pay more attention to sports activities for girls – because boys have an obviously positive motivation – in order to get them strongly motivated, first for establishing social relations of co-operations, then for maintaining a healthy body and, not least, for improving their physical level. Through the permanent care of physical education and sport teachers, sports competitions in school should be an occasion for joy, new friendships and self-discovery.

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