

## STUDY ON CHILDREN MOTIVATION IN PRACTICING SPORTS

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### Abstract

**Purpose.** Motivation is a regulator psychological phenomenon that activates the human mental life. Athletes' motivation for their performance is determined by the harmony between the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The purpose of this study is to detect the main reasons that stimulate children in practicing sports.

**Methods.** The main method of research is the survey. We had a set of 10 questions, for a total of 60 subjects aged 8 to 10 who practice individual sports, such as: track, rhythmic gymnastics and swimming. The subjects' responses were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively, and were represented in chart form.

**Results.** The subjects responded to all questions. The responses were generally similar in all sports.

**Conclusions.** At the age of 8-10, children are motivated to practice sports by personal needs that induce pleasure, but also due reasons supported by parents.

**Key words:** motivation, children, sports

### Introduction

The motivation is defined by the scientific literature as a constant, directed and persevering effort carried out by a person in order to get an aim.

The motivation becomes a psychical regulating phenomenon of the human activity. The motivation is "*the driving force of our psychical life, as anything we undertake is due to ones or other*

tensions, to be deactivated, Maslow, A. quoted by M. Modrea, 1998), ranked the needs under the form of a pyramid, having as fundament the biological needs and over them those regarding the security, affiliation, status, followed by the cognitive and esthetic ones, having the self-realisation in the top of the pyramid.

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*component parts of the motivation*" M. Modrea, 1998). All the human efforts are based on a motivation, an interest.

The motivation is based on the biological principle of homeostasis, according to which all organisms tend to keep a certain stability in relation to all changes appearing in the environment.

The motivation provides to the personality the energy and the reason of different actions.

The motivation is structured on fundamental elements acting independently in the human conduct. The component elements are disposed as follows: needs, reasons, interests, convictions, ideal of life and world outlook.

Each individual can be characterized by specific notes of his/her personality, through the stable components of the motivations, it means interests, convictions, life ideal and world outlook.

Therefore, the motivation represents a set of stimuli or motives – needs, platforms, tendencies, attractions, interests, convictions, strivings, intentions, aspirations, aims, ideals – which internally sustain the realization of certain actions, facts, attitudes P. Golu, I. Golu, 2002). In the motivation are involved unconscious, conscious, physiological, intellectual, cultural and social factors.

The needs are elements of motivation, which notice the internal imbalances which trigger

The needs appear along the human evolution and the biological and security needs are present even from the birth.

The needs of esteem and status appear at the puberty age, while the cognitive and esthetic needs become more evident in the adolescence time. The need of self-realization appears in adolescence and youth periods and personalizes the individual.

All actions, including the sport ones, have a motivating support and the motive structure directly related to the activity we carry out represents the motive.

By motive we understand the reason serving as ground for a conduct o concrete action P. Golu, 2000). The motives proceed from the awareness of the needs and they launch actions aiming their fulfillment. The motive is individually directed to an aim and it provides the necessary energy to sustain the action. However, the motives are not always conscious and some of them are launched by the unconscious.

The motives are durable, active and selective elements which direct the individual to a certain activity area, aiming to get satisfaction thanks to the carried-out activity. In the structure of a motive there have to be two components: an energizing segment P. Neveanu, Popescu, 1998) and an orienteering segment T. Crețu, 2004). The motives are the causes of the human behavior. According to A. Cosmovici

and L. Iacob 1998), “*a motive is a psychical structure, taking to the orientation, initiation and adjustment of actions towards an aim, more or less specified*”.

The convictions are ideas an individual prefers, being ready to involve himself/herself in it and to act accordingly. The convictions are durable elements firmly sustaining the individual's actions.

The ideal of life represents the future projection of an individual, the force pushing him/her to put into practice the perspective dream (M. Modrea, 1998).

The world outlook becomes the most complex component of the motivation and it is developing in the adolescence period, when the intellect is getting its highest capacity.

The level of aspiration (A. Cosmovici, L. Iacob, 1998) is stimulated by the individual's possibilities, according to his/her aptitudes. The school is the institution which has to discover the children's aptitudes and to stimulate their aspirations, supporting the young people in reaching an optimum level of aspirations.

According to some studies of Festinger, mentioned by A. Cosmovici, (1996) after a victory the level of aspiration increased in 51% of subjects and after a failure 64% of subjects decreases in the level of aspiration.

The pleasure of reward and the fear of being punished are motive structures which appear early and they play the role to stimulate and to orientate the activity (T. Crețu, 2004).

The motivation of children for movement, for the physical activity is stimulated by playing, curiosity, wish to distinguish himself/herself, to explore and to enjoy pleasure.

The children wish to play. Anytime, anywhere and endless. Playing covers many time in childhood, representing a large field of getting experience, a leisure and pleasure activity. „*A child no wishing to play is a child which personality is not emerging, being content to remain little and weak, without pride, without future*” (J. Chateau, 1976, quoted by E. Sabau, 2003).

Through the play, one can study the social behavior of individuals and implicitly of the future athletes. It is important to do not impose to the children the movements they have to learn, but to stimulate them, to excite their *curiosity*, their *wish to distinguish themselves* and particularly their *pleasure* to solve positively the action to be learned.

When the motor actions are successful appears evident the pleasure as well as the children's motor possibilities. *Playing is regarded as a pleasure, an amusement activity, free of stress, but the child comes to it with the highest seriousness, as a major opportunity to express his/her ego* (E. Sabău, 2003). In the very fact, children need to play, to join groups and to distinguish themselves inside of a group.

The play as a learning method in the sport activities allows to establish differences between the characteristics of movements and actions carried out during the training and those belonging to the play. The play represents an ideal and efficient activity to learn and a permanent motive to have activity.

The play as mean of training and the training as mean of play must to be interesting, to create situations stimulating the pleasure for the sport practice.

Playing and training have an evident motivating support and therefore these activities have to stimulate the children to be independent, to be conscious of their capacity, to stimulate their self-confidence after a victory, being supported and encouraged to overcome difficulties and to solve the motor problems. The motivating support helps to improve the results and the performances of the future athletes, to perfect the motor abilities.

The sport performance stimulates the motivation and the involvement of the children in the sport practice and it will prevail in the behavior of the future athlete. (E. Hahn, 1996).

Getting sport performances, a new level of the personal demands leads to a certain expectancy, which can rebuild a strong motivation. In the performing sport, the motivation evaluates according to the proposed aims, associated with the subjects' sport formation stages.

(S. Toma 2008) studied motivation in rowing and found out that the main reasons for the practicing were: self assertion, interest for competition, desire to win, compensation, need to move.

The motivation related to the sport performance is associated with the *hope of success* and the *fear of failure* and their intensity is measured according to the general motivation (Gabler, 1976, quoted by E. Hahn, 1996), through:

- *a positive growth* according to the plan of concrete aims and actions);
- *a negative conduct* which may appear among the parents and coaches).

Despite to the fact children have a biological need to move, some ones do not confirm it. It's the case of children having reduced aptitudes to move or living in hostile area for motion.

The possibilities to optimize the motivation in the performance sport depend on the following elements according to Hecker și Kleine, 1982, quoted by E. Hahn, 1996):

- introduction of age categories for the children involved into a training process;
- psychological education, according to the age;
- demonstration of complex motor actions, showing images; preparing tests before competitions.

(M. Pehlivan 2010) found out some reasons that motivate young people to continue sport activities: protection of the body health,

enjoyment/appreciation, development of ability, protection of mental health.

The interest for the performing sport is a result of personal experiences, through a training process (E. Hahn, 1996). For most of children, the interest for the sport activity is initially due to external factors, like the family, teachers, friends and the children's interest for sport grows later, according to their own experiences.

The child wishes to exhibit his/her motor abilities, up to his/her maximum possibilities. At the same time, he/she wants to compare, to compete and to get primacy among other children. Such tendency must be taken in mind when children are directed to a sport organized activity.

The sport, the training and the competition become activities where the child complete his/her concept of life and fix up his/her expectations.

Success and accomplishments in sport activity consolidate the children's motivation for sport. If the new learned things give pleasure, emulation and feelings during the sport competitions finishing by victories, the children's motivation and participation into sport activity will be more consolidated.

(G. E. Ilker and G. Demirhan 2010) suggest that physical education teachers have to create an motivational climate for students who practice sports.

The training orientation having the goal to improve the children's motivation to get better performances will take in mind:

- a clear performance aim in the training plan;
- never a senior training should be used for children;
- never the senior competition system should be used for children;
- training and competitions will be criteria to select children for the next stage;
- children will be not used to aggressive gestures in benefit of a victory with any price;
- the training tasks will incorporate structures in benefit of performance motivation.

The training for children will be focused on the athlete and the work will be careful, motivated, safety, avoiding any excess during the preparation, as a failure could create unpleasant emotional reactions (aggressiveness, rejection of performance ideas, interruptions of training) or subjective justifications (lack of chance, indisposition). If a failure occurs, there will be a serious analysis of its causes, specifying to each child the mistakes which led to it.

The assessment of the results has the aim to create motivating systems, by two reasons:

- to identify the deficiencies to be removed;
- to evaluate the athlete in view of a correct reward.

The training and the competition, interdependent structures, through their purposes lead to a higher level of aspirations.

An important role in directing the motivation corresponds to the coach, as an external stimulus of motivation. The teacher and the coach have to act carefully, as at the children's age the interests are not consolidated enough and they could easily give up their sport activity, if it should be difficult and restrictive.

However, there are also some aspects which can reduce the children's motivation for the sport:

- An early task to get difficult goals, so the interest of children for performance sport could be reduced;

- Training monotony, aiming exclusively higher results, can affect the stability of children's motivation, who enjoy also the emulation part of the sport activity;

- A team failure, especially in long distance competition, can reduce the child's motivation to follow the sport activity;

- Long term goals, in which there are not emulating episodes, can reduce the motivation and leave to give up the initial aim, as well as the sport activity.

(According to M. Epuran, 1996) motivation can be trained in childhood. For this the children must know that there are some goals for their activity and the objectives are planned for a period of time.

A study on the reasons of involving students in compulsive school, found out that they are not motivated to continue sport activities, because of: preparing the lessons, financial support, attendance problems, failure, reduced interest and desire and injuries and disorders (M. Pehlivan, 2010).

(I. Simonek and M. Fotkova 2006) found out the reasons for practicing sports in childhood: parents wish, children pleasure for sport, friends example, the wish win, improving fitness, improve the posture, other causes.

### Methods

The purpose of this study is to detect the main reasons that stimulate children in practicing sports.

The main method of research is the survey. We had a set of 10 questions. The subjects' responses were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively.

Subjects; 60 children aged 8 to 10 who practice individual sports, such as: gymnastics rhythmic (18), swimming (20) and athletics (22).

### Analysis of the results

#### 1. Do you like your sport?

Most of the children answered they like their sport. They like very much their sport: 95% of female gymnasts, 86% of athletes and 61% of swimmers.

However, 16% of swimmers and 9% of athletes answered they do not like so much their sport.

**Table 1** Item 1 Answers

Do you like your sport?	Gymnastics (%)	Swimming (%)	Athletics (%)
Very much	95	61	86
Much	5	23	5
Not so much	-	16	9

**2. How did you decide to do sports?**

Regarding their sport option, most of the children started in sports for their parents wish: 71% of female gymnasts, 64% of athletes and 51% of swimmers. A small part of them, 9% of athletes were involved into sport by their friends. Almost same percentage in gymnastics and athletics decided by their wish to practice sports.

**Table 2** Item 2 Answers

How did you decide to do sports?	Gymnastics (%)	Swimming (%)	Athletics (%)
So decided your parents	71%	51%	64%
So advised your friends	-	-	9
You decided it	29%	49%	27%

**3. Which reason do you do sports for?**

The strongest reason to do sports has been the pleasure; so answered 41% of swimmers, 33% of female gymnasts and 32% of athletes. The following reason was the parents' wish (39% of swimmers, 36% of athletes and 29% of female gymnasts). The wish to become a performing athlete involves a lot of female gymnasts (24%), then track and field athletes (9%) and swimmers (7%). The wish to be stronger thanks to their sport was expressed by 23% of athletes, 14% of female gymnasts and 13% of swimmers.

**Table 3** Item 3 Answers

Which reasons do you do sports for?	Gymnastics (%)	Swimming (%)	Athletics (%)
So decided the parents	29	39	36
You like sport	33	41	32
So you feel stronger	14	13	23
You believe to be a professional one	24	7	9

**4. How many times do you train every week?**

The frequency of 5-6 lessons every week could be found among 81% of female gymnasts and 39% of swimmers. Three-four times every week train 48%

of swimmers and 19% of gymnasts. All athletes have only two trainings every week.

**Table 4** Item 4 Answers

How many times do you train every week?	Gymnastics (%)	Swimming (%)	Athletics (%)
2 times/ week	-	13	100
3-4 times/week	19	48	-
5-6 times/week	81	39	-

**5. Do your parents condition your trainings/competitions to be not absent at the school, to do your home works or to have some kind of conduct)?**

The gymnasts parents less condition the sport activity (71%), followed by the athletes' (59%) and swimmers' (36%). In other words, more conditions have from their parents the swimmers (64%), then the athletes (41%) and the female gymnasts (29%).

**Table 5** Item 5 Answers

Do your parents condition your Trainings?	Gymnastics (%)	Swimming (%)	Athletics (%)
Yes	29	64	41
No	71	36	59
I do not know	-	-	-

**6. Do your parents support you to do sports?**

The majority of children consider they are very supported by their parents to do sports: 90% of female gymnasts, 84% of swimmers and 68% of athletes. Enough support get from their parents 32% of athletes, 13% of swimmers and 10% of female gymnasts. Among swimmers, 3% answered they have not enough support from their parents for the sport activity.

**Table 6** Item 6 Answers

Do your parents support you to do sports?	Gymnastics (%)	Swimming (%)	Athletics (%)
Very much	90	84	68
Enough	10	13	32
Not so much	-	3	-

**7. How do your parents support you to do sports?**

The most part of the female gymnasts (67%) consider they are supported by their parents who are present during the competitions, as well as by their positive evaluation of the results (24%) or by their encouragement (9%). The most part of the

swimmers 45%) consider they are supported by their parents who appreciate the results, 29%) and 26% by the assistance of their parents to the competitions. The athletes are supported by the parents' assistance 41%), by their encouragement 31%) and by their consideration to the results 28%).

**Table 7** Item 7 Answers

How do your parents support you to do sports?	Gymnastics (%)	Swimming (%)	Athletics (%)
Going to your competitions	67	26	41
Appreciating your results	24	45	28
Encouraging you to follow	9	29	31

**8. What do you need to get better results in your sport?**

The children consider they need first of all training: 71% of female gymnasts, 68% of swimmers and 45% of athletes. In their opinion, afterwards they need the parents' encouragement and here the percentages are very close (32% of athletes, 29% of swimmers and 24% of female gymnasts). But they need also financial support: 23% of athletes, 5% of female gymnasts and 4% of swimmers.

**Table 8** Item 8 Answers

What do you need to get better results in your sport?	Gymnastics (%)	Swimming (%)	Athletics (%)
More training	71	68	45
More encouragement from the parents/coaches	24	28	32
Financial support	5	4	23

**9. Are you talented for your sport?**

The most part of the female gymnasts consider they have talent for their sport (59%), a less percentage considers they have an outstanding talent and 3% consider themselves less gifted. Among the swimmers, 52% consider they have a lot of talent, 46% have enough talent and 2% are less gifted. The most part of the athletes (68%) consider they are very gifted, 27% have enough talent and 5% are less gifted.

**Table 9** Item 9 Answers

Are you talented for your sport?	Gymnastics (%)	Swimming (%)	Athletics (%)
Very much	38	52	68
Enough	59	46	27

Less then I need to be	3	2	5
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**10. Are you an athlete's fan?**

A high percentage of the female gymnasts (76%) have a model in their sport activity and only 24% have not such model. Only 32% of swimmers have an example to follow, but most of them (68%) have not anyone. Among the athletes, only 36% have a model to follow, but 64% have not such model.

**Table 10** Item 10 Answers

Are you an athlete's fan?	Gymnastics (%)	Swimming (%)	Athletics (%)
Yes	76	32	36
No	24	68	64
I don't know	-	-	-

**Conclusions**

- Children aged 8-10 enjoy very much their sport activities.
- The great majority of children aged 8-10 were directed to the sport disciplines by their parents.
- The main reasons impelling the children aged 8 – 10 to do sports are connected, in a considerable equal degree, to their parents' option and to their own pleasure.
- At this age of 8 – 10 years, more training sessions every week have the female gymnasts than the swimmers and athletes.
- The participation of female gymnasts in sport activities is less conditioned by the parents. On the contrary, the most part of swimmers felt restricted by their parents to take part in trainings.
- The great majority of little sportsmen receive a big support from their parents to do sports. Most of female gymnasts and athletes appreciate the support of their parents while assisting to their competitions. The swimmers appreciate the parents' support considering their encouragement regardless the results.
- The little swimmers and athletes consider they are very gifted, while the female gymnasts think they have enough talent.
- Answering the questionnaire, most of the female gymnasts confirmed they have a model to follow, but many swimmers and athletes have not an example or point of reference in their practice yet.
- At this age, 8 – 10, the reason to do sports is influenced by the parents' option
- The female gymnasts, who started early their sport activity seem to be more aware of the importance of their sport activity, being apparently more mature than their contemporary colleagues involved in swimming and track and field.

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