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Sports perception in young people Survey in the Italian primary school and comparison with the Maltese school

Riccardo IZZO¹, Filippo GOMEZ PALOMA², Diana SERENA³, Gaetano RAIOLA⁴

Abstract

Here below are the results of a comparative study on the perception of the sports practice in primary school by focusing on the possible differences between genders and classes, and assessing the difference of the sociologic aspects and the media. Studying, assessing and analyzing the issues related to physical activities offered to children of school age allows a deeper knowledge of the current psycho-physical condition of the child.

It's also important to know the cultural and social phenomena concerning young people which always represent, for better or for worse, the time they live in.

Key words: *sport, physical activity, children,*

Rezumat

În lucrarea de față se regăsesc rezultatele unui studiu comparativ în ce privește percepția practicării sportului în școala primară prin sublinierea posibilelor diferențe dintre sexe și clase cât și evaluarea diferențelor existente din punct de vedere sociologic și al mass-media.

Studierea, evaluarea și analiza rezultatelor raportate la activitățile fizice oferite copiilor de vârstă școlară permite o mai bună cunoaștere a stării psiho-fizice curente a acestora. Este de asemenea important să se cunoască fenomenul cultural și social care definește tinerii, „la bine și la rău”, la un moment dat.

Cuvinte cheie: *sport, activitate fizică, copii*

¹ Professor, Health and Sport Science School, Urbino, Italy, *e-mail: riccardo.izzo@uniurb.it*

² Professor, Salerno University, Italy

³ Graduate, Sport Science Faculty, Urbino, Italy

⁴ Contract Professor, Basilicata University, Italy

Introduction

For a long time now, and especially in the last years, there have been lots of discussions and debates regarding motor activity.

It's now universally recognized that it brings benefits to the human body at any age.

Movement is important for a complete growth and development, the prevention of certain diseases (obesity, diabetes, and hypertension), the preservation of a good health status and autonomy at an older age.

Thus it is "obvious" to reaffirm that it is necessary to educate people to practice physical activities and sports from childhood [1].

There are not just physical benefits, but also improvements of personality and intra- and interpersonal relations. To sum up, the main goal is to orient our little students towards a better life-style for their future in order to avoid the use of physical exercises as remedies for certain problems even after the end of the physical development.

So we have considered it interesting to understand the current situation of how children are motivated to practice sports and the relationship they have with it [2].

The study has analyzed pupils aged from 7 to 11, the age in which children are more "moldable", gullible and consequently addressable to a real sports education that also values a healthy mental-physical growth and even healthier dietary lifestyle habits.

Through sports, children want to get a positive confirmation of their selves together with social importance and prestige in their groups [3]. Instructors will have to check that this happens in a proper and limited way in order to avoid psychological deviations that might be troublesome or dangerous for the common psychological aspects in the development of a child's personality, nor must it generate states of anxiety of excessive apprehension that could undermine the learning path.

Materials and Methods

The survey has been carried out in the elementary school "Giovanni Pascoli" of Urbino; it has involved 159 students (81 males -M, 78 females -F) in the second grade (18 M, 21 F), third grade (21 M, 26F), fourth grade (23M, 13 F) and fifth grade (19M, 18

F), except children in the first grade since they are still unable to cope with the problems discussed in the survey.

For this research a questionnaire comprising of 21 items has been submitted to the pupils. In order to avoid possible external interferences in the answers, the compilation has been suggested in the classroom.

The survey includes open and closed questions, as follows:

Name:..... age:.....

class:..... date of the survey:.....

1. Do you practice sports? If yes, which one?
.....
2. Why have you chosen to practice or not to practice sports?
.....
3. Do you prefer team sports of individual sports?
.....
4. What does practicing sports mean to you?
.....
5. Do you like the motor activity you practice at school?
.....
6. Do you prefer the days you have to practice sports or those you don't have to? Why?
.....
7. What do you think about your instructor?
 he/she's a friend he/she's a leader
 other...
 he/she's a teacher he/she's an educator
8. What's your relationship with him/her?
.....
9. Is there an athlete you like? Who is he/she?
.....
10. What's the most important thing to become a good athlete?
.....
11. Among my sports mates I am:
 the best in the average
 among the best the worst
12. Which is the sport you know best?
.....
13. How have you known that?
.....
14. Do you know the name of a player? Which one?

- basketball..... football.....
 - volleyball..... swimming.....
 - track-and-field..... cycling.....
15. How many players are in a team of...?:
- basketball..... football.....
 - volleyball..... rugby.....
 - handball..... five-a-side football.....
16. Would you like to become a sports champion? Why?
-
17. Do you think it's most important to win a match or respect the opponents and game rules?
-
18. Do you think that violent supporters are sportsman?
-
19. Why do you think sports is important?
- Practicing sports is good for the body and health
 - It makes you earn a lot of money
 - It gives the opportunity of participating in many TV shows
 - Other
20. Do you know badminton?
- yes not
21. Have you ever played ping pong?
- yes not

The collected data have been subsequently analyzed through the basic statistic analysis (average) and in relationship with the different external factors that may influence the children's ideologies and choices.

Results

The results are interesting.

To the question "Do you practice sports? If yes, which one?" 81.8% of the students (M:41.5% F:40.3%) have given a positive answer, while 18.2% (M:9.4% F:8.8%) have claimed the opposite. In both cases there's "supremacy" of men on women since they seem to be more consistent in the sports practice during the years (figures 1 and 2). The highest percentage of subjects practicing sport is in the third grade (24.5%). It's important how this percentage, instead of increasing, decreases in the last grades (with only 19.5% in the fifth grade, something that doesn't happen with the non-sport practice and the preference of the physical activity

One explanation could be the fact that children want to do something different like watching television, playing on the computer or just playing with their friends. This concept can be observed in the answers given to question no.6, in which a preference can be observed during the non-sport practice days for other activities, (for a 7.5% of the subjects): "I don't like sports"(3.1%); "it takes too much time"(0.6%).

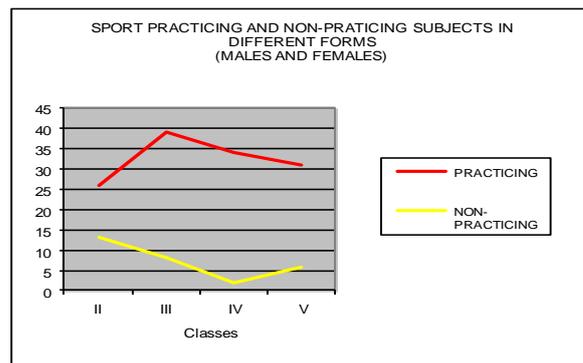


Figure 1. Sport practicing and non practicing subjects

For what concerns the days they do physical activity they have chosen "having fun and staying in company" (64.1%), the main reason why guys are more attracted to sports; "learning new things and improving myself" (3.1%), which represents the need to fill the child's intrinsic motivation; "doing a lot of exercise and keeping fit" (2.5%); "relaxing and avoiding school commitments" (1.9%); "to spend time" (0.6%).

These answers reflect the reasons that have prompted children to practicing or not practicing sports and the importance they give to it. This last concept can be linked to the importance of sports [4]; among the assertions (already in the questionnaire) the most chosen one by children has been: "doing sports is good for the body and health" (86.8%, M:42.1% F:44.6%), followed by "it makes you earn a lot of money" (3.8% - only males) and "It gives the opportunity of participating in many TV shows" (0.6%- only females).

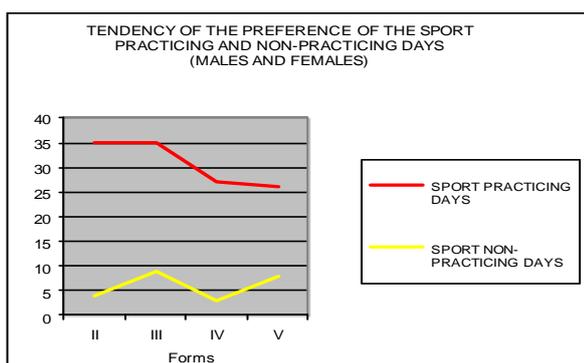


Figure 2. Tendency for the preference manifested for sports during practicing and non practicing days

Coming back to the first question: (“Do you practice sports? If yes, which one?”), it has been possible to outline how football, the most practiced sport, has been replaced by swimming (27%: M:5.7% F:21.4%); right after football (22% - only males) comes dancing (10.1% only females), basketball (9.4%- only males), volleyball (6.3%- only females), martial arts (5%: M:3.8% F:1.3%), gymnastics (4.4%: M:0.6% F:3.8%), track-and-field (1.3%- only females), and finally roller skating (0.6%- only females) (Figure 3).

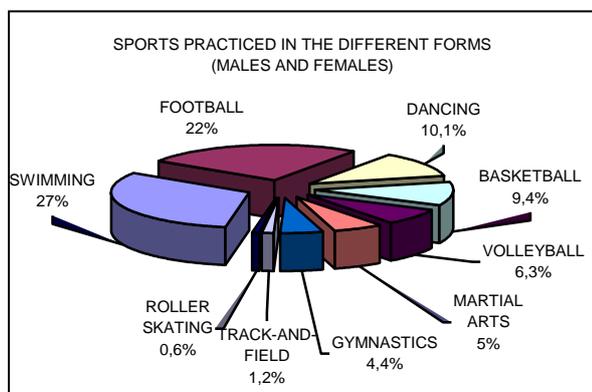


Figure 3. Sports practiced

All these sports are constantly practiced during the years except from roller skating (absent in the entire grade classes but the second grade class) and the martial arts (absent among the fifth grade students) [5].

These data show how males prefer team sports, since a great percentage of the subjects have expressed this preference, in contrast with the females’ preferences. Indeed, 79.3% of the pupils (males and females) affirmatively prefer team sports, while a 18.2% prefer the individual ones (Figure 4).

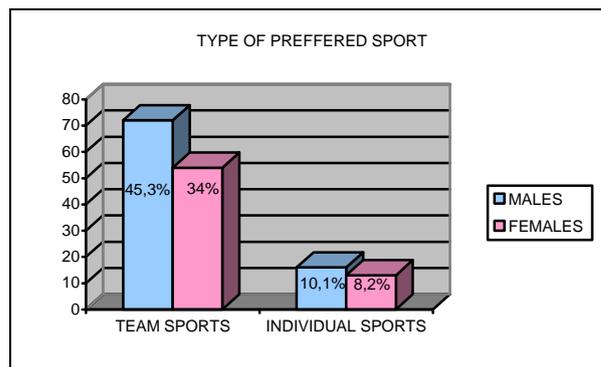


Figure 4. Preferred sport

This preference confirms one of the reasons behind practicing sports, i.e having an antourage and making new fiends. Moreover, according to the data obtained from question no.12, (Which is the sport you know best?), we can affirm that the most practiced sports are those they subjects are more familiar with (football 42.8%; swimming 19.5%; volleyball 11.3%; dancing 10.7%; basketball 10.1%; gymnastics 6.3%; martial arts 5.7%; track-and-field 2.5%; roller skating 0.6%;).

But these data also confirm that the more popular sports, both on television and in the newspapers get more followers than the others [6].

As we can see, 42.1% of the subjects state that they have become familiar with the sport they practice by watching it on television, 37.1% thanks to their family or friends, 22.6% by practicing it (this makes us understand why the most practiced sports are the those they’re more familiar with) and finally, only 3.8% through their school.

From the answers given to the other questions # emerges once again the importance of the mass-media in sports popularization [7]. Through question no.14 the subjects were asked to write the names of certain sports players, and they have shown to be more acquainted with the names of football players (20, among whom we find: Kakà 23,3%; Totti 16.3%; Del Piero 22%.....), followed by cyclists (7: Basso 5%, Pantani 3,1%, Cunego 1.9%....), basketball players (4: Jordan 25,8%, Iverson 0.6%, Bulleri 0.6%...), swimmers (3: Magnini 8.2%, Rosolino 3.1%, Pellegrini 1.2%), volleyball players (3: Basciano 1.2%, Togut 0.6%, Cisollo 0.6%), the track-and-field athletes (1: May 1.2%). Some of them also have been named sport “idols”: Valentino Rossi (12.6%), Kakà (12.6%), Del Piero (10.7%), Jordan (8.8%). Also for question no.15,

concerning the number of players in a specific sports team, the highest number of correct answers concerned football (47.2%), followed by basketball (16.3%), five-a-side football (9.4%) and volleyball (6.3%), while rugby and handball received no answer; this makes us reflect on the little general knowledge about certain sports which are not very popular. The situation of badminton is also critical, as only 2.5% of the subjects are familiar with this sport. The situation is better for ping pong with a 78% of the subjects stating to have played it at least once, but there's probably a social aspect in it since this sport can be considered more a recreational game instead of a real sport.

The mass media have influenced not only the promotion of sports but also the ideal sports champion [7]; in fact, when the subjects were asked if and why they would like to become a sports champions, 80.5% answered positively and 14.5% negatively; among the reasons why they'd like to become champions, the main one has been "to become famous and be admired" (34.6% of which M:21.4% and F:13.2%), followed by "I like and enjoy it" (13.2% of which M:7.5% and F: 5.7%), "to win" (8.2% of which M:1.9% and F: 6.3%), "to improve" not only from a physical point of view but also with regard to the life quality (3.1% of which M:2.5% and F: 0.6%), "to show my abilities" (F:1.9%). Among the reasons that justify the negative answers are: "to not have any commitment and do something else" (3.1% of which M: 2.5% and F: 0.6%), "for the fear of making mistakes and confronting myself with others" (1.2% of which M:0.6% and F: 0.6%), "because of a lack of aptitude" and "I don't like it" with 0.6% - only males.

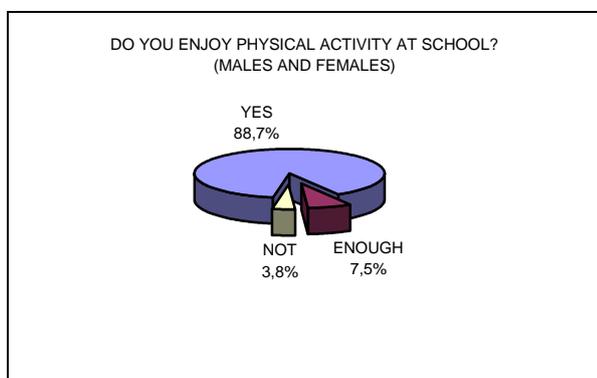


Figure 5. Percentage for the question: do you enjoy physical activity at school?

In the opinion of children, among the features that a great athlete should have are the following:

Having physical predisposition and working hard in trainings (77.3%), statement which incorporates different answers such as: "training and working hard", "paying attention to the trainings", "learning and improving", "doing teamwork" and "having physical skills".

- Having fun and enjoying it (10.1%).

- Having self-confidence and interacting with others (8.8%), also here there are more answers concerning the psychological sphere, such as: "being fair", "having self-confidence", "observing others" and "knowing how to socialize".

Within the educational and sporting field the instructor proves to be of main importance, becoming a point of reference for his students [8]. Among the 5 options given to question no.7 "what do you think about your instructor" (he/she is a friend, a teacher, a leader or an educator), 37.1% (M:22.6% and F:14.5%) of the subjects see in him/her a friend, the same percentage opted for teacher (M:16.3% and F:20.7%), a 9.4% (F:5.7% and M:3.8%) considered him/her an educator and finally, 1.9% and only females see their instructor as a leader. For what concerns the relationship between students and instructors, a 55.3% of the subjects describes it as pleasant, 25.1% as fun and friendly, 3.8% as strict and rigid and 1.9% as respectful; the latter definition has been given only by the fifth grade students, perhaps because of a greater maturity of the subjects compared to the younger pupils, while in defining the relationship as rigid and severe there could be a sense of respect. The empathy of the coach is of main importance, it can become a reason to attend more willingly, or even to not abandon the practiced activity.

Another "institution", a way to make kids come closer to sports, is the activity practiced at school and, in this case, the results are quite positive since a huge majority of the subjects (88.7%) states that physical activity at school is fun and pleasant, only a 3.8% claims the opposite and a 7.5% affirms to enjoy it enough.

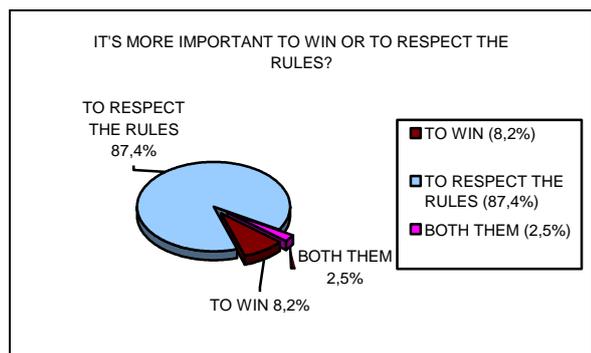


Figure 6. Percentage for question: It's important to win or not?

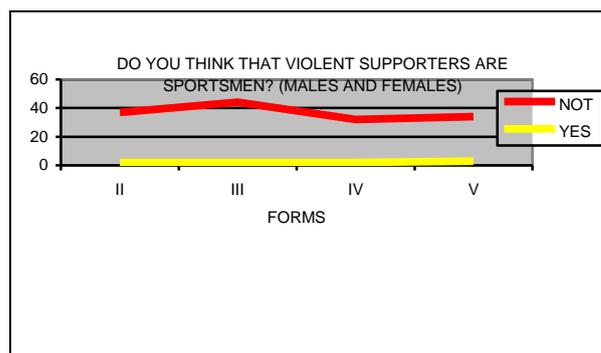


Figure 8. Percentage for question: Violent supporters are sportsmen?

These data are important because if kids have fun while exercising at school there will be a greater chance to see the same kids also practicing sports outside of school (Figure 5).

Another aspect which affects the world of sports and that has burst out in the last period is aggressiveness among fans and players [9].

Children were asked if, in their opinion, violent supporters can be considered sportsmen or not (Figure 6). The result is quite comforting since there's a 92.4% giving negative answers and only a 5.7% giving positive answers even though the first result has diminished slightly in recent years, a sobering thing because as time goes by there should be an even greater awareness on the matter.

The last two questions, answers of which can be found in the following two figures, are more addressed to the individual. In one of these we have wanted to investigate the perception the subjects have on their selves compared to their sport mates making it possible to understand the personality of the child; it is certainly not a simple task, especially because we don't know them at all.

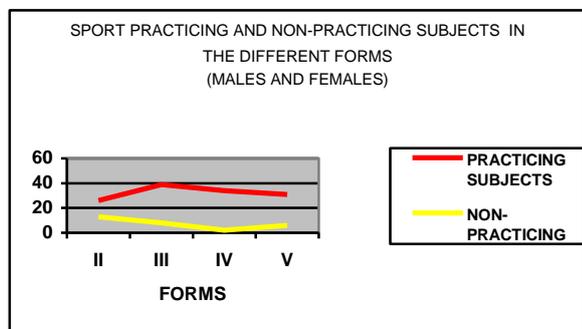


Figure 7. Sport practicing and non-practicing subjects

54.7% (M:30.8% F:23.9) define themselves as one of the best, a 27% (M:10,1% F:17 %) as average, 8.2% (F:3.1% M:5%) as the best and finally 2.5% (M:0.6% F:1.9%) as the worst (see figure 7). As you can see, male subjects have a better self-esteem than female subjects; in fact, the first identify themselves as the best and among the best, while the latter see themselves as average or the worst. Finally, the last question asks if it is more important to win or to show respect to the opponents and to respect the rules of the game. According to most of the subjects (87.4%) it is more important to respect your opponents and the rules of the game than to win (8.2%); a 2.5% of the subjects have marked both answers.

Conclusion

The data obtained from the questionnaire and presented above have provided a significant image of the situation regarding sports and the way primary school pupils perceive it and, although the names may be different today, the results wouldn't differ that much.

An important aspect is the satisfactory percentage of subjects (81.8%) included in the study that practice sports even if 18.2% of them claim the opposite. It is important how the latter percentage increases over the years, and the same pattern can be noticed with regard to preference for the days in which there's no sport practice.

The main cause for which some of the subjects do not practice sports is the lack of motivation, since they don't want to do it or they don't have time for it. This must make us reflect upon the problem because, practicing sports should be one of the most "pleasant" educational tools, a tool that should not

be hampered by the parents, who should take the children from an early age to the gym, the swimming pool, etc.

Thus, an intervention aiming not only individual but the whole family would be necessary [10].

Another "institution" responsible for the child's growth is the school, in which the acquisition of knowledge and skills takes place, but above all it stands as the first context in which the child, outside of his/her family, begins to relate with others and to undertake this arduous path that leads to growth.

The results of the survey show that the school also requires attention as it is highlighted the fact that it does not play a role important enough in the promotion of sports activities.

Actually, despite the fact that the vast majority (82.4%) states that the motor activities they are involved in at school are pleasant, only 3.8% of the subjects claim to have become familiar with the their favorite sport (also being the practiced one) at school. Therefore, at the same time, there's a great educational potential as well as a very didactic-educational superficiality.

It's also important to notice how football is the most popular sport, undoubtedly because everybody loves it but also because the mass media gives it great importance, and we all know that it plays a key role in the promotion and popularization of sports and in the creation of sports idols [7].

The attention of the media on certain sports personalities has influenced children, for whom the main motivation to become a sports champion is to become famous and to be admired. But included in this motivation, apart from the most frivolous and superficial aspects (to become famous and appear on TV) that might now seem obvious, there might be a "deeper" aspect, such as becoming the best, which can be interpreted as a form of social redemption, as well as being accepted and respected by others.

Notwithstanding it all, the aspect that children appreciate the most out of sports is the fun they have while practicing it and the possibility of having an entourage and of socializing.

Moreover, from the answers given to the questions concerning the importance of sports and sportsmanship, we can say that, at least from a theoretical point of view, children have understood

the importance of sport and are aware and oriented towards respect and otherness.

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