

Perceived Academic, Psychological, And Social Benefits Of Participation In Sports Activities Among University Students

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Abstract—This study focuses on the multiple benefits of student participation in sports activities, based on findings derived from a questionnaire conducted with students of the Faculty of History and Philology at the University of Tirana. Recognizing the gaps in existing local literature supporting the need for increased student involvement in sports activities, as well as the various challenges students face, both academically and psychologically, the findings of this study aim to assist administrative and teaching staff, as well as students themselves, in better understanding the current situation and identifying opportunities for improvement in this field.

The results confirm a positive perception among students toward physical education courses and other sports activities during their university years, highlighting the benefits and importance of sport in fostering young individuals who are physically, mentally, and emotionally healthy.

This study seeks to explore the broad range of positive impact of sports on students, emphasizing its role in personal development, psychological well-being and health, social integration, and the sense of belonging to a group or social and institutional community. The research underlines the need for further studies in diverse cultural and geographical contexts to deepen the understanding of these dynamics and serves as an initial step toward future quantitative research aimed at objectively measuring and enhancing the understanding of the relationship between participation in sports activities and the development of various student skills.

Keywords—*participation in sports activities, students, physical education, personal development, physical and psychological well-being, educational strategies and policies.*

INTRODUCTION

Sports culture and participation in physical activities vary from one country to another, as well as across different stages of human life. While in childhood and adolescence individuals tend to be widely and actively engaged in various games and sports activities, during youth and later stages there is

a progressively noticeable decline in both the quantity and quality of engagement in sports activities.

The years of university studies represent an important period for young people, not only for their academic development but also for their spiritual, physical, and psychological growth. Contemporary literature from various countries consistently demonstrates that student participation in sports activities not only benefits them physically but also has a positive impact on academic performance, social integration, and overall mental and emotional well-being (Siedentop, Hastie & Van der Mars, 2019; Liu, 2022 & Eime et al., 2013).

However, alongside these professional studies, we often encounter contradictory attitudes and opinions that emphasize the need for students to focus solely on academic achievement, and a tendency to believe that any other sporting or cultural activity may distract them from attaining appropriate academic results during these crucial years of university study.

In this context, it is essential to understand the multifaceted benefits of engaging in sports and maintaining meaningful participation in sports activities among students, which often intersect and help create an environment that also supports improved academic outcomes.

In our universities, physical education occupies a considerable place within the curriculum, encompassing a range of physical activities that students undertake throughout the academic year. These activities may be part of the mandatory curriculum selected by students, or they may take place within the framework of participation in friendly matches, championships, or other competitions, particularly when students are members of faculty teams.

However, considering that the literature in this field (Gaston-Gayles, 2004 & Holt & Neely, 2011) increasingly emphasizes the numerous positive aspects of student participation in sports activities, it remains the responsibility of all professionals in the field to pay greater attention to the need and opportunities to provide students with adequate time, spaces, and environments. This is essential to ensure

that physical education is not perceived as a secondary or almost unnecessary subject.

In this context, the present study aims to examine the benefits of physical education and sports activities in universities, as well as the current opportunities for their development and improvement.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was designed to explore university students' perceptions of participation in sports activities and its impact on their academic, psychological, and social development. The research aimed to capture both the benefits and perceived limitations of sports engagement during university years, as well as students' attitudes toward physical education and extracurricular sports participation.

A cross-sectional survey design was employed. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed by the author, specifically designed for the purposes of this study. The instrument was distributed among students of the Faculty of History and Philology at the University of Tirana. The questionnaire consisted of 13 items organized into thematic sections addressing sports participation, academic performance, psychological well-being, social integration, institutional belonging, time allocation, and perceived advantages or disadvantages of sports involvement.

The study sample included 204 students aged between 18 and 25 years, enrolled at both Bachelor's and Master's levels. Participation was voluntary, and responses were collected anonymously to ensure confidentiality and reduce response bias. The sample comprised 16% male and 84.8% female students, a distribution consistent with the gender composition of the faculty rather than a sampling imbalance.

The questionnaire included both closed-ended and structured opinion-based questions. Items were designed to assess: (i) frequency and duration of sports participation, (ii) perceived effects on academic performance, (iii) psychological and emotional well-being, (iv) social integration and institutional belonging, and (v) motivational factors and perceived barriers to participation in sports. In addition, specific questions explored students' sense of competition, self-perception, teamwork skills, and institutional pride in relation to sports engagement.

For analytical purposes, responses were categorized into descriptive frequency distributions and percentage-based summaries. Comparative interpretations were made across response categories (e.g., positive, neutral, negative perceptions) in order to identify dominant trends in students' attitudes and experiences. The findings were interpreted in relation to existing theoretical frameworks, particularly social identity theory and literature on self-efficacy, motivation, and youth development through sport.

Although the study is based on a single institutional sample, the results are considered indicative of

broader tendencies in university student populations, particularly in similar academic and sociocultural contexts. The methodological approach allows for exploratory insights into the role of sports participation in higher education, while also providing a foundation for future comparative studies across faculties, institutions, or regions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In an effort to contribute to the local literature with new findings that reinforce the positive impacts of student participation in sports activities, and to directly capture students' perceptions of physical education, its benefits, and the challenges of engaging in sports during university years, the author designed a questionnaire, which was widely distributed among students of the Faculty of History and Philology at the University of Tirana. Although our study is based on the findings of this questionnaire, which, nevertheless, reflects the results of a specific sample we are confident that the conclusions drawn are consistent with and applicable to a broader context.

The purpose of the questionnaire was to examine students' overall perceptions of the physical and psychological benefits of participation in sports activities, as well as its potential drawbacks, the amount of time they dedicate to such activities, and the impact of sports engagement on their academic performance, overall emotional and psychological state, and social integration. Questions were systematically designed and organized into distinct subcategories to evaluate the level of sports engagement and its associated psychological, social, and academic outcomes. They were intended to examine the influence of such engagement on the sense of social and institutional belonging, as well as on broader dimensions of emotional and personal experience, including the pride derived from participation in a shared project or passion, the competitive drive, and the motivation to achieve individual and collective success.

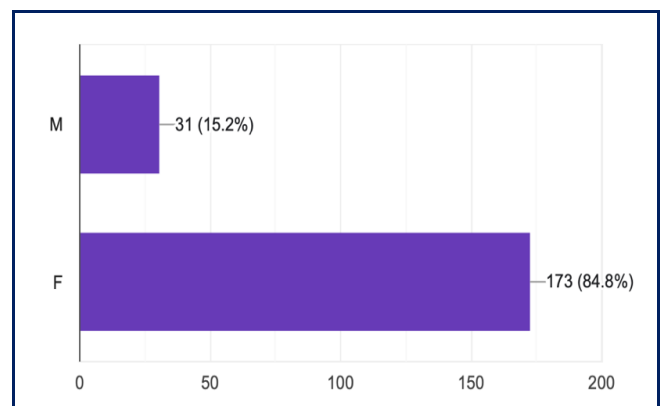


Figure 1. Gender distribution of respondents (M-male; F-female)

A total of 204 students, primarily aged 18–25, from both Bachelor's and Master's levels, participated in this study and responded to 13 questionnaire items. This not only indicates that the questionnaire was well

received, but also reflects their interest in the topic. Of the 204 participants, 16% were male and 84% were female a distribution that reflects the gender ratio within the Faculty of History and Philology rather than a lower level of interest among male students.

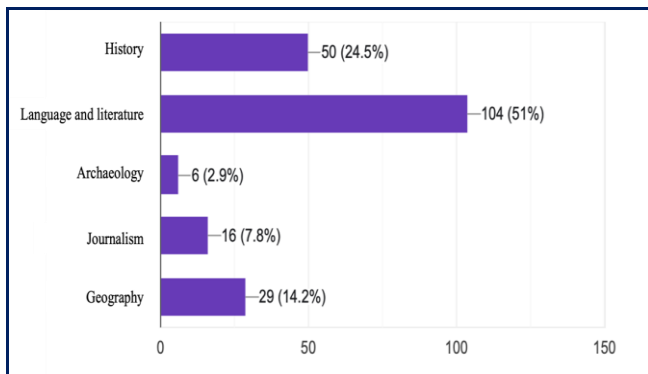


Figure 2. Student Distribution Across Departments

The distribution of students across departments revealed notable differences in representation, partly reflecting the overall size of each department. The majority of respondents belonged to the Department of Language and Literature, accounting for 104 students (51%). This was followed by the Department of History, with 50 students (24.5%). A smaller proportion of participants were from the Department of Geography (29 students; 14.2%) and the Department of Journalism (16 students; 7.8%). The least represented group was the Department of Archaeology, with only 6 students (2.9%). Overall, the sample was predominantly composed of students from Language and Literature, while the remaining departments were represented to a lesser extent.

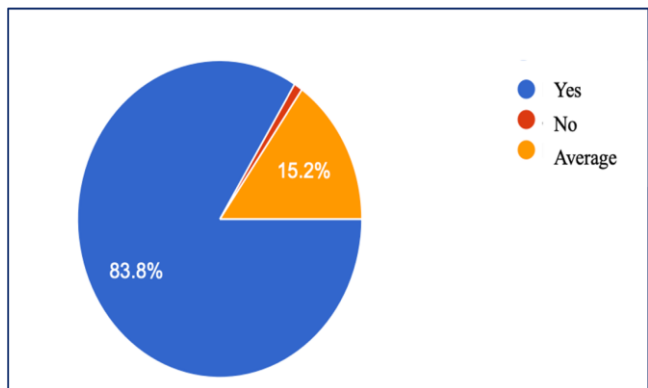


Figure 3. Perceived Effect of University Sports Activities on Academic Progress

Regarding the potential conflict between participation in university sports activities and the time students are expected to dedicate to academic progress, respondents to the questionnaire indicated that the opposite is true; namely, that engagement in sports activities also supports their academic work and outcomes. Only 13 students (0.6% of respondents) considered involvement in sports activities to be a hindrance to their academic progress, while 22 students (1%) reported that it may be moderately obstructive. In contrast, 83% of

students expressed a strong conviction that participation in sports activities has a positive impact on their academic performance.

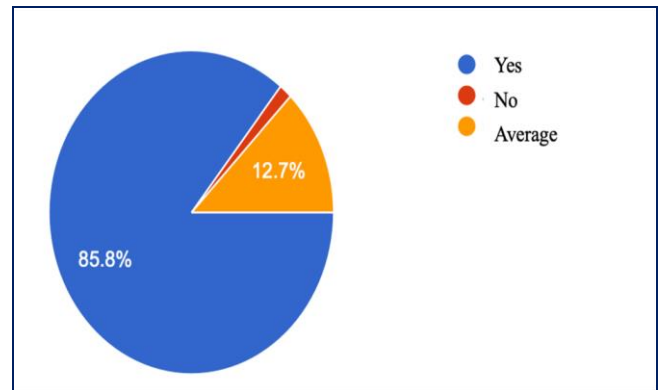


Figure 4. Perceived Social Benefits of Participation in University Sports Activities

Similarly, along the same line, students responded to a question aimed at assessing the impact of university sports activities on the quality of their social life and their social integration within the university. Only 2 students (0.9%) did not believe that sports activities have a positive effect on social interaction with other students, while 26 students (12.7%) considered that sports have a moderate influence in the social domain. In contrast, 85.8% of students expressed confidence that participation in sports activities represents a valuable opportunity for enhancing social life and promoting social integration within the university.

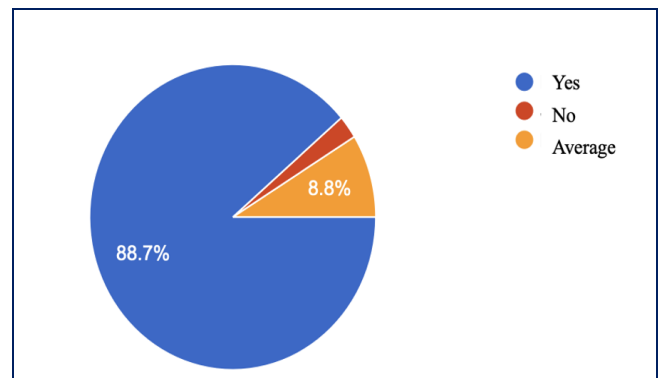


Figure 5. Perceived overall benefit of Participation in University Sports Activities

Within this set of questions, students also reported on the positive impact of sports activities on their overall psychological well-being and mental health. Only 5 students (2.4% of respondents) indicated that they did not observe any positive effect on their psychological state, whereas 18 students (8.8%) reported a moderate impact. Notably, 181 students (88.7% of participants) expressed a strong conviction that participation in university sports activities has contributed to an improvement in their psychological well-being.

Soulliard and colleagues have argued that, from a psychological perspective, participation in sports positively contributes to increased self-confidence and

the development of other competencies, such as more effective life and time planning (Bandura, 1997; Weinberg & Gould, 2018; Soulliard et al., 2019). The structured nature of sports activities within class hours or other pre-planned activities encourages the development of time management skills, a highly important element for achieving the necessary balance between academic and non-academic responsibilities (Kimball & Freysinger 2003).

In line with the literature on the impact of sport (Gaston-Gayles, 2004; Holt & Neely, 2011) the vast majority of students affirm the multifaceted benefits of engaging in sports activities at the social, psychological, and academic levels. When asked how they would respond to someone who advises them not to participate in sports but to focus solely on their university studies, most participants in the study listed a number of benefits they have personally experienced from involvement in sports during their university years. These include improved concentration and discipline; reduced levels of stress and anxiety related to coursework and examinations; improved health status; a better balance between time spent in indoor and outdoor environments; strengthened social relationships; improved mood; relief from the monotony of studying; the creation of a healthy balance between academic work and physical activity; the development of time management skills; achieving balance across multiple aspects of life; enhanced teamwork abilities; increased productivity; and, consequently, improved academic performance.

Similarly, numerous researchers have argued for the positive impact of sports activities on the acquisition and development of various skills and behavioral habits that are highly beneficial for young people, particularly at this stage of life. At an age when university students are strongly motivated to excel in the academic field and in other areas of interest, involvement in sports activities appears to support the improvement of interaction skills, teamwork, a sense of competition, and a sense of institutional or community belonging (Kimball & Freysinger, 2003; Sabo et al., 2005; Hausmann, Schofield & Woods, 2007).

In the context of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1978), participants in our study responded to two questions aimed at exploring the effects of participation in sports activities on strengthening the sense of belonging and institutional pride. To the first question, whether university sports activities had helped students feel more part of the university, 146 students, or 71.6% of them, affirmed their positive impact on developing a sense and perception of being part of a community or organization with shared goals.

Similarly, responses to the second related question, which addressed institutional pride and the experience of being part of a unified university team, particularly in competitions against other teams, showed that over 70% of students responded positively, thereby confirming findings from

researchers such as Hausmann, Schofield, and Woods (2007).

The findings of our study support the idea that student engagement in sports activities fosters a sense of belonging, helping them feel part of a social community and a shared purpose. Consequently, this contributes to the creation of a welcoming and healthy environment for their psychological well-being, while also facilitating the achievement of better academic outcomes.

Students were asked about their sense of competitiveness in relation to participation in sports activities. The majority of respondents (60.8%) reported that participation increases their sense of competition, while 13.7% stated that it increases it significantly. Additionally, 19.1% of students indicated that it increases their sense of competition to some extent, whereas only a small proportion (6.4%) reported little or no effect.

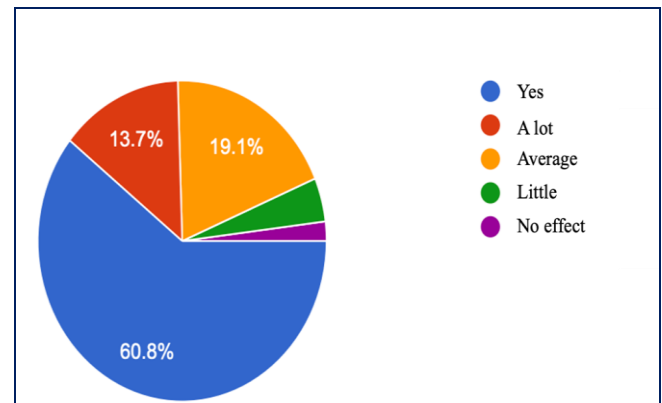


Figure 6. Self-Reported Effect of Sports Activities on Students' Competitive Attitudes

Another aspect of the benefits derived from participation in sports activities emerged through the question of whether sport fosters in young people a sense of competition and the desire to be the best both in sports and in their studies. The literature suggests that self-esteem and the level of effectiveness in the activities we perform are also shaped by active participation and success in sports (Lev & Weinish 2020).

In our case as well, the overwhelming majority of students expressed strong confidence in the positive impact of sports activities on the development of a healthy ambition and drive to achieve high results in both sport and academic work. A total of 143 students, or 70% of them, acknowledged the positive influence of sport in this regard, confirming that it contributes to increased self-confidence, enhanced self-esteem, and an improved overall perception of one's values and abilities, thereby playing a significant role in achieving academic success and beyond.

Another important question concerned students' views on the potential negative aspects of participating in sports activities during their university years, whether they had encountered any, and their

responses were quite striking. The overwhelming majority of students reported that they did not identify any negative aspects, apart from occasional risks of physical injury or fatigue, while further emphasizing their positive experiences with sports engagement.

Their responses to the question of whether they had received parental support for participating in sports, or had instead encountered opposition, suggest a certain general hesitation among parents to encourage involvement in sports, mainly due to concerns that it might distract from academic studies, though not at alarming levels. Around 40 students, or 19% of them, stated that they had only partial support or no support at all from their parents for engaging in sports activities, whereas 80% reported having full parental support, confirming a growing awareness of the benefits of sports participation.

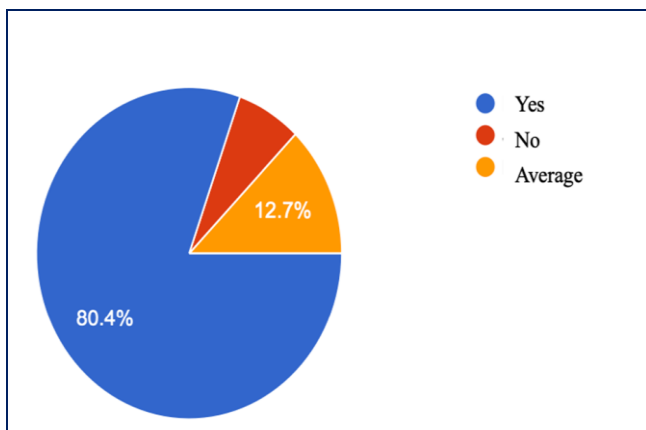


Figure 7. Parental Support for Sports Participation

In our study, particular attention was also given to gathering students' opinions regarding the adequacy of the time allocated for sports activities within the approved academic program, as well as whether physical education was a subject they attended willingly or merely as an academic obligation. Only 12 students, or 5.8% of them, stated that they engage in university sports activities because they feel obliged to do so, whereas 192 students, or 94% of the participants in our study, reported that they take part in university sports activities voluntarily and with genuine interest. Such a result is truly remarkable and indicative of students' overall positive perception of physical and sports activities, as a result of the experiences and personal benefits they have gained through their involvement in university sports.

This finding is further reinforced by responses regarding their willingness to devote more hours per week to sports activities. Only 27 out of 204 students, or 13% of them, stated that they would not like to spend more time on sports activities, whereas 177 students, or 87%, expressed a desire to dedicate more time each week to sport.

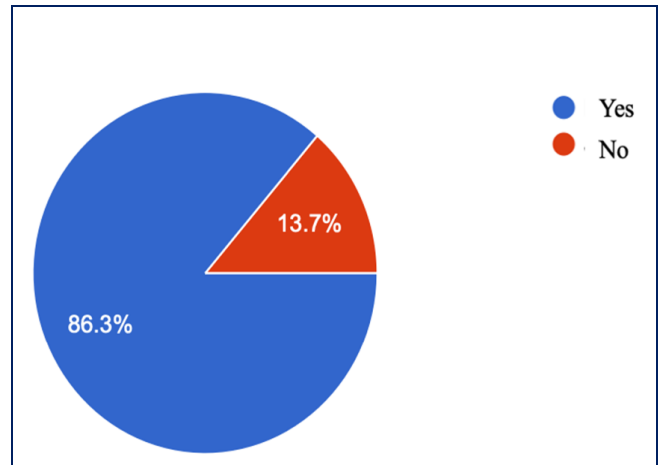


Figure 8. Students' Willingness to Increase Time Spent on Sports Activities

This finding is understandable and reasonable, considering that the majority of the surveyed students. 141 students or 69% reported spending 0–2 hours per week on physical and sports activities. In contrast, only 16 students, or 7.8%, stated that they spend more than 4 hours per week, while 47 students, or 23%, reported spending 2–4 hours per week.

Despite the limited amount of time students report dedicating to physical activities during the week, the fact that they express a desire to be more involved in university sports activities supports the idea that they perceive sport as a way to improve the quality of their lives and their university education. It is seen as a functional pathway toward achieving psychological and physical well-being, as well as professional and personal development (Newman, 2020).

On the other hand, this perspective provides an opportunity for the relevant institutions responsible for academic programs to assess needs and possibilities for revising the duration of physical education courses in higher education, or for expanding opportunities for student participation in sports activities, both within and beyond the formal curriculum.

CONCLUSIONS

The positive effects of sport on physical, psychological, and emotional well-being are well recognized. However, especially in today's context, where other activities, largely driven by technological developments, may diminish young people's motivation and commitment to engage in sports, it becomes even more important to emphasize the multiple benefits of sport.

Our study highlights several key findings regarding the impact of sports participation on students' physical, psychological, emotional, and social well-being, as well as their overall perceptions of the skills they develop through engagement in sports activities during their university years, both in academic and social terms.

The study reaffirms that, in general, students do not perceive a conflict between involvement in sports

activities and academic success, further emphasizing the benefits of engagement in university sports. The findings indicate that, regardless of their level of participation in sports activities, students view sport and physical education as a valuable opportunity to achieve a balance between academic commitments, leisure, socialization, maintaining good physical condition, and psychological resilience.

Students do not report negative aspects of their engagement in sports, instead highlighting the role of sport as a highly important means of achieving multiple benefits simultaneously, both in terms of personal development and the improvement of academic performance without significant financial or time costs for students.

In the context of social identity theory, the findings reaffirm that sport helps students develop a sense of group belonging and shared pride in achieving common goals, while also significantly enhancing their self-perception and sense of role within a group or community.

Our findings indicate that participation in sports activities leads to increased self-confidence, improved social interaction, a stronger social position within the group, greater trust and cooperation, enhanced ambition and competitive spirit, and reinforced commitment to achieving shared objectives. Overall, it contributes to improved physical, mental, and emotional well-being, thereby increasing the likelihood of better academic performance as well.

Another important aspect of our study is that it revealed that, regardless of the intensity of participation in sports activities, there is a generally positive attitude among students toward their sports experiences at university, as well as toward the skills they develop through them. In this regard, while the study outlines a general framework of the multiple benefits and advantages of developing physical education courses and organizing various sports activities outside the formal curriculum, further expansion of this line of research into other contexts, faculties, or cities remains important.

Such an extension would not only allow for a better understanding of the level of social awareness regarding the positive effects of sport in encouraging students toward social and academic success, but, more importantly, would also highlight the current need to reassess strategies, educational policies, and university curricula.

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