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Studying the motivation of students to participate in table tennis activities

Abstract: Personal interest, inner conviction and need for motor activity, i.e., the students' enjoyment of sports activities in general, and the school facilities determine the extracurricular forms of teaching Physical Education and Sports in schools. Their main tasks are aimed at introducing adolescent students to systematic sports activities, expanding and improving their knowledge, skills and habits in the respective sports planned for studying in Physical Education and Sports classes. Developing extracurricular forms of sports activities and increasing the scope of participating students is one of the possibilities for purposeful and organized realization of the objectives of Physical Education and Sports during their free time. The aim of the present study is to determine the motivation of students to participate in the educational and training process of table tennis. The object of the research are the characteristics of the educational and training process of young table tennis players. The respondents in the survey are 42 students practising table tennis. After the generalizations made in the text, the following conclusions can be drawn: adolescent students practising table tennis clearly state their motivation for participating in organized sports activities and receive the support of their parents for taking part in an organized educational and training process in table tennis; and sports activities have a positive effect on their physical condition and they demonstrate a drive for success based on motivation and competition.

Keywords: table tennis, students, sport, motivation, educational and training process.



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Проучване мотивацията на ученици за участие в занимания по тенис на маса

Абстракт: Личният интерес, вътрешно убеждение и потребност от двигателна дейност, т.е. от удоволствието от дейността сама по себе си на учениците към спортни занимания и материалната база на училището определят извънурочните форми по физическо възпитание и спорт в училищата. Основните им задачи са насочени към привличане на подрастващите за системни спортни занимания, разширяване и усъвършенстване на знанията, уменията и навиците им в съответните спортове, планирани за изучаване по физическо възпитание и спорт. Развитието на извънурочните форми за занимания със спорт и увеличаване обхвата на учениците е една от възможностите за целенасочено и

организирано реализиране на задачите на физическото възпитание и спорт през свободното им време. Целта на настоящото анкетно проучване е да се установи мотивацията на ученици за участие в учебно-тренировъчен процес по тенис на маса. Обект на изследването са признаците, характеризиращи учебно-тренировъчния процес на млади състезатели по тенис на маса. Контингент на изследването са 42 ученика, трениращи тенис на маса. След направените в текста обобщения може да се генерират следните изводи: подрастващите ученици, трениращи тенис на маса, ясно заявяват мотивацията си за участие в организирани занимания със спорт и получават подкрепата на родителите си за участие в организиран учебно-тренировъчен процес по тенис на маса;. спортните занимания влияят положително върху физическото им състояние и демонстрират стремеж към успех, обоснован от мотивацията и конкуренцията.

Ключови думи: тенис на маса, ученици, спорт, мотивация, учебно-тренировъчен процес.



Introduction

According to Tsvetan Zhelyazkov, “at the modern stage of human development, education is a complex social phenomenon with a high degree of significance. The educational system is a major factor determining the development of society and, at the same time, the functioning of an educational system is a consequence to the demands of society. The development of society is characterized by a clearly expressed advancing strategy for understanding nature and subordinating it to human needs. At the heart of this process lies the desire to minimize people’s physical efforts. This leads to a highly pronounced psychophysical disharmony in the biosocial nature of people, which, combined with a number of negative ecological and stress factors of the environment, is the basis of the most widespread diseases of civilization” (*Zhelyazkov, 2015, p. 9*). The social and political changes that have occurred in recent decades are proving to be serious challenges to the national system for organizing children’s and youth sports (*Aleksieva, 2015, p. 152*).

According to Petkova and Aleksieva, “...practice shows that the success of countries with developed sports and with high physical capacity of the younger generation is due to the almost daily classroom work in Physical Education or to systematic extracurricular (outside school) work on the particular types of sports. The opinion about the need for a new formulation of the forms and activities of Physical Education and Sports classes organization in view of the new requirements of the dynamic global economy and the challenges facing humanity in the new technological century is increasingly prevailing” (*Petkova & Aleksieva, 2013, p. 6*). “Creating an atmosphere in which students can express themselves fully, feel emotional comfort, show high cognitive and motor activity, satisfy their needs for new impressions, knowledge, communication, self-expression, and gain social experience summarizes the main mission of organized physical activities” (*Denev, 2016, p. 62*).

A study by Belomazheva-Dimitrova and Dimitrov shows that over 30% of the surveyed students aged 11-12 do not play sports outside of school. The motives for practising sports among students who are physically active after school are interesting to observe. In over 50% of the cases, they do it “for better health”, the rest do sports “for pleasure”, “for a more harmonious figure” or “to be with their friends and/or family” (*Belomazheva-Dimitrova & Dimitrov, 2018*).

In a study by Peneva and Ilieva it is claimed that “extracurricular forms of work in Physical Education and Sports are a natural extension of classroom work. They create opportunities to increase the motor activity of students in their daily and weekly routine and to fully perform their classroom tasks. It is characteristic of the extracurricular forms of work that they are tailored to the interests of the students and the facilities of the school. Their main objectives are aimed at introducing students to systematic sports activities, expanding and improving their knowledge, skills and habits in the respective sports planned for studying in Physical Education and Sports” (Peneva & Ilieva, 2014, p. 112). It has been proven that “physical exercise and sports during students’ free time is a matter of personal interest, inner conviction and need for motor activity, i.e., the pleasure of the activity in itself” (Aleksieva & Denev, 2016, p. 249).

According to Dimkova, “among the factors determining students’ choice of activities during their free time their own interests and preferences definitely come first, followed by the influence of the friends’ environment, parents and family, teachers and the school, the offered set of organized forms in the place of living” (Dimkova, 2014, p. 68). Developing extracurricular forms for sports activities and increasing the scope of students is one of the possibilities for purposeful and organized realization of the objectives of Physical Education and Sports during their free time (Atanasov, 2010, p. 205).

“Extracurricular forms, with their scale and versatility, offer students a wide range of opportunities for practising their favorite sport, it is the school environment that is most favorable for popularizing children’s and youth sports. And what’s more, sports talents can be most easily discovered there, who will subsequently be directed to elite sports” (Prokopov, 2022). Conducting activities based on sports interests, as an extracurricular form aimed at improving sports conditioning, increases the number of children who will have the necessary skills for sports specialization (Atanasov, 2020, p. 93).

The selection of talented children is a fundamental problem for leading European and world countries in table tennis. The fact that the foundations of high sports achievements are laid in childhood and adolescence is increasingly being confirmed. Good practices for the selection of athletes are carried out at different stages – from the initial stage of including children in groups for initial sports training to their orientation to the sport of table tennis and inclusion in the teams for participation in competitions of different types (Tsvetkova, 2021, p. 172).

Summarizing the proposed theses, the possibilities to introduce compulsory extracurricular activities in various types of sports in schools should be discussed, “depending on the qualification of the particular P.E. and Sports teachers, which will improve not only the health status of students, but also help their mental development, as well as lead to a reduction in the risk of some emotional problems and aggressiveness in their behavior” (Echeva & Ignatov, 2021, p. 125). “If the main strategic goal is for young talented athletes to be the future professional elite athletes, then they should receive sufficient support from the state and society” (Aleksieva & Denev, 2016, p. 250).

The purpose of the current survey is to determine the motivation of students from the Student Sports Centre – Pleven and from the Tetron Table Tennis Sports Club – Pleven to participate in a table tennis educational and training process.

To achieve this purpose, the following tasks have been set:

- determine the students’ motivation for participating in an organized educational and training process in table tennis;

- determine the attitude of parents, teachers and classmates towards those practicing sports;
- determine the impact of the training process on table tennis practising students.

Methodology

The study subject is the sport of table tennis.

The study object are the characteristics of the educational and training process of young table tennis players.

Respondents of the research are 42 students practising table tennis.

The questionnaire consists of 19 questions. The survey was conducted in the table tennis Sports hall in the city of Pleven among students aged 11-12 at the end of the 2021-2022 academic year.

Student participation in the survey is voluntary and anonymous. In addition to the proposed answers, there is an opportunity to formulate one's own opinion, as well as to select more than one answer to some of the questions. 42 survey cards were filled in correctly.

The questions in the survey card can generally be divided into 3 groups:

- first group – motivation of the surveyed people to participate in organized sports activities in table tennis;
- second group – attitude of the respondents' parents, classmates and teachers towards their sports activities;
- third group – impact of sports activities on students practising table tennis.

Result Analysis and Discussion

Free time is an integral part of human activity, time outside professional, family and social obligations. It is an individual's choice to select forms and activities for recreation and entertainment according to their own will, interests, needs, preferences and abilities. It provides an opportunity to acquire new knowledge, improves emotional life, encourages the development of psychophysical abilities, skills and habits, improves independence and socialization. All this affects the physical, intellectual, emotional state of the person (*Ignatov et al., 2016, p. 138*). In this regard, the first two questions of the survey card are "Why did you choose to practise table tennis?" and "What do you intend to achieve by practising it?". 10 students have answered that it is their favorite sport as well as that they want to win prizes. 26 of them like table tennis, 16 think it will keep them in shape, and 6 chose it just to try it (*Figures 1; Figure 2*).

The following questions are aimed entirely at revealing the second study task to determine the attitude of parents, teachers and classmates towards those practicing sports.

"Practising physical exercises and sports during students' free time is a matter of personal interest, inner conviction and need for motor activity, i.e., the enjoyment of the activity itself. The urge to such a need can also be realized by suggestion or stimulus from the outside – from the teacher, from classmates, from parents, following the example of famous athletes, etc., in order to achieve something else, external to the activity – a reward, an increase in popularity etc. Recognition by classmates, friends, teachers and family is of great importance for reaching high achievements in a sport. This recognition of success by adults and peers is an incentive to improve oneself. The activities in which the students are involved not because they are internally motivated, but because

of the people important to them or because of the participation in different social groups, are gradually integrated with the values and attitudes of the individual” (Koyanova-Zbelyazkova, 2014, p. 286). According to K. Markov, “...the formation of the personality is a special process of acquiring social experience. This is a special process, because it is not about the simple acquisition of knowledge, skills and habits, but about such an acquisition in which the formation of new motives and needs, their transformation and re-subordination takes place” (Markov, 2014, p. 27).

Questions number 3, 4 and 5 give information specifically about the supportive environment of students practising table tennis. The parents of 40 students fully support their children’s participation in tennis training, the friends of 30 of them also, while the teachers of 22 of them do not know that they attend such activities in their free time, but still 18 of them are interested in the success achieved.

The next four questions, numbered 6 to 9, reveal the distribution of students' free time, as well as their opinion regarding the educational process of table tennis.

Four answers chosen by the largest number of respondents are of particular interest - *training does not interfere with my school work* – 28 respondents or 66.67% (Figure 3), *I will spend more time studying, but I will not stop training* – 32 of them or 76.19% (Figure 4), *There should be training sessions every day* – 30 students, and during the vacation they are ready to train as frequently as possible – 34 respondents. These relatively high figures once again prove the conscious choice of the respondents in the survey to participate in the table tennis educational and training process.

The social status that sport provides to people practicing it creates the need for the appreciation of others and the striving for popularity. Personal fulfillment related to the feeling of strength and energy, the need to do something, the satisfaction of the achieved goal, are all factors that affect the ego of each person. Personal realization, the motivation to succeed should not be understood as an absolute desire for ultimate success (Aleksieva & Kirov, 2019, p. 71). An essential aspect of the general motivation to practice a sport is the motivation to succeed. The drive to achieve success begins in childhood. The diverse game situations characteristic of table tennis place high demands on the actions of the athletes. Its idiosyncracies can be used to improve chances for success.

The following two questions from the survey are also in this aspect: “*Do you think that training benefits your physical condition?*” and “*Do you think that training benefits building your character?*”. Almost categorically, the surveyed students have chosen the answer: *training definitely affects me positively* – 38 and 34 of them, respectively.

The athlete’s degree of readiness to accept all the positive aspects of the training process, as well as all the positive influences of the coach is described in sports literature with a special term - coachability (the receptivity, susceptibility of the player to the training effects) (Borukova, 2018, p. 25). The specificity of the table tennis coach’s work requires that in every activity with young people practicing the sport of table tennis, they offer exercises for the development of coordination in various forms and through appropriately selected methods. The variability in working with them is most likely also the reason for the answers to the question: “*In how many training sessions of the weekly cycle do you work on the development of coordination abilities?*”.

The answers of the respondents show that 20 of them accept that they work on coordination in every training session, 16 – in three training sessions, and 6 of them – that they work in only one training session a week.

Despite the young age of the respondents, the following question was asked: “*Do you plan to play table tennis professionally?*”. Only 8 students from the respondents say that they have not thought about this issue, and almost equally choose the other two proposals – 18 of them will not develop professionally in this field, and the remaining 16 state their motivation to train professionally.

The last four questions of the survey card are adapted from Brian Mackenzie’s “101 Performance Evaluation Tests” questionnaire – “Questionnaire for the evaluation of the team and the ego orientation of the sports individual”. It is interesting to note the ratio of the answers to question 18: *In sports, I feel most successful when I have studied something that entertains me...* – 30 of the respondents agree and 12 of them are neutral (Figure 5). This ratio once again brings to the fore the importance of the sports pedagogue’s own style, which needs to be adapted to the individuality of the trainees, for example, the anatomophysiological and psychophysical characteristics, as well as gender, cognitive abilities, etc. In-depth knowledge of the sport of table tennis, the variety of tools and methods, the expedient application of game forms could enrich the content of the training of young players, as well as make the educational and training process more attractive, and training sessions - interesting and entertaining.

The answers to the last statement, which is oriented towards the ego of the respondents, *In sports, I feel most successful when I can do more than my friends*, also attract attention. 36 (85.72%) of the respondents strongly agree with this opinion, only 6 of them choose a neutral position (Figure 6). These answers direct the analysis to the conclusion that the competitive nature of the studied group is broadly represented and the students have a greater ego orientation.

Conclusion

After analyzing the results of the survey and the summaries made in the text, the following conclusions can be formulated:

1. Adolescent students practising table tennis clearly state their motivation for participating in organized sports activities.
2. The respondents receive the support of their parents for participating in an organized educational and training process in table tennis.
3. Sports activities have a positive effect on the physical condition of students.
4. Students practising table tennis demonstrate a drive for success, fueled by motivation and competition.



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Appendix

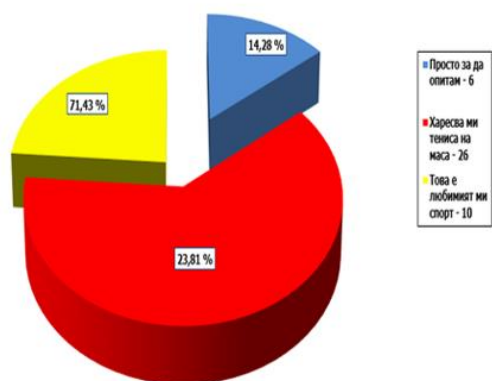


Figure 1. The statistics round diagram of answers why a respondent chooses to practice table tennis

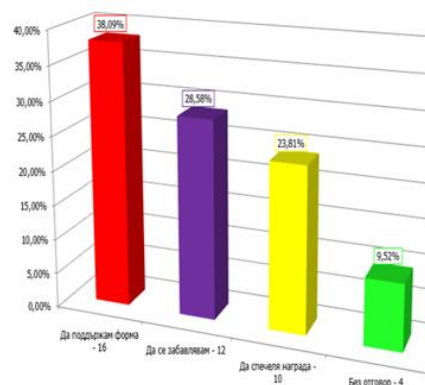


Figure 2. The statistics column diagram of answers what a respondent hope to achieve by practicing it

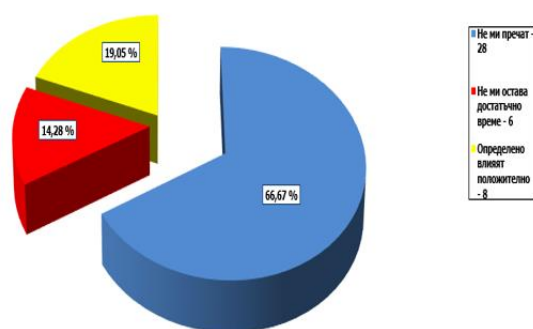


Figure 3. The statistics round diagram of answers if training interfere does with respondent's school preparation

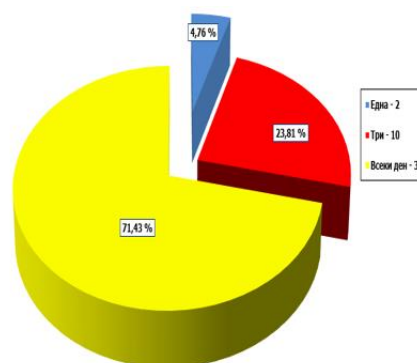


Figure 4. The statistics round diagram of answers how many training sessions a respondent thinks one should have per week

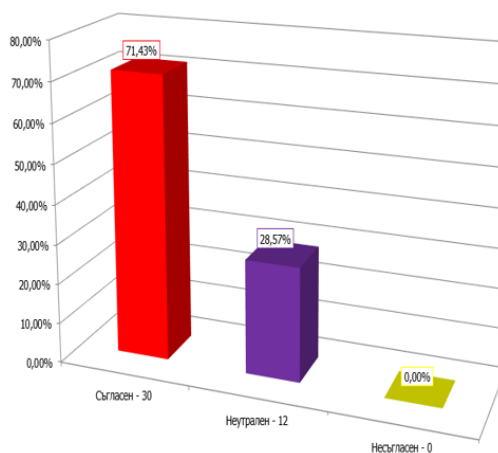


Figure 5. The statistics column diagram of answers that in sports, a respondent feels most successful when one has studied something that entertains me

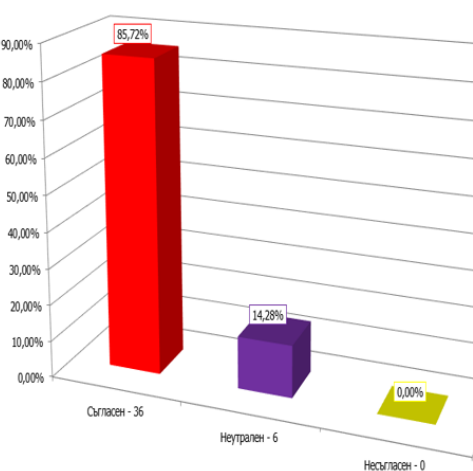


Figure 6. The statistics column diagram of answers that in sports, a respondent feels most successful when one can do more than my friends

