



Life Skills Development through Sports among Student-Athletes: A Survey of Secondary Schools

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Abstract: Life skills are applicable psycho-social skills and abilities to develop desirable qualities such as self-confidence and socialization. In this context, the research aims to investigate how participation in sportive activities during secondary education affects an individual's life skills. The sample group in the study consisted of 212 students, 99 female and 113 male students, studying at Private İstek 1915 Çanakkale Schools in Çanakkale province. Life Skills Scale for Sport (LSSS) scale was used to evaluate life skills acquired through sport. Statistical package program (SPSS 21 Version) was used to analyze the data obtained in the study. The findings of the research showed that there were differences in the life skills of the sample group according to the variables discussed. According to gender, the sub-dimension of goal setting is in favor of male students. It is seen that as the years of doing sports increase and those who play in the school team have higher life skills gains. In addition, students who play team sports have higher scores than those who play individual sports in all sub-dimensions of the scale except communication, which are time management, leadership, teamwork and goal setting. As a result, it is thought that secondary school students who play sports regularly, play in a club or school team and are directed to sports starting from an early age have more positive life skills in their future lives.

Keywords: Sports, Life Skills, Secondary Education, Athletes

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1. Introduction

The problems that individuals face in various periods of their lives have an impact on life skills. The main factors affecting life skills are demographic characteristics, ability to cope with problems, ability to manage life, communication skills, quality of interaction established in different environments at different times in life, family and people in the environment, responsibilities, living conditions, awareness, knowledge, collaborative and team work, active participation, skills, attitudes, behaviors and social resources (Gazioğlu and Canel, 2015).

Researchers interested in life skills development have reached the results that young people learn life skills through sports (McCallister *et al.*, 2000). Many researchers and most program implementers have argued that these skills should be taught and encouraged through sports (Hodge, 1989). Therefore, sport is an extremely important ground for teaching life skills to young people. It is known that individuals who do sports are more social, have more balanced emotions, are more agile, more hardworking, can cope with difficulties more easily and are more diligent than those who do not. In this context, it is necessary to investigate the gains of sports to individuals with different variables from different angles (Tiryaki, 2000).

In developing the youth experiences research, they also identified a range of developmental experiences and competencies that young people can gain from extracurricular activities (Bhowmick *et al.*, 2023). These included positive experiences (finding identity, identity projection, goal setting, problem solving, time management, emotional skills, cognitive skills, peer relations, group work, leadership, social skills) as well as negative experiences (inability to cope

with stress, negative peer influence, exclusion, inappropriate group dynamics) (Hansen *et al.*, 2003). It also includes young people's ability to manage their emotions, recognize their own and others' emotions, be aware of how emotions affect them, and express emotions in a positive way (Pujar and Patil, 2016).

In recent years, life skill learning through sport has attracted much attention. In these studies, along with learning life skills, some skills such as leadership, goal setting, communication and emotion control have been associated with participation in sports (Gould and Carson, 2008). While sport develops the personality, mind and body, it also contributes significantly to positive attitudes. There is evidence that many skills such as problem solving, time management, goal setting, coping with winning and losing are transferred to other life environments in order to achieve success in sports (Catalano *et al.*, 2004).

The competitive structure of our age brings with it the continuous change of living conditions. Therefore, sport is one of the most important tools in acquiring these skills. When we look at the effects of sports in learning life skills, we see that it prepares a suitable environment, is one of the ways of development in extracurricular environments, develops socially, emotionally, mentally and physically, provides a positive attitude towards life and provides an environment for healthy development by keeping away from bad habits (Acak and Düz, 2018). Sport is seen as a medium with the potential to offer social benefits to young participants and alleviate wider social problems (Anderson-Butcher, 2019).

There are scientific results that sport improves many life skills such as teamwork (Holt *et al.*, 2017), goal setting, taking initiative, respecting other individuals (Holt *et al.*, 2008), time management (Fraser-Thomas and Côté, 2009), cognitive skills (Danish *et al.*, 2004), emotional skills (Brunelle *et al.*, 2007), communication skills (Gould and Carson, 2008), social skills (Gould and Flett, 2012), leadership (Camire and Trudel, 2009), problem solving and decision making (Strachan and Côté, 2011) in young people of different age groups. The age group of this study was 11-14 years old. As it is known, at this age, the ability of logical comparison has started to develop and socialization is in the age group. In this context, the study aims to investigate how and in what way the participation in sports activities during the middle school period, which includes the 11-14 age group, affects the life skills of young people.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Research Design

In this study, quantitative and descriptive research method was used. A questionnaire was used as a data collection tool.

2.2 Population and Sample of the Research

The population of the research consists of 212 people, 99 female and 113 male students, who are studying in Özel İstek 1915 Çanakkale Schools in Çanakkale province in the 2022-2023 academic year. In determining the sample size of the research, the "Sample Size Formula with Known Number of Individuals in the Universe" was used for both genders ($n = \frac{Nt^2pq}{d^2(N-1) + t^2pq}$) (Sumbuloglu and Sumbuloglu, 2012). When calculating the sample size, $\alpha=0.05$ error level, 0.05 sampling error, $p=0.8$, $q=0.2$ were accepted. Students who were selected through simple random sampling, who agreed to participate in the study and who met the selection criteria were included in the study.

2.3 Research Data Collection Tools

Measurement Tool: The original Life Skills Scale for Sport (LSSS) was developed by Cronin and Allen in 2017 as a 5-point Likert scale to assess life skills acquired through sport (Cronin and Allen, 2017). The scale was developed to be used in young people aged 11-21 years. The Turkish validity and reliability of the scale was conducted through (Acak and Duz, 2018). The scale consists of a total of 31 items from 7 sub-dimensions: teamwork, goal setting, time management, emotional skills, communication, social skills and leadership. Each statement in the scale is scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly disagree (1)" to "Strongly agree (5)". The scale items consist of 7 sub-dimensions. In our study, the reliability coefficients were; Time Management (items 1, 2, 3, and 4) Cronbach's Alpha 0.92, Communication (items 5, 6, 7, and 8) Cronbach's Alpha 0.91, Leadership (items 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13) Cronbach's Alpha 0.93, Teamwork (items 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19) Cronbach's Alpha 0.93. items) Cronbach's Alpha 0.89, Social Skills (items 20, 21, 22, and 23) Cronbach's Alpha 0.90, Emotional Skills (items 24, 25, 26, and 27) Cronbach's Alpha 0.92, Goal Setting (items 28, 29, 30, and 31) Cronbach's Alpha 0.91. There are no reverse scored statements in the scale.

2.4 Data Collection

Permission was obtained from the relevant school administration for the scale to be used in the study. The information and consent form was read and signed by the researchers to the participants. The questionnaire permission for the implementation of the research was obtained from Özel İstek 1915 Çanakkale Schools. In addition to the individual information form, the individuals who wanted to participate in the study were also given a questionnaire form containing the life skills scale statements and were asked to answer the statements in this form sincerely.

Variables of the Research: In this section, the dependent and independent variables used in the study and how the variables are categorized are given. As the dependent variables of the study, life skills and sub-dimensions of the research group constituted the dependent variables. The independent variables of the research group were age, gender, class, family income status, sporting status, parental education status, playing in the school team, and the type of sport they practiced.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria: The following determinants were used for the inclusion of the students in the study: Voluntary acceptance to participate in the study, studying in the 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th grades of secondary school, and participating in sportive activities. The exclusion criteria were not volunteering to participate in the study and incomplete completion of the scale and personal information.

2.5 Statistical Analysis

Since the number of volunteers participating in the study was greater than 50, the normality analysis of the data was tested with the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. In analyzing the data, Mann-Whitney U test was used for binary variables and Kruskal-Wallis H test was used for more than two variables. Tamhane's T2 test, one of the post hoc tests, was used to determine the source of the difference obtained. In addition, Spearman's correlation analysis was used to determine the relationship between the OFS and BDFAS values of the participants. All statistical analyses were performed with IBM Statistics (SPSS, version 25.0, Armony, NY) package program. Data were expressed as mean \pm standard deviation ($\bar{x} \pm ss$) and significance level was accepted as $p < 0.05$.

3. Results

According to the gender variable of the participants who participated in the study, it was found that while the results of the ISLSS were statistically significant in favor of men in the sub-dimension of goal setting, it was not statistically significant in the other sub-dimensions, but the score values of men were higher than women.

According to the age and class variables of the participants participating in the study, the results in the sub-dimensions of the ISLSS were not statistically significant, but according to the family income variable, the score values of the participants with medium income in the time management dimension, which is the sub-dimension of the scale, were found to be low.

Table-1. ISLSS results of the participants according to the variable of practicing sports

	Practicing Sports	N	Mean	SD	Mann-Whitney U	p
Time Management	Yes	155	14,61	3,22	3057,500	,002
	No	55	12,41	4,52		
Communication	Yes	155	15,12	3,23	2796,500	,000
	No	55	12,98	3,85		
Leadership	Yes	155	18,33	4,16	3226,000	,007
	No	55	16,41	4,81		
Teamwork	Yes	155	23,49	4,34	2824,500	,000
	No	55	19,85	6,36		
Social Skills	Yes	155	15,38	3,55	2656,500	,000
	No	55	12,45	4,56		
Emotional Skills	Yes	155	14,43	4,01	2817,500	,000
	No	55	11,74	4,63		
Goal Setting	Yes	155	16,18	3,39	2570,000	,000
	No	55	12,72	5,08		

Table-2. ISLSS results of the participants according to the variable of playing in the school team

	Playing In The School Team	N	Mean	SD	Mann-Whitney U	p
Time Management	Yes	42	15,76	2,56	2469,500	,002
	No	171	13,62	3,83		
Communication	Yes	42	15,52	2,89	2941,500	,068
	No	171	14,32	3,60		
Leadership	Yes	42	19,04	3,78	2888,500	,049
	No	171	17,55	4,48		
Teamwork	Yes	42	24,57	3,74	2610,000	,006
	No	171	22,07	5,34		
Social Skills	Yes	42	15,97	3,16	2842,000	,036
	No	171	14,28	4,15		
Emotional Skills	Yes	42	14,50	3,37	3255,500	,347
	No	171	13,54	4,52		
Goal Setting	Yes	42	17,38	2,73	2284,000	,000
	No	171	14,78	4,29		

Table-3. ISLSS results of the participants according to the variable of sport type

	Sport Type	N	Mean	SD	Mann-Whitney U	p
Time Management	Team Sports	108	14,62	3,48	4525,500	,011
	Individual Sports	105	13,45	3,86		
Communication	Team Sports	108	14,76	3,52	5232,500	,328

	Individual Sports	105	14,34	3,48		
Leadership	Team Sports	108	18,62	3,97	4528,500	,011
	Individual Sports	105	17,05	4,66		
Teamwork	Team Sports	108	24,16	4,03	3680,500	,000
	Individual Sports	105	20,92	5,67		
Social Skills	Team Sports	108	15,24	3,49	4849,000	,067
	Individual Sports	105	13,98	4,44		
Emotional Skills	Team Sports	108	14,10	4,14	5219,000	,314
	Individual Sports	105	13,36	4,51		
Goal Setting	Team Sports	108	16,22	3,44	4388,000	,004
	Individual Sports	105	14,35	4,61		

Table-4. ISLSS results of the participants according to the variable of sports age

	Sports Age	N	Mean	SD	Kruskal Wallis H	p	Fark
Time Management	1-3 years	96	12,70	3,93	27,006	,000	1<2,3,4
	4-6 years	70	14,72	2,99			
	7-9 years	41	15,53	3,30			
	10 years and more	6	17,33	2,50			
	Total	213	14,04	3,71			
Communication	1-3 years	96	13,70	3,73	10,819	,013	1<3
	4-6 years	70	14,98	3,26			
	7-9 years	41	15,51	3,03			
	10 years and more	6	16,66	2,42			
	Total	213	14,55	3,50			
Leadership	1-3 years	96	16,55	4,28	23,809	,000	1<3,4
	4-6 years	70	18,21	4,46			
	7-9 years	41	19,92	3,73			
	10 years and more	6	20,16	2,22			
	Total	213	17,84	4,38			
Teamwork	1-3 years	96	20,78	5,65	24,778	,000	1<2,3,4
	4-6 years	70	23,58	4,67			
	7-9 years	41	24,24	3,13			
	10 years and more	6	27,83	2,99			
	Total	213	22,56	5,16			
Social Skills	1-3 years	96	13,29	4,39	19,964	,000	1<2,3
	4-6 years	70	15,20	3,53			
	7-9 years	41	16,31	2,94			
	10 years and more	6	17,50	2,88			
	Total	213	14,61	4,03			
Emotional Skills	1-3 years	96	12,69	4,72	9,921	,019	1<3
	4-6 years	70	14,21	3,98			
	7-9 years	41	15,04	3,59			
	10 years and more	6	15,83	2,56			
	Total	213	13,73	4,33			
Goal Setting	1-3 years	96	13,52	4,57	34,057	,000	1<2,3,4 2,3<4
	4-6 years	70	16,34	3,22			

	7-9 years	41	17,12	3,00			
	10 years and more	6	19,16	,98			
	Total	213	15,30	4,16			

1: 1-3 years, 2: 4-6 years, 3: 7-9 years, 4: 10 years and more

4. Discussion

In this study, the life skills of individuals participating in sportive activities in secondary education level students were discussed in the light of the literature in order to examine their life skills in terms of various variables.

According to the results of the study, there were no statistically significant differences between male and female students in the other sub-dimensions and total score averages except for the goal setting sub-dimension according to the gender of the participants. This situation shows different results in the literature. The contribution of gender differences to social skills has been found in many studies (Avşar and Kuter, 2007; Düz and Aslan, 2020; Kabakçı and Fidan, 2008; Kasatura, 1991; Kurak and Açağ, 2019; Seven, 2008). Another study, contrary to the results of our study, did not find a significant difference in gender criterion in gaining life skills in sports (Kardag, 2009). There are studies showing that sport-based life skills have a very important place especially in the development of girls (Kwauk, 2022). Considering the studies on the subject, it was found in all studies that sports contributed a lot to male and female individuals without gender discrimination.

According to the results of the research, statistically significant differences were found in the mean scores of time management, sub-dimensions of moderate and very good scale scores according to the economic levels of the participants' families, while statistically significant differences were not found between economic level groups in communication, leadership, teamwork, social skills, emotional skills and total score averages. According to family income levels, which were divided into four categories, in all sub-dimensions of life skills, those with the highest income were found to be significantly higher than the participants with other income levels. In studies parallel to our study, the time management, communication, leadership, teamwork, social skills and emotional skills scores of those with higher income levels were found to be more significant than those with lower income levels (Kardağ, 2019; Zeze and Erel, 2021). There are studies in the literature that are contrary to our study. It is seen that the economic status of the family does not have a high effect on the

outcomes of their children (Taşçı, 2020; Türk, 2015; Mayer, 1997). As a result, we can say that participation in sports at all income levels contributes positively to life skills. Therefore, it is seen that different income levels do not prevent the acquisition of life skills.

Statistically significant differences were found in time management, communication, leadership, teamwork, social skills, emotional skills, goal setting sub-dimensions and total score averages of the participants according to the sport age variable. As the years of practicing sports increased, the scores in gaining life skills were significantly higher. As a result, by directing students to sports starting from a young age, they can become ready for later ages by gaining life skills.

According to the results of the research, statistically significant differences were found in the time management, communication, leadership, teamwork, social skills, emotional skills, goal setting sub-dimensions and total score averages of the participants according to the number of days of doing sports in Table-1. As the number of days of practicing sports increases, there is a positive correlation in gaining life skills. The same findings were found in another study supporting our study in the literature (Kurak and Acak, 2019; Tascı, 2020; Reynolds *et. al.*, 1990; Ozturk, 2018; Yıldırım, 2011; Turk, 2015). It is seen that doing sports contributes to positive gains in life skills in young individuals.

According to the results of the research, a statistically significant difference was found between those who participated in school teams and those who did not participate in school teams in the mean scores of time management, leadership, teamwork, social skills, emotional skills and goal setting sub-dimension scores according to the participants' playing in the school team in Table-2. Only in the communication sub-dimension scores, it was in favor of those who played sports and it was not statistically significant. In the related literature studies; it was observed that students believed that they could learn life skills such as communication, teamwork and respect and these values and transfer them to other environments with participation in school sports (Camire and Trudel, 2010). Students who participated in school sports had

positive effects on their course grades, professional aspirations and self-esteem (Fox *et al.*, 2010). In another study, it was observed that students who participated in the football team at the university increased their school success as well as their physical development (Rothschild-Checroune *et al.*, 2012). In another study, the social skill levels of students who did not do sportive activities and those who did team sports and individual sports were compared and significant results were found in favor of those who did sports in the sub-dimensions of communication skills, emotional skills, social skills, sensitivity to the environment and social control (Yildirim, 2011). It is also supported by the related literature that the social skill levels of young people who do sports are higher than those who do not do sports.

When the statistical results of the participants who participated in the research according to the sport type status variable in Table-3 are analyzed, it is determined that individuals who do team sports have more social skills than those who do individual sports. In the related literature, there are studies that support and do not support this situation. Yıldırım (Yıldırım, 2011) found that there was a difference in favor of students who were licensed in team sports and individual sports. Taşçı's (Tasci, 2020) study supports our study. When the results of this study are evaluated, it can be said that students who engage in team sports and individual sports gain more life skills than those who do not engage in sports. According to the results of the study, no statistically significant differences were found between the students in the 11-14 age group, which constituted the study groups of the research, and the class variables. Related studies have found findings in the opposite direction (Düz and Aslan, 2020; Türk, 2015; Altun *et al.*, 2020; Cronin *et al.*, 2018). Based on this, we can conclude that the effect of sports on life skills is significant regardless of age. However, it can be said that there is no difference between the groups with high mean total scores.

In Table-4, statistically significant differences were found in time management, communication, leadership, teamwork, social skills, emotional skills, goal setting sub-dimensions and total score averages of the participants participating in the study according to the sport age variable. As the years of practicing sports increased, the scores in gaining life skills were significantly higher. As a result, by directing students to sports starting from a young age, they can become ready for later ages by gaining life skills.

5. Conclusion

As the age group of this study, the ability of logical comparison started to develop at the age of 11-14 and is known as the socialization age group. Sport has always been the crown jewel as a means of socialization in its most natural form. In this context, it has been determined that participation in sports activities during secondary school education, which includes the 11-14 age group, affects the life skills of young people in a very positive way. Especially in the development of life skills of young people in the 11-14 age group who do sports, both sexes make positive contributions. Again, it is thought that the economic status of individuals who do sports has no effect on their social skills, and it is thought that economic status has no effect on the relationship between sports and social skills. It has been determined that factors such as playing sports, playing in a club or school team, type of sports and years of playing sports are very positive factors affecting the social skills of young people. However, these results are limited to this study. It is open to test these results with studies conducted with more participants.

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Author Contribution Statement

Mahmut Acak: Conceptualization, Supervision, Methodology, Writing original draft. **Hakan Buyukcelebi:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Review and editing, **Can Arslanargun:** Writing original draft, Data collection. **Ramazan Bayer:** Conceptualization, Writing original draft. All the authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Informed Consent

Informed written consent was obtained from the participants.

Ethics Approval

The study was approved by Insitutional Review Board.

Conflict of interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Data Availability

The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon approval of the request.

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