



NEEDS AND INTERESTS IN THE FIELD OF SPORTS AMONG STUDENTS IN PEDAGOGICAL SPECIALTIES

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to analyze the needs and interests of students enrolled in pedagogical specialties regarding sports and motor activity, as well as to identify the main factors influencing student initiative.

Through the applied research methods, a content analysis of scientific publications was conducted, alongside a survey among students from the Faculty of Education at Trakia University. The results are categorized into the following key areas: the significance of sport for social integration and the development of moral values; the relationship between motor activity and psychosocial well-being; the impact of physical activity on students' adaptation to the university environment; and differences in students' sports interests according to gender and social background.

The analysis of the survey data and theoretical overview highlights the need for a personalized and adaptive approach within university settings to foster student engagement in sports activities. This approach aims to promote physical activity, social inclusion, emotional resilience, and academic success.

Keywords: pedagogy students, motor activity, needs, interests.

INTRODUCTION

Interest is a key element in pedagogical theory and practice. It has been the subject of research across various disciplines, including philosophy, economics, psychology, and pedagogy. In the context of education, interest plays an essential role in motivation, the fulfillment of needs, and student engagement, particularly within the educational and developmental process.

Interest is defined as a "socio-economic, socio-psychological, and individual-psychological phenomenon, a form of expressing economic relations within a given society, a way of satisfying needs – i.e., fulfilling them through the use of social relations, through objective interdependence between people... it presupposes the awareness of human needs and their transformation into ideal aspirations" (1).

Therefore, interests cannot be considered in isolation from needs.

In the same source the term "need" is defined as "the primary source, the deepest and most general basis of human activity, a prerequisite for one's actions and communication with others, the main and initial internal driving force of behavior, a relatively stable psychological characteristic manifested in a state of internal tension that determines activity and leads to organized behavior". This suggests that the essence of human needs is complex and deeply rooted.

The examination of students' needs for and interests in sports activities is a topic of particular relevance, especially in the context of contemporary education. The present study undertakes the ambitious task of investigating students' needs and interests in the field of motor and physical activity.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A literature review was conducted on the topic of students' needs and interests in the field of sports, with a focus on the social, emotional, and educational aspects of physical activity.

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The aim of the study is to analyze the needs and interests of students in pedagogical specialties regarding sports and motor activities, and to identify the key factors that influence student initiative. To achieve this goal, the following research tasks were defined:

1. An analysis was performed of contemporary scientific publications by both Bulgarian and international authors, taking into account the relevance and importance of the issue in the context of higher education in pedagogy.
2. As part of the study, a well-established research method – surveying – was employed to collect empirical data on the level of interest in sports activities, motivational factors, and preferred types of sport among students in pedagogical programs at Trakia University – Stara Zagora. The survey questionnaire consisted of 12 questions addressing students' needs and interests in the field of sports and 3 sociodemographic questions.

For the quantitative analysis of the collected data, statistical software was used, and the results were visualized through tables and charts.

DISCUSSION

Sport and physical education are essential aspects of both social and personal development. Engagement in sports activities is often driven by a variety of social, psychological, and educational needs. Understanding students' interests and attitudes toward sports can contribute to the development of more effective physical education programs at the university level. One of the main challenges facing higher education is creating an environment that not only promotes physical activity but also fosters social responsibility and moral values.

According to P. Kislyakov et al. (2), students demonstrate a particularly strong commitment to values such as health, ethics, and respect. This suggests that sport is not only a physical necessity but also a vital means of cultivating moral character among students. The authors conclude that involvement in sports is a significant prerequisite for students' psychosocial well-being.

M. Alaev et al. (3) report that first-year students who do not participate in physical or sports

activities may experience weaker or even unsuccessful adaptation to university life. Their study indicates that regular participation in motor activities not only improves physical fitness and condition but also facilitates social and psychological integration into the new educational environment, supporting the development of adaptive mechanisms throughout the learning process.

A study by E. Taja-on et al. (4) shows that students express strong interest in sports when they are supported in developing skills and confidence. According to the authors, traditional sports games learned during school age should be prioritized in both school and university physical education programs. At the same time, conditions should be provided for participation in less common sports disciplines. Accounting for students' expectations and self-assessments is crucial when designing effective sports programs. In order to stimulate student interest in sports, the researchers recommend organizing specialized training in specific sports and maintaining a regular cycle of competitive games. The study also proposes securing investments to improve the quality of sports facilities and hiring qualified coaches, aiming to create a comprehensive sports environment that reflects the diverse interests of all students.

In a study conducted by Z. Zhou and Y. Liu (5) on group sports preferences among students in the Chinese province of S, a growing interest in team ball games was observed. Factors such as gender and student background were found to significantly influence various psychological and social aspects. Notable differences were revealed based on students' place of origin and their participation in available courses. The study found that male students are more inclined toward contact sports, while female students tend to prefer dance-based and gymnastic activities.

In another academic study, L. Sikorska (6) finds that sports activities based on group games not only enhance physical fitness but also play a significant role in stabilizing the psycho-emotional state of young people. The research analyzes the impact of sports games on the emotional well-being of students enrolled in pedagogical specialties, tracking their indicators of mood, activity, and overall condition throughout one academic year. The

participating students primarily engaged in sports games such as table tennis, volleyball, and football, but also in combat sports and athletics. Those who participated in group sports activities demonstrated more pronounced positive changes in their emotional state compared to students who did not engage in extracurricular sports.

The results confirm that participation in sports games significantly reduces the number of students with negative emotional states while increasing the proportion of those experiencing positive emotions. In contrast, students who did not take part in additional sports activities showed a decline in mood over the academic year. A key focus of the study is the relationship between students' participation in sports activities and manifestations of academic stress. The research aims to thoroughly analyze how university-level physical education supports academic performance, particularly by enhancing students' psychological resilience and helping reduce academic tension.

In this context, findings from a 2018 study conducted by D. Zheleva-Terzieva (7) at the Faculty of Education at Trakia University reveal that only 7,69% of students engage in sports activities at a level necessary for maintaining good health. These results clearly indicate the need to promote regular participation in sports as an effective strategy for improving physical and mental health, as well as for fostering social engagement. Creating more accessible

opportunities for participation in various sports activities – both group-based and individual – could significantly contribute to students' overall adaptation.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

This study, conducted within the Faculty of Education at Trakia University, aims to explore students' attitudes, preferences, and needs in the domain of sports and physical activity. The results presented are based on data collected in March 2025 through a pedagogical research survey.

The analysis focuses on the following aspects:

- students' attitudes toward the use of sports facilities within the faculty and the frequency of potential usage if access were unrestricted;
- students' interests and needs in the field of sports.

A total of 36 students participated in the study (31 women and 5 men), ranging in age from 18 to 55 years, all enrolled in pedagogical specialties at the Faculty of Education at Trakia University "Special Education", "Social Pedagogy", "Preschool Pedagogy", "Preschool and Primary School Pedagogy", "Primary School Pedagogy with a Foreign Language", "Pedagogy of Physical Education", "Pedagogy of Information Technology Education" and "Pedagogy of Art Education and Graphic Design".

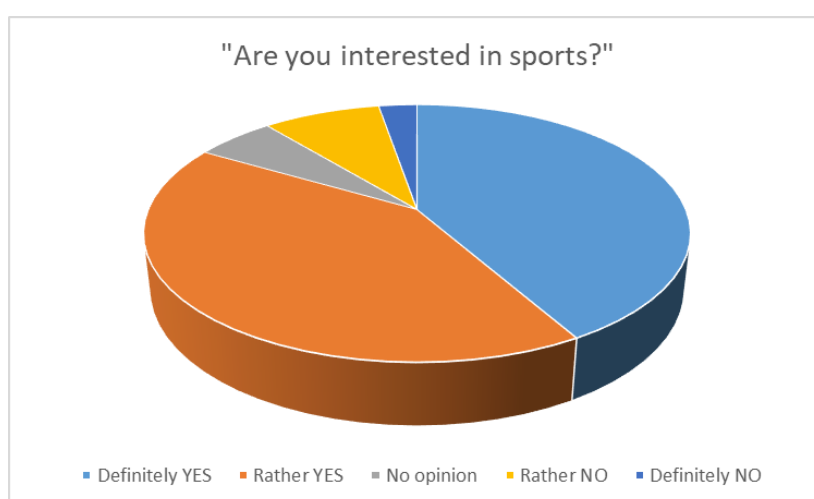


Figure 1. Students' Interest in Sports

When assessing student engagement with sports activities (**Figure 1**), it was found that 41,7% of respondents expressed a strong interest, while another 41,7% indicated a somewhat positive

attitude. In total, 83,4% of the surveyed students demonstrated a clear inclination toward participation in sports activities or, at the very least, a favorable attitude toward motor activity.

The remaining participants included 8,3% who reported minimal interest, 2,7% who were completely uninterested, and 5,6% who did not express a specific opinion.

These results highlight a high level of awareness and acceptance of sports as a meaningful social and cultural practice that extends beyond the scope of formal physical education. To gain a deeper understanding of the nature of this interest, responses to the question "In what capacity do you engage with sports?" were also analyzed.

According to the data, 55,6% of respondents identified themselves as active participants, while 44,4% preferred a passive form of involvement, such as observing or providing support.

This distribution indicates a balanced division between those engaged through direct participation and those who express interest in sports through other forms of involvement. It reinforces the importance of sports not only as a means of physical development but also as a cultural and social phenomenon.

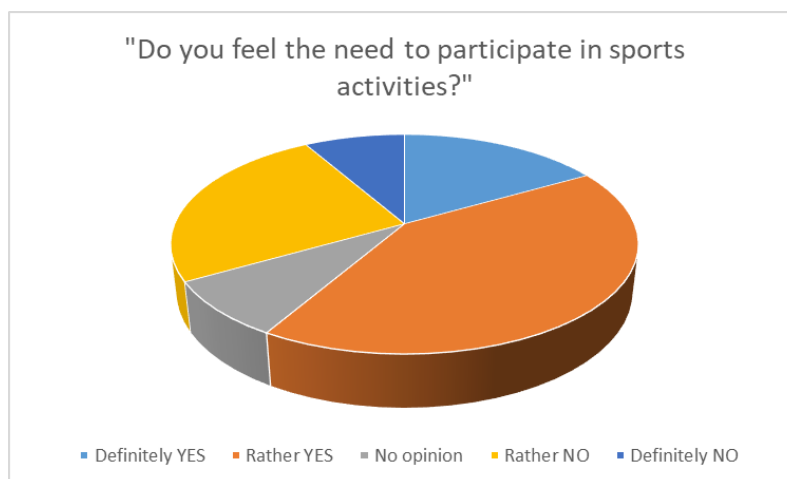


Figure 2. Need for Sport among Students

The purpose of the question "Do you feel the need to participate in sports activities?" is to determine to what extent students recognize the importance of sport as a component of their lifestyle and whether they feel an internal necessity to be physically active. The results, illustrated in **Figure 2**, show that 16,7% of respondents answered with a definite "yes", and 41,7% chose "rather yes". Thus, a total of 58,4% expressed a positive attitude toward sports activity and a conscious need to participate in it. In contrast, 33,3% answered "rather no", and 8,3% gave a definite "no", indicating that 41,6% of the respondents do

not feel such a need or reject it. The remaining 8,3% stated that they have no opinion on the matter.

The data show that although more than half of the participants perceive sport as important to them, a significant proportion of students still do not exhibit a clearly defined personal motivation or interest in regular physical activity. This suggests a need for more in-depth efforts aimed at informing, motivating, and fostering a culture of movement within the educational environment – one that supports both awareness and engagement in sports activities.

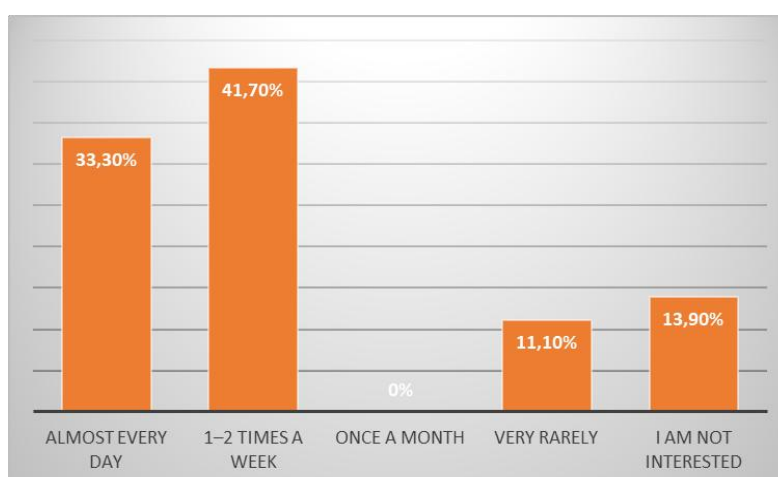


Figure 3. Potential use of a Sports hall if available

The purpose of the question "How often would you use the faculty's sports facility if you had access to it?" is to explore the actual interest of students in regularly participating in sports activities, provided that an accessible sports facility is available within the Faculty of Education. The results, presented in **Figure 3**, show that 33,3% of respondents would use the sports hall daily or almost daily, while 41,7% would attend 1-2 times per week. Thus, a total of 76% demonstrate an inclination toward increased physical activity given appropriate conditions.

On the other hand, 11,1% state they would exercise very rarely, and 13,9% are not interested in using the sports facility at all. The responses reveal a predominantly positive

attitude toward sports, especially when accessible and convenient conditions for practicing are ensured.

However, when compared with the responses to the question regarding the need for sport, a certain paradox becomes evident: 33,3% of students indicate that they do not feel a need for sport, and an additional 8,3% have no opinion. This suggests that while the majority of respondents are willing to engage in sports activities when opportunities are provided, not all perceive physical activity as an internal necessity. This highlights a lack of awareness regarding the benefits of sport, despite the readiness to participate when conditions are favorable.

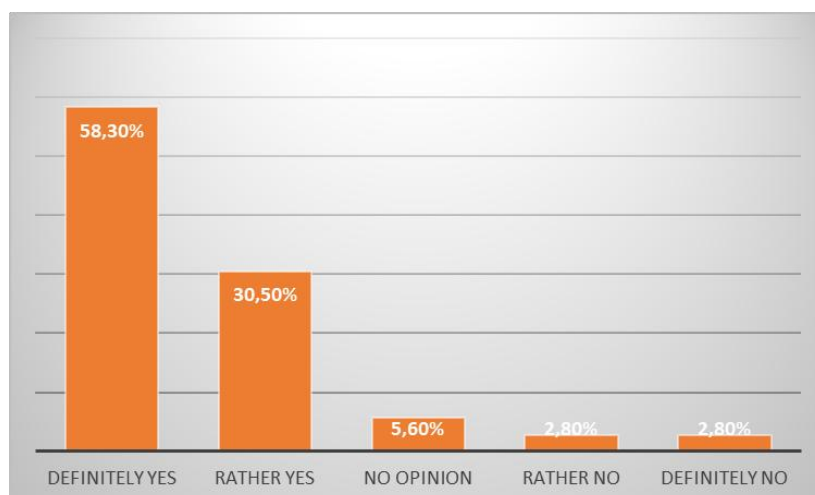


Figure 4. Responses to the Question "Do you feel the need to engage in sports to support your Physical and Mental health?"

The results illustrated in **Figure 4** show high levels of awareness and understanding regarding the importance of physical activity for overall well-being. More than half of the respondents (58,3%) answered "definitely yes", and 30,5% selected "rather yes", which amounts to a total of 88,9% expressing a positive attitude toward the importance of sport for their health. Only 2,8% of respondents do not feel a need for physical activity, while 5,6% have no opinion on the matter.

These results reveal a strong and conscious need among students for regular participation in sports activities aimed at achieving and maintaining good health. At the same time, when viewed alongside the previous question regarding sport as an internal motivation, a certain contradiction emerges: 33,3% of respondents indicated that they do not feel a

personal need to engage in sports, and another 8,3% expressed no opinion.

This suggests that although students acknowledge the significance of sport for their health, a significant portion do not see it as an established part of their daily routine or as an internal desire for participation. This contradiction can be interpreted as a gap between the theoretical understanding of the benefits of physical activity and its practical implementation in daily life. In other words, while students recognize the importance of sport for their health, not all of them are motivated to incorporate it actively into their everyday lives.

CONCLUSION

The conducted study on students' interests and needs regarding sport within the Faculty of Education highlights several key points:

1. **Positive interest in sport** – the results show that most students demonstrate an interest in regular participation in sports activities, with 76% of respondents expressing willingness to engage in sports when appropriate conditions are provided. This reflects a high level of motivation for physical activity if suitable resources, such as a sports or artistic-sports hall, are available.
2. **Discrepancies between perceived need and actual participation** – despite the strong interest in sport, there is a mismatch between students' perception of the need for sport and their actual motivation to participate. For example, 33,3% of surveyed students report not feeling an internal need to engage in physical activity. This emphasizes the necessity of raising awareness and reshaping attitudes toward sport as an essential element of students' daily lives.
3. **Need for greater integration of sport into the academic process** – to achieve meaningful student engagement in physical activities, sport must be integrated into university culture and the academic curriculum. This includes both the provision of suitable conditions for sports practice and encouraging students to perceive physical activity as an essential component of their physical and mental well-being.

The findings of the study indicate that providing accessible and convenient sports facilities at the Faculty of Education at Trakia University, along with additional university-led educational initiatives emphasizing the benefits of physical activity, can significantly enhance student participation in sports. These efforts should be accompanied by improved awareness of the health benefits of sport and the promotion of habits for an active lifestyle.

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