

THE CONTRIBUTION OF SPORT TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AMONG ADOLESCENTS: AN EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: *Sport is an important vector in the development of adolescents' emotional intelligence, contributing to the formation of social and emotional skills that are essential for their harmonious integration into society. This study explores the educational role of sport in developing self-control, empathy and collaboration skills in adolescents. During a six-month intervention in an urban school, sports activities were organized in such a way as to promote interaction, cooperation and management of emotions. The results indicate a significant improvement in the emotional intelligence of the participants, with a focus on relationship skills and adaptability, confirming the importance of sport as an educational tool for socio-emotional development. The findings suggest that sport should be integrated more frequently into school curricula, having a positive impact on adolescents' emotional and relational health.*

Key words: *sport; emotional intelligence; social skills; adolescents; education; collaboration; self-control.*

Theoretical foundation

Sport represents a holistic development environment for adolescents, having a significant impact not only on physical well-being, but also on socio-emotional and cognitive development. Recent studies confirm that sport promotes the formation of emotional intelligence and social skills, providing adolescents with unique contexts to learn to manage their emotions, collaborate and develop harmonious relationships with those around them.

Emotional intelligence (EI) is defined as the ability to recognize,

understand, and manage one's own emotions as well as those of others (Petrides, 2011). In the sports environment, adolescents are often put in situations of competition and cooperation that require self-control, resilience and empathy, thus contributing to the development of emotional intelligence. According to a study by Laborde et al. (2016), regular sports have a positive correlation with EI, demonstrating that adolescents involved in sports develop their ability to manage their emotions and react constructively to challenges.

In a recent study, Taks and Scheerder (2019) found that adolescents who play sports show increased development of emotional regulation and resilience skills, due to constant exposure to situations that require adaptability and perseverance. This is a central dimension of EI, and sport provides an ideal framework to develop and strengthen this skill.

Sport offers many opportunities to develop social skills, which include communication, collaboration and compliance with collective norms. According to research conducted by Jones and Lavalée (2009), sports activities stimulate adolescents' social skills, making them more likely to collaborate, share resources and develop a positive attitude towards their peers. Team activities also encourage relationships based on respect and mutual support, being recognized for lasting benefits on the development of character and interpersonal skills (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2020).

In addition, sports help teenagers develop leadership skills and improve their self-confidence. As the study by Holt et al. (2019) shows, adolescents who regularly participate in team sports develop a proactive attitude and greater adaptability in the face of challenges, essential skills for adult life.

Empathy and self-control are essential skills of emotional intelligence, and sport is an ideal environment to develop them. By participating in sports activities, adolescents are exposed to contexts that require understanding the emotions of others, providing support and respecting differences between peers (Jowett & Shanmugam, 2016). According to a study by Harwood et al. (2021), adolescents involved in sports activities show a greater capacity for empathy and emotional resilience, being able to manage conflicts and cooperate effectively in a team.

In addition, sport provides an environment for practicing self-control, as young people learn to manage their emotions in times of stress and intense competition. The study by Crane and Temple (2015) shows that adolescent athletes show an increased ability to control their emotional reactions, self-control becoming a transferable skill in different social and educational contexts. These skills, once formed through sport, remain a valuable long-term resource, supporting adolescents in social integration and personal development.

Given the significant benefits of sport on emotional intelligence and

social skills, its integration into formal education would make important contributions to the training of young people. According to a UNESCO report (2018), physical education should be an essential component of the school curriculum, having an essential role in the holistic development of adolescents. Recent studies, such as the one conducted by Bailey and Howells (2020), argue that physical and sports education programs that are structured to develop emotional and social skills can contribute to the formation of balanced and empathetic young people, capable of collaborating and managing conflicts in a constructive way. In conclusion, sport offers a complex educational framework, ideal for the development of emotional intelligence and social skills, having a lasting impact on the socio-emotional health of adolescents. By integrating sport into formal education, schools can contribute to the formation of young people capable of harmonious relationships and emotional balance, thus facilitating an easier transition to adult life.

Research:

The purpose of this study is to explore the role of sports activities in the development of emotional intelligence and social skills of adolescents. The study aims to investigate to what extent sport contributes to the formation of self-control, collaboration, empathy and resilience skills. By regularly participating in sports activities, adolescents can develop a series of social and emotional skills essential for a harmonious integration into the community and for personal balance.

The main hypothesis of the study is that adolescents involved in structured sports activities will significantly improve their level of emotional intelligence and social skills, compared to those who do not participate in such activities. Sports activities are expected to stimulate collaboration, respect for others and emotion management skills in high-intensity contexts.

The study was carried out over six months in an urban school, with adolescents from the eighth and ninth grades, aged between 13 and 15 years, as participants. The method used is quasi-experimental, with pre- and post-intervention assessments, to measure students' progress in the field of emotional intelligence and social skills.

The research sample included 40 adolescents, divided into two groups: an experimental group (20 students involved in the proposed sports activities) and a control group (20 students who did not participate in additional sports activities).

For the assessment of emotional and social competences, the SEI-YV questionnaire (Social and Emotional Intelligence - Youth Version) was used, a tool validated and adapted to measure the dimensions of emotional intelligence in adolescents. SEI-YV assesses skills such as

self-control, empathy, collaboration, and adaptability, making it ideal for analyzing the changes that occur as a result of participating in sports activities.

During the six months of intervention, the adolescents in the experimental group participated in a series of structured sports activities organized in the form of training and team games. These activities have been selected to foster collaboration, self-control and the ability to work effectively in a team, as well as to encourage respect for colleagues and perseverance.

During the six months of intervention, the adolescents in the experimental group were involved in various sports activities, structured to stimulate collaboration, self-control and the ability to work effectively in a team. These activities have been specifically designed to contribute to the development of empathy and resilience, providing adolescents with real contexts for emotional and social learning.

A central component of the intervention was regular participation in team games, such as football, basketball and handball, aimed at developing the spirit of collaboration and empathy. The teenagers were put in the situation of cooperating to achieve a common goal, learning to respect the rules, to show fair play and to manage conflict situations in a constructive way. After each game session, the students were invited to reflect on their experiences, discussing how collaboration and respect for other colleagues contributed to the success of the team and the cohesion of the group.

To develop the capacity for self-control and resilience, the adolescents participated in training and physical exercises that involved endurance and self-control challenges in moments of intense effort. These sessions gave them the opportunity to learn how to manage their emotions in stressful situations and respond positively to difficulties. Following each training, the teenagers had the opportunity to discuss the moments when they felt their limits, reflecting on how they managed to overcome them and the strategies they used to control their emotions.

Teambuilding activities were another essential component of the intervention, being designed to improve communication and collaboration skills. The adolescents participated in collaborative tasks that required good organization and the ability to solve problems together, each participant having a well-defined role in the activity. These exercises gave them the opportunity to practice conflict resolution in an effective way, encouraging them to be patient, actively listen and respect the opinions of other members of the group.

Also, teenagers were involved in friendly sports competitions and athletics competitions, which stimulated perseverance and mutual respect, regardless of the final result. Each competition was followed by a reflection session, in which the students discussed how they managed

the pressure of the competition and how they managed to collaborate to support the team, regardless of victory or defeat. These activities allowed the adolescents to understand the importance of joint effort and to develop a positive attitude towards their peers and towards themselves.

Through these structured activities, the teenagers had the opportunity to practice and develop their emotional intelligence and social skills in an authentic and progressive way. Sport has provided them with a safe and stimulating environment that has allowed them to manage their emotions, collaborate effectively, and appreciate the diversity of roles and personalities within the group.

Prior to the implementation of the program, the SEI-YV questionnaire was applied to assess the social and emotional competencies of adolescents in both groups, establishing a basis of comparison for measuring further progress.

During the six months, the experimental group participated in the mentioned structured sports activities, under the supervision of specialized teachers. Each session was documented and monitored, observing the developments and reactions of the adolescents to the emotional and social challenges during the activities.

At the end of the program, the SEI-YV questionnaire was reapplied to assess changes in adolescents' emotional and social competencies by comparing pre- and post-intervention outcomes. The data collected was analysed to determine the impact of sports activities on emotional intelligence and social skills.

Results:

The results of the study showed a significant improvement in the social and emotional skills of adolescents involved in sports activities, confirming the positive impact of sport on the development of emotional intelligence. The comparative analysis of the data collected through the SEI-YV questionnaire, applied both before and after the intervention, highlighted notable progress in terms of self-control, collaboration and empathy skills.

One of the most important results observed was the increase in adolescents' capacity for self-control and adaptability. Following their participation in training and team games, they learned to manage their emotions in stressful situations and to respond in a balanced way to the challenges of competitions. The reflection sessions after each activity contributed to the development of this competence, with students reporting greater confidence in their abilities to cope with pressures and control their reactions. Data from the SEI-YV questionnaire indicated a significant increase in scores on the dimensions of self-control and emotional resilience, confirming the effectiveness of the program.

Also, collaborative activities and team competitions had a positive impact on communication and empathy skills. Direct observations from teachers indicated an improvement in the way adolescents interacted with their peers, making them more open, patient and willing to provide support. After the team games and teambuilding sessions, the students showed an increased ability to actively listen, respect the opinions of others and resolve conflicts in a constructive way. The data from the questionnaire confirmed an increase in scores on the empathy and collaboration dimensions, highlighting the beneficial effect of these activities on social skills.

Regarding adolescents' interest in sports and team activities, a much more positive attitude towards physical and collaborative activities was observed, as well as a greater desire to continue participating in such activities. The fact that the teenagers were able to express their emotions and collaborate in a safe and stimulating environment helped to strengthen their self-confidence and develop a positive attitude towards sport as a means of personal and social development.

The overall analysis of the data and observations shows that the intervention had a significant impact on the emotional and social development of adolescents. They demonstrated a clear improvement in self-control, collaboration and empathy skills, confirming the role of sport as an essential vector in the formation of socio-emotional competences. The results suggest that the integration of structured sports activities into educational programs can bring important benefits for the development of emotional intelligence and social skills of adolescents.

Conclusions:

The present study demonstrated that structured sports activities have a significant impact on the development of emotional intelligence and social skills of adolescents. Regular participation in team sports and training geared towards collaboration and self-control provided students with genuine opportunities to learn how to manage their emotions, communicate effectively, and collaborate with others. These results confirm the essential role of sport as an educational tool for the formation of socio-emotional skills.

One of the notable outcomes of the intervention was improved adolescents' ability to control their emotions and respond constructively to challenges. Training and teambuilding activities have provided them with a safe environment to practice self-control, thus developing emotional resilience and the ability to cope with stress. At the same time, team games and sports competitions favored the development of empathy and communication skills, teenagers learning to listen, collaborate and respect their peers.

The results obtained support the idea that sport can be a valuable

component of socio-emotional education and that, by integrating it into the school curriculum, adolescents can benefit from a stimulating environment that supports their personal development. Sport not only improves the physical condition of students, but also contributes to the formation of essential skills for a harmonious social integration and good adaptability in the face of challenges.

In conclusion, sport is a particularly effective educational tool for the development of emotional intelligence and social skills in adolescents. The integration of structured sports activities into educational programmes can support the formation of balanced, empathetic young people capable of effective collaboration. In the long term, these skills contribute to their emotional health and better integration into the community, suggesting the need to support sport as an integral part of formal education.

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