

ORIGINAL SCIENTIFIC PAPER

The Impact of Parental Support on Children's Orientation Toward Sport

İlyas Görgüt ¹, Piyami Çakto ², Nurullah Emir Ekinci ³

¹ Ankara University, Faculty of Sports Sciences, Ankara, Türkiye, Email: ilyasgorqut@hotmail.com

² Murcia University, Faculty of Sports Sciences, Research Group on Health, Physical Activity and Education- SAFE, Murcia, Spain, Email: piyamii1011@gmail.com

³ Yalova University, Faculty of Sports Sciences, Yalova, Türkiye, Email: nurullah.ekinci@yalova.edu.tr

Corresponding Author: nurullah.ekinci@yalova.edu.tr

Abstract

Parental support plays a critical role in shaping children's participation and persistence in sports. However, the perspectives of parents with athletic backgrounds remain underexplored in the literature. This study aims to examine the role of parents with sporting backgrounds in shaping their children's orientation toward sports and to explore their perceptions of this process. A qualitative phenomenological design was employed. The study included 15 parents of children actively engaged in sports at various school levels. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed using thematic analysis. Findings indicate that sport contributes to children's discipline, self-confidence, socialisation, and academic achievement, although exam periods present challenges. Parental approaches to professional athletic careers varied: some prioritised individual happiness and talent, whereas others emphasised balancing sport with academic success and societal values. Although the egalitarian nature of sport was widely acknowledged, cultural and patriarchal norms were found to limit this potential, particularly in girls' discipline choices. In conclusion, sport plays a central role in children's personal development and social value production. Parental education programmes and balanced sport-academic policies are essential for sustainable youth development, particularly to address gender-based limitations and infrastructure deficiencies.

Keywords: Academic achievement, gender equality in sport, parental support, phenomenological analysis, youth sport participation

1. Introduction

In contemporary societies, family support emerges as a decisive factor in directing children toward sports, influencing not only their choice of sport but also their processes of discipline, self-confidence, socialization, and academic achievement. Knight and Holt (2014) emphasize that the psychological and practical contributions provided by parent's shape children's motivation, continuity in sports, and the life skills acquired through sports, while also creating a transformative impact on personal development and social adaptation. At this point, Wolfenden and Holt (2005) highlight that parents are key actors in shaping their children's talents at an early stage, and that the support they provide not only facilitates participation in sport but also serves as a powerful source of energy and motivation, encouraging children's personal interests. These findings demonstrate that parental support enhances the quality of sporting experiences and plays a transformative role in children's developmental processes. Lauer et al. (2010) argue that parents provide opportunities for their children to try and experience physical activity, that their investments in this process are decisive in the development of young people's talents, and that the financial support required for access to training, matches, camps, and tournaments is covered by parents. In this context, Harwood and Knight (2015) stress the critical importance of parents understanding what their children aim to achieve through participation and what they themselves expect their children to accomplish.

Parents are generally the first and most enduring social actors in children's participation in sport; by providing opportunities, resources, and emotional support, they shape motivation and commitment. However, excessive pressure and unrealistic expectations may lead to stress and withdrawal from sports (Jowett & Lavallee, 2007). Therefore, the quality of parental involvement is decisive. Supportive behaviours foster self-confidence and autonomy, whereas controlling attitudes can undermine intrinsic motivation (Horn, 2008). Moreover, parents' attitudes toward competition, achievement, and success are transmitted to children, shaping their goal orientations and responses to challenges (Smoll & Smith, 2002). In sporting contexts, the quality of the parent-child relationship is a significant determinant of motivational outcomes independent of peer influence, and when supportive parental behaviours are combined with peer support, the most adaptive motivational profiles emerge (Ullrich-French & Smith, 2006). Mothers play a central role in the development of children's perceived competence in sports. Maternal expectations are directly related to adolescents' perceptions of physical competence throughout the year; positive expectations enhance confidence, while negative expectations lead to declines. This demonstrates that family influences shape not only participation but also self-perception. Maternal beliefs are also critical in sustaining adolescents' early confidence in their physical abilities (Bois et al., 2002).

Accordingly, family support multidimensionally shapes children's participation in sport, motivational processes, and self-perceptions; balanced, autonomy-supportive, and encouraging parental attitudes stand out as the fundamental factor supporting young people's long-term commitment to sports, healthy development, and sustainable motivational profiles.

Parental education programs in youth sports are an important tool to support healthy participation and enhance positive parental behaviours. These initiatives help parents sustain their

children's sporting experiences within a more adaptive motivational environment, while simultaneously reducing stress factors on athletes and coaches. Parents are the most influential social actors in youth sports. Since the quality of participation can yield both positive and negative outcomes, education programs facilitate a balanced provision of encouragement and autonomy support. Moreover, such programs reduce controlling attitudes and strengthen children's intrinsic motivation. Therefore, parental education initiatives are regarded as a critical strategy for fostering sustainable motivational profiles and supporting healthy psychological outcomes in youth sports (Burke et al., 2024). Within this framework, the historical transformation of parental involvement underscores the growing importance of structured education programs in fostering sustainable motivation and healthy development in youth sports (Dorsch et al., 2021). Finally, parental involvement has been consistently associated with athletes' enjoyment of sport, self-esteem, and persistence. Conversely, perceived parental pressure has been linked to higher competitive anxiety and lower intrinsic motivation. This indicates that the quality of parental support is a critical factor in determining the nature of children's sporting experiences and their long-term commitment. Accordingly, autonomy-supportive and encouraging parental attitudes strengthen young athletes' motivational profiles, whereas coercive approaches increase the risk of sport withdrawal (Hayre, 2024). In conclusion, the literature reveals that parents in youth sports are not merely facilitators of participation but also primary actors shaping motivational environments and psychosocial outcomes. Balanced, autonomy-supportive, and encouraging parental attitudes are considered the most critical elements in sustaining children's long-term commitment to sports, healthy development, and sustainable motivational profiles.

The primary aim of this study is to reveal how parents with a sporting background shape their children's orientation toward sports and to find the answer for these questions.

- What role does parental support play in the academic achievement of children engaged in sports?
- How do parents' attitudes toward professional sports influence children's sport preferences?
- How does the perception of gender equality in sport shape the way families guide their children?
- What is the relationship between children's wishes, talents, and parental support in the selection of elite sport branches?
- How does the adequacy of state sport infrastructure and policies affect families' decisions to direct their children toward sport?
- What are parents' observations regarding the impact of sport on time management and academic success during exam periods?

Methods

A qualitative research method was employed to understand the support provided by parents with sporting experience for their children's participation in sport, their expectations of sporting activities, their views on gender discrimination in sport, their approach to choosing a sport at elite level, their opinions on the country's sporting infrastructure and policies, and their attitudes towards the impact of sport on academic achievement and time management during exam periods. This approach examines individuals' perceptions within natural contexts using observation, interviews and document analysis (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). The process involves examining the meanings attributed to issues, collecting data in natural settings, identifying themes and conducting analyses. The comprehensive report resulting from this process brings together the participants' perspectives, the researcher's evaluations, and contributions to the literature (Creswell, 2018).

Research design

In this study, a phenomenological research design was employed as part of qualitative methodologies. Phenomenology was considered the most appropriate approach due to its emphasis on individuals lived experiences and the meanings they attribute to those experiences (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). Within this framework, participants were asked to reinterpret their experiences regarding sport and family support from a fresh perspective. Accordingly, the study adopted a transcendental (experimental-abstract) phenomenological approach. Transcendental phenomenology does not merely require individuals to recount their experiences; rather, it enables them to reframe and re-assign meaning to those experiences (Creswell, 2018). Through this approach, the study examined participants' perspectives in a renewed context, thereby enhancing methodological depth and allowing the findings to be interpreted within a broader framework.

Identification of participants

The study group of this research consists of 15 parents whose children are actively engaged in sports or related activities (Table 1). Participants were selected through convenience sampling based on accessibility and willingness. However, specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to ensure the validity of the research. This approach allowed the sample to be both practically accessible and directly relevant to the research questions, thereby aiming to achieve an in-depth understanding (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013; Creswell, 2018). In line with the directives of the SRQR and COREQ guidelines, the processes of sampling, data collection, and analysis were structured to ensure methodological transparency, and the inclusion and exclusion criteria were clearly defined to guarantee the reliability of the findings.

Inclusion criteria:

The participant must be a parent of a child actively engaged in sports (at amateur or licensed level).

The child must be of primary, middle, or high school age.

The parent must have experience regarding the effects of sport on individuals and society.

The participant must agree to take part in the study, sign the informed consent form, and voluntarily participate in the interview process.

Exclusion criteria:

Parents whose children do not engage in sports or have no direct relation to sports.

Families whose children are not of school age (e.g., preschool or university level).

Individuals who refuse to participate in the interview, do not provide informed consent, or provide incomplete/misleading information.

Persons without experience regarding the effects of sport on individuals and society.

Table 1. Distribution of information about the participants in the study

Participant Code	Gender	Age	Educational Background	Parents' Sport Participation	Number of Children	Number of licenced child	Children's Licensed Sports Branches
P1	Male	43	Bachelor's Degree	Not Active	1	1	Badminton
P2	Female	40	Master's Degree	Not Active	3	2	Badminton, Swimming
P3	Female	26	Bachelor's Degree	Active	2	1	Swimming
P4	Male	39	Master's Degree	Not Active	2	1	Basketball, Taekwondo
P5	Male	37	Master's Degree	Not Active	2	1	Basketball, Muay-Thai
P6	Male	32	Bachelor's Degree	Active	1	1	Archery
P7	Female	43	Bachelor's Degree	Active	2	2	Basketball, Gymnastics
P8	Male	42	Master's Degree	Active	1	1	Taekwondo
P9	Female	49	Bachelor's Degree	Not Active	2	1	Soccer

P10	Female	53	Bachelor's Degree	Active	1	1	Tennis
P11	Male	57	Bachelor's Degree	Not Active	1	1	Volleyball
P12	Male	30	Bachelor's Degree	Active	2	1	Archery
P13	Male	61	Bachelor's Degree	Active	4	2	Taekwondo, Fitness
P14	Male	38	Bachelor's Degree	Not Active	1	1	Basketball
P15	Male	53	Master's Degree	Active	5	5	Taekwondo, Kickboxing

A total of 15 parents participated in this study. The participants' ages ranged from 26 to 61, encompassing both younger parents and those in older age groups. This diversity enabled an examination of the role of sport in children's lives from different generational perspectives.

Data collection techniques and tools

Semi-structured interviews were used as the primary data collection method. The interview protocol was developed through a systematic review of national and international literature, with the guidance of two experts in sports science, both holding PhDs, and one expert in measurement and evaluation, also holding a PhD. A pilot interview was subsequently conducted, followed by some minor revisions. In its final form, the interview consisted of six questions designed to elicit the reasons why parents with sporting experience encourage their children to take up sport and the effects of sport on their children's individual, social and academic development. The interview guide for these questions is provided below (Table 2).

Table 2. Interview guide (sample questions)

Theme	Questions
Academic Achievement	How do you think sports affect students' academic achievement?
Professional Career	How do you approach the possibility of your child becoming a professional athlete?
Gender Equality	Do you think boys and girls have equal opportunities in sports?
Elite-Level Choice	If your child chooses an elite-level sport branch, what factors should be decisive?
State Policies	Do you find the state's sports infrastructure and policies sufficient?

Exam Periods	How does sports participation affect your child’s academic performance and time management during exam periods?
--------------	---

Data analysis

The data in this study were analysed using a qualitative thematic analysis method. Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim to ensure holistic familiarity with the content. Inductive codes were generated from participants’ statements regarding the impact of sport on academic achievement, expectations of professional athletic careers, perceptions of gender equality, the selection of elite-level disciplines, state policies, and experiences during examination periods. These codes were then grouped into categories based on similarities and differences, and themes were developed through the constant comparison method. The coding process was conducted independently by two researchers, after which consensus meetings were held to resolve discrepancies (Creswell, 2018). Data saturation was confirmed when no new codes or themes emerged. During the analysis, Maxqda 2020 software was utilized to systematically organize codes and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach enabled a comprehensive presentation of how parents with sporting experience perceive their children’s orientation toward sport, making visible the interaction of individual, familial, and structural factors within a holistic framework.

Trustworthiness and credibility

Reliability and validity in this study were strengthened through the combined use of multiple data collection methods (interviews, observations, and document reviews). The use of convenience sampling enabled the inclusion of diverse parental profiles, thereby contributing to the breadth of the study (Patton, 2002). The coding process was grounded in systematic thematic analysis, and methodological rigor was supported through the meticulous examination of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Researcher reflexivity was incorporated to maintain impartiality and minimize potential biases (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Research ethics

All procedures carried out in this study were conducted in accordance with institutional guidelines and the Declaration of Helsinki and its subsequent amendments. Great care was taken to ensure that participants agreed to take part in the study, signed the informed consent form, and participated voluntarily in the interview process. Parents who agreed to participate in the study were informed that their confidentiality would be safeguarded and that all data would be collected solely for academic purposes. Interviews were conducted with volunteer participants who accepted the conditions. Participants were identified using codes such as P1, ..., P15; the interviews were conducted face-to-face in settings where participants could feel at comfortable. The interviews lasted an average of 35 minutes.

Findings

The findings obtained from the analysis process are presented in detail below, and parents’ views on the role of sport in children’s lives are evaluated under thematic headings.

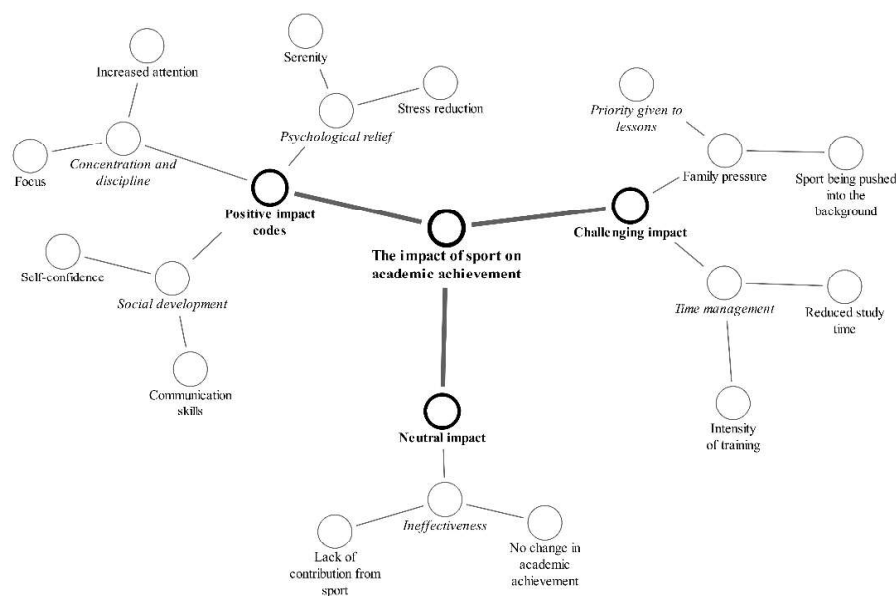


Figure 1. Participants’ perspectives on the impact of sports on academic achievement

Participants evaluated the impact of sport on students’ academic achievement from different perspectives. The majority emphasized that sport contributes positively to concentration and discipline, increasing students’ focus on lessons and their attention span. Regular habits gained through sport, its support for study motivation, and its indirect contribution to academic success were among the prominent findings (P5, P6).

P5: *My child’s involvement in sport can make time management difficult during exam periods. However, with proper planning, the disciplinary effect of sport supports academic success.*

P6: *I do not think sport negatively affects my child’s academic performance during exam periods. Sport provides discipline and order, which helps in exam preparation.*

Some participants stated that sport has a neutral effect on academic achievement, noting no significant changes. These views suggest that the impact of sport may vary depending on individual differences and contextual conditions (P4, P8).

P4: *My child currently attends basketball training four days a week, and the teachers have also stated that these trainings have no negative effect on his academic performance.*

P8: *I observe that sport does not negatively affect my child’s academic performance during exam periods. Sport provides discipline and order.*

Other participants indicated that sport could create challenges during exam periods, particularly due to intensive training schedules and time management difficulties, which may negatively affect academic achievement. The prioritization of exams, their non-recoverable nature, and fatigue were highlighted in these views (P1, P2, P3).

P1: Unfortunately, in our country everything is indexed to academic success, so we prioritize it slightly. The intensity of training hours inevitably has an impact.

P2: I observe that sport falls into second place during exam periods. Sport can be compensated, but exams cannot.

P3: Sport should be part of our lives, but if it is not pursued professionally, I believe it is better to take a short break during exam periods.

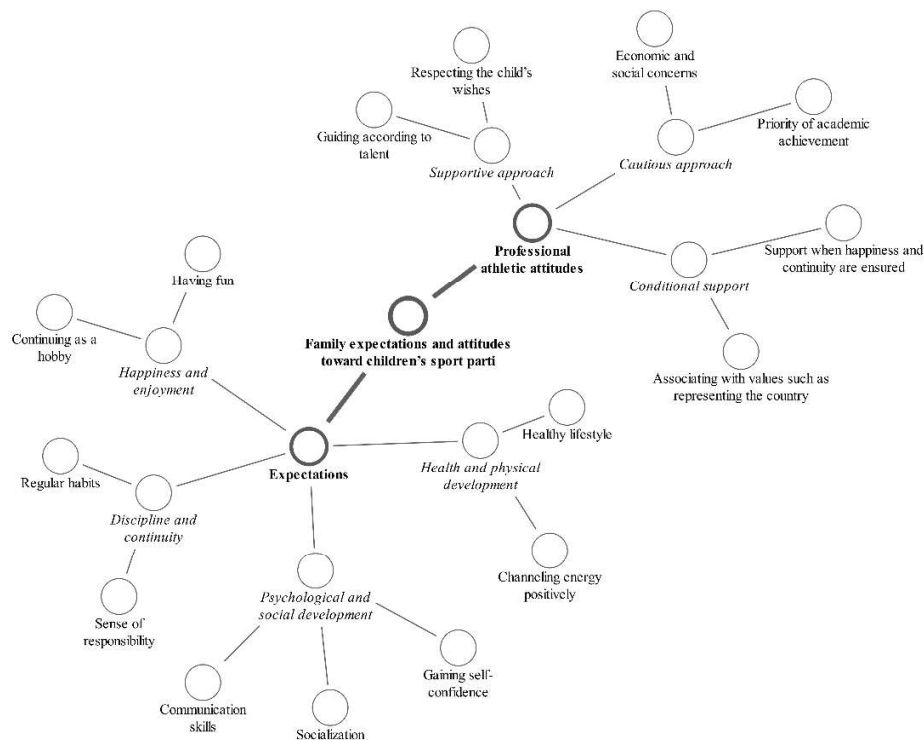


Figure 2. Parental approaches toward the possibility of children becoming professional athletes

Participants expressed their expectations from their children's involvement in sports primarily in terms of health, discipline, self-confidence, and socialization. Statements highlighting that sport channels children's energy positively, enhances their social relationships, and increases their personal happiness were prominent. These findings reveal that sport is perceived primarily as a tool for quality of life and personal development (P1, P7, P12).

P1: My expectation is for my child to be healthy, to build good relationships with society, and to express himself better socially. I do not prioritize becoming a professional athlete, but if circumstances lead him in that direction, I will not prevent it.

P12: I want my child to gain discipline and be healthy through sport. I would like him to become a professional athlete and will guide him according to his talent.

Approaches to the possibility of professional athletic careers were more diverse. Most participants stated that they would support their children's decision to become professional athletes according to their own preferences, with this support being closely linked to the child's happiness and talent (P2, P5, P9).

P2: My priority is my child's happiness... if he advances professionally, I believe he should represent the country.

P5: I want my child to live a healthy life through sport. If he becomes a professional athlete, I will support him, but I also prioritize his academic success.

Some participants viewed professional athletic careers positively but emphasized that academic achievement must remain a priority, noting that professional sport can only be sustainable when balanced with education (P5, P9, P11, P14).

P5: I want my child to live a healthy life through sport. If he becomes a professional athlete, I will support him, but I also prioritize his academic success.

P11: I expect my child to live a healthy life through sport. I would support his professional career only if it is conditional on academic success.

Another group associated professional athletic careers with representing the country and contributing to social values. In this perspective, sport was seen not only as a means of individual development but also as a tool of national identity and social contribution (P2, P13).

P2: If he advances professionally, I believe he should do so by representing the country.

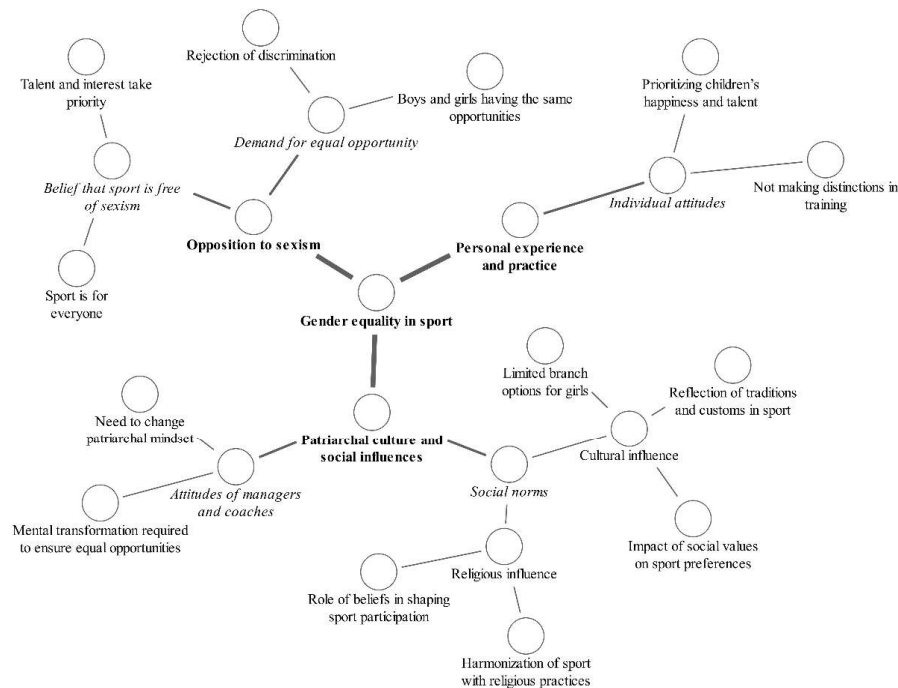


Figure 3. Perceptions of equal opportunities for boys and girls in sports

Participants emphasized that, by its very nature, sport should not allow space for gender discrimination. The majority stated that girls and boys should have equal opportunities, and that sport should be evaluated based on talent and interest. A strong view emerged that sport must be free from sexism, enabling children to freely choose their disciplines and be supported with equal opportunities (P6, P10).

P6: I believe sport has no sexism. Children should be guided according to their talents.

P10: I am against gender discrimination. Sport is for everyone, regardless of being a girl or boy.

Some participants noted that, particularly in Anatolia, cultural and religious norms limit girls' choices of disciplines, and that patriarchal thinking still influences the field of sport. These findings show that while sport should be an egalitarian domain, social norms restrict this equality (P2, P4).

P2: Unfortunately, Turkish society is patriarchal... if managers and coaches change their patriarchal mindset, we will have no concerns about sexism.

P4: Families who allow girls to do sports usually limit the disciplines... why shouldn't girls play football, why shouldn't girls play basketball? There should be no distinction.

Other participants, drawing from personal experience, stressed that sport must remain free from discrimination, and stated that in their own practice they treat boys and girls equally (P3, P9).

P3: No discrimination can be made in a sport field based on gender, and I absolutely do not approve of it. Personally, I do not make distinctions among those I train.

P9: I believe girls and boys should have equal opportunities. Sport should progress with equality of opportunity, not discrimination.

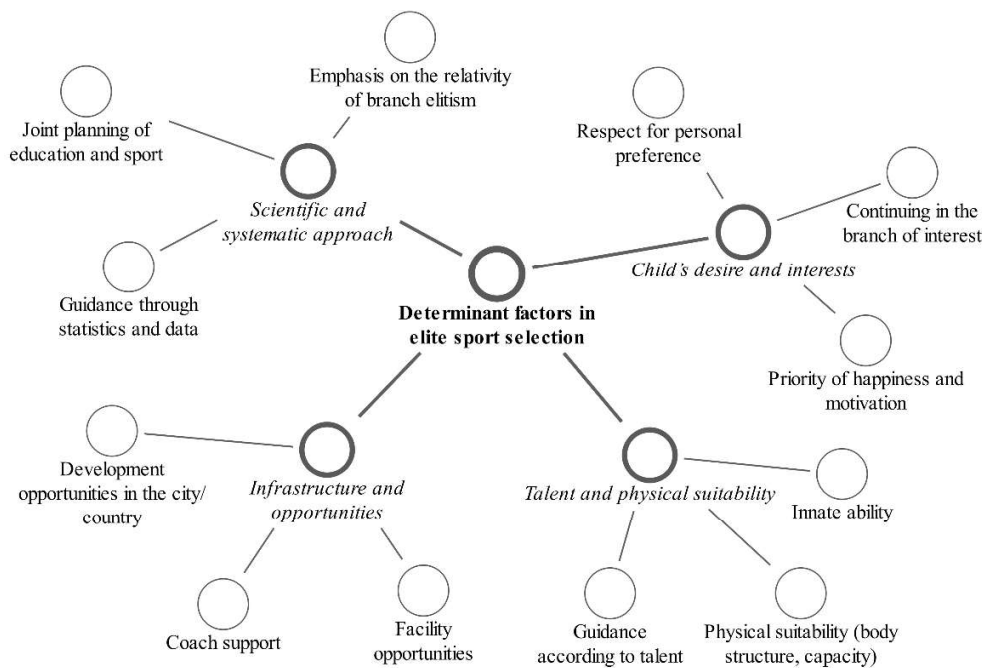


Figure 4. Determinant factors in choosing an elite-level sport branch

Participants emphasized that the most important factor in choosing an elite-level sport discipline is the child's own interest and desire. Respecting the child's preference, maintaining motivation, and prioritizing happiness were highlighted as essential. Rather than whether a discipline is considered "elite," what matters is the child's willingness to develop in that branch (P1, P5, P7).

P1: What the child loves is important... I don't separate sports into 'this branch is elite, that one is not.'

P5: Talent and interest are important. The child's own preference and physical suitability should be decisive in branch selection.

P7: The child's talent and happiness are important. If they are not interested in a branch, they cannot succeed in it.

Another prominent finding was that talent and physical suitability are decisive factors in branch selection. Participants stressed that children's innate abilities and physical structure should be considered when determining which discipline is most appropriate (P2, P3, P10).

P2: They should choose a branch in which they have ability... talent is necessary to prefer that branch.

P3: Whichever sport they have talent for, I think they can achieve better success with specialized guidance. I direct them according to what their physical condition allows.

P10: Talent and interest should be decisive. The child's physical suitability must also be considered.

Participants also emphasized the importance of infrastructure and facility opportunities in branch selection. The availability of development opportunities, coaching support, and facilities in the child's city or country were seen as determining factors (P2, P8).

P2: They must have opportunities to develop in that field in the city or country we live in. I pay attention to facilities, talent, and the coach's opinion.

P8: Talent and facility opportunities should be decisive. If there is infrastructure for that branch in the child's city, I support it.

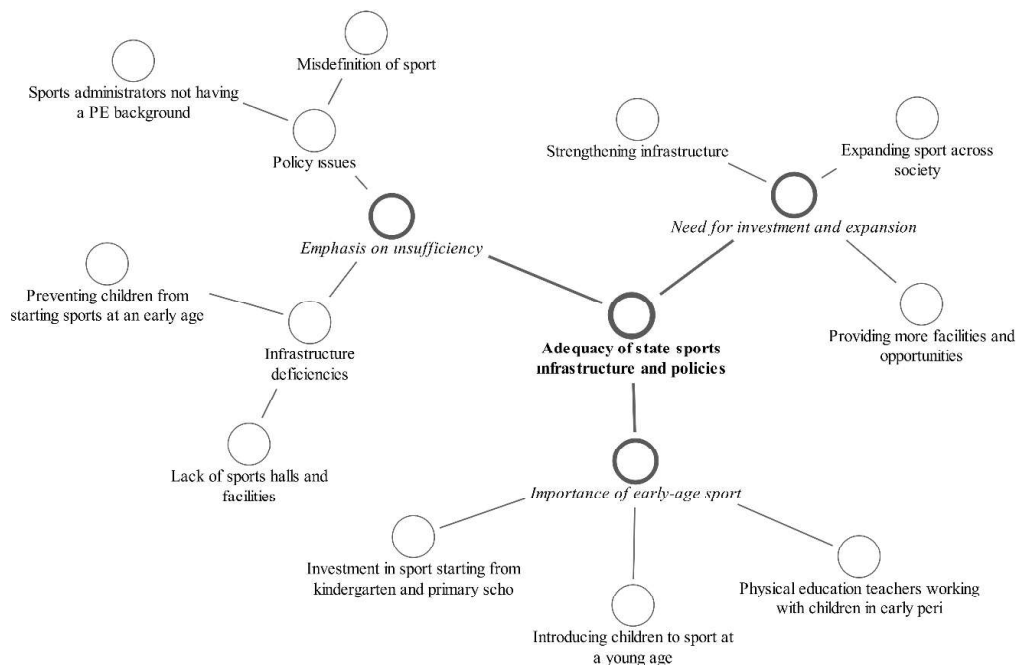


Figure 5. Participants' evaluations of the adequacy of state sports infrastructure and policies

Participants expressed strong views regarding the role of the state in sports infrastructure and policies, generally finding them inadequate. The most frequently mentioned issue was the lack of support for sport at an early age and insufficient facility development starting from primary school. The absence of gyms and facilities delays children's introduction to sport and hinders its widespread adoption (P1, P4, P6).

P1: All primary and secondary schools should have sports halls and facilities... otherwise it becomes too late.

P4: If the state invests from kindergarten and primary school onwards, the reflections in later years will be much better.

P6: Sport needs to be supported at younger ages and infrastructure strengthened.

Some participants highlighted that the shortcomings of state sport policies extend beyond infrastructure to managerial issues. They noted that sports administrators often lack a background in physical education and that sport is misdefined, reducing the effectiveness of policies (P2, P3).

P2: Unfortunately, in our country, those in positions of authority in sports management are not physical education specialists... I believe children should meet physical educators at much earlier ages.

P3: In Turkish society, people think sport is just running around a stadium or doing a few stretches... I believe we do not receive adequate support.

Additionally, participants emphasized the need for greater investment to ensure children encounter sport at an early age (P7).

P7: More investment should be made so that children can meet sport at an early age.

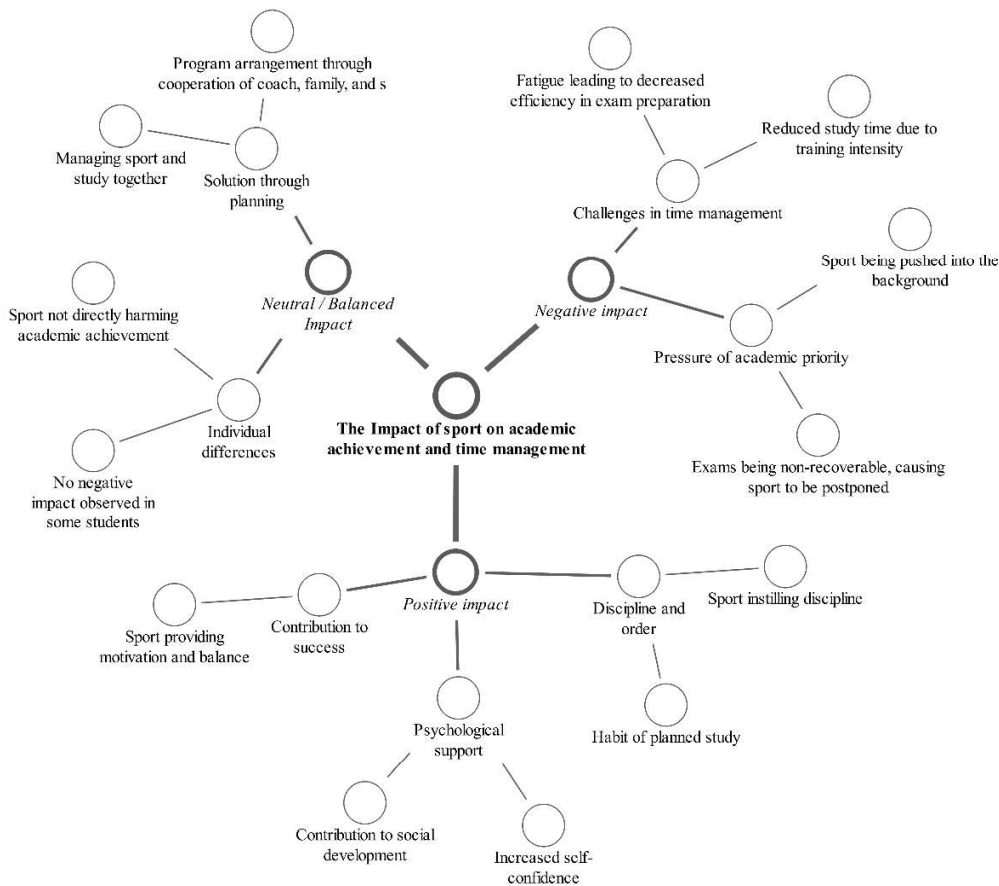


Figure 6. The influence of sports on academic performance and time management during exam periods

Participants evaluated the impact of sport on academic achievement and time management during exam periods in different ways. One group stated that intensive training programs make time management difficult and may negatively affect academic success. In these views, the irreversibility of exams, fatigue, and reduced study time were emphasized (P1, P2, P3).

P1: Unfortunately, in our country everything is indexed to academic success, so we prioritize it slightly. The intensity of training hours inevitably has an impact.

P2: Sport falls into second place during exam periods. However, sport can be compensated, exams cannot.

P3: Sport should be part of our lives, but if it is not pursued professionally, I believe a short break should be taken during exam periods.

Another group expressed that sport does not have a negative effect during exam periods; on the contrary, it provides discipline and order, helping with exam preparation. Findings highlighted that sport increases motivation and supports academic success (P4, P10).

P4: My child attends basketball training four days a week, and the teachers have also stated that these trainings have no negative effect on his academic performance.

P10: I do not think sport negatively affects my child's academic performance during exam periods. Sport provides discipline.

Some participants noted that sport creates both challenges and supportive effects during exam periods. While sport makes time management more difficult, it also contributes to self-confidence, discipline, and social development, thereby supporting academic success (P2, P5).

P2: I observe that sport falls into second place during exam periods. Sport can be compensated, but exams cannot.

P5: My child's involvement in sport can make time management difficult during exam periods. However, with proper planning, the disciplinary effect of sport supports academic success.

Discussion

In this study examining the support of parents with a sporting background for their children's participation in sport, parents emphasized that the impact of sport on academic achievement cannot be evaluated in a one-dimensional way. Some participants highlighted that sport develops discipline, focus, and motivation, supporting academic performance. Others stated that sport has a neutral effect, indicating that its impact varies according to individual characteristics and contextual conditions. During exam periods, sport presents a dual experience: intensive training and time management problems can negatively affect academic success, while self-confidence, discipline, and social development can support exam preparation. Knight and Holt (2014) and Jowett and Lavalley (2007) confirm that the quality of parental involvement shapes children's motivation and experiences. Zhang et al. (2022) argue that balanced parental involvement supports sustainable success in both sport and education. Critically, the impact of sport on academic achievement is multi-layered, shaped by personal characteristics, exam intensity, and parental support strategies. Therefore, balanced integration of sport into education is fundamental for sustaining both academic and personal development.

Parents' expectations regarding their children's sports activities are shaped around health, discipline, self-confidence, and socialization. Sport is perceived as a tool that enhances quality of life and supports personal development. Regarding professional athletic careers, most participants stated they would support their children's decisions based on individual happiness and talent. However, some parents stressed that academic achievement must remain a priority, while others associated professional careers with national identity and social values. Harwood and Knight (2015) and Ullrich-French and Smith (2006) show that supportive parental behaviours increase

self-determined motivation and commitment. Critically, balanced and supportive parental involvement is essential for sustaining children's success in both academic and sporting contexts. Most participants emphasized that sport should not allow gender discrimination, underlining equal opportunities based on talent and interest. However, some participants noted that cultural and religious norms limit girls' discipline choices, and that patriarchal thinking remains influential. Smoll and Smith (2002) and Bois et al. (2002) confirm that cultural norms and maternal expectations shape children's self-perceptions. Critically, while the egalitarian potential of sport is widely acknowledged, cultural and patriarchal norms actively restrict this potential. Reconstructing sport as an egalitarian domain requires systematic transformation of social norms, not only individual parental attitudes.

In elite-level sport discipline selection, parents prioritize the child's own desire and interest, maintaining motivation and happiness. Talent, physical suitability, infrastructure, and facility opportunities are also decisive factors. Laband and Lentz (1985) and Gao et al. (2024) confirm that genetic factors and parental attitudes shape motivational environments. Critically, elite sport branch selection gains meaning through the interaction of parental attitudes, genetic factors, and environmental conditions. Parents' evaluations of state sports infrastructure and policies are largely negative. Lack of early support and insufficient facility development from primary school are the most critical problems. Additionally, sports administrators often lack backgrounds in physical education, reducing policy effectiveness. Burke et al. (2024) and Hayre (2024) argue that parent education programmes and structured initiatives can reduce pressure and create healthier motivational environments. Critically, fundamental policy changes are needed for sport to be disseminated as an egalitarian and sustainable practice at the societal level.

The impact of sport during exam periods is multidimensional. Some parents stated that intensive training limits study time, pushing sport into the background. Others expressed that sport provides discipline and order, supporting exam preparation. Some noted both challenges and supportive effects. Thórsson and Ólafsdóttir (2024) and Zhang et al. (2022) confirm these contrasting effects. Critically, parents' attitudes and sports policies directly determine the impact of sport on students during exam periods. Based on these findings, the following practical implications are proposed. State sports policies should prioritize facility development and infrastructure investments from primary school level, with sports administrators selected from experts in physical education. Structured parental education programmes should reduce coercive attitudes and strengthen autonomy-supportive practices. Policies aimed at transforming cultural norms are necessary to eliminate gender discrimination, guaranteeing equal access for both girls and boys. Local-level facilities and qualified coaching support should be expanded. Flexible training programmes and time management strategies should be developed to balance sport with academic success during exam periods.

This study has several limitations. The research was conducted with only 15 parents, limiting generalizability; future research should use larger and more diverse samples. The qualitative design lacked quantitative measurements; future studies should adopt mixed methods. The study was conducted solely in Turkey without cross-cultural comparisons; future research should

examine different countries. The cross-sectional design did not assess long-term effects; longitudinal designs are needed. Parents' perceptions of sports policies were revealed but policy implementation effectiveness was not analysed; future studies should empirically investigate these factors.

Conclusion

This study reveals that sport is perceived not merely as a physical activity but as a tool for discipline, self-confidence, socialization, and quality of life. The relationship between academic achievement and sport is not unidirectional; during exam periods, sport can exert both supportive and challenging effects. Parents' approaches to professional athletic careers vary some prioritize happiness and talent, while others emphasize balancing sport with academic success. The egalitarian nature of sport is widely recognized, yet cultural and patriarchal norms limit this potential, particularly in girls' discipline choices. Elite discipline selection requires joint evaluation of the child's desire, talent, physical suitability, and available infrastructure. In conclusion, sport plays a central role in children's personal development and social value production. Future longitudinal and cross-cultural research is needed to clarify how parental support interacts with diverse cultural and policy environments over time.

Declarations

Ethical Declaration and Informed Consent:

This study was conducted with the necessary permissions from relevant authorities, and all procedures adhered to the Helsinki Declaration and international ethical standards. Participants' rights, safety, and confidentiality were protected, and data were used solely for academic purposes. Before participation, individuals were fully informed about the study's objectives, scope, and procedures through written and verbal explanations. Participation was voluntary, with no pressure applied. All participants signed informed consent forms prior to interviews, agreeing to take part. Their identities were kept confidential and represented only through codes (e.g., P1, P2...). Data were restricted to academic use, and participants retained the right to withdraw at any time. Interviews lasted approximately 30–35 minutes, and audio recordings were used exclusively by the research team for analysis. Researchers ensured privacy by securely storing data and preventing third-party access. Participants were informed that findings might be published in academic outlets, with explicit assurance that personal identities would not be disclosed.

Conflicts of interest:

The authors report no personal, academic, or financial conflicts that may have impacted this publication.

Funding declaration:

This research received no external funding.

Data availability statement:

The qualitative data used in this study were obtained through semi-structured interviews conducted with participants. The data were collected solely for academic purposes and anonymized to protect participant confidentiality. Identity information was coded (e.g., P1, P2...) and no personal details were disclosed. Raw datasets used in the research were accessible only to the research team, within the framework of institutional permissions and informed consent. Due to the obligation to protect participant confidentiality, the data are not publicly shared. However, academics wishing to verify the findings or conduct re-analysis may request limited access by contacting the authors of the article, in accordance with ethical guidelines.

References

1. Babkes, M. L., & Weiss, M. R. (1999). Parental influence on children's cognitive and affective responses to competitive soccer participation. *Pediatric exercise science*, 11(1), 44-62.
2. Baker, J., Horton, S., Robertson-Wilson, J., & Wall, M. (2003). Nurturing sport expertise: factors influencing the development of elite athlete. *Journal of Sports Science & Medicine*, 2(1), 1-9. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3937568/>
3. Baxter-Jones, A. D. G., & Maffulli, N. (2003). Parental influence on sport participation in elite young athletes. *Journal of Sports Medicine and Physical Fitness*, 43(2), 250-255.
4. Bois, J. E., Sarrazin, P. G., Brustad, R. J., Trouilloud, D. O., & Cury, F. (2002). Mothers' expectancies and young adolescents' perceived physical competence: A yearlong study. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, 22(4), 384-406.
5. Bowker, A., Boekhoven, B., Nolan, A., Bauhaus, S., Glover, P., Powell, T., et al. (2009). Naturalistic observations of spectator behavior at youth hockey games. *The Sport Psychologist*, 23,301e316. <https://doi.org/10.1123/tsp.23.3.301>
6. Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qual Res Psychol*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>

7. Burke, S., Sharp, L. A., Woods, D., & Paradis, K. F. (2024). Enhancing parental support through parent-education programs in youth sport: A systematic review. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 17(1), 208-235.
8. Creswell, J. W. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design choosing among five approach*. Sage Publications.
9. Darling, N., & Steinberg, L. (1993). Parenting style as context: An integrative model. *Psychological Bulletin*, 113(3), 487–496. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.113.3.487>
10. Dorsch, T. E., Wright, E., Eckardt, V. C., Elliott, S., Thrower, S. N., & Knight, C. J. (2021). A history of parent involvement in organized youth sport: A scoping review. *Sport, Exercise, and performance psychology*, 10(4), 536.
11. Gao, Z., Chee, C. S., Norjali Wazir, M. R. W., Wang, J., Zheng, X., & Wang, T. (2024). The role of parents in the motivation of young athletes: a systematic review. *Frontiers in psychology*, 14, 1291711.
12. Gould, D., Lauer, L., Rolo, C., Jannes, C., & Pennisi, N. (2008). The role of parents in tennis success: Focus group interviews with junior coaches. *The sport psychologist*, 22(1), 18-37. <https://doi.org/10.1123/tsp.22.1.18>
13. Görgüt, İ., & Köylü, D. (2023). Masa tenisi branşına karşı ebeveynlerin bakış açısı. *Spor Ve Performans Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 14(3), 293-314. <https://doi.org/10.17155/omuspd.1272353>
14. Harwood, C., Drew, A., & Knight, C. J. (2010). Parental stressors in professional youth football academies: a qualitative investigation of specialising stage parents. *Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise*, 2, 39-55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19398440903510152>
15. Harwood, C. G., & Knight, C. J. (2015). Parenting in youth sport: A position paper on parenting expertise. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 16, 24-35. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2014.03.001>
16. Hayre, R. S. (2024). *The impact of parental involvement and perceived parental pressure on athletes: a meta-analytic review*. (PhD thesis), Simon Fraser University.
17. Horn, T. S. (2008). *Advances in sport psychology*. Human kinetics.
18. Holt, N., & Knight, C. (2014). *Parenting in youth sport: From Research to practice* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203798553>
19. Jowett, S., & Lavalley, D. (Eds.). (2007). *Social psychology in sport*. Human Kinetics.
20. Kidman, L., McKenzie, A., & McKenzie, B. (1999). The nature and target of parents' comments during youth sport competitions. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 22, 54-68.

21. Knight, C. J., & Holt, N. L. (2014). Parenting in youth tennis: understanding and enhancing children's experiences. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 15, 155e164. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2013.10.010>
22. Laband, D. N., & Lentz, B. F. (1985). *The roots of success: Why children follow in their parents' career footsteps*. New York: Praeger.
23. Lauer, L., Gould, D., Roman, N., Pierce, M. (2010). Parental behaviors that affect junior tennis player development. *Psychology of sport and exercise*, 11(6), 487-496. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2010.06.008>
24. Lincoln, Y.S., & Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park (CA): Sage.
25. Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A Guide to design and implementation*. Jossey-Bass.
26. Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks (CA): Sage Publications.
27. Rowe, D. C. (1994). *The limits of family influence: Genes, experience, and behavior*. New York: Guilford Press.
28. Schader, R. M. (2001). *Perceptions of elite female athletes regarding success attributions and the role of parental influence on talent development*. [Order No. 3038047]. University of Connecticut.
29. Smoll, F. L. and Smith, R. E. (2002). *Children and youth in sport: A biopsychosocial perspective*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.
30. Smith, A. L., & Biddle, S. J. (2008). *Youth physical activity and sedentary behavior: challenges and solutions*. Human Kinetics.
31. **Thórsson, B., & Ólafsdóttir, S. (2024).** *Parental involvement and its influence on academic achievement: A cross-cultural analysis. International Journal of Educational Development*, 1(1), 16–20.
32. Ullrich-French, S., & Smith, A. L. (2006). Perceptions of relationships with parents and peers in youth sport: Independent and combined prediction of motivational outcomes. *Psychology of sport and exercise*, 7(2), 193-214.
33. Wolfenden, L. E., & Holt, N. L. (2005). Talent development in elite junior tennis: Perceptions of players, parents, and coaches. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 17(2), 108-126. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200590932416>.
34. Yıldırım, A., & Şimşek, H. (2013). *Sosyal bilimlerde nitel araştırma yöntemleri*. Seçkin Yayıncılık.

35. Zhang, D., Hong, J., Chen, S., & Liu, Y. (2022). Associations of physical activity with academic achievement and academic burden in Chinese children and adolescents: do gender and school grade matter? *BMC Public Health*, 22(1), 1496.