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## INVESTIGATION OF MOTIVATION LEVELS OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS FOR SCHOOL SPORTS COMPETITIONS

(Research article)

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### Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the motivation levels of high school students towards school sports competitions in terms of demographic variables. The research is based on quantitative survey model. The research group consists of 168 female and 134 male students studying at high school level. The data collection tools used in the study are School Sports Competitions Motivation Scale (SSMCS) and Personal Information Form. The data were analysed by taking missing values and extreme values into consideration and parametric tests were applied. In statistical analyses, independent groups t test, One-Way Anova, Tukey test were used to determine the difference between groups and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used in relational analyses. According to the findings of the study, the scores obtained by female students in the interest and involvement dimensions were found to be significantly higher than male students. However, in the analyses made according to the grade level, no significant difference was found between the grade levels in the motivation scores of the students. There was no significant relationship between age and motivation scores. These findings emphasise that school sport competitions should be designed by considering gender-specific motivational factors. The research contributes to a better understanding of motivational factors for school sport competitions.

**Keywords:** School sports, interest, involvement, motivation, competition

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## **1. Introduction**

Sports are competitive activities that contribute to the lifelong development of individuals. They require physical effort and skill and are governed by a set of rules and an organizational framework (Akkaya, 2023). Sport is also recognized as a means of developing important life skills, such as discipline, self-control, teamwork, and leadership (Hacızaferoğlu & Sümer, 2019). In contemporary societies, sport is considered from several perspectives, including health, social interaction, education, and personal development. This versatility allows sport to help individuals reflect on their life values, promote social values, and serve as a source of inspiration (Heper, 2012; Molnar & Kelly, 2013). In this context, the values and contributions of sports in areas such as health, social interaction, education, and personal development are further enriched by school sports competitions. These events, held in educational institutions, enable young people to learn these values experientially and participate in a holistic development process (Tüfekçi, 2020).

School sports competitions are extracurricular activities conducted in educational settings as individual and team sports, encouraging youth involvement in sporting activities (Özdoğan, 2018). These programs enhance students' physical fitness, promote a healthy lifestyle, and foster social and personal skills related to sports (Mahoney, Larson, & Eccles, 2005). Additionally, these competitions provide a platform for students to showcase their sporting abilities and engage in a competitive environment (Rus, Radu, & Vangu, 2016). Organized at inter-school, regional, and national levels, these events allow students to experience the excitement of sports and team spirit (Şahan, 2008). Beyond improving physical skills, school sports competitions also develop critical life skills such as decision-making, leadership, teamwork, perseverance, and patience—essential for achieving success. Furthermore, they enhance social interactions and facilitate the establishment of relationships with peers from diverse cultural and social backgrounds (Yanık, 2017). Thus, the values and gains from school sports competitions play a pivotal role in enriching students' educational and athletic development by bolstering their motivational resources.

Motivation encompasses mechanisms that mobilize, manage, and sustain both physical and psychological action, influencing the level of preference and persistence of one action over others (Howard et al., 2021). This psychological concept serves as the primary driving force behind the effort, perseverance, and determination necessary for individuals to achieve their goals (Murphy & Alexander, 2000). The level and types of motivation can vary among individuals, including not only the intensity but also the source and nature of motivation (Mahadi & Jafari, 2012). Motivation can affect individuals both directly and indirectly. For instance, intrinsic motivation is associated with an interest in new experiences, a sense of curiosity, and the satisfaction and enjoyment derived from activities. In contrast, extrinsic motivation relates to external factors such as rewards, appreciation, or social approval (Deci et al., 1991; Harada, 2007). In the educational setting, the motivation levels and types present in sports activities are critical determinants of students' involvement, success, and ongoing engagement in learning processes (Shaffer, 2019). Understanding the sources of motivation that influence students' involvement in sports competitions is emphasized as significant in the literature (Tüfekçi, 2020). Therefore, it is essential to recognize that the motivation sources of students who participate in school sports competitions, both as athletes and spectators, play crucial roles in promoting and supporting sports activities.

Extracurricular school sports competitions cater to students' interests and contribute to the acquisition of behaviors that enhance their lives (Pehlivan, 1998). Through involvement in these competitions, students acquire social and personal skills such as team spirit, discipline, self-control, and leadership, which in turn foster their motivation for engaging in school sports (Bozkurt, 2014).

These competitions are also known to positively impact students' physical health, mental resilience, and academic performance (Kocayiğit & Ekinçi, 2020). Bailey et al. (2009) demonstrated that school sports involvement could significantly aid in students' developmental processes. Tüfekçi (2020) analyzed the decision-making processes of 31,500 licensed students participating in out-of-school sports activities, revealing that these students had positive perceptions of their decision-making experiences, supported by environmental factors and encouragement from reference groups such as family and friends. Additionally, Doğruer, Pehlevan, and Uzun (2023) developed a tool to measure the motivation levels of high school students who, while not active athletes, participated as spectators in school sports competitions. While existing literature predominantly focuses on the motivation of students participating as athletes (İlhan & Gencer, 2013; Aycan & Yıldız, 2016; Yalçın et al., 2017; Erim & Küçük, 2023), there is a notable gap concerning students who participate as spectators. This study aims to address this gap and make a significant contribution to the field.

This study aims to significantly enrich the fields of education and sports sciences by thoroughly examining the motivation levels of high school students towards school sports competitions and the underlying factors of this motivation. Understanding the influence of school sports competitions on students' physical, social, and academic development is essential for crafting and implementing effective educational policies and school-based sports programs. This research will provide crucial insights for educators and policymakers, elucidating how involvement in sports competitions influences students' motivation and how this motivation correlates with academic achievement, social adjustment, and psychological well-being. Consequently, the findings of this study will be instrumental in guiding strategic decisions for the development of policies that support school sports competitions, thereby enhancing both education and sports sciences. By offering strategic insights into how the education system can better comprehend and integrate the effects of school sports competitions on student development, the results of this study will make a significant contribution to the literature in education and sports sciences.

In alignment with the objectives of this study, the following research questions were formulated to investigate the motivational dynamics among high school students towards school sports competitions:

1. Do the motivation levels of high school students for participating in school sports competitions vary by gender?
2. Are there differences in the motivation levels for school sports competitions among high school students across different grade levels?
3. Is there a correlation between the ages of high school students and their motivation levels for involvement in school sports competitions?

## **2. Method**

### *2.1. Research Model*

This study employed the survey model, a method within the quantitative research paradigm. This model is designed to gather data about individuals' attitudes, beliefs, opinions, behaviors, expectations, and personal qualities across various subjects. The approach involves collecting this information through the use of scales. Gürbüz and Şahin (2018) define this method as research aimed at identifying these specific characteristics of individuals.

### *2.2. Research Group*

The population of this study encompasses high school students enrolled in the 9th, 10th, and 11th grades across Turkey. The sample includes 168 female and 134 male students attending high schools in the province of Malatya. The mean age of the participants in the research group has been calculated to be 15.22 with a standard deviation of  $\pm 0.91$ .

### *2.3. Data Collection Tools*

In this study, two primary instruments were utilized to gather data: the School Sports Competitions Motivation Scale (SSMCS) developed by Doğruer, Pehlevan ve Uzun (2023) and a Personal Information Form designed by the researchers. The SSMCS is a 5-point Likert-type scale consisting of 26 items and includes two sub-dimensions: interest and involvement. In the original study that developed the scale, the internal consistency coefficient was .93 for the interest sub-dimension and .92 for the involvement sub-dimension. In the current study, the internal consistency coefficients were .89 for the interest sub-dimension and .87 for the involvement sub-dimension. The Personal Information Form collects demographic data on variables such as gender, age, and grade level.

### *2.4. Process*

Prior to the collection of research data, schools representing various types of high schools were randomly selected. Following the acquisition of the necessary permissions, the objectives of the research were explained to the students. Subsequently, the School Sports Competitions Motivation Scale (SSMCS) was administered to students who volunteered to participate in the study. It was observed that, on average, students completed the data collection tool within 7 minutes.

### *2.5. Data Analysis*

In this study, a statistical package program was employed for data analysis, with a significance level set at 0.05. Data were collected from 334 high school students using a questionnaire technique. Before analysis, the data were prepared by examining missing values and outliers. A total of 32 questionnaires were deemed unsuitable for evaluation and excluded, leaving 302 questionnaires for analysis. Given that the kurtosis and skewness values ranged between -2 and +2, it was appropriate to apply parametric tests (Büyüköztürk, 2018). For paired groups, the independent groups t-test was utilized, while One-Way ANOVA was conducted for multiple comparisons. The Tukey test was used to identify the sources of differences. The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was applied in relational analyses.

### 3. Results

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

		N	%
Gender	Female	168	55,6
	Male	134	44,4
Age	14	77	25,5
	15	105	34,8
	16	97	32,1
	17	23	7,6
Grade Level	9 <sup>th</sup> grade	95	31,5
	10 <sup>th</sup> grade	85	28,1
	11 <sup>th</sup> grade	122	40,4

Table 1 presents the demographic breakdown of the participants in the study. Regarding gender, 55.6% of the participants were female (n=168) and 44.4% were male (n=134). Age distribution shows that 14-year-olds constituted 25.5% of the sample (n=77), 15-year-olds 34.8% (n=105), 16-year-olds 32.1% (n=97), and 17-year-olds 7.6% (n=23). Grade level distribution reveals that 9th grade students made up 31.5% of the participants (n=95), 10th graders 28.1% (n=85), and 11th graders 40.4% (n=122). These data illustrate the distribution of participants across gender, age, and grade levels.

Table 2. Independent Groups t-Test Results for Gender-Based Comparisons of School Sports Competition Motivation Scale Subdimension Scores Among High School Students

Sub-Dimensions	Gender	N	M	SS	t	p
Interest	Female	168	3,45	0,90	4,980	,000*
	Male		2,89	1,08		
Involvement	Female	134	2,55	0,98	4,280	,000*
	Male		2,06	0,96		

\*p<0,05.

The analysis results comparing the mean scores of high school students' sub-dimensions on the School Sports Competitions Motivation Scale by gender are presented in Table 2. Upon examination of these results, it was found that female students scored significantly higher than male students on both the Involvement and Interest sub-dimensions of the scale, with p-values less than 0.05.

Table 3. One-Way ANOVA Test Results for Comparing High School Students' School Sports Motivation Scale Subscale Scores by Grade Level

Sub-Dimensions	Grade Level	N	M	SS	f	p	Significant Difference
Interest	9 <sup>th</sup> grade	95	3,18	1,01	,949	,388	-
	10 <sup>th</sup> grade	85	3,10	1,05			
	11 <sup>th</sup> grade	122	3,29	1,00			
Involvement	9 <sup>th</sup> grade	95	2,35	0,98	,290	,748	-
	10 <sup>th</sup> grade	85	2,39	1,01			
	11 <sup>th</sup> grade	122	2,28	1,02			

The differences in mean scores across the sub-dimensions of the School Sports Competitions Motivation Scale among high school students were analyzed by grade level using a One-Way ANOVA test. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 3. Upon reviewing Table 3, it was found that there are no statistically significant differences between the grade levels in either of the scale's sub-dimensions (p > 0.05).

Table 4. Correlation Analysis Results Examining the Relationship Between Age and Subscale Scores on the School Sports Competitions Motivation Scale Among High School Students

<b>N =302</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
1-Age	1		
2-Interest	,095	1	
3-Involvement	,293	,000	1

The relationship between the mean scores of the sub-dimensions of the School Sports Competitions Motivation Scale among high school students and the age variable was assessed using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 4. Upon reviewing Table 4, it was determined that there is no significant correlation between the scale's sub-dimensions and the age variable ( $p > 0.05$ ).

#### **4. Discussion**

Today, school sport competitions are recognised as one of the important activities that support students' physical, psychological and social development (Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003). In this context, gender-based differences in motivation for sport competitions offer important insights to educators, policy makers, and researchers. In particular, examining the differences of high school students according to their gender in the School Sport Competitions Motivation Scale is a research that enriches the literature in this field. The findings of the study showed that the mean scores of female students were significantly higher than male students in the involvement and interest sub-dimensions ( $p < 0.05$ ). This finding reveals that gender has a significant effect on involvement and interest levels in sports competitions. Studies reporting similar results in the literature suggest that female students show more interest in sports competitions due to factors such as social interaction, entertainment, movement/activity (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Şirin et al., 2008; Aycan & Yıldız, 2016). Sirard, Pfeiffer, and Pate's (2006) study examined secondary school students' involvement in sport programmes in terms of gender-related motivational factors. This research reveals that male students show more interest in the competitive features of sport programmes, while female students value social interaction opportunities more. These findings suggest that social motivation is an important factor in female students' involvement in sport competitions. When evaluated in terms of the factors that encourage students' involvement in intramural sport activities, it can be said that female students' need for social interaction is related to the scale sub-dimensions of interest and involvement. These studies indicate that female students may have more intrinsic motivation than male students and this may increase their level of involvement. Gender roles and socialisation processes are among the important factors underlying these differences. Eagly and Wood's (2012) social role theory explains the way individuals learn and internalise gender-specific behaviours. Within the framework of this theory, the higher involvement of female students in sport competitions can be associated with social expectations and socialisation processes. In addition, education and sport policies may affect gender-based motivational differences. Schools' policies encouraging sport activities for female students may increase their interest in sport competitions. This may contribute to the creation of an environment that supports more involvement and interest of female students in sports activities. When the differences related to gender in terms of motivation theories are evaluated; Bandura's (2001) Self-Efficacy Theory explains how individuals' beliefs in their own abilities affect their actions and motivation. According to this theory, when individuals have high self-efficacy, they show more effort in the face of difficulties and are more determined to achieve their goals even if they encounter failure. The higher scores of female students in the involvement and interest sub-dimensions may indicate that these students feel more competent in the context of sports competitions

and are more motivated to participate in these activities (Bandura, 2001; Sevinç & Kapçak, 2021). McClelland's (2015) Achievement Motivation Theory, which is frequently examined in the literature, suggests that individuals' desire to achieve success is driven by the desire to achieve personal goals. This theory explains individuals' desire to overcome difficulties and improve their performance (Roberts & Papaioannou, 2014). The fact that female students have higher motivation than male students in the involvement and interest sub-dimensions may indicate that their motivation to achieve success is stronger in these activities. Achievement Goal Theory, which provides different explanations for the concept of motivation, examines the effect of individuals' achievement goals on motivation, learning and performance (Nicholls, 1989; Ames, 1992). This theoretical framework analyses the way individuals approach tasks under two basic goal dimensions: Competence goals and performance goals. While competence goals emphasise learning and personal development, performance goals aim to demonstrate comparative superiority over others and to prove their competence (Roberts & Nerstad, 2020). The higher scores of female students in the involvement and interest dimensions may indicate that these students attach more importance to competence goals and see sports competitions as personal development opportunities. In this context, gender-based differences observed in the School Sport Competitions Motivation Scale reveal the complex social and psychological dynamics underlying these differences when analysed in the light of self-efficacy, achievement motivation, free will and achievement goals theories. These findings provide important insights that require consideration of gender differences in sport education and policies.

The fact that there is no significant difference between the mean scores of the sub-dimensions of the School Sports Competitions Motivation Scale of high school students according to the grade level variable can be explained within the framework of various conceptual frameworks. Research findings show that grade level does not have a significant effect on students' motivational responses. This finding is consistent with the findings of Weiss (2019) that demographic factors do not have a direct effect on the motivational orientations of young individuals. In addition, Gould and Carson (2008) emphasise that motivation is more closely related to factors such as intrinsic motivation, social support and group dynamics. In the study conducted by Biddle et al. (2003), various factors of achievement goal orientations in the context of physical activity were examined. The study indicated that motivation is more influenced by individual goals and social environment rather than demographic factors such as class level. In another study in the literature, high school students' motivation to participate in physical activity was examined in terms of various variables. According to the findings, a significant difference was found in favour of 10th grade students in the overall scale of motivation to participate in physical activity according to the grade level of the students (Bozdağ & Bekir, 2020). This finding is not in parallel with our research findings. The findings of our research may lead to the development of customised motivational strategies to encourage students' participation in sports competitions and to design these strategies to support individual motivations. In this framework, structured and student-centred sport trainings are important to increase students' motivation levels.

Another finding obtained in our study shows that there is no statistically significant relationship between age and scale sub-dimensions ( $p>0.05$ ). When this finding is evaluated in the light of motivational theories, it offers various interpretations and insights. Motivational theories play a critical role in determining the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation sources of individuals, especially in the context of education and sport. Deci and Ryan's Self Determination Theory (SDT) analyses motivation in two main categories as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Adams, Little, & Ryan, 2017). Intrinsic motivation stems from a natural pleasure and interest in the activity itself (Fishbach & Woolley, 2022), while extrinsic motivation is driven by external factors and rewards (Chen, Elliot, & Sheldon, 2019). The lack of a significant relationship between age and motivation sub-dimensions

in this study may indicate that students' motivation sources do not change with age or that this change is not measurable. This may suggest that the motivational responses of students, especially in adolescence, remain constant according to age. Bandura's Social Learning Theory also has a significant impact on motivation (Rumjaun & Narod, 2020). This theory states that individuals learn through observation, imitation and modelling (Nabavi, 2012). However, the results of this study reveal that age does not function as a significant variable in such social and motivational learning processes. This may indicate that motivational interaction and social learning mechanisms function similarly among students of different age groups. When interpreted in line with motivational theories, these findings suggest that the effect of age on motivation related to school sport competitions is limited or ambiguous, at least with these measurement methods and demographic information. The findings may provide important information for educators and coaches to develop motivational strategies that can be applied across a broad age spectrum rather than interventions differentiated across age groups.

## **5. Conclusions**

In this study, the effects of demographic variables on motivational processes were evaluated among high school students using the School Sports Competitions Motivation Scale (Doğruer, Pehlevan, & Uzun, 2023). The analyses revealed that female students had significantly higher scores than male students in the involvement and interest sub-dimensions in terms of gender variable. However, no significant difference was found between the groups in terms of class level variable and participation and interest sub-dimension mean scores. These findings indicate that students' motivational responses are shaped independently of demographic factors. On the other hand, in the relational analysis of the age variable, no significant relationship was found between the age variable and the participation and interest sub-dimensions.

The findings of this study provide several recommendations for school administrations and educational policy makers. Firstly, in order to increase female students' participation in sport competitions, it is recommended to support sport activities that provide opportunities for social interaction and promote intrinsic motivation. Secondly, motivational strategies need to be customised and made attractive for both genders. Furthermore, considering that demographic variables such as age and grade level do not have a significant effect on motivation, it would be useful to develop general motivational strategies to cover a wide age spectrum. In future studies on the concept of motivation for school sport competitions, similar studies can be conducted with students from different regions, different socioeconomic statuses and different educational levels in order to confirm the findings of our study with a wider demographic diversity. In addition, conducting long-term studies that will follow the changes in the motivation levels of high school students regarding school sport competitions over time may help to understand the factors affecting motivation in more depth.

In conclusion, this study emphasises that school sport competitions can contribute to the physical, psychological and social development of students and that students' participation in these activities can be increased with a better understanding of motivational dynamics. It is suggested that educators and coaches should develop more inclusive and effective training strategies by taking this information into consideration.



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