

HOW SLOVENE PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS SPEND THEIR SUMMER HOLIDAYS

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PREŽIVLJANJE POLETNIH POČITNIC SLOVENSКИH OSNOVNOŠOLCEV

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Abstract

The purpose of the research was to analyse how Slovene primary school pupils spend their summer holidays. The analysis included 7,344 Slovene primary school pupils and was based on a questionnaire completed by children at home. The data were analysed by means of the calculation of Pearson's χ^2 coefficient, Spearman's correlation coefficient and the discriminant analysis.

It has been established that during the summer holidays the Slovene primary school pupils are more active as far as sport is concerned than a few years ago; as regards other aspects, they spend their summer holidays in a more healthy way as well. Their organized and unorganized sports activities during this period of time are mostly affected by the sports activity of their parents.

The analysis of the sports activities primary school pupils take part in during the summer holidays shows that they mostly engage in the following activities: cycling, swimming, playing football and roller skating. There are differences between the sexes, since boys prefer team sports, whereas girls prefer individual sports activities, with less physical contact and requiring less muscular exertion.

Pupils would like to take part in sports activities in the school gym during the summer holidays. We therefore propose a national project which would enable the use of school gyms during summer holidays.

Key words: pupils, primary school, sports activity, summer holidays, free time

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Izvešček

Namen raziskave je bil analizirati način preživljanja poletnih počitnic slovenskih osnovnošolcev. V raziskavo je bilo vključenih 7344 učencev slovenskih osnovnih šol. Za analizo smo uporabili vprašalnik, ki so ga učenci izpolnjevali doma. Podatke smo analizirali z izračunom Pearsonovega χ^2 koeficienta, Spearmanovega koeficienta ranga korelacije in diskriminantno analizo.

Ugotovljamo, da so slovenski osnovnošolci med poletnimi počitnicami bolj športno dejavni kot pred leti; tudi sicer preživljajo poletne počitnice bolj zdravo. Na njihovo športno organizirano in neorganizirano udeleževanje v tem času najbolj vpliva športna dejavnost njihovih staršev.

Analiza športnih dejavnosti, s katerimi so se ukvarjali med poletnimi počitnicami, kaže, da osnovnošolci največ kolesarijo, plavajo, igrajo nogomet in rolajo. Pri tem obstajajo razlike med spoloma, saj fantje izbirajo več ekipnih športnih iger, dekleta pa več individualnih športnih dejavnosti, kjer je manj medsebojnih dotikov in ki zahtevajo manjši obseg mišičnega naprežanja.

Učenci si med poletnimi počitnicami želijo športnega udeleževanja v šolski telovadnici, zato predlagamo nacionalni projekt aktiviranja šolskih telovadnic v počitniškem času.

Ključne besede: učenci, osnovna šola, športna dejavnost, poletne počitnice, prosti čas

INTRODUCTION

Summer holidays are very important for the overall development of pupils and their preparation for a new school year, since in this period the children and the youth are much less burdened with learning and consequently they have more free time. The effects of the achievements of the civilization and modern society are also reflected in the ways holidays are spent. These effects are varied and unforeseeable, both positive and negative. The intensive development of industrial society and a pluralist civilization bring about strong negative pedagogic and functional effects which are also reflected in how children and youth spend their summer holidays. The result is that summer holidays can represent a critical period from the point of view of health, since children spend more time in front of the TV set and computer screen, while more rarely they take part in systematic sports activities (Novak et al., 1991; Štihec, Karpljuk, Videmšek, & Kondrič, 2000; Štihec, & Strel, 1998). Strel, Novak, Pisanski, Mesarič, & Štihec (1993) establish that motor abilities of pupils diminish during the summer holidays. This is not surprising, if we take into account that within the educational system the compulsory and elective sports programmes account for a half of all sports activities (Strel et al., 1997), since one cannot expect that all children and their parents will place sport on such a high place in their value system so that they would practice it regularly even in their free time.

In primary school, children are most active in sport. Up to the age of 12 their sports activity increases, whereas it decreases after the age of 14 (Brettschneider, & Sack, 1996; Laakso, Telama, & Yang, 1996; Russel, Allen, & Wilson, 1996; Sisjord, & Skirstad, 1996; Wenkel, & Mummery, 1996) as a result of physical and mental changes in adolescence. Lately, new but not yet controlled factors of youth socialization in modern affluent and hedonistic societies have appeared, causing a series of educational problems. The intrusive abundance of mass media and information technology provides a simple and immediate satisfaction as well as encourages children and the youth to choose the activities where they mainly sit; increasingly, they choose fewer sports activities (Novak et al., 1991; Kršnjakova, & Pavlovičova, 1995).

This study aims at analysing how Slovene primary school pupils spend their summer holidays and at

establishing the influence of some factors on their sports activity during the holidays.

METHODS

Subject sample

The subject sample comprises 7344 pupils (45.2% of boys and 54.8% of girls) aged from 7 to 15 and attending Slovene primary schools. The sample covers all Slovene regions. The subjects were chosen at random and they took part in the research on a voluntary basis. The subjects' parents gave their written consent, enabling us to use the data collected for research purposes.

Variable sample

To establish the aims we used a questionnaire prepared on the basis of the questionnaire by Strel et al. (1993) with closed and open-ended answers. The children completed the questionnaire at home, the younger ones with the help of their parents. The list of the schools included and the questionnaire are available from the authors.

The following are the variables that will be dealt with in the continuation.

EDUMOTH	Mother's education
EDUFATH	Father's education
OPINPE	Opinion about physical education
PEMARK	Physical education mark
ORGACTIV	Participation in organized activities during holidays
ACTIVFREQ	Frequency of sports activities during holidays
HOMESPENT	Time during summer holidays spent at home
CONTR7OUT	Possible parents' contribution for a 7-day organized sports participation outside place of residence
BROTHSIST	Number of brothers and sisters
SCHOOLORG	Desired forms of school sports activities during holidays
GENDER	Gender
SPORT	Sports events children took part in
SPORTMOTH	Frequency of mother's participation in sports activities
SPORTFATH	Frequency of father's participation in sports activities
AGE	Age
COMPUT_HRS	Number of hours of work on computer
TV_HRS	Number of hours of watching TV
BEDTIME	Time of going to bed
GETUPTIME	Getting-up time
DAYOBLHRS	Daily work obligations
SCHOOLMARK	Marks at school
LIKEPE	Pupil's rating of sports education in the previous school year

Data analysis

Basic statistics were calculated by standard procedures, which produced data on the distribution of the variables used. The characteristics of differences in individual variables between the sexes were established with the calculation of Pearson's χ^2 coefficient. The connection between the individual variables was established with the calculation of Spearman's correlation coefficient and Pearson's χ^2 coefficient. The discriminant analysis was used to establish the differences between the individual groups of pupils concerning the extent of participation in sports activities during the summer holidays. All the hypotheses were analysed at 5% alpha error level.

RESULTS

It was established that 85% of primary school pupils spend a month or several days of their summer holidays at home. There are only 6.6% of primary school pupils who spend the entire summer holidays at home, which is about 3% less than established by Strel et al. (1993) some years ago. The most frequent destination of Slovenes to spend their summer holidays outside their place of residence is the Adriatic coast, where the political situation is now stable, the national GDP is higher (Gibanje bruto domačega proizvoda, 2000), which results in Slovene families' better financial standing, enabling them to spend their summer holidays outside their place of residence.

The daily rhythm of primary school pupils during the summer holidays differs from that established some years ago. They go to bed at a quarter past ten (mean 22:14 \pm 56 min) and get up at around nine (mean 8:48 \pm 1'06 min). The comparison with the data gathered by Strel et al. (1993) shows that primary school pupils go to bed earlier now than they used to, which is probably due to the fact that they spend less time watching TV. It was established that they sleep long enough (mean 10:34 \pm 1'06 min) in terms of their developmental needs.

On average, children have one hour and forty minutes' work obligations a day (\pm 1'34 min), which is an hour and a half less than some years ago (Strel et al., 1993). The reasons for fewer work obligations lie in the following facts: parents organize their children's holiday time to a lesser extent, everyday household activities are increasingly automated and fa-

milies are less numerous. The result is that 45% of primary school pupils have a whole day off during their summer holidays, whereas 30% have the afternoon off.

The variety of free-time activities and fashion trends dictate a slightly different way of how primary school pupils spend their summer holidays today in comparison to some years ago. Today, children watch less TV (mean 2h 30 min \pm 1h 34 min), since several other pastime activities, such as computer games and the Internet (mean 57 min \pm 1h 12 min) are available, and so are some fashion sports (roller skating, skate boarding etc.).

More than a half of primary school pupils do not take part in any organized activity during the summer holidays. Most of them (i.e. around 40%) take part in organized sports activities. Sports programmes in which they engage during the summer holidays most frequently include swimming, football, cycling, roller skating, basketball, tennis and mountaineering. Similar to other countries (Brettscheider, & Sack, 1996; De Knop, Vanreusel, Theeboom, & Wittcock, 1996; Laakso, Telama, & Yang, 1996; Wankel, & Mummery, 1996) boys take part in sports programmes more frequently in Slovenia as well ($p < .000$). These boys account for 25.5%, whereas the girls taking part in sports programmes account for 14.3%. These results may be explained by a different structure of interests of boys and girls (Pavlikova, 1995).

In comparison to the data collected some years ago (Strel et al., 1993) the present results show that there are more primary school pupils taking part in sports activities during the summer holidays now (Figure 1), however, the trend for pupils to participate in sports activities goes in two directions.

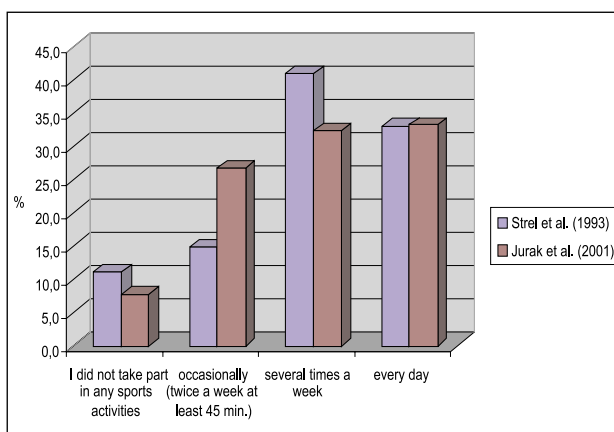


Figure 1: Comparison of the frequency of sports activities of primary school pupils during the holidays with research carried out by Strel et al. (1993)

1. The proportion of primary school pupils not taking part in any sport during the holidays decreases (in 2000 only 7.7%, whereas eight years ago 11.2%).
2. Among those who engage in sports activities the proportion of those participating in a sport several times a week during the holidays decreases.

We believe that the decrease in pupils not taking part in any sport during their summer holidays is the consequence of pupils' better knowledge of sports gained in the framework of planned school physical education in the past years, the variety and a good organization of extracurricular sports activities as well as the emergence of new sports that are very popular among the young today (roller skating, skate boarding).

The downward trend in the frequency of sports of children engaging in sports several times a week is probably the consequence of a wide range of other free-time activities, in which primary school pupils participate during their holidays besides sport.

A survey of the answers by sex shows that during the holidays boys take part in sport more often than girls ($p < .000$), which supports the findings of various authors (Brettscheider, & Sack, 1996; De Knop et al., 1996; Laakso, Telama, & Yang, 1996; Maciaszek, 1995; Wankel, & Mummary, 1996; White, & Rowe, 1996).

We tried to explain the frequency of primary school pupils engaging in sports activities during the summer holidays based on a discriminant analysis. Our aim was to find out whether four groups of test subjects, defined according to the frequency of their sports activities during the holidays, can generally be distinguished and which variables define best the function of the differentiation.

The results showed that the discussed variables mutually distinguish between separate groups, since the first two discriminant functions are statistically significant (Table 1). Both statistically significant functions together explain 98.6% of the entire variance.

Table 2: Discriminant structure matrix of discriminant functions of groups of primary school pupils as regards the frequency of sports participation

Variable	Function		
	1	2	3
SPORTFATH	.587	-.221	-.187
SPORTMOTH	.558	-.205	.205
LIKEPE	-.532	-.045	-.282
OPINPE	-.485	-.114	.065
TV_HRS	.380	.332	.032
EDUMOTH	.279	-.240	.012
HOMESPENT	.245	.228	-.061
COMPUT_HRS	-.123	.096	-.065
SCHOOLMARK	-.133	.542	.149
CONTR7OUT	.283	-.441	-.094
AGE	-.084	-.204	-.140
BROTHSIST	-.086	.180	.113
EDUFATH	.241	-.354	.450
BEDTIME	.101	.073	-.376
PEMARK	-.139	.056	.285
DAYOBLHRS	-.023	-.110	-.157
GETUPTIME	-.001	-.097	-.139

The discriminant structure matrix shows how the chosen variables are projected on the discriminant function (Table 2). The formation of the first discriminant function is mostly affected by the following: both parents regularly engage in sports, the pupil likes sports education very much, the pupil has a good opinion about sports education in the past school year, the pupil watches the TV very little, high education of the mother, shorter period of time spent by children at home during the summer holidays and a greater number of hours dedicated to computer activities.

It has been proved several times that the parents' participation in sports exerts a positive influence on their children's participation in sports (Dragutinović, 1986; Hošek, 1987), which was confirmed by our research as well (.197-.205; $p < .001$). Therefore, it is not surprising that this is the most important factor influencing the distinction between the

Table 1: Canonical discriminant functions of differentiation of groups of primary school pupils as regards the frequency of sports participation

Function	λ	% of var.	cum. %	can. corr.	Wilks' λ	χ^2	df	sig.
1	.146	90.5	90.5	.357	.860	1109.256	51	.000
2	.013	8.2	98.6	.114	.985	112.006	32	.000
3	.002	1.4	100.0	.047	.998	15.996	15	.382

Table 3: Centroids of groups of primary school pupils as regards sports participation during the summer holidays

POGSPDEJ	Function		
	1	2	3
I did not take part in any sports activities	-.926	.257	5.074E-02
occasionally (twice a week at least 45 min.)	-.325	-9.212E-02	-5.465E-02
several times a week	9.355E-02	-8.781E-02	5.614E-02
every day	.384	.101	-2.236E-02

groups. Its influence also reflects in parents' readiness to provide financial (sports activities and equipment costs) and logistic support (transport to the venue of sports activities), which directly and extensively influences the organized sports activities. The fact that children like sports education very much and that they have a good opinion about sports education during the previous year shows a general positive attitude towards the sports education, which can have several reasons: the pupil's knowledge, morphologic characteristics and motor abilities of the child, his/her previous experience with sport, etc. Logically, this attitude is also shown in more frequent sports activities in one's free time. Watching TV as the most frequent free-time activity affects the sports activity (.146; $p < .001$) and, obviously, also exerts a considerable impact on the extent of child's participation in sport during the summer holidays. It is interesting that the latter is also influenced by the time children spend at home during the summer holidays. The relation between the variables of the frequency of engaging in sports activities during the holidays and those of the length of holiday time spent at home (.088; $p < .001$) shows that the children spending more time at home during the holidays are the least active in terms of sport, whereas the children away from home most of the time during the holidays are the most active. It is assumed that the free time of the children spending more time at home is not organized, the result being that more of their free time is devoted to the TV. Parents with higher education help their children organize their free time, therefore they take part in various activities. Because of the variable of parents' education there is an indirect relation between the computer and sports activities of the children (.046; $p < .001$). According to the described characteristics the first discriminant function denotes: parents' high sports education.

The second discriminant function, which explains only a small part of the variance according to the first function, is well determined by: lower marks at

school, smaller parents' contribution to the organisation of sports activities, young age of the subjects and a greater number of brothers or sisters.

The analysis excluded a group of pupils of the very first classes who have a brother or a sister. Owing to the social variables their parents are probably not capable of financing many organized sports activities. This function was not given a special name and the connection between socio-economic variables in particular (smaller contribution to sports activities, number of brothers or sisters) shows the social impact on child's sports activities.

The positions of the group centroids in the area of the carried out discriminant functions show the differences between the representatives of individual groups in the individual discriminant function (Table 3). The first discriminant function most markedly differentiates between the subjects not engaging in sport and those engaging in sport every day, i.e. extreme groups of subjects considering the variable of grouping. The second discriminant function most markedly differentiates between the group of subjects not participating in sport and those participating occasionally or several times a week.

Since it was of great interest to us whether the variables affecting mainly the frequency of participating in sports activities during the holidays result in significant differences within the group of children taking part in the organized sports activities during the holidays (18.1% of primary school pupils), we carried out a discriminant analysis based on participation in sports programmes during the holidays as well. The results confirmed our assumption, since the discriminant function is statistically significant ($\lambda = .052$; can. corr. = .222; Wilks' $\lambda = .951$; $\chi^2 = 370.348$; $df = 17$; $p = .000$), the discriminant structure matrix shows that the formation of the discriminant function is greatly affected by frequent sport activity of both parents and a generally high opinion about sports education and less by parents' good financial standing. The analysis by sex showed certain differences.

In boys the discriminant function ($\lambda = .056$; can. corr. = .231; Wilks' $\lambda = .947$; $\chi^2 = 180.842$; $df = 17$; $p = .000$) is most greatly affected by the father's frequent participation in sport. This is followed by parents' better capability of financing organized sports activities, late bed time, high opinion about sports education and mother's frequent participation in sport. Among the variables which importantly affect participation in sport, the time children go to bed is slightly unusual, but the links between the variables of sports activities and the time children go to bed ($.042$; $p < .001$) make us conclude that there is an inverse influence between the variables in children engaging in sport. Children who take part in sport do not go to bed early during the holidays, since sports activities and other activities besides sport terminate late in the evening.

In girls the chosen variables which affect the formation of the function, which differentiates the group of girls engaging in sport during the summer holidays from the rest ($\lambda = .044$; can. corr. = .205; Wilks' $\lambda = .958$; $\chi^2 = 172.065$; $df = 17$; $p = .000$), exert an impact different from that in boys. The most important variable for the inclusion of girls in sports programmes during the holidays is father's education, followed by father's frequent participation in sport and mother's frequent participation in sport. The influence of the variable of the time spent at home during the holidays led us to a conclusion that the girls are more frequently active in a sport organized outside the place of residence, i.e. when they are away on holiday with their parents. Interestingly, the parents' financial standing has no considerable effect on the participation of primary school girls in organized sports activities during the holidays.

Besides some quantitative changes in sports participation of primary school pupils during the summer holidays, some changes in quality have also been observed.

During the summer holidays, primary school pupils mostly cycled, swam, played football and roller skated (Table 4). Even though it has spread widely, especially in the last years, basketball ranks fifth among the sports in which primary school pupils most frequently participated during the holidays. Among the chosen sports a high place is occupied by the popular ball game in which two teams try to eliminate the other side's players by hitting them with a ball. This demonstrates how greatly physical education in school influences the choice of free-time activities, since this game is one of the most

Table 4: Trend of participation of primary school pupils in sports during the summer holidays

<i>sport</i>	<i>Strel et al., 1993 (%)</i>	<i>Jurak et al., 2001 (%)</i>	<i>trend</i>
cycling	18.59	21.92	^
swimming	32.26	15.66	∨
football	11.17	14.33	^
roller skating	0.09	10.76	^
basketball	5.09	8.08	^
athletics	7.86	7.34	•
volleyball	3.66	4.10	•
tennis	10.50	2.85	∨
handball	2.06	0.74	∨
mountaineering	0.71	0.53	•

common ones during the physical education classes in the first four years of the primary school, especially where physical education is the responsibility of classroom teachers.

The comparison between choices of sports activities during the holidays in the last few years (Antončič, & Podgornik, 1994; Boštjančič, 1999; Jerkič, 2000; Strel et al., 1993) reveals some changes in the priority of sports activities. Over the last few years a new popular sports activity i.e. roller skating has developed and today it is one of the most popular free-time activities of primary school pupils. An increase in children's interest in cycling, football and basketball has also been observed, whereas they showed less interest in swimming and playing tennis.

The results show a considerable impact of fashion in sports industry and top sport on children's elective sports activities as well as the influence of today's social and economic factors. The beginning of the 1990s witnessed the expansion of tennis, followed by strong enthusiasm over roller skating and an upswing in basketball (success of Slovene clubs and teams, NBA). Football increased in popularity during the last few years (success of the Slovene team) as well as cycling (Tour de France, Giro d'Italia in Slovenia, success of the Slovene cyclists). The influence of families' economic status can also be observed, since swimming and tennis require a financial contribution each time (admission at the swimming pool, fee for hiring a tennis court).

When comparing the participation of boys and girls in sports activities, it is found that boys and girls choose different sports activities during the summer holidays ($p < .000$). Boys prefer team sports (football, basketball), whereas girls prefer individual

sports with less physical contact (swimming, roller skating, running) and sports requiring less muscular exertion (cycling, badminton, horse riding, jumpsies). The results confirm previous findings (Boštjančič, 1999; Bregar, 1996; Bosnar, & Gošnik, 2000; De Knop et al., 1996; Jerkič, 2000; Laakso, Telama, & Yang, 1996; Maciaszek, 1995; Makuc, 1998; Wankel, & Mummery, 1996; Weiss, 1996; White, & Rowe, 1996). The differences in the choice are a consequence of a different structure of interests and motives of boys and girls for engaging in sport (De Knop, Engstroem, & Skirstad, 1996; Pavlikova, 1995).

Surprisingly, there is a large proportion of girls (4.4%) playing football, which shows the trend towards equal participation in sport by sex, observed also in some other developed countries (Blair, 1985; Laakso, Telama, & Yang, 1996; Sisjord, & Skirstad, 1996; Wankel, & Mummery, 1996). Such percentage should be attributed to the increasing popularity of football in Slovenia and worldwide in recent times; this result also reflects the impact of top sports results (success of the Slovene team) on elective sports activities of children and youth. It would be interesting to gather some information about girls' football knowledge, since for girls football is not a compulsory intra-curricular sports activity. It would be reasonable to think about the inclusion of girls in the football programme as an elective.

A comparison with other countries shows some differences in the choice of sports of the Slovene primary school pupils. The most popular sports are universal almost throughout the world, then some peculiarities appear, relating to country's culture and tradition. Globally, football is the most widely spread sport among boys, followed by swimming, which is also most widely spread among girls (De Knop, Engstroem, Skirstad, & Weiss, 1996). In Slovenia children most frequently engage in sport which is spread worldwide, except for the fact that this is not football but cycling. The popularity of the latter increased at the expense of swimming, despite the fact that primary school pupils have better knowledge of swimming (Jurak, & Kovač, 2001). The reasons lie primarily in lack of suitable swimming pools and lack of sports activities offered there. Owing to changeable weather, many outdoor swimming pools have fewer bathing days than before and from the point of view of sports activities the possibilities are poor.

An important piece of information obtained from this research is that as many as 96.7% of primary

school pupils would engage in sports activities offered by the school during the summer holidays. Most often, pupils preferred various sports in the school gym, which is followed by various forms of sports activities outside school. A comparison with the results obtained by Strel et al., (1993) shows an upward trend in desires and needs for an active role of the school in organizing sports activities during the holidays. It is, therefore, worrying that only about 10% of programmes organized during the summer holidays take place in school gyms, as sports activities could be organized there with minimal financial costs (Jurak, Kovač, & Strel, 2001).

CONCLUSIONS

The findings about the way primary school pupils spend their holidays are encouraging. The comparison with the previous research (Strel et al., 1993; Štihec et al., 2000) shows a more frequent participation of pupils in sport as well as gradually shorter time during which they watch TV. A somewhat problematic issue is only the fact that children spend too much time in bed in the morning, which indicates that their time during the summer holidays is not organized to a great extent.

The reasons for the changes can be attributed to social changes in the past few years, planned school physical education and consequently children's better knowledge of sports, a variety of organized extracurricular sports activities and some fashion trends in sport. Research by other authors (Dragutinović, 1986; Hošek, 1987) and our research both show that children's participation in sports is mostly affected by the sports awareness of their parents. Therefore, in the future it will be necessary to carry out the activities aimed at raising the general level of sports culture.

Based on the above results we propose a project enabling the use of school gyms during the holidays. Late in the afternoon, sports activities can be organized in school gyms at a favourable price, which will make them available to all children regardless of their family's socio-economic status and logistic support. The vicinity of the school gives children a relative independence while engaging in certain activities. These programmes would not be aimed at looking after children, which is the case in the majority of holiday programmes (Jurak, Kovač, & Strel, 2001). Motor abilities and sports knowledge would be preferred to hedonism. They would

primarily be based on the principle of honesty by emphasising equal opportunities for all the participants, which hopefully would develop into a desire to co-operate, understand other people, encourage friendship and tolerance and not promote the principle of competition, victory and eagerness to achieve the best result possible, perform well, to be determined and self-disciplined. A good information support offered by the school would also ensure a good response from children. Activities led by experts, suitable sports devices and equipment would reduce the risk of injuries. If we lay firm foundations, which include quality physical education programmes continuing throughout the holidays, we may expect long-term effects as well as a positive influence on other dimensions of children.

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