

# THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION FOR SPORT SCHOOLS STUDENTS

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## ABSTRACT

The main task of vocational education institutions is to implement the relevant knowledge and skills, alongside the acquisition of primary or secondary education. In the context of sports schools, the main emphasis is on achieving results in tournaments, games, and competitions. However, in parallel with the implementation of the sports field, the task of sports schools is to promote the opportunities and desires of students in the field of education. The author points out that too much emphasis is placed on the realization of sports goals, without paying attention to the accents of students' personal development – for example, the importance of education.

The aim of the research is related to the actualization of education in the context of sports schools. Two main guidelines are emphasized – the interest of sports schools in educating students, as well as the athletes' own opinion about the education and its connection with sport. Within the framework of the research, the author wants to analyze the obtained data correlations. For example, the relationship between students' current progress and their desire to continue their studies at university. Analyze the results and make recommendations to improve the situation.

Data were collected from three professional sports schools in Latvia – Vidzeme and Riga region. The total number of respondents is 147. The survey was conducted anonymously, with respondents aged 13–16 years.

Data processed using Windows SPSS and Microsoft Exel programs

**Keywords:** *education, learning achievements, sport, sport schools.*

## Introduction

In today's society, the sphere of education is becoming more and more important. Nations are investing additional resources to reorganize education systems and make them as meaningful as possible. Reforms are being implemented that require both educators and students to adapt.

Various changes also affect the field of sports education. The topic of educating athletes or activities in parallel with sports training and competitions is becoming more and more topical. The main document on

the subject is the European Union's dual career guidelines (European Guidelines... 2012). It mentions some factors related to the combination of education and sports but focuses on the initial stage, or the involvement of mainstream schools in the training process. Athletes have the right to combine training with sport, as this promotes their personal development and works to enter both the labor market and the highest possible level of the sport (Tessitore et al., 2021).

The foundation of the sports pyramid is related to youth sports. The share of academics or sports boarding schools in the Latvian education system is not pronounced. More often, the function of sports education is performed by professional sports education orientation institutions or sports schools. Such a model is especially implemented in the regions. However, cooperation with mainstream schools is essential for sports schools to be able to function successfully as dual careers.

Croatian researchers in sports education point out that the countries of the European Union have different understandings of the legal, ethical and practical side of the sport. There is a strong correlation between the level of prosperity of the nation and the connection of education with sports. There are different levels of educational institutions – vocational schools, general education schools, universities – each of them has its own specifics, which is also equated in the context of dual-career (Capu-Jogonica et al., 2012).

Given that there are different models for the development of physical education in the European context, each country must be able to create its unique system. As mentioned above, the Latvian sports education system is not based on academies, but sports schools. Most of them are founded by local governments, thus financial resources are obtained from state grants. However, there is a growing tendency to create private sports schools, which are entitled to be founded by sole proprietors with the basic idea of making a profit (Sport Law, 2017). The corresponding trend related to the establishment of private sports schools is more related to the development of sports in major cities, as well as to the field of team sports. The most pronounced example is football.

The primary task of sports schools is related to the acquisition of the program of the respective sport. Their content is aimed at achieving specific results, criteria or participations. The requirements can vary significantly when comparing different sports, but the main idea is the same. The criteria of the youngest students envisage that the number of groups is more inclined towards quantity, while the main task of the largest training groups is the achieved results (The procedure ... 2017). However, the author wants to emphasize that the tasks of sports schools are not only related to the achievement of concrete results. At the same time, both the management and the coaches must be able to provide several other

functions – transport to competitions or tournaments, availability of equipment, as well as personal development. It is the latter function that can pose the greatest challenge in the context of sports schools, as there are relatively many possible developments. One of the primary – education.

The relevant process of updating education in the context of sports schools can be done in different ways. The basic function should be performed by the school management, which chooses the available directions accordingly, to be able to successfully integrate education into the training process. One of the tasks of this study was related to athletes' perceptions of individuals who may influence their choices in combining sports and learning. Parents were noted as the most common choice, but coaches were the second. Consequently, management activities should be oriented towards the education of the persons or groups of persons concerned. The range of activity of the head of the institution is relatively wide. The driver must have several characteristics, at the same time perform several actions:

- Leader and leadership;
- The leader as a symbol;
- Mediator;
- Observer;
- Information distributor;
- Representative;
- Troubleshooter;
- Resource Manager, etc. (Wajdi, 2017).

In the context of dual careers, education managers should pay additional attention to two lines of action: disseminating information and observing. The management of sports schools should inform the coaches about the possibilities of updating the connection of education with daily training. There are several recommended actions. For example, showing success on the part of athletes. This type of practice is performed in the Latvian Basketball Union, when players who are unsuccessful in at least one subject are not allowed to participate in the youth national team. A similar system would also be recommended in the practice of sports schools, as it promotes the motivation of athletes to learn at a semi-high level.

From the management sphere, the next steps are related to the monitoring function. To the extent possible, observe, analyze and, if necessary, regulate the relevant process. It must be borne in mind that this type of action must have clearly defined objectives. The regulation of young athletes about the training process must be coordinated with the parents. It is necessary to explain the basic idea of a dual career, as well as the main benefits of involving sports schools in the field of education. Further actions depend on the communication between the school management and the coaches, the types of activities and believes (Tekavs et al., 2015). The

control or supervision function can also be performed by the management of the institution without the involvement of coaches as intermediaries.

The process of sports schools related to the field of education in the Latvian education system is in close co-operation with general education schools. Both types of educational institutions must be accommodating in terms of combining education and sports. It is possible that the new educational project “Skola 2030” (“School 2030”), which is implementing changes in the content of education, will have an additional positive impact. The main idea is to create interdisciplinary links, self-directed learning skills, as well as to promote critical thinking. The author draws attention to the fact that relatively large changes are also focused on the field of sports in general education schools. Instead of the current subject “Sports” the subject “Health and Physical Activity” will be studied in the future. The biggest change is related to the deeper integration of the health aspect in the learning process, as well as the emphasis on sports in leisure time (School2030, 2016). One of the biggest challenges for sports educators could be related to the actualization of sports activities in everyday life. The author believes that it is a vital function in the field of sports pedagogy – to promote the cultivation of a sporty lifestyle in the daily life of students. One of the potential directions of development is cooperation with sports schools, which can promote students’ common understanding of the field of sports.

Today, the term “sport” is associated with a wide range of variations. The Sport Policy Guidelines document for the period 2021-2027 sets out the main priorities for sport. The fact that a relatively large emphasis is placed on youth and high-achievement sports is to be welcomed. However, there is no process of actualization of education, which is often defined as a dual career (Sports policy... 2021). The relevant document explains rationally and logically that additional resources will be involved in sports activities, while also focusing on high-performance sports. The author of the study points out that there is a lack of a unifying factor that can be defined as a dual career, using its various manifestations. This type of process needs increased attention at national level. It is in the interests of countries, including Latvia, to create a structured system that promotes various types of dual careers. The process provides several vital directions that can have a positive impact on a country’s prosperity:

- Improving general public health;
- Raising the level of education;
- Psycho-emotional state of society;
- Economic aspect;
- More developed sports education system.

Of these benefits, all are vital in the context of national development. Each of them is necessary for the state to be able to get the maximum

benefit from the dual career process. The author of the study points out that several of these aspects are closely related. For example, the economic and health spheres. If students understand the basic guidelines of a healthy lifestyle from the very beginning, then their work will be of better quality. The general public will make less use of medical services offered by the state, as well as various types of exemptions related to health conditions. The process is linked to the population of any age, as it increases productivity, while reducing public spending on health care. This type of progress needs to be updated already at the age of general education schools. Changes in the context of educational content have already been mentioned. In the context of the subject "Health and Physical Activity" sports educators need to integrate relevant topics to promote the overall well-being of the country. Vocational guidance institutions have less responsibility for the process, as participation is not mandatory. Consequently, some young people do not receive this type of education.

Among the previously considered positive effects of dual career development, the improvement of the quality of sports was also mentioned. The Dual Career Guidelines (Dual career... 2012) developed by the European Union mention as one of the main points in the updating of athletes careers after the end of professional sports. This type of process can facilitate the involvement of specific individuals in the process of sports pedagogy, which in turn can improve the overall quality of the sport. Unfortunately, there is no systematic process of integration of former athletes in the respective sport in Latvia.

As indicated in the European Commission's report on Physical Education in European Schools, there are a number of other factors involved in this process. Along with the educational and daily training process, students must also learn:

- Principles of fair play;
- Mutual respect;
- Work ethic;
- Aesthetic culture, etc. (Sport education... 2013).

Relevant principles are also noted in other international sports policy documents. For example, the White Book on Sport (White book...2007), which also mentions factors related to the principles of equality. This type of issue is also considered in other subjects, so the author points to the possible interdisciplinary link, where it is possible to analyze global issues. In this way, students can be given a relevant idea of the problems of racism, gender equality or other topical issues addressed in sports policy documents. However, Lithuanian scientists point out that sport ethical norms are different – in the context of coach and athletes. Athletes have a lower tolerance level for the basic principles of sport ethics compared to their

coaches (Kardišauskas, 2015). It can be attributed to the different levels of education that coaches and athletes have.

## Research

Three professional sports education institutions were involved in the study. The total number of respondents reached 147 (a questionnaire was sent to 178 athletes). Respondents were selected at random basis. The survey period is the period from June to August 2020. The age range of the respondents is 13–16 years. The author points out that the relevant age group has been chosen appropriately because in it athletes have an opinion about the possibilities to combine training with sports at a semi-high level.

The quantitative survey method was chosen because in this way it is possible to get a broader idea of the situation in the respective field. The main tasks of the research:

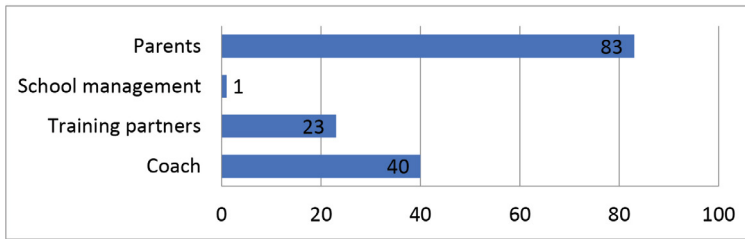
- Understand the thoughts of athletes in relation to the possibilities of combining sports and education;
- Find out whether educational institutions pay attention to the possibilities of combining sports and learning;
- To find out what additional factors can contribute to athletes' desire to combine training and sports.

The respondents involved in the study are students of three sports schools representing the Northeastern part of Latvia – Vidzeme. Consequently, there may be regional differences in the possibilities for combining training and sports.

The author of the study would draw attention to the importance of various additional aspects that can significantly affect. Of course, in order to successfully combine sports and education functions, several additional factors are needed – infrastructure, high-class coach, or development opportunities for a particular sport in the country.

However, additional attention should be paid to the human factor. The dual-career process mainly involves groups of four people – parents, school management, coaches, as well as training partners, who can also be members of the school at the same time. Within the framework of the study, the respondents indicated a convincing tendency towards the statement related to the support persons – the family or parent factor has the greatest influence (Fig. 1.).

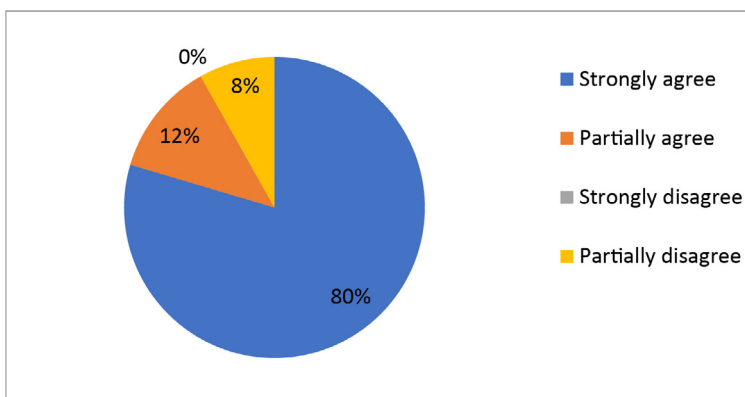
As mentioned above, the majority of respondents (n-83) indicated that the family factor plays an important role in the process. The second most common answer was aspect by the coach (n-40). In turn, training members were marked as the third answer – (n-23). Only one respondent noted that school management has the greatest impact.



**Figure 1.** Influencing factors related to the possibilities of combining sports and training

The author draws attention to the fact that school management activities in the context of dual-careers remain relatively unnoticed, as they are related to organizational functions – to educate coaches or to discuss with other schools about possible directions of cooperation. As a result, young athletes benefit from other people, such as coaches. However, the activities of the school management have a great connection with the education of coaches in dual-career issues (Ābelkalns, Kravalis, 2020). Firstly, the process needs to be updated, as a large proportion of sports professionals place a relatively high emphasis on achieving sporting achievements.

There are relatively many variations in combining the educational and sports functions. Influencing factors are related to school goals, teachers ‘competence, as well as the level of students’ interest. However, several unifying aspects will fit into any direction of dual career development. For example, the development of work ethic or the process of development of the overall personality.



**Figure 2.** Statement: “I develop my personality through the sports education”

During the quantitative survey, the author of the study highlights one statement, the results of which indicate a relatively good trend. Most respondents answered in the affirmative to the statement whether sport helps them to develop their personality. 80% answered *Strongly agree*, while 12% indicated *Mostly agree*. This shows that due to different circumstances, young athletes can see the benefits of the training process in terms of mental development. Of course, it can be speculated that relevant personality development does not always help to achieve higher learning outcomes. However, it should be taken into account that the learning process of athletes is relatively more complicated compared to other students. The higher the level in sport, the more effort is needed to be able to successfully plan one's responsibilities. In some educational institutions, high-level athletes are assigned a mentor or tutor to help them plan their activities successfully. This is often related to the communication function. The mentor conducts daily discussions with educators or coaches to successfully help the athlete to combine training with training, camps, and tournaments. Although this type of practice is more relevant to the level of higher education, this type of support can also be integrated into mainstream schools with an emphasis on sport.

The relevant area in terms of planning one's time and fulfilling one's responsibilities is closely correlated with the statement highlighted in the study about personality development called the sports prism. The author interprets the obtained results as proof that young athletes can better plan their time through daily training while promoting the development of their personality.

The study used a program Windows SPSS, which provides a better understanding of the correlations (Bivariate Pearson Correlation) of the results of interrelated statements. The author highlighted one of the obtained correlations. The emphasis is on the level of learning achievement, which is often relatively secondary. Both educational institutions and representatives of the sports field place too little emphasis on updating the quality of teaching, being satisfied with a successful assessment.



**Figure 3.** Correlation between statements about the level of education

The selected statements are related to the impact of sport on the learning process, as well as the overall level of learning achievement. According



to the obtained answers, the obtained correlation (0.566 with a P-value of 0.71) indicated that a relatively strong correlation was observed. Respondents who learn at a high level daily indicated that sport is one of the main factors contributing to their learning achievements. The author points out that this type of correlation can be assessed as positive. Athletes with high learning achievements recognize that with the help of sports they can better mobilize themselves and perform all the necessary tasks.

However, the author points out that the level of respondents related to the field of sports is relatively different. Although the survey was conducted in a professional sports education institution, the current Latvian system does not tend to achieve high-level sports achievements in such institutions. The criteria that need to be met for a training group to be taken to the next level are often relatively easy to meet. As a result, vocational sports schools also perform the function of interest education, which is not aimed at achieving specific results. Theoretically, this type of activity should be carried out by general education schools, which would provide students with additional sports activities after the acquisition of the compulsory curriculum. This would help to improve the overall physical condition of children, as well as avoiding various potential threats related to addictions or problematic behaviors. This is not often the case in the Latvian education system, as general education schools invest additional financial resources in other types of interest education, such as dance or song groups. The second additional aspect that prevents vocational sports education institutions from moving to a high-level sports field is related to the total number of students in the institution and the funding attracted from it. This contributes to additional motivation to enroll more and more students, with less winning towards high-achievement sports. Taking into account both of the above factors, the correlation obtained about the impact of sport on the overall level of learning achievement can be two-fold. For some respondents, participation in a vocational sports school can only be a way of spending free time.

The author of the study highlights another of the obtained correlations. It is related to the ability of young athletes to combine sports with training without additional burden, while actualizing the overall development of the personality.



**Figure 4.** Correlation between statements about personality development

Respondents who can easily perform the tasks of both a sports school and a general education school have also pointed out the positive impact of sports on the overall development of the personality. This is evidenced by the obtained correlation (0.674) with a P-value of 0.46, which is significant.

The obtained correlation shows the best side of the sport funktion. However, it should be noted that the respondents provided their answers with the appropriate interpretation. Athletes may have acquired a high level of workability in other types of daily activities. For example, doing daily chores or being influenced by the example of a family.

## Discussion

Researching and analyzing various studies on the actualization of sports and education, it can be concluded that the common position is positive. By performing regular sports activities, it is possible to promote the social function of young people (Bailey, 2006). However, one of the most important aspects that affect the quality of the process is the provision of information. A sports coach or sports teacher plays an important role in educating athletes. However, the ways to get a teacher involved in the educational process are different. For example, by implementing a reporting system where athletes report progress. The second support measure involves the provision of general information that promotes a common understanding and sense of responsibility in the field of education for athletes. It can be implemented without explicit evaluation or reporting criteria (Welch et al., 2021).

Dual careers can take many forms. It should be noted that the main influencing factor is the purpose of the process. Sport in the educational process can be – priority, secondary or variable. The sports process, such as training, competitions, and tournaments, is defined as a priority activity in sports academies or boarding schools, where two pieces of training a day are performed in the daily routine, in parallel with the acquisition of compulsory subjects. Institutions of this type are not widespread in the Latvian education system, with more emphasis on vocational schools. However, in several sports abroad, boarding schools or academies are the main tools that promotes the development of professional sports. Institutions of this type ensure the development of national sports at the highest level, as they are strongly focused on high-achievement sports (Malm et al., 2019). Professional sports have reached a high level nowadays and it is relatively difficult to be a professional athlete. An individual who wants to become a professional athlete must have one distinct or even several, traits or character traits that can help in a particular sport. Most often, it is related to the existence of talent, which manifests itself in different ways – understanding of the game, general physical fitness, work ethic, etc. However, both young

people who will become professionals and young people who will not be able to do so need an education. The risk arises because young athletes in this type of academy place great emphasis on the field of sport. As a result, a situation may arise, the level of training becomes unsatisfactory, while the lack of talent, or other reasons, fails to pursue a professional athlete's career. This can negatively affect the further development of the personality in the psycho-emotional field. It is relatively more difficult for an individual to enter a higher education institution, which in turn influences the further development of the field of work. However, the second, smaller target audience that becomes professional athletes must also be taken into account. Although professional athletes can secure their financial situation until the average age of 35, a further plan is also needed. Unfortunately, there is an increased risk that athletes will not be able to find meaningful further employment after an active professional career because they do not have the necessary knowledge, skills, or other aspects.

Another way to use sport is to integrate it into the daily learning process. The main goal is personal development through the use of sport as one of the priority development tools. This type of process has been relatively little studied by sports spectators, as the primary focus is on high-level sports achievements. They are relatively easier to evaluate and may attract more attention from the surrounding community. However, by researching and focusing on the process of sports integration, which helps to promote young people's personalities, it is possible to reach a wider range of respondents. Different types of physical activities that help to develop both emotionally and physically are most often included in the curriculum of general education schools. In the Latvian education system, the project "Sport class" is being implemented, within the framework of which children engage in additional physical activities. Their content may vary due to available infrastructure or other ancillary conditions. For example, 2020/2021. 1788 students of the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> grade in the school year participated (Reihmane et al., 2020). Schools used additional sports lessons, swimming pool and physio-therapist visits as the main sports activities.

There are a number of important aspects to consider when pursuing any of the dual-careers. First, an analysis needs to be made of how the relevant process can be ensured by the institution's management. The management of schools or sports clubs is often seen by respondents as a relatively insignificant factor in the development of dual-careers in a particular institution. Coaches or other sports professionals who have direct contact with athletes are more often the focus. However, it should be in mind that the main idea and the way forward is with the management. People in the field of management must be able to analyze the potential development direction of a particular institution related to the integration of education in

the sports process. Given the importance of coaches' understanding of the subject, it would be important to educate these professionals on dual-career guidance. The Latvian education system is experiencing a change in various fields, including sports pedagogy. The younger generation of coaches more often understands the importance of education and the connection with the field of sports. This specific nuance must also be taken into account in the management context. There is a high probability that various types of innovations and better will be received by sports coaches who have relatively recently graduated from university.

An important aspect of overall development in the process of actualizing sports and education is the family factor. Often the parents of the young athlete are the determining factor that can change the common position in connection with the actualization of education (Ābeļkalns, Kravalis, 2020). Parents can influence the learning process in both positive and negative directions. This aspect must also be taken into account in the context of school management, as parental education is as important as coaching education.

## Conclusion

The general public sentiment regarding the need to combine sports and education is becoming more and more positive. The public, including athletes, is aware of the potential dangers of placing too much emphasis on sport. This trend can also be observed in the study, as the overall assessment of the respondents' answers is positive. Young athletes understand the need for education, as well as there is no clear tendency about the negative impact of sport on learning achievements.

The management function, which facilitates the relevant educational process, is of great importance. This is a difficult stage, as there are several parties involved – athletes, coaches, teachers, parents, and the school management itself. The author of the study points to an important nuance. In the Latvian education system, the dual-career process in the context of general education schools is more often associated with two educational institutions, in the context of one athlete. Thus, from the side of general education schools, teachers and school management are involved, while in the field of sports school – coaches and school management. An additional factor – the athlete's parents.

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