OPPORTUNITY TO INCREASE STUDENTS' INTEREST IN HANDBALL THROUGH SPORTS TRAINING GAMES

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Abstract: This article presents an idea to increase students' interest in the sport of handball. A large set of sports training games has been developed for teachers to use in the main part of their lessons. With their multifunctionality, they would transform monotonous handball-themed lessons into emotional, physically productive, and educationally lasting ones. A questionnaire has also been developed, whose questions are directly related to the impact of the games on learning and students' interest in handball. Due to the constraints of the report's length, only six games are presented, which can be used in the future by teachers involved in physical education and sports in primary schools. Based on an analysis of survey results from 121 students, this paper presents conclusions and recommendations on the value of sports training games for education, as well as their place, role, and proper application in the learning process. The results of the experiment and the subsequent survey showed positive changes in the students' attitude towards the teaching of this sport. Namely, the sports training games used succeeded in changing the attitude of both teachers and students towards the lesson, as well as influencing their emotionality, activity, and consolidation of more lasting knowledge and skills related to the sport in question. As a recommendation, we can say that games provide excellent opportunities that should not be ignored by teachers. They should constantly select appropriate games for the topic of the lesson and, through their implementation, succeed in adding emotionality to the students and permanence to the motor skills and competences they have acquired.
Keywords: sports training games, education, handball, students

1. INTRODUCTION

In Bulgarian education, the sport of handball was first included in the school curriculum in 1958, and the following year, the first official tournament was held. Over the years, the game has been evolving to make it more appealing to play and watch. According to Vurbanov, the most typical characteristic of handball today is the continuous intensification of the game (Vurbanov, 2015). Avramov shares that a characteristic feature of handball is the complex and multifaceted nature of the game's impact on the functions of the adolescent organism (2022). Rarely does another sport contain all-natural forms of movement (running, jumping, rolling, shooting). All of them are evenly represented and are often used in defensive and offensive actions (Avramova, 2022). This multifunctionality, common to handball, is also characteristic of the game as a type of activity. Through play, students express themselves, become active, socialize, and develop their motor and moral-volitional qualities (Mavrudieva, 2022). Some authors (Antonova, 2010; Grets, 2014; Inov, 2014; Kovalko, 2014; Mostovaya, Ilyina, 2016;) believe that the value of games lies in the fact that the acquisition and consolidation of skills, knowledge, competencies, and the development of motor abilities and moral-volitional qualities take place in constantly and rapidly changing situations and conditions. In lessons, it provides conditions for making quick and adequate decisions in response to the situation at hand and fully satisfies the motor needs of students.

Following recent changes in Bulgarian education, the curriculum for physical education and sports has been divided into compulsory and elective areas. Handball is included in the compulsory area of sports games, along with the other three main sports taught in school – football, volleyball, and basketball. More detailed and specific training is provided from the third grade onwards, with the curriculum stating that students use and apply the specific elements and actions learned in handball in relay and sports training games and in specific game forms (Physical Education Curriculum for Third Grade, 2023). Handball is a compulsory subject in the curriculum, but it is often ignored by teachers due to insufficient or a lack of training and uncertainty about the knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired during their university studies.

On the other hand, a large proportion of students do not like handball as a sport. Perhaps this is because it is not as widely covered and promoted on television and the internet, and fewer children play handball compared to other team sports. A change is needed in the style, method, and approach of teaching by teachers in order to increase students' interest in handball.

In this scientific study, we will present an idea for increasing interest in handball by including selected original sports training games in the training program. When teaching at the initial stage, we can say that sports training games can successfully replace educational games in sports lessons. In other words, they will be effectively

integrated into the main part of the lesson, making it more interesting, educational, physically productive, entertaining, and emotional.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Subject and object:

Analyzing our stated main research intentions, it is logical to define the training of students in handball in the physical education and sports curriculum as the object of the study, and the possibility of sports training games to increase students' interest in learning as the subject.

Objective and objectives:

The main objective of the scientific report is to present teachers with an opportunity to increase students' interest in the sport of handball. To this end, we will include in the training developed original sports training games, which will reinforce the basic motor elements of the game in a playful environment, generate lasting interest in further handball-oriented activities and lessons, and lay the foundation for handball motor culture and education.

To achieve this objective, the following key tasks need to be addressed:

- To study and analyze literary and Internet sources directly related to handball training in school.
- To analyze how, when, in what way, and to what extent we can apply sports training games in handball training.
- To select appropriate sports training games that will have a positive impact on handball training with students.
- To use a questionnaire to assess the impact of the games on student interest.

To conduct the study and accomplish the set tasks, we used the following methods:

– theoretical analysis and synthesis-analysis of scientific and methodological-applied sports-pedagogical literature concerning handball training in school and game activities in the educational process;

– A sports education experiment conducted in a real practical environment at school by five teachers. The handball-themed lessons they conducted included specially developed sports training games.

– Questionnaire survey – the questionnaire contains five questions directly related to our research intentions in the scientific report. The opinion of the students in the study was examined on how sports training games have influenced their learning.

– Percentage analysis of the results obtained.

Research contingent:

With the help of five teachers, five classes (three third-grade and two fourth-grade) were studied, with a total of 121 students.

In order to achieve the goals and objectives set out in the scientific report, we developed sports training games whose content and rules include the performance of natural applied movements and basic motor elements from the game of handball. The games are combined with solving specific educational tasks, constantly changing situations, and decision-making, which is a prerequisite for increasing the degree of coordination of movements and the occurrence of adequate and quick mental reactions (Rumenov, 2022).

Description of sports training games

Given the volume of the scientific report, we have presented only six of the sports training games used in the experiment. They were implemented in a real, practical lesson environment with the help of five physical education and sports teachers. During the second term of the 2024-25 school year, each of them conducted a different number of handball-themed lessons, depending on how they had allocated the hours in the annual thematic distribution.

№ 1: Goal in the corners

Game description: The students are divided into two teams scattered freely across the playing field. Four squares with sides measuring one meter are formed at the four corners using hats or cones. One of the teams wears distinctive jerseys. The teacher gives a handball to one of the teams. The game starts from the center. After the signal, they try to reach one of the four squares by passing or dribbling the ball. To score a goal, the player with the ball must wait for a teammate to enter the square and pass the ball to them. They are allowed to wait inside the square for five seconds to receive the pass. The other team tries to take the ball away and score a goal of their own. The team that scores more goals wins.

The game has an impact on **speed, accuracy, teamwork, and logical thinking.** Motor elements in the game content**: different types of passes, dribbling.**

№ 2: Run to the corner for a goal

Game description: The students are divided into two teams scattered freely across the playing field. Two hats or cones are placed at each of the four ends of the end lines, one meter apart from each other. A student from one team

stands behind one end line in the opponent's field, and a student from the other team stands behind the other end line. The teacher gives a handball to one of the teams. After the signal, they try to reach the other half of the playing field by passing or dribbling the ball. To score a goal, the teammate behind the end line must run to one of the two goals formed by hats and receive a pass from his teammate. The other team tries to take the ball away and score a goal of their own. The winner is the team that scores more goals.

The game has an impact on **speed and teamwork.** Motor elements in the game content: **different types of passes, dribbling, and running in a straight line.**

№ 3: Dribbling between teammates

Game description: The students are divided into three teams, lined up in columns one arm's length behind each other on the playing field. The starting position for everyone is a straddle stance. The first players have a handball in their hands. After a signal from the teacher, they pass the ball under the tunnel formed by the last player. He catches it and zigzags between his teammates, changing hands. He stands at the front and does the same. The fastest team wins.

The game has an impact on **dexterity and agility**. Motor element in the game content: **rolling a ball, catching, and dribbling a ball with the dominant and non-dominant hand.**

№ 4: Eliminate the enemy

Game description: The students are divided into two teams of twelve students, scattered freely in their half of the handball court. One of the teams wears distinctive jerseys. The teacher gives a handball to one of the goalkeepers. By passing, dribbling, and shooting, each team tries to score a goal. If someone scores a goal, one student from the other team is eliminated from the game. The game continues until all players from one team are eliminated. The eliminated players pass the ball behind the end lines of the playing field while waiting for the game to end.

The game has an impact on **overall endurance**. Motor elements in the game content: **various types of catching and passing, dribbling, various types of shooting over the shoulder from a standing position and after a rebound, individual and group defensive actions when outnumbered.**

№ 5: Move the caps

Game description: The students are divided into two teams and line up behind lines drawn across the width of the playing field, at a certain distance from each other. A cap of a different color for each row is placed in the middle between them. The teacher gives six handballs to the students in each row. At the teacher's signal, they try to hit and move the cap in the middle to the other team's line with a one-handed shot over their shoulder. The winner is the team that moves the cap to the line first.

The game has an impact on **upper limb strength, accuracy, and precision**. Motor elements in the game content: **shooting with one arm over the shoulder from a standing position, catching**.

№ 6: Pass to the center

Game description: The students are divided into two teams scattered freely across the playing field. One of the teams wears distinctive jerseys. One student from each team is selected to stand in a circle with a diameter of three meters in the center of the playing field. A handball is given to one of the teams to start the game. The goal is to pass the ball between themselves, while the students from the other team try to take the ball away. A point is scored when one of the teams passes to a teammate in the circle and he returns the ball. The winner is the team that scores the most points.

The game has an impact on **overall strength and accuracy**. Motor elements in the game content: **different types of catching and passing, dribbling, finding open spaces, and positioning**.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE SURVEY RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After the end of the school term and the implementation of handball-themed lessons with the help of sports training games, each of the teachers presented the surveyed students with a questionnaire to assess the effect of the games used in handball training.

Table 1 presents the results of the first question related to the active participation of students in handball-oriented lessons. Almost all of the students who participated in the lessons were active. 5.1% answered "no" and 2.6% answered "rather no." These students did not show the necessary activity in the lessons, which may be due to the subject matter, namely handball, or, in principle, they are not among the most active in physical education and sports lessons. It is assumed that the younger the students are, the more active they are. However, this also depends on the teacher's style of work and the selection of exercises and games included in the lesson. The responses received show that students are willing to actively participate in activities that include sports training games, albeit with a focus on handball.

Table 1: Activity in handball-themed lessons.

Did you actively participate in handball-oriented lessons?	%
No	5,1
Rather no	2,6
Rather yes	56,2
Yes	36,1

Source: Author research

Physical activity is one of the important processes in the lesson. Every teacher should strive for a high level of physical activity, which can be achieved with appropriately selected means and methods. That is why the selected sports training games aim both to reinforce basic motor skills and to achieve a high intensity when playing them. As can be seen in Table 2, positive responses are given by more than half of the students, which is not such a high percentage. Perhaps teachers have paid more attention to the technique of performing a given element in the game rather than to the number of repetitions, speed, and intensity of the performances. Although games are used when a given motor skill is at the consolidation or refinement stage, sometimes, most students make significant mistakes when performing the motor element at a faster pace. That is why the teacher is obliged to stop, explain, and demonstrate again, thus interrupting the game and reducing its load and that of the lesson.

Table 2: Actual intensity in the main part of the lesson.

Did you achieve a high level of exertion through the sports training games used by the teacher in the main part of the lesson?	%
No	14,2
Rather no	27,4
Rather yes	34,6
Yes	23,8

Source: Author research

Earlier in the text, we mentioned that the third-grade curriculum, under the heading of competencies as expected outcomes, states that specific handball elements would be reinforced with the help of sports training games. This is precisely what we asked the students surveyed (see Table 3): whether they had managed to reinforce basic handball skills and knowledge with the help of the games used. 30.5% gave a definite positive answer, while 42.3% were not so sure, giving a "rather yes" answer. However, we can also include them in the positive responses, as together the two percentages make up 72.8%. These are students who have mastered some or all of the handball motor skills using variability as a method and sports training games. The rest of the students experienced some difficulty and were unable to master the technical elements. For them, the teacher may need to find a suitable time during or outside of class and use an individual approach to teaching so that they do not fall behind the main group, which would lead to greater difficulties in learning and, over time, less active participation in lessons on such topics.

Table 3: Consolidation of motor skills and knowledge.

Did you reinforce the motor skills and knowledge of handball with the help of sports training games?	%
No	11,8
Rather no	15,4
Rather yes	42,3
Yes	30,5

Source: Author research

If a game, regardless of its nature, intensity, and organization, does not evoke emotion in those playing it, then it is not recommended for use, or the teacher must make radical changes, striving to create an emotional mood during play. The game should bring joy to children, emotions, a desire to win, and self-sacrifice. Sometimes, however, teachers fail for one reason or another to implement these important elements in the game. Table 4 presents the results of the question related to the emotionality of the games. 11.2% of the surveyed students gave negative answers. In other words, for them, the sports training games did not provide the much-needed emotionality when playing them. The remaining 90% managed to experience emotional moments during the games, which, as we said, is one of the important conditions for a given game.

Table 4: Emotionality of the sports training games used.

Did the sports and training games used in the lesson add emotionality?	%
No	3,7
Rather no	7,5
Rather yes	26,1
Yes	62,7

Source: Author research

To the question presented in Table 5, "Did interest in handball as a sport increase after the lessons?", 74.9% answered positively and 25.1% answered negatively. The high percentage of positive responses largely confirms our idea of using selected, specific, emotionally charged sports training games with a handball focus during the main part of the lesson. Of course, we do not neglect students who have not shown interest in this sport, but we can define the idea as a first step towards a more interesting and accessible way of presenting this not-so-popular but compulsory sport, which is included in the Bulgarian education curriculum. Games carry a positive charge, but they must be applied systematically, consistently, and purposefully.

Table 5: Increased interest in the sport of handball.

Did interest in handball as a sport increase after the lessons?	%
No	14,7
Rather no	10,4
Rather yes	54,6
Yes	20,3

Source: Author research

4. CONCLUSION

As we mentioned, handball is not very popular in schools nowadays. Teachers do not feel sufficiently prepared to teach this type of lesson, and this has a certain impact on the students themselves, who do not participate as actively if the teacher decides to conduct a lesson on this topic. As we said, this sport is taught starting in third grade, and primary school teachers who teach this subject play an important role here. In other words, they are not specialists in the subject, and we cannot expect them to lay the foundations for this sport. In this regard, the idea we presented can be successfully implemented by them to introduce and increase interest in handball.

For us, sports training games are not just a simple tool; they are an essential part of teaching students and helping them acquire basic sports skills. In the future, they can be used in handball lessons as well as in other sports games.

The results of the experiment and the subsequent survey showed positive changes in the students' attitude towards learning this sport. In other words, the sports training games used succeeded in changing the attitude of both teachers and students towards the lesson, as well as influencing their emotionality, activity, and the consolidation of more lasting knowledge and skills related to the sport in question.

The opportunities provided by sports training games should not be overlooked by primary school teachers who teach this subject. In the scientific report, we presented only six of them, all focused on handball, but if desired, other games can be found in the scientific methodological literature that would have a positive impact on the learning process of students.

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