



Assessing access and inclusion of children with disabilities in leisure activities and sports

Evaluación del acceso y la inclusión de niños con discapacidad en actividades de ocio y deporte

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Abstract

Introduction: All children, including those with impairments, have a universal right to physical activity, which is crucial to their social, and physical development.

Objective: This study was to evaluate the degree of involvement, current opportunities, and primary obstacles encountered by children with disabilities in sports and leisure activities in Albanian schools and sports teams, as well as to examine the opinions of important stakeholders involved in this process.

Methodology: A quantitative, descriptive, cross-sectional research design was used for the investigation to gather data from 176 participants (parents, physical education instructors, and sports coaches) in several Albanian cities. The SPSS software and Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was then used to analyze the data.

Results: The findings demonstrated that while most children with disabilities have a strong interest in physical exercise and adaptive sports, their actual involvement is still quite low and mostly concentrated on school physical education. The absence of specialized sports programs, inadequate sports facilities, and restricted access to extracurricular activities were the primary obstacles found. The analysis of the results reveals a substantial discrepancy between children's desire and interest and the real conditions provided by Albanian educational and athletic institutions, particularly when compared to nations in the EU.

Conclusions: In order to increase the actual and long-term participation of children with disabilities in sports and recreational activities, the study emphasizes the necessity of a comprehensive and coordinated approach that includes investments in accessible infrastructure, the creation of adaptive sports programs, and continuous professional support for teachers and coaches.

Keywords

Accessibility; children with disabilities; inclusive sport; participation.

Resumen

Introducción: Todos los niños, incluidos aquellos con discapacidad, tienen derecho universal a la actividad física, la cual es crucial para su desarrollo social y físico.

Objetivo: Este estudio tuvo como objetivo evaluar el grado de participación, las oportunidades actuales y los principales obstáculos que enfrentan los niños con discapacidad en las actividades deportivas y de ocio en las escuelas y equipos deportivos albaneses, así como examinar las opiniones de importantes actores involucrados en este proceso.

Metodología: Se empleó un diseño de investigación cuantitativo, descriptivo y transversal para recopilar datos de 176 participantes (padres, profesores de educación física y entrenadores deportivos) en varias ciudades de Albania. Se utilizó el programa SPSS y el coeficiente Alfa de Cronbach para analizar los datos.

Resultados: Los hallazgos demostraron que, si bien la mayoría de los niños con discapacidad tienen un gran interés en el ejercicio físico y los deportes adaptados, su participación real sigue siendo bastante baja y se concentra principalmente en la educación física escolar. La ausencia de programas deportivos especializados, las instalaciones deportivas inadecuadas y el acceso restringido a actividades extracurriculares fueron los principales obstáculos encontrados. El análisis de los resultados revela una discrepancia sustancial entre el deseo e interés de los niños y las condiciones reales que ofrecen las instituciones educativas y deportivas albanesas, especialmente en comparación con los países de la UE.

Conclusiones: Para aumentar la participación real y a largo plazo de los niños con discapacidad en actividades deportivas y recreativas, el estudio enfatiza la necesidad de un enfoque integral y coordinado que incluya inversiones en infraestructura accesible, la creación de programas deportivos adaptados y apoyo profesional continuo para maestros y entrenadores.

Palabras clave

Accesibilidad; niños con discapacidad; incluidos los deportes; participación.

Introduction

Physical activity is universal for all children, including those with disabilities. Children with disabilities who participate in sports and leisure activities enhance their general well-being, limit deconditioning, maximize physical functioning, and foster participation (Murphy & Carbone, 2008). For their physical, social, and emotional development, sports and leisure activities are crucial. Particularly among children with impairments or unique developmental needs, regular physical activity is strongly associated with enhancing social relationships, boosting self-confidence, improving mental health, and developing motor skills (Strömle, 2019; Martin Ginis et al., 2021; Lankhorst, et al., 2020). In this regard, sport is increasingly seen as a crucial instrument for fostering social inclusion and equality in education and the community, giving all kids the chance to participate actively and feel like they belong (Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000). According to recent research, children's cognitive and emotional development is directly improved by participation in organized sports and extracurricular physical activities, which also helps to lessen the symptoms of neurodevelopmental disorders like ADHD (Pagani et al., 2020). Simultaneously, adaptive sports and customized programs have been found to be successful strategies for boosting the involvement of kids with disabilities, enhancing not only their physical capabilities but also their sense of autonomy, belonging, and psychological health (Rimmer & Alexandre, 2012; Haegele & Sutherland, 2015). Adaptive sports are defined as sports that require the use of specific equipment (e.g., wheelchairs designed for participation in basketball, tennis, athletics, etc.) or a change in some rules to enable people with disabilities to practice them (e.g., in wheelchair tennis, the ball is allowed to bounce twice in the opponent's court before returning). Adaptive sports include various sports modalities specifically designed to be practiced by people with disabilities (Isidoro-Cabañas et al., 2023). Because children with disabilities engage in less physical activity, it is crucial to quantify their engagement in sports and physical recreation with accuracy and reliability (Clutterbuck et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, despite the benefits that have been shown, there are still many obstacles that prevent kids with impairments from participating fully in sports and leisure activities (Chang, Coster, & Helfrich, 2013; Chien, Rodger; Morris, Kurinczuk, & Fitzpatrick, 2005; Sakzewski, Boyd, & Ziviani, 2007; Seekins et al., 2012; Ziviani, Desha, Feeney, & Boyd, 201). The lack of suitable facilities, inclusive sports programs, funding, and professional training for instructors and coaches are the primary causes of these obstacles, according to international and European research (Jaarsma et al., 2014; Shields & Synnot, 2016). Additionally, children's participation in physical education and sports is greatly impacted by unfavorable views and a lack of professional awareness about disabilities, which frequently results in social exclusion and marginalization (Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000; Wilhelmsen & Sørensen, 2016). Due to a lack of institutional capacity and inadequate funding for inclusive sport, these issues are frequently more severe in South-Eastern European and Western Balkan nations (European Commission, 2018). In the absence of long-term national policies and organized collaboration between schools, sports teams, and local organizations, regional studies reveal that the inclusion of children with disabilities in sports is still mostly dispersed and dependent on individual initiatives or short-term projects (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2020). These difficulties are brought to light by Albania's sports and education legal framework, which emphasizes that the absence of explicit legal support for inclusive sports means that sports facilities for kids with disabilities continue to be a major problem. The Albanian Law on Sports does not include legal requirements for the adaptation of sports facilities for people with disabilities, nor does it contain explicit provisions to institutionally and financially support the growth of Paralympic and Special Olympics sports (Law No. 79/2017). However, although advocating for inclusive education, the education law framework (Law No. 69/2012) does not explicitly incorporate sports and adaptive physical education as a structural component of this process. Compared to some other Balkan nations where Paralympic sport and inclusive infrastructure are more firmly supported by national public policies, Albania is more vulnerable to these problems because of these institutional and legal gaps that restrict sustainable investments in adapted sports infrastructure (European Commission, 2022). For instance, initiatives promoting sport as a tool for social inclusion and well-being are organized in certain Western Balkan nations, with assistance from European programs like Erasmus+ (such as the "All In Plus" initiative, which also involves Western Balkan nations in promoting equality and inclusion in sport) (European Commission & Council of Europe, 2024). The efforts to fund and develop sports activities for children with disabilities in Kosovo are further hindered by a lack of investment in inclusive sports infrastructure, as seen by the absence of accessible sports facilities in



local communities and schools (Save the Children & UEFA Foundation, 2025). Additionally, other regional projects and initiatives that are part of the framework of international cooperation help to create safe and equal environments and build capacities for inclusive sport. For example, seminars on inclusion and diversity in sport are held in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Council of Europe & EU Joint Project, 2025).

Many schools and communities lack basic equipment for adaptive sports and safe physical access, making their sports infrastructure unsuitable for the needs of children with disabilities. Additionally, physical education instructors and sports coaches frequently lack the specialized training and experience necessary to work effectively with this group of kids, especially when it comes to modifying activities, controlling behavior, and fostering an inclusive sports atmosphere. According to earlier research on the unfavorable experiences of students with disabilities in physical education, these problems lead to children's involuntary exclusion from sports activities or to inefficient and unsustainable inclusion (Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000). This issue is further exacerbated by a lack of free organized sports programs, a lack of funding, and a lack of institutional understanding of the significance of inclusive sports, in addition to professional and infrastructure difficulties. Because of this, the involvement of disabled children in sports in Albania is still unequal and reliant on isolated initiatives, which exacerbates the disparities in children's physical, social, and emotional development. In this regard, the study's objective is to evaluate the opportunities, degree of involvement, and primary obstacles that children with disabilities encounter when participating in sports and leisure activities in Albanian schools and sports teams. In order to provide evidence-based recommendations for more inclusive policies and practices, the study intends to analyze key stakeholder perceptions, interest in adaptive sports, and the need for professional development through the completion of a structured questionnaire by parents, physical education teachers, and sports coaches.

Method

This study uses a quantitative, descriptive, and cross-sectional research approach to analyze the available possibilities, degree of involvement, and key hurdles that children with disabilities face in sports and leisure activities in Albanian schools and sports teams. The survey approach was utilized to collect data using a standardized questionnaire, allowing for answer standardization and outcome comparability. The study was conducted as part of a national research project financed by the Ministry of Education and the National Agency for Scientific Research and Innovation (AKKSHI).

Participants

The study's target group includes parents, physical education instructors, and sports coaches, who are the main actors directly involved in the education, development, and sports inclusion of children with disabilities. A non-probability convenience selection technique was used to choose the 176 participants in the study sample based on their availability and willingness to participate. The University of Sports of Tirana's experts in physical education, sports, and social inclusion reviewed the research instrument as part of a content validation procedure to make sure the questions were acceptable, pertinent, and clear in relation to the study's goals.

A pilot test was also carried out with a small group of participants prior to the final application to evaluate the instrument's functionality, understandability of the questions, and completion time. This allowed for minor technical adjustments before the questionnaire was distributed.

An example structure based on a professional function is as follows:

- Parents: 58% (n = 102)
- Physical education instructors: 26% (n = 46)
- Sports coaches 16% (n = 28).

Four Albanian cities, (Shkoder, Pogradec, Tirana, Korça and Vlora), are represented among the participants. This guarantees that Albanian sports and education are fairly represented both geographically and temporally.

Procedure and Instrument



A structured questionnaire that was developed from the "Sport Day for Every Child" project's approach (Erasmus+, n.d.) and contextualized for Albanian reality within the framework of the national research project served as the data gathering tool. The majority of the questions were closed-ended, allowing for uniform quantitative analysis. There were two primary portions to the questionnaire:

- Section I: Professional and demographic information, including years of experience, location, gender, age, and professional role.
- Section II: Children's participation and involvement in sports, which included questions about how often and what kind of physical activities they engage in, how they participate (individually or in groups), how many and what kind of activities they participate in, how interested they are in recreational activities and adaptive sports, the main structural and professional barriers, the need for professional development and training, equal opportunities in schools and sports teams, the effects of sport on physical, social, and emotional development, and the suitability of sports infrastructure.

Procedure for gathering data

During the project development phase, the questionnaire was distributed in both printed and electronic formats to collect data. The goal of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the assurance of data confidentiality and anonymity were all explained to each participant beforehand. Prior to filling out the questionnaire, informed consent was acquired.

Data analysis

The statistical tool IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 25), which is extensively used in scientific research and by national and international statistical institutions, was utilized to code, clean, and electronically analyze the data gathered from the questionnaires.

Descriptive statistics, such as absolute frequencies (n) and percentages (%), were used in the first phase to characterize the sample's features and pinpoint the key patterns pertaining to children with disabilities' involvement in sports and leisure activities. Descriptive comparative analyses between the participant groups (parents, physical education instructors, and sports coaches) were carried out in the second phase to find variations in opinions about:

- Degree of involvement in sports,
- The amount and quality of physical activity,
- Primary obstacles to inclusion,

A passion for professional training and adaptive sports.

To improve the findings' visual and interpretive clarity, the statistical analysis's results are displayed in graphs created with SPSS. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, which is frequently used to gauge the internal consistency of research instruments in quantitative studies, was employed to evaluate the questionnaire's statistical reliability. Cronbach's Alpha is regarded as a suitable metric for evaluating the internal consistency of measurement scales, particularly in closed-option questionnaires that gauge attitudes and perceptions (Setyaedhi, 2024). The acquired values demonstrated a good degree of reliability, hence validating the instrument's eligibility for statistical analysis.

Ethical aspects

The study was carried out in compliance with the ethical standards of scientific research, which uphold participant autonomy, confidentiality, and the use of data exclusively for research. As required by the funding organizations and applicable laws, the data was handled anonymously and kept safe.

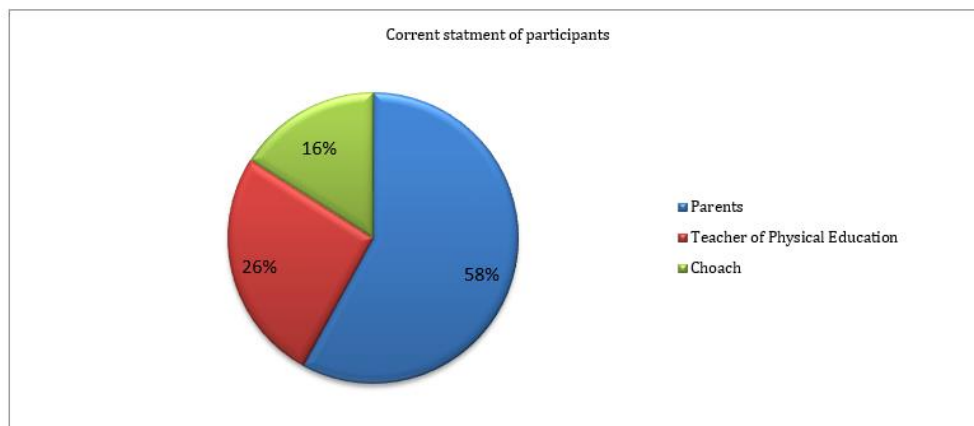
Results

The primary findings of the study, which are based on the statistical analysis of data gathered by the standardized questionnaire, represent the participants' primary opinions regarding the degree to which

children with disabilities participate in sports and leisure activities, the caliber and accessibility of current programs, and the primary obstacles that prevent their inclusion. Descriptive statistics are used to portray these results in an organized way. Frequencies and percentages are used, and the graphs that follow make it easier to evaluate and compare the results across various participant groups.

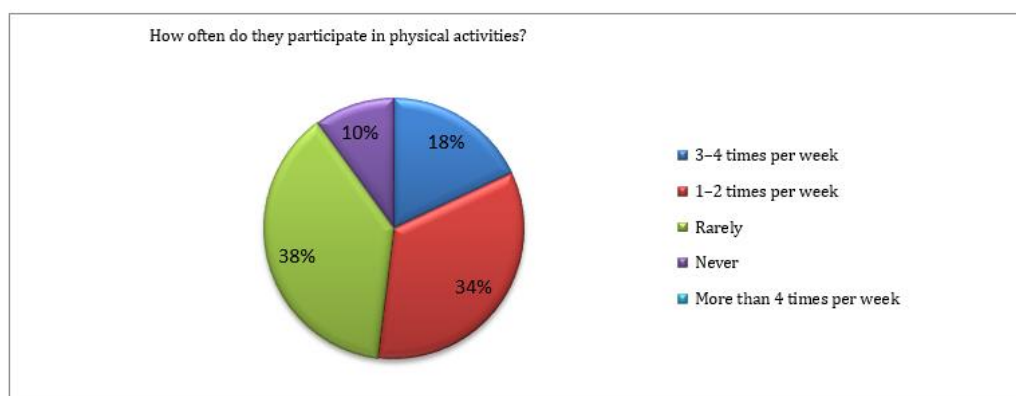
The figure 1 shows the distribution of participants in this study according to their statements. Parents make up the largest number of participants (58%), followed by physical education instructors (26%), and sports coaches (16%), according to the sample's distribution by professional function. The results have significant practical weight in the examination of the inclusion of children with disabilities in sports because of the sample structure, which implies that the perceptions expressed in the study mostly reflect direct family and educational experience.

Figure 1. Participants' distribution by occupation



The data in figure 2 show that 66% of children are physically active often or occasionally, indicating that there is a minimal level of involvement in physical activity. However, the fact that 34% of children are active rarely, very rarely or not at all highlights a significant group of children at risk of physical inactivity, signaling the need for targeted interventions and more comprehensive policies.

Figure 2. Frequency of participation in physical activities



Football continues to be the most popular sport (28%), according to the results shown in Figure 3, which reflects Albania's predominance of traditional sports. While participation in other sports (athletics, gymnastics, basketball, and swimming) is still low, the large percentage of students (36%) who participate in physical education alone indicates that many kids only participate in sports that are part of the

school curriculum. This suggests that there aren't enough varied and accessible sport options for kids with impairments.

Figure 3. Type of activity that kids with varying skill levels engage in

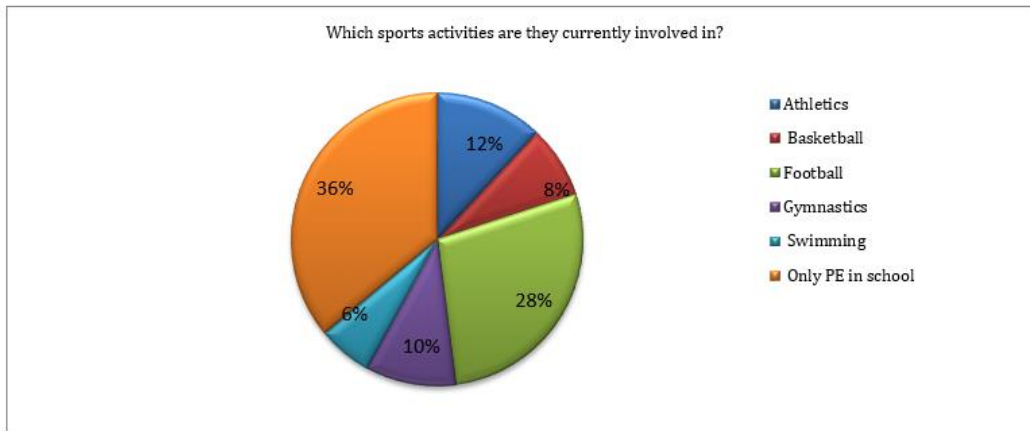
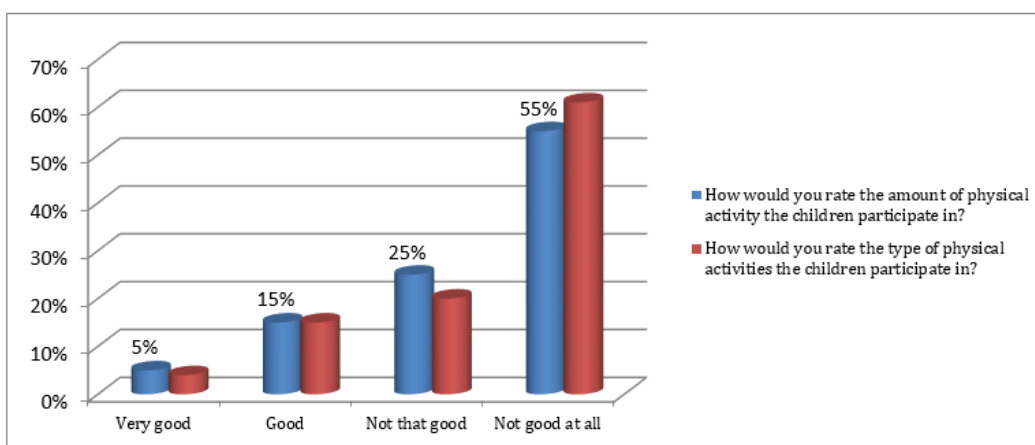


Figure 4's findings demonstrate a blatantly negative opinion of the standard of children's physical activity. The majority of respondents express displeasure, with 25% deeming it not so good and 55% not at all fantastic, despite the fact that 5% evaluate it as very good and 15% as decent, or 20% in total positive. This distribution demonstrates that the negative assessment is evidently more prevalent and points to a widespread perception that physical activity levels now fall short of expectations, suggesting the need for change and intervention. There is an even more noticeable downward trend in the evaluation of the different kinds of physical activity. Just 4% think it's very good, 15% think it's good, and 19% think it's good overall. Meanwhile, 20% think it's not so good, and 61% think it's not good at all. The preponderance of negative answers (81%) indicates that the issue is not just with the quantity of physical activity but also with its appropriateness and content. All things considered, these statistics show a widespread belief that the activities being carried out now are inadequate or of inadequate quality, underscoring the necessity of reviewing and enhancing them.

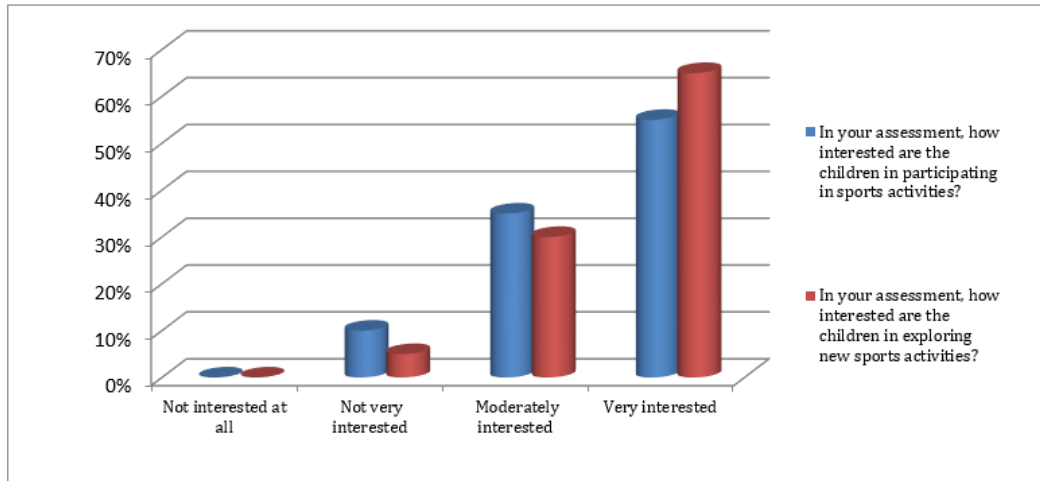
Figure 4. Assessment of the type and amount of physical activity in which children participate



According to the research, youngsters with impairments in Albania are more interested in sports. The vast majority of them find sports to be an essential and appealing field, as seen by the 90% who indicate interest (55% extremely interested and 35% moderately interested). The fact that just 10% of children are deemed uninterested and that there are no children who are completely uninterested indicates that there is a strong motivational foundation that may be expanded upon and that there is a very high potential for involvement. The favorable tendency is much more noticeable when it comes to attempting

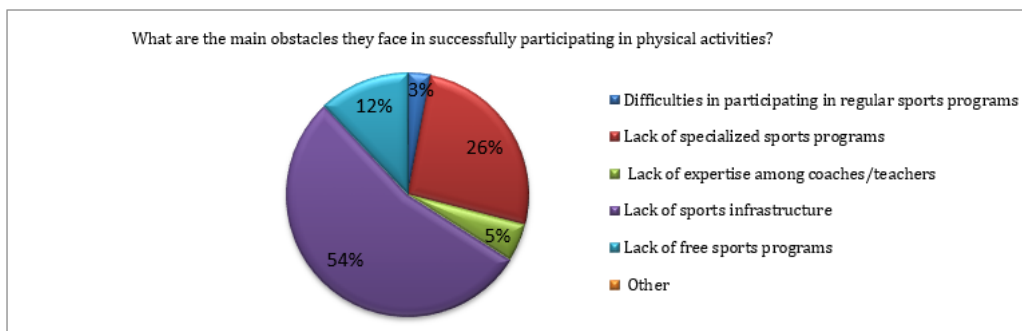
new sports. 95% of children expressing interest (65% extremely interested and 30% moderately interested) suggests that they are willing to explore and grow as well as want to participate. The fact that only 5% are not very interested and none are disinterested at all supports the notion that sports are a field with broad appeal and significant opportunities for active participation.

Figure 5. Assessing children's interest in sports activities



The lack of sports facilities, identified by 54% of respondents, is not simply a dominant statistic, but indicates a structural problem that directly affects children’s real opportunities to engage in physical activities. This suggests that the main barriers are not necessarily related to a lack of interest or motivation, but to infrastructural limitations that make participation difficult or impossible. Also, the fact that 26% highlight the lack of specialized sports programs as the second biggest obstacle indicates the need for greater organization and diversification of sports offerings, implying that even where spaces exist, they may not be effectively utilized through structured programs. The lack of free programs (12%) highlights the socio-economic dimension of the problem, suggesting that for some families, financial cost constitutes a significant barrier to children’s involvement in sports. In contrast, the lower percentages related to lack of experience of coaches (5%) and difficulties in regularly attending programs (3%) indicate that professional quality and individual commitment are perceived as less problematic compared to structural and economic issues. Overall, the data suggest that improving infrastructure and expanding financial access would have the greatest impact on increasing children’s participation in physical activities.

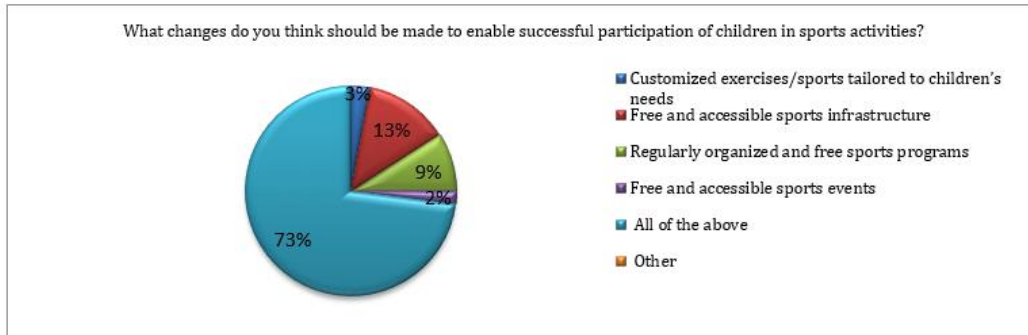
Figure 6. Factors that limit participation in physical activities



According to the data in Figure 7, 73% of respondents think that all suggested actions should be performed to guarantee kids' successful involvement in sports. This shows that there is a clear understanding that the issue is complex and cannot be resolved by taking isolated solutions. This suggests that interventions must to be integrated and encompass a holistic strategy that combines organizational,

financial, and infrastructure enhancements. However, the smaller percentages that highlight particular actions—13% for accessible and free sports and 9% for routinely open free sports programs—indicate that while these actions are valued, they are not viewed as adequate on their own. This demonstrates that respondents do not simplify the solution to a single element but rather recognize the necessity of a comprehensive set of reforms in order to produce long-lasting effects.

Figure 7. Changes needed for successful participation of children with disabilities in sports



The information reveals a notable discrepancy between optimistic outlooks and preparedness for tangible action. A positive atmosphere in terms of declarativeness and widespread acceptance of the inclusion principle is indicated by the extremely high level of interest (94%) in creating adaptive sports. But when it comes to professional involvement, the situation gets more complicated: although 57% of coaches and teachers say they would be open to attending training to work with kids of all skill levels, a sizable 36% say they would not. This is an important discovery because it demonstrates that investing in professional growth is not always a direct result of broad interest. We can presume that we are dealing with professionals with accumulated experience because Section I of the questionnaire indicates that the average work experience of the teachers surveyed is between 10 and 15 years. This could indicate that some of the resistance to training stems from a lack of drive to adjust to new, inclusive standards, a sense of professional self-sufficiency, or aversion to change. This data should therefore be linked to the job experience variable and given additional weight in the study.

Figure 8. Interest in the development of adaptive sports and professional development for children with disabilities

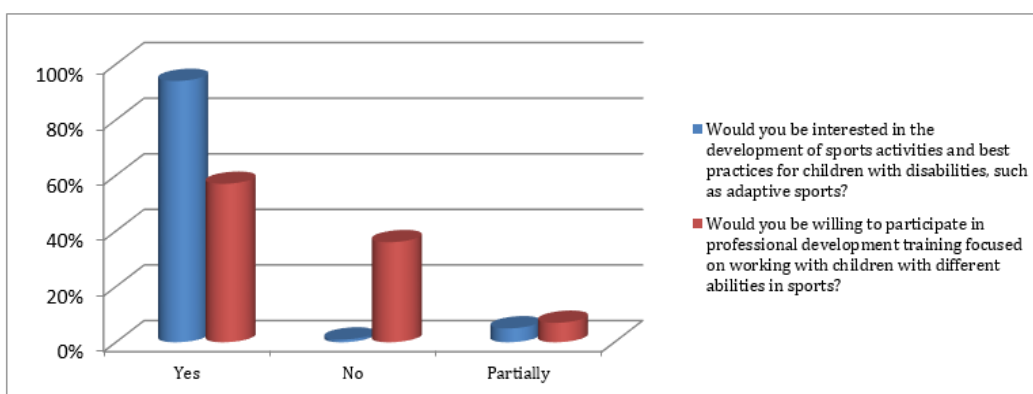
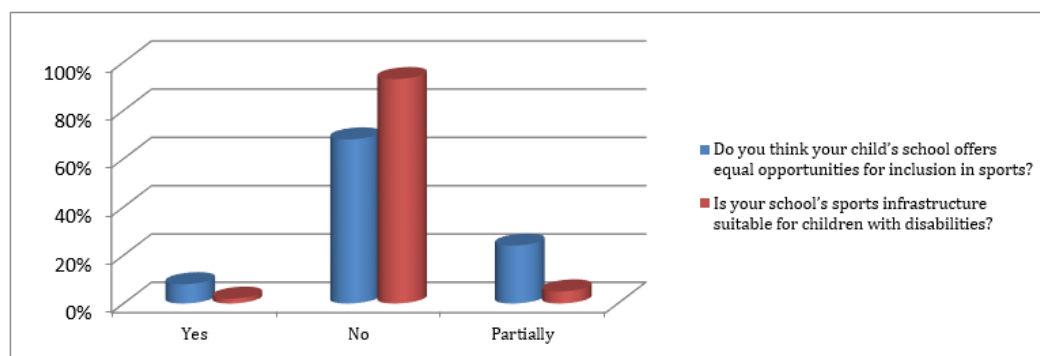


Figure 9's findings support this structural issue. Just 8% of respondents have a favorable opinion of educational institutions and sports teams, whilst the majority (68%), do not think they provide equitable possibilities for participation. Even more concerning is the fact that 93% of respondents disagree that sports facilities are appropriate for kids with impairments, while only 2% think so. All things considered, these data point to the necessity of professional and cultural change inside institutions as well as the lack of infrastructure as the problem. In addition to suitable physical surroundings, real inclusion necessitates a consistent willingness on the part of seasoned employees to pursue ongoing professional development.

Figure 9. Opportunities and challenges in the development of sports for children with disabilities



The study's findings demonstrate that the information gathered gives a clear picture of the problem being addressed. The results' analysis validates the significance of the variables looked at and establishes a crucial foundation for additional study and useful initiatives in this field.

Discussion

It is generally accepted that children with disabilities' involvement in sports and leisure activities is crucial to their social, emotional, and physical development. International research highlights that participation in sports and leisure activities depends not only on formal attendance but also on the removal of institutional, social, and physical barriers that restrict access to and the quality of sports experiences (Ulset et al., 2025). According to the study's findings, children with disabilities in Albania have few opportunities to participate in sports and leisure activities outside of school and sports teams. The study sample is distinguished by a varied geographic distribution in addition to its dispersion by professional role. In order to assure representation from both urban and rural areas, the study's participants come from four different cities in the nation; Korçe, Pogradec, Tirana, Vlora, and Shkodra. This geographic distribution, which reflects various viewpoints and experiences surrounding the participation of children with disabilities in sports activities in Albania, helps to increase the validity of the findings. However, there are a number of limitations to this study that should be taken into account when interpreting the results. Despite includes participants from multiple Albanian cities, the sample size ($n = 176$) is still too small to allow for complete national generalization. Additionally, because convenience sampling was not used to pick participants at random, it decreases statistical representativeness. These variables might have limited how broadly the findings might be applied by affecting the sample's makeup and the reported perceptions. Therefore, to further confirm and expand on these findings, larger sample sizes and probabilistic selection techniques would be required in future studies.

The data shows that football is the most widespread sporting activity in Albania, with 28% of participants engaged, making it the most popular sport and with the largest number of children involved. Participation in athletics results in 12%, gymnastics 10%, basketball 8% and swimming 6% is significantly lower, indicating a limited distribution of opportunities for involvement in different sports. A significant proportion of children around 36% participate only in physical education at school, indicating that opportunities for extracurricular activities are more limited.

Regarding the sufficiency of the types of activities that children can participate in, the data show that a large proportion of respondents assess the physical activities for these children as insufficient. It appears that a tiny percentage of kids participate in particular physical activities, as only 5% think they are very good and 15% think they are good. More concerning is the facts that 55% of participants think children's physical activities are not at all good, but a higher amount, 25%, think they are somewhat good. The majority of children in Albania do not have enough opportunities to engage in physical activity, and the majority of opportunities to be active and participate in sports are primarily found within the school curriculum, with very little involvement in extracurricular activities. The situation in Albania

seems far more unequal than in Croatia and Sweden. In Croatia, only 34% of participants think the activities are not at all good, while 27% think they are very good and 27% think they are good. With 55% of participants evaluating the activities very well and only 20% rating them poorly, Sweden stands out for having the highest level of kid physical activity. The comparison unequivocally demonstrates that whereas other EU nations provide greater chances for children to engage in physical activities, the majority of Albanian children are not sufficiently engaged, and only a tiny percentage are involved in activities at a thoughtful and ideal level. Recent European data and reports on inclusive sport and physical exercise for kids with disabilities are the basis for the comparison with Croatia, Sweden, and Italy. According to reports by the Council of Europe (2022) and the Publications Office of the European Union (2018), European Union nations that adopt structured policies under the "Sport for All" framework and provide sustained public funding exhibit greater levels of participation and greater accessibility to adaptive sports programs. Specifically, the Swedish model, which is overseen by the Swedish Sports Confederation, demonstrates how adapted sports are systematically included into the current educational and community institutions, guaranteeing professional support and institutional continuity. Recent research in Italy indicates that the focus on individualized programs and the development of coaches' professional skills have had a major impact on the rise in the successful inclusion of kids with special needs (Alam, Bhattacharjee, & Das, 2024). In the meantime, Croatia views inter-institutional collaboration and the creation of specialized programs as crucial components for enhancing the availability and caliber of sports service delivery (Council of Europe, 2022). This data backs up the comparison that was made and places Albania's circumstances in a larger European context of inclusive sports practices and regulations. In terms of the range of sports and leisure activities available, it reveals that most participants believe there aren't enough physical activities for kids. 15% of participants think the activities are good, but only 4% think they are very good. 20% of respondents think the activities are somewhat decent, while 61% think they are not good at all. This outcome unequivocally demonstrates that children in Albania are not provided with enough physical activities, and the majority of these activities are mostly insufficient to meet their needs. The situation in our nation appears to be even worse than in Croatia and Sweden. Only 18% of participants in Croatia think the activities are not at all excellent, while 27% think they are very good and 24% think they are good. With 58% of participants rating the activities very well, 42% good, and no rating at all well, Sweden shows the best results. The comparison makes it abundantly evident that while other EU nations provide a wide choice of suitable and varied physical activities for kids, Albania's selection is small and does not satisfy the demands of the majority of kids.

According to the research, youngsters are interested in playing sports, according to the majority of respondents. In particular, 55% of respondents believe that children are highly interested, 35% believe that they are fairly interested, and only 10% believe that they are not very interested. None of the respondents believe that a child is not interested at all. This demonstrates that while actual involvement may be low, most kids desire to be active and have a very high interest in participating. Data on this topic reveals some intriguing disparities when compared to other EU nations. Children in Sweden are more likely to be quite interested (52%) than very interested (32%), suggesting that their curiosity is frequently modest but steady. Despite variations in actual involvement and possibilities for physical activity, Italy and Croatia exhibit nearly identical conditions to Albania, with 53–55% extremely interested and 36–40% quite interested, suggesting that the level of interest in Albania is comparable to EU countries. This is in contrast to the actual participation data that we have already seen, which shows that the majority of kids participate mostly in physical education classes at school and have comparatively little involvement in extracurricular sports. Investing in more diverse extracurricular programs and sports teams may satisfy children's wants and desires, as evidenced by their high level of interest in sports. The findings also indicate that a significant number of kids are eager to try out novel sports like adapted sports. In particular, 65% of respondents reported that their kids are highly interested, 30% reported that they are quite interested, and only 5% reported that they are not at all interested. This reflects children's curiosity and eagerness to attempt new and particular activities, demonstrating a strong desire and openness to new sports experiences. According to the results, children in Albania have a high level of curiosity, but it is significantly lower than in Italy (75% of children are very interested) and slightly higher than in Sweden (52% of children are very interested). The distribution is more evenly distributed in Croatia, where 36% of respondents are highly interested and 9% are not. The comparison indicates that Albanian youngsters are receptive to a variety of sports, as Albania's degree of motivation to try new sports is comparable to that of EU nations. However, it seems that this high curi-



osity does not necessarily translate into active involvement outside of the learning process in educational institutions, based on actual participation data from past activities. This discrepancy between high interest and actual participation demonstrates the enormous potential to broaden, facilitate, and diversify extracurricular sports activities by providing kids with genuine engagement opportunities. Albania's shift from intense theoretical interest to successful practical implementation necessitates coordinated actions at multiple levels, building on the examples of Sweden and Italy. First, in accordance with the guidelines of the Publications Office of the European Union (2018), a national strategy for inclusive sport must be drafted, including with quantifiable goals and a specific budget. Furthermore, it is crucial to incorporate mandatory adaptive sport training into teacher and coach professional development programs, create local pilot programs with transparent monitoring and evaluation systems, and invest in accessible infrastructure and adaptive equipment in accordance with WHO guidelines (2022). These metrics can be used as an operational framework to convert current motivation into inclusive, long-lasting engagement.

The absence of sports facilities, which was cited by 54% of the participants, is the primary impediment to children's successful engagement in physical activities in Albania. This demonstrates that there are few actual chances, even when kids are motivated and interested in participating. The absence of specialized sports programs, which worries 26% of the respondents, is another significant barrier. This suggests that many kids do not have the chance to participate in activities that are suited to their requirements and skills, despite their desire to be active. Also 12% of respondents cited a shortage of free programs, but only 5% cited trainers' or teachers' lack of knowledge. This suggests that the primary issue is not staff capabilities but rather program availability and type. The majority of youngsters are prepared and motivated for leisure and sports activities, while only 3% of participants report having trouble participating in regular programs. When comparing these data with other EU countries, the differences are clear. In Croatia, the biggest obstacle is also the lack of specialized sports programs 27%, but only 27% of respondents mention the lack of infrastructure, which is significantly less than in Albania. In Italy, the lack of expertise of coaches and teachers dominates with 43.8%, while infrastructure is not mentioned, indicating that the main problem is the quality of professional guidance. Sweden has a completely different profile where the main obstacle for children is the lack of free programs expressed by 34% and difficulties in participating in regular programs say 34%, while the lack of infrastructure is minimal and is rated by 3% of respondents. According to the aforementioned data, Albania has a distinct profile where children's engagement is mostly hampered by organizational and structural constraints, particularly the lack of specialized programs and infrastructure, rather than a lack of interest or willingness. This is consistent with other findings, which showed that while youngsters are highly driven and interested in trying out new sports, actual involvement is still quite low.

Based to data for Albania, 73% of participants believe that all necessary changes, such as specialized programs, accessible infrastructure, and regularly scheduled free programs, should be made in order to facilitate children's successful participation in sports activities. This demonstrates an all-encompassing and interactive response to the current problems, indicating that participants believe a mix of actions to increase involvement is more important than a single reform. Just 13% of respondents cite the need for accessible, free sports facilities, 9% for regularly scheduled, free sports programs, and 3% for sports or exercises tailored to children's requirements. There are significant disparities when compared to other nations. In Croatia, 24% of respondents consider regularly scheduled programs and individualized workouts to be extremely important, while 27% cite other things, indicating a more uneven distribution of priorities. Personalized exercises for kids are emphasized by 65% of participants in Italy, suggesting a significant emphasis on individual adaptability. Similar results were seen in Sweden, where 39% of respondents called for a mix of all measures and 69% cited personalization as a priority measure. This analysis demonstrates that Albania need an all-encompassing and well-coordinated strategy that can match children's high levels of interest and motivation through a combination of individualized programs, easily accessible infrastructure, and free chances outside of the educational process. In order to increase inclusivity and genuine engagement in physical activities, it is crucial to provide individualized sports programs in addition to constructing infrastructure. According to the statistics, participants are very interested in creating sports programs and best practices, such as adaptive sports, for kids with impairments. In particular, 94% of respondents said they were interested in this field, compared to just 1% who were not interested and 5% who were only somewhat interested. This reflects a favorable and encouraging culture for inclusive sports and shows a high level of knowledge and enthusiasm among



physical education instructors and coaches to include kids with disabilities in sports and physical activities.

However, the percentages differ considerably when asked if they would be willing to take part in professional training that focuses on working with kids of various skill levels in sports, 57% said they would be fully willing, 36% said they would not, and only 7% said they would be partially willing. This discrepancy shows a disconnect between theoretical interest and a desire to devote time and effort to professional skill development. To put it another way, even when participants are interested in the subject, a sizable percentage are unwilling or hesitant to attend hands-on training. This could be caused by a number of things, including a lack of time, money, or confidence in the training's immediate advantages. Recent research points to deeper structural and psychological issues, even if reluctance to pursue professional training is frequently attributed to a lack of time and money. Research indicates that a large number of trainers lack professional self-efficacy and doubt their ability to work with children of varying capacities (Townsend et al., 2021; Wilson et al. 2024). Additionally, people are less inclined to participate in specialized training due to concerns about risk management, legal liability, and a lack of real-world mentorship.

Townsend et al. (2021) found that when training incorporates collaborative models, practical components, and continuous institutional support, trainers are more likely to engage in professional development. This implies that in the Albanian setting, creating a support network that boosts self-confidence is just as important as offering instruction.

The findings indicate a strong interest in inclusive and adapted sports, but a sizable percentage of respondents require more encouragement and assistance to take advantage of opportunities for professional growth. When it comes to policy and practice suggestions in the area of sports for kids with disabilities, this is a crucial point. Parents' unfavorable opinions about equal possibilities for participation in sports at their kids' schools and the appropriateness of sports facilities for kids with varying skill levels are significant issues. Just 8% of parents think that their child's school provides equitable possibilities for participation in sports, whereas 68% disagree and 24% provide a partial evaluation. This outcome indicates the absence of effective policies and practices for equality in sports in educational institutions and shows a significant gap between ideal norms and reality on the ground. The situation appears to be even worse when it comes to school sports facilities, as only 2% of respondents believe the facilities are appropriate for kids with disabilities, while a startling 93% believe they are not. This demonstrates how, despite a desire for sports and leisure activities, their implementation is hampered by the absence of essential elements including adaptable equipment, suitable access, and secure surroundings. Only 5% of parents provide a partial evaluation, which further suggests that the current state of affairs is not particularly encouraging. These findings are significant because they highlight the primary obstacles that kids with disabilities have when trying to participate in school sports. They show that in order to guarantee genuine circumstances for inclusivity and active engagement in sports, it is imperative that infrastructure be improved and educational policies be changed. Inadequate infrastructure and a lack of equitable opportunities are barriers that impact these kids' social and physical growth in addition to making them feel alone and stigmatized. These findings emphasize the need of establishing an inclusive and accessible educational environment when it comes to arranging sports practices for kids with impairments. Infrastructure and adaptive equipment should be prioritized, along with professional training for coaches and instructors.

Conclusions

This study found a stark discrepancy between children with disabilities' strong enthusiasm in physical activity and the actual opportunities available to them in Albania. The findings revealed that, while children with disabilities have a strong interest in sports and are open to new and adaptable activities, their actual participation is restricted and mostly focused on school physical education. The findings revealed that opportunities for sports and recreational activities were limited, both in quantity and quality. The variety of activities available was restricted, with a focus on some traditional sports, while adaptive sports and programs targeted to these children's specific requirements were nearly nonexistent. This situation was also reflected in the negative perceptions of parents, who overwhelmingly assessed the



equal opportunities for inclusion as inadequate, as well as the sports infrastructure of schools. According to the data, Albania falls well short of European Union nations like Sweden, Croatia, and Italy when it comes to the availability, variety, and caliber of sporting activities for kids with impairments. While specialized programs, easily accessible infrastructure, and institutional support are prioritized in these nations, Albania's primary challenges are not a lack of enthusiasm or drive, but rather a lack of suitable sports infrastructure and specialized programs. The study's key conclusion was that there is a lot of unrealized potential due to children's strong interest in inclusion and coaches' and instructors' good understanding of it. Nonetheless, the discrepancy between theoretical curiosity and professional training preparation demonstrated the necessity of supportive regulations and long-term professional development initiatives.

The study concluded that the main challenge in Albania was not related to a lack of desire to participate, but to structural, organizational and institutional factors. To truly improve the inclusion of children with disabilities in sports and recreational activities, a comprehensive and coordinated approach is needed that combines investment in accessible sports infrastructure, the development of specialized and adaptive sports programs, the provision of free and regular extracurricular activities, as well as ongoing professional support for teachers and coaches. Only in this way can real, equal and sustainable participation in sports be ensured, contributing to the physical, social and emotional development of children with disabilities and reducing their isolation and stigmatization.

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