

## Family involvement in under 7s school football in La Rioja: interests, motivations, roles and family dynamics

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### Abstract

The under 7s football is a non-formal socio-educative scenario especially overcrowded. The adult environment puts efforts and illusions on school sport as an extracurricular activity for the child to promote their education. There are numerous proposals for trying to establish guidelines to family behavior. However, this study wants to understand the familiar illusions that encourage the participation in under 7s football of their children as primarily responsible for their education. In this way, the aim of the study is to investigate the family motivations for school football to revalue the confluences of its educational value. The research emerges from a Case Study design ethnographic mode that uses the questionnaire (N=134, 63 women and 71 men) to deepen of the perception of family members involved in school football: parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters. The results reaffirm the social function that the football has for the child and the adults that accompany them. Family involvement stands as an indispensable pillar for the sport activity. Thus, to optimize the educational potential is necessary to have the complicity of the family to reclaim the educational reference against the permeability of football business.

### Keywords

School sport; under 7s football; family involvement; adherence; motivation.

### Resumen

El fútbol prebenjamín supone un escenario socioeducativo no formal especialmente masificado. El entorno adulto vierte esfuerzos e ilusiones sobre el deporte escolar desarrollado como actividad extraescolar por el niño para promover su formación. Existen numerosas propuestas por tratar de establecer pautas hacia el comportamiento familiar. Sin embargo, este estudio trata de comprender las ilusiones familiares que animan a la

participación en el fútbol prebenjamín de sus niños como primeros responsables de su educación. De este modo, el objetivo del estudio es indagar sobre las motivaciones familiares hacia el fútbol prebenjamín a fin de revalorizar las confluencias sobre su valor educativo. La investigación emerge desde un diseño de estudio de caso de modalidad etnográfica que se apoya en el cuestionario (N=134, 63 mujeres y 71 hombres) para profundizar sobre la percepción de los familiares que participan en el fútbol del niño de entre 6 y 7 años: padres, madres, abuelos y hermanos. Los resultados reafirman la función social que el fútbol tiene para el niño que lo practica y para los adultos que lo acompañan. La implicación familiar se erige como un pilar indispensable sobre el que se cimienta una actividad deportiva no formal. Por ello, para optimizar el potencial formativo se ha de contar, inherentemente, con la complicidad familiar para reivindicar el referente educativo frente a la permeabilidad del fútbol negocio en el escenario socioeducativo del fútbol.

### **Palabras clave**

Deporte escolar; fútbol prebenjamín; implicación familiar; adherencia; motivación.

### **Introduction**

The socio educational non-formal scenario of the children's football is characterised by the big affluence of families that cheer up the teams because their sons who are playing.

This reality is absolutely palpable if one Saturday in the morning you go for a walk and near your home there is a school, it produces an image absolutely sport-centered (Castejón, 2008).

One of the fundamental models for children between six and seven years old, corresponding to the under 7s category, are the parents, for this reason it is required an especial analysis; in fact, in this age the parents are who promote their prosociality, responsibility and self-management by their educational style and the dynamizing of different sports practices (Suldo, 2009; Ossorio, 2012). Particularly, the interest is in the belief about the meaning of the school football that parents transmit to their children as their real behaviour.

We have to take into account that this relation has more significance than only in the temporary limits of the scenario object of study, therefore, it determinately affects to the educational value attributed to the scenario. The interest to Reschly and Christenson (2009) resides in the association of the adult's environment to transmit a message to the children that

it can be, at least, coherent, responsible and, accordingly, getting involved with the educational values. So, it is pointed out to a need of interpersonal adult coordination.

Going further, Suldo (2009) considers that parents should be with their children in the achievement of difficult goals but being coherent with the values aimed to be transmitted and suitable to their possibilities, in order to boost the self-efficacy. Equally, it is taken into account the potential of the learning by imitation of the parental model. López (2005: 5) highlights the importance that the parental figures do not try to control each behaviour of their son, but they should guarantee if “a rich and varied environment, gratifying, that allows to the student to confront different situations and surpass them, helping to develop their self-esteem and the knowledge of himself/herself”. In this way, to understand the scenario is essential to allude to the parent-child relationship.

The permeability of the scenario facilitates that bigger communications exist between the participants in the football under 7s than in other school sports (Garrido, González y Romero, 2010). Cara, Pernía and Utrilla (2014) defend the need that the adult environment, compounded by parents, coach and referee, cooperates to offer a coherent sports training, especially between instructors and parents, because it exists an explicit interest by strengthening the progress of the child. Thus, a social-adult scheme should be favoured in order to increase the value of the instructor’s work, who with his/her actions generates educational consequences over the player that can transcend to the a priori interests (Abós, Sevil, Sanz, Aibar y García, 2015).

In this scenario socio-built for the child, the *hope*<sup>1</sup> offers an interesting opportunity since it points out to the building of the identity of the person, assuming its divergence and complexity. The school sport provides experiences to the child in situated key; nevertheless, the conjunction between the non-fomalisation of the learning and the opportunities that the sport provides, represents an excellent pedagogic scheme for the promotion of the *hope*, in order to contribute to its incipient emancipation, in conclusion, to its self-determination. It has been studied how the *hope* favours the development of the self-esteem, self-concept,

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<sup>1</sup> The *hope* is conceptualized as the cognitive disposition directed to a goal, formed by two interrelated components: *Agency*, as the motivation to the determination, and *Pathways*, as the ability to create the own learning path (Snyder *et al.*, 1991).

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academic achievements and, especially, it helps with adversities or failure experiences, that they will be inevitably lived more or less in the sport, but without affecting the self-esteem (Lopez, Rose, Robinson, Marques and Pais-Ribeiro, 2009). In this sense, Boman *et al.*, (2009) consider interesting to attribute the success and failure done in order to promote an optimistic sense and a search of solutions to the adversities in children. In this way, they give importance to the contribution of an honest and constructive *feed-back*.

In this research, it is expected to investigate in the motivations and expectations that the families put in the socio-educational scenario, understanding as fundamental the minimum unit that form the diagram of the interpersonal triangulation instructor-child-family (Sánchez, 2001; Jasso *et al*, 2013), even considering the recurring possibility that a parent practice as coach, something that, to Weiss and Fretwell (2005), involves an additional preasure for the child derived of over-expectations.

Traditionally, it has been shown the need of paying attention to the three models to describe and participate in the culture created in this scenario, for this reason different attempts exist in order to educate not only children, but also to pay attention to the behaviour of the families, using specific programmes and behaviour guidelines for the parental awareness or “training parents” (Hernández-Núñez, 2005; Garrido, Campos and Castañeda, 2010; Diputación Foral de Bizkaia, 2012; Jasso *et al*, 2013). Moreover, there are researchers that confirm how the reinforcement for the development of coordinated strategies by the adult, which promote the values that facilitate the sport in school age, through intervention programmes, they lead to an inherent capitalisation by who practise them (García-Calvo, Sánchez-Oliva, Sánchez-Miguel, Leo and Amado, 2012; Fuller, Percy, Bruening and Cotrufo, 2013; Jiménez, López-Pastor and Manrique, 2014; Ruiz, Ponce de Leon, Sanz and Valdemosos, 2015; Veroz, Yagüe and Tabernero, 2015). It is underlined the importance of the adherence of the participants to the dynamics that promote the optimization of the promotion of values in the sport (Arufe, 2015).

Football occupies a privileged position quantitatively among the sport activities according to the data of the national surveys about sport habits of people older than 15 years old, keeping about the 25% of the participation (García-Ferrando, 2006; García y Ramón,

2010). As it is shown, football is an activity that transcends to its commercialization (Hijos, 2014) and it is raised as one of the activities more practised in Spain by the adults despite the fact that it is practised in a limited percentage in a federated way. Under 7s Football can not live unconnected to it, because the learning that is promoted comes from adult motivations or expectations of people who are an active part of the culture in which football is constituted.

It has been investigated about the reasons and causes by which athletes practise physical activity, as well as its abandonment, through questionnaires. The results justify the practice and the abandonment for the competition, personal abilities, interpersonal relationships, the evasion, the channelling of energies, the personal pleasure, the physical condition, the belonging to a team or the feelings (Pavón, Moreno, Gutiérrez and Sicilia, 2003; Recours, Souville and Griffet, 2004; Garita, 2006).

The main motivation for children to participate in sports is the enjoyment and to make friends. The competition is an aspect more appreciated when the level in the physical activity increases, although it exists a decrease in the participation in physical activities associated to the age (Garita, 2006; García, Rivera de los Santos, Jiménez and Ramos, 2012; Tuero, Zapico and González, 2012). On the one hand, González, Taberero and Márquez (2000) investigate why children between 8 and 15 practise football in the sports initiation, drawing some conclusions: in football there is more parental influence than in other activities such as tennis; boys are more competitive than girls; according the age increases, the extrinsic aspects are more valued and little children value more the figure of the coach as motivation of adherence to participate in football. On the other hand, Tuero, Zapico and González (2012) determinate in their research that for parents the interest in the sports practice is centered in the promotion of educational values.

In our case, the interest is to understand the motivations of the family that facilitate the practice of the child under 7s. Due to under 7s category in football is a relatively recent competition, there are not impact researches which pay attention to motivations of the family for going with children in the process of sports initiation. In this way, Levey (2013) suggests the paradoxical relation between the increase in children who are signed up by their parents in competitive activities is related to the decrease of the time in which the family is together. He

maintains that one of the reasons to favour this strange phenomenon is that parents could worry about their children remain back if they do not participate in these activities.

This research expects to investigate about the motivations and interests of the families of children between 6 and 7 years old to the football under 7s. It is taken into account the role they perform in order to reevaluate the convergence of the adult environment over its sport educational value to build a scenario that promotes the educational potential of the football.

## **Method**

### **Design and Participants**

It is carried out a survey research in the context of the descriptive stage of a case research of the ethnographic modality (Sabirón, 2006). The ethical considerations were taken into account through anonymity, the informed consent of adults, the consideration of the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki (2008) the return of the results to the participants as Restitution to the field.

The sample was composed of 134 adult members of different families (63 women and 71 men) of 59 children who practise football in 7 different teams of under 7s football of La Rioja. The criterion selected for the inclusion in the sample was the regular attendance to the matches played by the child with his team on weekends. With coherence with the design, the representation is not the aim, but the transferability and the usefulness of the research in the educational practice.

### **Instruments**

To study the family perspective about the sport activity practised by the child under 7s, the research uses an emerging questionnaire of the results of the fieldwork of a qualitative research about the socio-educational scene of the under 7s football (Merino, Arraiz and Sabirón, 2015). It is a questionnaire of multiple choice and it goes more deeply into the

motivations used in the research to know the weight and the importance that each one have. The format of the answer was opened to the narration of the participant about his/her perception, besides the selection of a maximum of three options in each question. The narration was categorised again in order to allow the appearance of new categories or the inclusion in those established previously.

## Procedure

About the fieldwork specified in a participant observation with 7 football teams under 7s during a complete competitive season (from October 2014 to June 2015) and reaching the category of member defined by Taylor and Bogdan (1986), the suitable conditions appear in order to go deep through a questionnaire about the families. This participant observation was based in the interest about senses and meanings given to the under 7s football by the families as mediators in the promoted learning, where their interests, motivations, roles and dynamics as basic interpretative keys for the understanding of the socio-built culture in this scene emerged.

To access to the teams, the Consejería de Educación, Juventud y Deporte of La Rioja was informed and, after the selection of a theoretical sample of the teams which include different special features of the school football teams, it facilitated the contact with the teams. Afterwards, we made contact with the teams to inform about the motivations of the research, with the epistemological commitment of carrying out a restitution to the field that returns what the native intersubjectively has built (Arraiz and Sabirón, 2012). The questionnaire was the last stage of the process and it was presented and explained in detail *in situ* to the families of each team previously its fulfilment.

## Data analysis

The phases established in the Consant Comparative Method of Glaser and Strauss (1967) were taken into account to analyse the quanlitative data, which implies a cyclic

process of data collection, analysis and triangulation. In order to categorize again the narration in the questionnaires, it was considered the phenomenological emergence and the reflexivity, facilitated by the treatment programme of qualitative data NVivo 11; although the answer was encoded inside the spectrum of a priori possibilities that the questionnaire considered. The results were presented as part of the restitution to the field, providing to the criterion of scientific nature of the credibility and returning to the native what he/she has collaborated in their construction. A descriptive analysis was carried out to make a study of the quantitative data, facilitated by the data processor *Excel* 2013.

## Results

The participation in a sample  $M=134$  was divided in 34.33% mothers, 37.31% fathers, 14.93% grandparents, 8.21% big brothers, 8.73% uncles and aunts, and a only participant from guardians and cousins (0.75%).

About the initial motivations due to the family decided to sign up the child to football (Table n.1), families highlight the intrinsic fondness of the child to football (64.18%) and the prosociality boosted by the friends' participation in the activity (61.19%). In this way, the value of a sports practice in general (40.30%) and the importance of a discipline (33.58%) are underlined.

Table 1. Percentages about the initial motivation of the families to sign up the child to school football.

<i>Motivation</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
a. Children's friendship	61.19%
b. Child's fondness	64.18%
c. Learning of the discipline	33.58%
d. Indifferent practice of a sport	40.30%
e. Facilities to carry out the activity	16.42%

f. Good qualities of the child	14.93%
g. Family tradition	17.16%
h. School advice	0.75%

Regarding the aspects most interesting in under 7s football for their education (Table n.2), families value more the environment of friendship that is generated around the football team of their children in which they are active agents and participants (49.25%) and that the activity is carried out by the children with their friends (37.31%). Along these lines, the belonging to the group (37.31%) is valued as a key aspect, as well as the unspecific enjoyment of the physical activity (36.57%).

Table 2. Percentages about the most interesting aspects of under 7s football for the families of the players.

<i>Motivation</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
a. To know more children	19.40%
b. To share moments with friends	37.31%
c. Feelings produced	17.16%
d. To compete against other people	8.21%
e. To demonstrate the value of the team	2.24%
f. The environment of friendship between involved	49.25%
g. Channelling of child's activity	4.48%
h. Belonging to a team.	37.31%
i. Enjoyment of the physical activity	36.57%
j. Training for the adult life	3.73%
k. Sportsmanship	28.36%
l. Good disciplines	17.16%
m. Sacrifice	15.67%

In relation to the implications of the family that under 7s football involve (Table n.3), it is positively highlighted that it allows to the families to enjoy the participation as fans of the team of the player (58.21%). They are also underlined the prosocial implications by which football promotes the relationships between adults (27.61%) and the opportunity to gather the family (24.63%).

Table 3. Percentages about the implications that football has to the families of the players.

<i>Motivation</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
a. Balanced with activities of more brothers	21.64%
b. Opportunity to get together with the family	24.63%
c. Schedule adaptation to see the matches	20.15%
d. Preparation of the sports material	13.43%
e. Satisfaction of participating as fan	58.21%
f. Reorganization of the family's tasks	23.88%
g. Social relationships between adults	27.61%
h. Economic cost	8.96%
i. To organise other family member to deal with tasks	14.18%
j. Effort investment in the child's education	14.18%

The role that the member of the family develops when he/she go with the under 7s player in football (Table n. 4) is mostly defined as an entertained of the personal intervention of his/her son or related player (76.12%) and the responsible of the transport to the places required (57.46%). Those who claim the group identity of the team are placed to a lesser extent (23.13%), who energize activities which transcend to the competition of the child (22.39%), who eliminate the accumulated stress through football (22.39%) and those that collaborate with the coach (17.16%).

Table 4. Percentages about the role that the member of the family develops in the under 7s football team.

<i>Motivation</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
a. To encourage the player during matches	76.12%
b. Assistant of the coach	17.16%
c. Organizational work	4.48%
d. Claim the team's identity	23.13%
e. To carry and bring the child where appropriate	57.46%
f. Care of the player during the match	14.18%
g. Activities beyond football	23.13%
h. To eliminate stress	22.39%

## Discussion

About the objective which consist of investigating in the family perception regarding motivations and hopes in the socio-educational scenario of the under 7s football, with this research different results are cleared up. Firstly, the family defends that the intrinsic fondness of the child about football is the key to facilitate them the access; according to González, Tabernero and Márquez (2000), the extrinsic motivations become more visible when the age of the player increases. In this way, the prosocial aspect that football facilitates is very appreciated, not only in order to children grow up in an environment of friendship with other children, but also the member of the family become an active participant of a team in which friendship bonds are generated between adults, and these bonds transcend to the children's sport.

The active and massive participation of the adult that emerges as the first fan of his/her child, favour the sport-centered image of football (Castejón, 2008); although the construct should be expanded to a temporary and spatial organization, because the results show how

this sport-centered acquire an especial dimension when it is configured as central concept of the organization of families on weekends.

It is highlighted that many motivations shown by the families to the football practice, increase the value of practising a team sport in an unspecific way: a discipline or the physical activity, without mentioning to the nature of football, which means that the reasons about why people participate in football are equally valid in the case of other team sports. However, these data should be triangulated with the main reason by which the child practises football: his fondness, that joined to the adult predisposition towards the football practice (García-Ferrando, 2006; García and Ramón, 2010) and the commercial phenomenon of the transparent sport, which occupies the media (Lapresa *et al.*, 2008), explain the uniqueness about the family perceptions are focused on football and not in other sports.

The fondness of the families can be coherent with the results of the researches of González, Tabernero and Márquez (2000) in which it is confirmed that the influence of the family in the football practice is bigger than in other sports.

The members of the families claim their active participation in the socio-educational scenario built for the education of the child so, we can see as an excellent opportunity to carry out a suitable pedagogical support to the regulated education, because the trust grows with the experiences of success mediated through *hopeful places*.

An environment based on the friendship and the coherence with which the member of the family is proud, as Cara, Pernía and Utrilla (2014) point out, a common guideline to the adult environment can be established in order to promote the educational value of football and the development of the self-esteem prepared to deal with a inexorable uncertainty to the development of the person (Lopez, Rose, Robinson, Marques and Pais-Ribeiro, 2009).

Along this line, it is interesting a bigger convergence between the perception of the family and the importance that the optimistic assignment of the success to the effort of the player has, as Boman *et al.* (2009) underline, and not to a score.

It is highlighted that the families give more importance to the positive aspects of the implications of the school football (personal satisfaction, family meeting, possibilities of

sozialization) to the difficulties, such as fees, the preparation of material or the dynamics of the families on weekends that are linked to the match of the child.

In a lower percentage there are people who participate actively in activities related with the training of the child's team. The cases are in minority but they are important in specific weight due to the cases in which a member of the family assumes the education of his/her child, and his teammates can expose the player to a situation of over-expectations and over-evaluation that he/she should be prepared to manage (Weiss and Fretwell, 2005). In this way, as Cara, Pernía and Utrilla (2014) underline, the cases in which some member of the family emerges as a protector of the self-identity as team against the opponents are in minority. However, it is important to study these cases in depth in order to explain unpleasant situations that caricature a sport scenario with a big educational potential and that can be prejudicial to the adherence (Arufe, 2015).

The results coincide with the contributions of Garita (2006) and Tuero, Zapico and González (2012) that show the fact that the person who practise sport values the friendship. In this research it is explained the prioritisation of the cohesion of the participants' group in the same team with a common identity.

## Conclusions

The research opens new spaces to explore about the impact of illusions and expectatives about the sports efficiency of children, as well as their implications or the deepening in the family dynamics derivated of the massive attendance to the scenario during the weekends. Moreover, the research offers a platform and an invitation to optimism for the socio-building of stimulating environments of the sports values, where the families can be an inherent, allied and active part. Traditionally, the focal point was in the behaviour of the families, being judged as inappropriate and, as a result, it was attempted to correct with behavioural guidelines; nevertheless, considering the results, it is possible to consider that the families can be an active, allied and involved part in the proposals about under 7s football that increase the value of the educational model about the omnipotence of the competition. The

family convergence with the promotion of educational values such as friendship against the predominance of the competition should encourage the organizations to dynamize proposals that emphasize their interest in the education through the school sport.

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