

## ANALYSIS OF DIFFERENCES BETWEEN UNTALENTED STUDENTS AND STUDENTS WITH SPORTS TALENT IN PERSONALITY DIMENSIONS AND TEACHER SUPPORT

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### Abstract

Given the fact that some environmental and personality factors are closely related to the development of sports talent, the goal of the research is to determine differences between untalented and children with sports talent in personality dimensions measured by Five Factor Model (Neuroticism, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness and Openness to experience) and teacher support in primary schools of Sarajevo. The participants were N=71 untalented children, N=23 children with talent in individual/duel sports and N=30 children talented in team sports. According to the research results, a significant difference was found between the students talented in individual/duel and team sports (treated as one group) and untalented students in the value on the dimension of Neuroticism, where talented students had lower results. Additionally, the differences on this dimension were identified even when the talented in individual and talented in team sports were treated as two separated groups. In this case, the talented in individual/duel sports had the lowest and the untalented students had the highest results on this dimension. No differences were found on other dimensions. Significant differences were also identified in the results on Teacher Support Scale, where the talented in individual/duel sports had the lowest and the untalented had the highest results.

**Key words:** talent, sport, personality dimension, teacher support

### Introduction

According to contemporary models of giftedness and talent, these terms represent two sides of the same developmental process. Giftedness can be defined as inborn potential that is transformed through practice, training and learning into high achievements in specific domains of human activities (Gagné, 2000; Ziegler & Heller, 2000; Heller & Schofield, 2000). One of these specific domains is sport. Psychomotoric abilities are inborn potentials that play the key role in this developmental process and these potentials are limited by genetic factors. Gardner (1983) mentions bodily-kinesthetic intelligence as general bodily ability important for high accomplishments in sport activities. Some authors attribute the greatest percentage of sport success to these inborn abilities (e.g. Gagné, 2009). Some others lay a great emphasis on training and deliberate practice (e.g. Ericsson and al., 2009). Sure enough, talent cannot be developed without inborn abilities but the abilities without practice and learning are not sufficient for talent realization (Ziegler & Heller, 2000). This developmental process is influenced by environmental and personality factors. Thus, according to *Munich Model of Giftedness and Talent*, family climate, quality of instruction, classroom climate and critical life events are some important environmental factors for talent development (Heller, 1990). Within this model, the importance of personal characteristics are also emphasized and some of these intrapersonal moderators (so called by Heller) are: coping with stress, expectation control, test anxiety and learning strategies and motivation; Similarly, Gagné (2000, 2004) in his *Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent* lists macrosystemic environment, important other persons (such as

parents, teachers and mentors), provisions and important life events as environmental catalysts and physical characteristics of individuals (appearance, strength and motor abilities), motivation, volition, self-regulation and personality traits as intrapersonal catalysts. The both groups of variables in the both models are important as they direct the developmental process from gifts to talents. It is unlikely to develop sport talents without investing efforts in learning and training, and in this process, the personality as well as the support by others play an important role. The support reflects in the early recognition and identification of sport potentials and in the stimulation of its development by other important persons from closer environment, parents and teachers in the first place. Also, the traits related to temperament determine what kind of sport activities an individual is prone to, while character traits such as the strength of will, self-discipline and work habits determine if an individual will persist in training and maintain a needed level of performance through a longer period of time. The importance of personality and its interaction with environment have been confirmed in a number of studies. Van Rossum found lower levels of neuroticism and higher levels of extraversion in sport talents compared to the people untalented in sports. Accordingly, Gobet (2009) in his study discovered high extravertedness in chess champions. In general, there are more pronounced interests for some activities such as sports in people with extraverted behavior. Thus Blackburn (1997) in his study discovered that students with high extraversion had more interest in the domain of sports (aside from some other domains such as law and humanitarian work).

But, these personality dimension interact with social environment and, as Simonton (2010) points out, children with sports talents are encouraged and recognized by society and society accepts of their high achievements. In this system of talent identification, the first to recognize sport potentials in children are teachers in schools. So their task is to recognize specific characteristics of talented children and to take adequate interventions in order to nurture these talents. In this way, they enable talented children training, motivational, emotional, academic and logistic support. So, the chief purpose of the study in this paper is to find out if and to what extent personal dimensions of extraversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness, agreeableness and openness to experience and environmental factor of teachers support are attributable to the realization of sport talent in children at primary school age. This analysis will be conducted in the way of comparing children with sports talent with untalented children on these variables.

## Methods

### Participants

The research was conducted on a sample of N=125 primary school students (67 males and 58 females) from VII, VIII and IX grades. In total, participants from 23 primary schools in Sarajevo were examined. Within this sample there were N=71 children untalented for sport (control), N=30 children talented for *team sports* (football, volleyball and basketball), N=23 children talented for *individual/duel* sports (martial arts, tennis, table tennis and athletics). The main criterion for the selection of the talented participants were that they had taken part in sport competitions within a period of one year prior to the research and had won the three highest ranks in the competitions. The competitions had to be at least at municipality level. There were N=15 talented competitors at municipality level, N=23 talented competitors at county level, N=2 talented competitors at federal level, N=11 talented competitors at state level and N=3 talented competitors at international level. The both categories (talented and untalented) were equal with respect to their school grades and school conduct. Thus, there were N=41 talented and N=45 untalented children with the highest total school achievement grade 5 (A) at the end of the previous school year, N=8 talented and N=23 untalented children with a total school achievement grade 4 (B) at the end of the previous school year, N=5 talented and N=3 untalented children with a total school achievement grade 3 (C) at the end of the previous school year. The differences between the two groups in school grades were not significant ( $\chi^2=5.738$  and  $p=0.057$ ). There were N=2 untalented children with t grade 4 (B) for school conduct while no talented child had lowered grade for school conduct. Yet, this difference was not statistically significant ( $\chi^2=1.546$  and  $p=0.214$ ). Mean age of the participants was M=14.209 for the talented and M=13.647 for the untalented group and this difference was significant ( $t=3.478$ ,

$df=115$  and  $p=0.001$ ). There were N=39 male and N=26 female talented children. On the other hand, there were N=15 male and N=37 female untalented children. The gender differences were statistically significant, where more males were in the talented and more females in the untalented group. The objection to further data analyses is that the data interpretation is limited due to the fact the groups were not equalized with respect to gender and age.

### Instrumentation

The instruments used in the research were: (1) Socio-demographic Data Questionnaire for Children (SDDQ), (2) Adjective Measure of Five-Factor Model of Personality (A-PFM) and Teacher Support to students Scale (TSS);

### Socio-demographic Data Questionnaire (SDDQ)

The questionnaire contains 12 questions divided into two sections. The first section is related to general data on children such as school a child goes to, gender and age. The second section is related to the data concerning school grades and conduct, competitions and the domains of talent and activities the child had taken participation in. These questions also covered the data related to competition level and awards in case a child had competed.

### Adjective Measure of Five-Factor Model of Personality (A-PFM)

*Description.* The questionnaire is a form of NEO-PI (originally created by Costa & McCrae), translated and adapted to Croatian language. The original form contains 60 questions that were five-point rating scales of Likert-type. Igor Kardum and Irena Smojver translated, adapted and modified this questionnaire with a lexical approach where they used self-descriptive adjectives instead of standardly formulated questions (Kardum, Gračanin & Krapčić, 2007) and the new form of the questionnaire had 50 instead of 60 questions. The examinee answers to these question by choosing one of five numbers of the scale to assess to what extent some trait (adjective or attribute) is related to him/her (where the number were: 0-does not describe me at all, 1- mostly does not describe me, 2- neither describes me nor does not describe me, 3- mostly describes me and 4- describes me completely). This new version also covers five personality dimensions as the original form: *Neuroticism, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness and Openness to experience*; There are five scales in the questionnaire and each of the scales is consisted of 10 questions (items) related to one of the dimensions. *Reliability.* For all the scales of A-PFM, at least medium to high  $\alpha$ -Cronbach type reliability was found:  $\alpha=0.664$  for Neuroticism,  $\alpha=0.802$  for Extraversion,  $\alpha=0.756$  for Agreeableness,  $\alpha=0.717$  for Conscientiousness and  $\alpha=0.763$  for Openness to experience; *Normality of data distributions.* Skewness and kurtosis indices and Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z-value (K-S Z) were calculated for each of the scale. Except for the scale Agreeableness, the results on the remaining four scales were normally distributed according to the

values of these indices (skewness=-0.064, kurtosis=0.394, K-S Z=1.039 and p=0.231 for Neuroticism, skewness=-0.444, kurtosis=-0.058, K-S Z=1.112 and p=0.169 for Extraversion, skewness=-0.966, kurtosis=0.529, K-S Z=1.368 and p=0.047 for Agreeableness, skewness=-0.459, kurtosis=-0.438, K-S Z=1.126 and p=0.158 for Conscientiousness and skewness=-0.636, kurtosis=0.814, K-S Z=1.254 and p=0.082 for Openness to experience). A transformation of the results on the scale Agreeableness was performed through mathematical function  $X_t =$

$$2,38x\left(3 - \sqrt{X_{maks} + 0,1 - X}\right)$$

after which we got normally distributed results on the scale (skewness=-0.188, kurtosis=-0.459, K-S Z=0.735 and p=0.652). The transformed results on the scale Agreeableness entered further statistical analyses.

#### Teacher Support Scale (TSS)

TSS was specially designed for the purpose of the study. The background for the construction of the scale were previous empirical studies on students' perceptions of the support by their teachers, where small scale formats containing from four (Torsheim, Wold & Samdal, 2000), to sixteen items (Marjoribanks, 1990) were used. The formulation of the questions in TSS were made in accordance to the research on the teacher support perception, conducted by Sands and Plunkett (2005). Based on these research, 15 questions were formulated for TSS. *Description.* Final form of TSS contains 15 questions related to the ways in which teachers give support to their students in their school tasks, school and extracurricular activities. Students had to reply to each of the question on five-point Likert type scale with numbers from 1 to 5 (meaning of the number are as follows: 1-never, 2-rarely, 3-sometimes, 4-often and 5-almost always). The scale is designed to measure one dimension of teacher support so the result on the scale is defined the mean of all items values. *Reliability.* High-Cronbach reliability was found for TSS ( $\alpha=0.859$  and  $N=15$ ) *Normality of results distribution.* According to the values of skewness and kurtosis indices and K-S Z-value, the results on the scale are normally distributed (skewness=0.126, kurtosis=-0.828, K-S Z=0.975 and p=0.298).

#### Data collection

The permission for data collection was officially given by the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth and sent to the N=31 primary schools of Sarajevo. In total, the cooperation in the research project was established with N=23 out of 31 schools. Managers in each of these 23 school gave out a written permission to the researchers to carry out psychological testing on the children in their schools. Afterwards, professional communication between researchers and school staff (school psychologists, pedagogists and teachers) and parents was set up. The goal and nature of the research were explained to the staff and parents.

Teachers, pedagogists and school psychologists gave their aid to correct samples selections and enabled adequate testing conditions in classrooms. The selected students were informed on the testing date several days in advance, so they could reorganize their activities in and out of school. The selected students were given instructions how to fill in questionnaires, and, if needed, they were given additional explanations related to the questions.

## Results

### Differences between untalented students and students with sports talent in personality dimensions

Two analyses were done and presented in this section of the paper. In the first analysis, two groups were compared with regard to their results on personality dimensions- the group of sport talents taken together (regardless of what kind of sport they participate in) and the group of untalented students. In the second analysis, three groups were compared on these scales- students talented for individual/duel sports, students talented for team sports and untalented students.

Table 1. Mean values and standard deviations of the groups on the personality dimensions measured by A-PFM

Dimension	Group	$X_{min}$	$X_{maks}$	Mean	St.D.
Neuroticism	Untalented	0.40	3.10	1.62	0.50
	Talented in individual/duel sports	0.30	2.80	1.32	0.69
	Talented in team sports	0.00	2.50	1.37	0.61
	Talented-total	0.00	2.80	1.35	0.64
	Total	0.00	3.10	1.50	0.58
Extraversion	Untalented	0.80	4.00	2.97	0.68
	Talented in individual/duel sports	1.00	4.00	2.94	0.74
	Talented in team sports	1.50	4.00	3.11	0.65
	Talented-total	1.00	4.00	3.03	0.69
	Total	0.80	4.00	2.99	0.68
Agreeableness	Untalented	1.70	4.00	3.23	0.59
	Talented in individual/duel sports	2.80	4.00	3.49	0.34
	Talented in team sports	1.70	4.00	3.29	0.58
	Talented-total	1.70	4.00	3.38	0.49
	Total	1.70	4.00	3.29	0.55
Conscientiousness	Untalented	1.50	4.00	3.03	0.59
	Talented in individual/duel sports	2.40	4.00	3.23	0.48
	Talented in team sports	2.00	4.00	2.98	0.58
	Talented-total	2.00	4.00	3.09	0.55
	Total	1.50	4.00	3.06	0.57
Openness to experience	Untalented	1.00	4.00	3.01	0.56
	Talented in individual/duel sports	2.30	4.00	3.23	0.51
	Talented in team sports	1.40	4.00	2.99	0.58
	Talented-total	1.40	4.00	3.09	0.56
	Total	1.00	4.00	3.05	0.56

There are mean values on the dimensions shown in the table 1 above, showing some differences between groups at descriptive level. But, when the two groups were compared, the group of students with talent in individual/duel and team sports (taken together) and the group of untalented, a significant difference in the results on Neuroticism was found. In average, the untalented group had higher values on this dimension, compared to the talented group ( $t=2.629$  i  $p=0.01$ ). No significant differences were found on all the other personality dimensions ( $t=-0.529$  and  $p=0.598$  for

Extraversion,  $t=-1.427$  and  $p=0.156$  for Agreeableness,  $t=-0.601$  and  $p=0.549$  for Conscientiousness and  $t=-0.863$  and  $p=0.390$  for Openness to experience). The analysis was repeated, this time with one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) where three groups were compared-the group of students talented in individual/duel sports, the group of students talented in team sports and the group of untalented students. The only difference among the three groups was found in the values of Neuroticism ( $F=3.723$ ,  $df=2$  and  $p=0.027$ ). The group of students talented in individual/duel sports have the lowest and the group of untalented students had the highest results on Neuroticism. No significant differences among the three groups were found in the values of other dimensions ( $F=0.550$ ,  $df=2$  and  $p=0.578$  for Extraversion,  $F=1.717$ ,  $df=2$  and  $p=0.184$  for Agreeableness,  $F=1.392$ ,  $df=2$  and  $p=0.253$  for Conscientiousness and  $F=1.557$ ,  $df=2$  and  $p=0.215$  for Openness to experience).

#### *Differences between untalented students and students with sports talent in results on the Teacher Support Scale (TSS)*

Table 2. Mean values and standard deviations of the groups on the Teacher Support Scale (TSS)

Group	X <sub>min.</sub>	X <sub>maks.</sub>	Mean	St. D.
Untalented	2.00	4.87	3.35	0.67
Talented in individual/duel sports	2.73	4.53	3.79	0.51
Talented in team sports	2.07	4.87	3.23	0.73
Talented-total	2.07	4.87	3.48	0.70
Total	2.00	4.87	3.41	0.68

Two analyses were done and presented in this section of the paper. In the first analysis, two groups were compared with regard to their results on Teacher Support Scale- the group of sport talents taken together (regardless of what kind of sport they participate in) and the group of untalented students. In the second analysis, three groups were compared on these scales-students talented for individual/duel sports, students talented for team sports and untalented students. When talented in individual/duel sports and talented in team sports were taken as one group and compared to the group of untalented students, no significant difference was identified between the two groups in the value on Teacher Support Scale ( $t=1.094$  and  $p=0.276$ ). But when the kind of sport was taken into account, and the sport talents were compared separately, significant differences among the talented in individual/duel sports, talented in team sports and untalented students were found ( $F=5.567$  and  $p=0.005$ ). On average, the talented in individual/duel sports had the highest and the talented in team sports have the lowest results on this scale.

#### **Discussion**

The goal of this research was to determine if primary school students with sports talent differed from their untalented peers in personality dimensions and the support they received from their teachers at school.

The personality dimensions were measured by Adjective measure of Five-Factor Personality Model covering five broad personality dimensions Neuroticism, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness and Openness to experience, while the variable of perceived teacher support was measured by a scale specially designed for the purpose of the study. The theoretical frame for the study were contemporary models of giftedness and talent in which the importance of environmental and personality factor for talent development was specially analyzed. Also, the results of a range of empirical researches show that there are important differences in personality traits and environmental support between people talented for sports and their untalented controls. For instance, when it comes to personality, Kirkcaldy and Furnham (1991) found out in their research that extraversion and, to less extent neuroticism had the most powerful prediction of sports preference (passive or active sport, competitive or non-competitive sport). The results of the research presented in this paper show that there are no significant differences between the group of students with sports talent and untalented students in the dimensions Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness and Openness to experience. No difference was identified in the both cases: when the group of talented in individual/duel sports and talented in team sports were taken together and then compared to untalented students and when two groups of the talented were formed with respect to sports and compared with each other and with untalented students. But, clear differences were identified between the groups on Neuroticism. In general, the group of talented have significantly lower values on Neuroticism compared to the group of untalented. Also, the group of the students talented in individual/duel sports has the lowest and the group of untalented students has the highest values on Neuroticism. These findings are similar to those ones from Van Rossum's study (Van Rossum, 2009) where the results showed that emotional stability is more present at sport talents, especially at the sportsmen talented in individual sports. But his study also revealed that people with sports talent (especially in team sports) were more extraverted. No doubt, extraversion and leadership are important for the success in team sports where team spirit, motivation for group work and adequate communication depend on these traits. Yet, this finding of the author has not been confirmed in our research. In another research conducted by Lazarević and al. (2012), four groups of rhythmic gymnasts were compared: amateurs, more successful amateurs, competitors and successful competitors (gifted competitors). In short, the results of their study showed that the both groups of competitors scored higher on the self-report measure of Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness and on Agreeableness assessed by mothers in comparison to both amateur groups. But, the gifted competitors did not differ from other competitor group on any of the personality dimensions. We must point out that there are some methodological limitations of our

research, which make it hard to compare the results of our research with the results of these previous studies. One of these limitations are small samples of the participants due to which statistical analysis had less sensitivity to identify significant differences. The second limitation may be the fact that the both talented groups in our research consisted of the competitors in very different sport disciplines (no matter if they are individual or team sports) each of which requires somewhat different personality profiles. Besides, greater objectivity of the data in our study could have been gained through the use of different personality measures (self-report measures and assessments made by teachers or parents) as it was in the case of Lazarević's et al. research. One of the problems for some future research could be to explore the differences between untalented students, students talented in individual sports and students talented in team sports with the use of some other measures of personality traits. For instance, Garland and Barry (1990) used Cattell's Sixteen Personality Factor (16 PF) questionnaire in their study of sport talents. According to their research results, personality traits extroversion, emotional stability, tough-mindedness, and group-dependence, along with the perceived leader behaviors of training and instruction, democratic behavior, autocratic behavior, social support, and rewarding behavior, were predictive of performance in collegiate football, independently and interactively. Also, O'Sullivan, Zuckerman and Kraft (1998) in their research determined that general college population scored lower on the Activity and higher on the Neuroticism-Anxiety scales in the Zuckerman-Kuhlman Personality Questionnaire (ZKPQ), compared to lacrosse players, hockey players and equestrians.

But, the results of our research are consistent with other authors' in the way they also confirmed lower emotional instability in sport talents even different neuroticism/stability measures were used. In the second data analysis, we found out that there were no statistically significant difference when the group of talented in individual/duel sports and talented in team sports were taken together and then compared to untalented students. But, when the three groups were compared (the talented in individual/duel sports, talented in team sports and untalented students) significant differences were found on the variable of teacher support. On average, the talented in individual/duel sports have the highest and the untalented have the lowest values of teacher support. These results indicate the importance of teachers' support to the young people in their sport achievements. Of course, according to the data of the research, this support is more important to some sport domains than others. Bloom (1985a) asserts that abilities by themselves are not sufficient for the success in the domain of art, science and sport if are not supported by encouragement, training and education and sources of these stimulation factors are teachers. The sport teachers are the first line in the recognition, selection and training sport talents.

Unfortunately, some factors may make teachers blind to recognize sport talents at children belonging to some demographic categories such as female gender. Accordingly, Lentillon, Cogérino and Kaestner (2006) report on the results of their study in which male pupils generally receive higher grades for sport activities than female pupils. But, on the other hand, there were no differences between males and females in their perception of injustice for getting different grades from their teachers. Yet, the results of the study indicate that these pupils' perceptions may not be free of gender stereotypes. In our research, in the preliminary analysis we determined that significantly larger proportion of males were within the groups of talented students. This means that there may be a strong influence of teachers' gender-stereotyped perception on their recognition of sports talent and on their consequent support to children with sports talent. The interaction of gender and sport talent possibly affects the process of selection of the children talented in sport but this a problem beyond the scope of this paper and should be left for some future research.

### Conclusion

On the account of the results of this research it can be concluded that there are significant differences between the group of students talented in individual/duel sports, the group of students talented in team sports and the group of untalented students on Neuroticism. On average, the talented in individual/duel sports have the lowest and the untalented have the highest results on this dimension. Also, when the groups of talented in individual/duel sports and talented in team sports were treated as one group and then compared with the group of untalented students, the significant difference on Neuroticism was also found. Here, the talented ones had lower values on this dimension.

This finding supports the results of many previous studies that showed less pronounced neuroticism in people with sports talent. But, unlike the previous researches, the results of our research show no significant differences among groups on all the other personality dimensions. We can mention small sample sizes and different personality dimensions measures as methodological limitations for further data comparisons. The analysis of the results on the variable of teacher support showed that there were no difference between the group of talented and the group of untalented students in the values of this variable. But, when the group of students talented in individual/duel sports, the group of students talented in team sports and the group of untalented students, significant differences were identified. On average, the students talented in individual/duel sports have the highest and the talented in team sports have the lowest values of teacher support. Possible effects of students' gender on the teacher' support and students' perception of that support are implicated in this study as analysis revealed a substantial domination of males within the groups of talented.

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## **ANALIZA RAZLIKA IZMEĐU NETALENTIRANIH UČENIKA I UČENIKA SA SPORTSKIM TALENTOM U DIMEZIJAMA LIČNOSTI I UČITELJSKOJ POTPORI**

### **Sažetak**

*S obzirom na činjenicu da su neki uvjeti okoline i osobnosti čimbenici koji su usko povezani s razvojem sportskog talenta, cilj istraživanja bio je utvrditi razlike između netalentiranih i djece sa sportskim talentom u dimenzijama ličnosti mjerene sa "Five Factor Model" (neuroticizam, ekstraverzija, ugodnost, savjesnost i otvorenost za iskustvo) i podršku učitelja i nastavnika u osnovnim školama u Sarajevu. Sudionici su N = 71 netalentirane djeca, N = 23 djece s talentom za pojedinačne sportove i N = 30 djece talentiranih u momčadskim sportovima. Prema rezultatima istraživanja, pronađena je znatna razlika između učenika talentiranih u pojedinačnim i ekipnim sportovima (tretiranih kao jedna skupina) i netalentiranih učenika u vrijednosti na dimenziji neuroticizma, gdje talentirani učenici imaju slabije rezultate. Osim toga, razlike na ovoj dimenziji su identificirane čak i kada su talentirani u pojedinačnim i ekipnim sportovima tretirani kao dvije odvojene skupine. U tom slučaju, talentirani u pojedinačnim sportovima imali su najniže a netalentirani najviše vrijednosti rezultata na ovoj dimenziji. Nisu pronađene razlike na drugim dimenzijama. Značajne razlike su također identificirali u rezultatima kod ljestvice Učiteljska potpora, gdje su talentirani u pojedinačnim sportovima imao najniže a netalentirani najviše rezultate.*

**Ključne riječi:** talent, sport, dimenzije ličnosti, učiteljska potpora

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