

ASPECTS OF LEARNING AND PLAYING THE ULTIMATE GAME

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Abstract: Introduction: The study aimed to make the most of the experience gained by the implementation team of the Erasmus Plus Sport project 622885-EPP-1-2020-1-RO-SPO-SSCP in teaching sports games and use it to train people working in different entities and having the opportunity to apply the knowledge learned either at their workplaces or during their practical leisure activities.

Materials and Methods: The research methods used to carry out the study were: bibliographic documentation (based on printed and electronic resources), questionnaire survey, mathematical analysis and graphical representation. The questionnaire, which included 19 mandatory items, was administered in the first and fourth stages of the study. In the second stage, an online presentation of the Ultimate game was delivered, while the third stage consisted of playing the game.

Results: Initially, 82.3% of respondents had not heard of the Ultimate game or were unfamiliar with it and only 51% expressed interest in learning and playing a sports game that was new to them. Practice was beneficial because understanding the rules of the game and how to play it, as well as the lack of physical contact between players, attracted more participants, finally leading 74.2% of them to express interest in this game and a desire to share what they had learned with other interested people.

Conclusions: The interest shown by the study participants was due to the increased attractiveness of physical education lessons based on means that were new, unfamiliar but easy to apply and able to enhance their self-confidence through the results achieved.

Keywords: *ultimate, sports game, questionnaire survey, learning, practice*

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic had direct negative effects on many aspects of everyone's life. These negative influences also affected young people, who had limited opportunities to engage in motor activities at that time. The end of the lockdown period brought a number of restrictions when important activities could be resumed, but direct contact with fellows was allowed much later.

People who were regularly engaged in motor activities searched for solutions to exercise and move during that period. Most entities offering services in the area focused on the issue and quickly came up with solutions, making online activities available to anyone interested in the matter. These activities helped to satisfy the desire for movement of those regularly engaged in motor activities, who constantly felt the negative effects induced by the lack of exercise.

Online activities were also organised in schools and universities, which continued their teaching process. Under these conditions, online physical education lessons were conducted at both pre-university and university levels.

In universities, physical education lessons were varied, with teachers seeking solutions to attract students. However, the lack of movement was also felt at this level, as in the case of all social categories.

At the end of the lockdown period, activities were gradually resumed; at that stage, they were carried out in a hybrid format. Thus, part of the physical education lessons for students were conducted online, and the other part, face to face. Face-to-face lessons imposed a number of rules (Mihăilă, Paraschiva, & Mihăilă, 2021) such as social distancing, disinfection of sports equipment after each use, conducting outdoor physical education lessons, etc.

In this context, teachers were forced to combine the rules imposed for practical lessons, the specifics of motor activities allowing them to be carried out in the open air; thus, joint activities were organised for people of both genders who engaged together in different sports that required social distancing between players, with physical contact being prohibited.

A sports game that responded to both of the previously mentioned aspects was Ultimate. The game originated in the United States in 1968 and has since spread around the world, being now played „in more than 100 countries” (Bălan, & Bota, 2019). Ultimate, a cooperation-opposition game (López Trejos, 2020), involves two teams of 7 players (3 men and 4 women or vice versa) who compete against each other while trying to pass a disc (Frisbee) to teammates until a player manages to catch it in the opposite end zone to score a point. At the same time, players in possession of the disc try not to lose it while passing it to each other. In this way, they prevent their opponents from gaining possession of the disc and scoring a point.

A very important aspect is the absence of the referee, whose role is taken over by players, who constantly ensure that the rules of the game are respected through each athlete's fair play, which is called the “Spirit of the Game” (Spencer-Cavaliere, Kingsley, & Gotwals, 2017; Thonhauser, 2023).

A game lasts 40 minutes of playing time and is divided into 20-minute halves; the first half ends when a team first scores eight (8) goals, and the game is finished and won by the first team to score 15 (fifteen) goals (USA Ultimate 2024-2025).

This dynamic game has several positive effects on the players' bodies (Braneț, et al., 2022), just like any other motor activity performed for a longer period of time. Among these effects, we mention: maintaining health, improving physical fitness, combating stress, sedentary lifestyle and overweight, better communication and social integration.

Materials and Method

Research aim

The study aimed to make the most of the experience gained by the implementation team of the Erasmus Plus Sport project 622885-EPP-1-2020-1-RO-SPO-SSCP in teaching sports games and use it to train people working in different entities and having the opportunity to apply the knowledge learned either at their workplaces or during their practical leisure activities.

Research methods

The research methods used to carry out the study were: bibliographic documentation (based on printed and electronic resources), questionnaire survey (Epuran, 2005), mathematical analysis and graphical representation.

The questionnaire, which included 19 mandatory items, was administered in the first and fourth stages of the study. It should be noted that a first question asked participants to give their consent to the processing of personal data. Those who responded negatively to this item were not allowed to complete the questionnaire. For the others, the questions were divided into two sections as follows: the first part included a number of introductory questions, and the second one aimed at assessing the respondents' knowledge about the Ultimate game. We mention that most of the questions were common, but there were also different questions. These differences were necessary because the questionnaire was applied in different situations. The questionnaire was uploaded to Google Form and sent to the respondents using the MS Teams digital tool, a platform used by the Politehnica University of Bucharest throughout the online activities carried out during and after the pandemic.

Research Design

The study was conducted between May and June 2021, using the sports facilities provided by the Politehnica University of Bucharest. Their use was adapted to the restrictions imposed at the time by the authorities, but also by the university through university autonomy.

Thus, the study combined online and face-to-face activities and included four stages, each one with clearly defined content:

1. The first stage consisted in applying the questionnaire. It was completed by 288 people (55.2% women and 44.8% men) who gave their consent to participate in the study. Of them, 193 were students (67%) at the two project-partner universities, 71 were physical education teachers (24.2%) and 8 were primary school teachers (2.4%), 8 people were involved in sport (2.4%) and 12 were employed in other fields of activity (4.0%). With regard to the age category of our respondents (Figure 1), 70.1% were aged 19-30, followed by those aged 31-45 and 46-60.

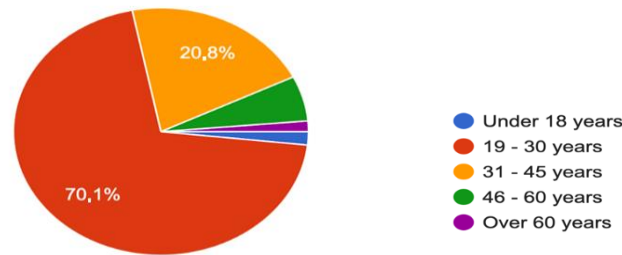


Figure 1. Age of respondents

The introductory items of the questionnaire indicated that most respondents (43.3%) performed motor activities several times a week, 19.1% once a week and only 18.8% were engaged in such activities on a daily basis. At the same time, most participants (69.1%) preferred to play sports games in their free time, and 80.2% of them were interested in various sports events broadcast by the media or participated as spectators. This can be explained by the large number of participants in the proposed activities, who wanted to learn the specific skills of a new sports game that is less known in our country but is played at the highest level worldwide.

2. In the second stage, the study participants watched the online presentation of the Ultimate game. In addition to the aspects regarding the emergence and development of the game, participants were introduced to the rules. The main rules of the game were reinforced by the images of a methodological video that facilitated their understanding and allowed the association of theoretical information with practical issues.

3. The third stage was conducted face to face and consisted of actually playing the game. Participants played Ultimate by applying the rules learned during the online course. We mention that the game was interrupted especially in its first part so that the organisers, members of the implementation team, could exemplify the main rules, thus facilitating learning.

4. In the fourth stage, which took place at the end of the practical lesson, participants were asked to complete the questionnaire again and express their

opinions about the Ultimate game after playing it (252 respondents).

To note that the large number of participants required several online presentations and practical lessons conducted within the sports complex of the Politehnica University of Bucharest or on the sports field of UNEFS Bucharest.

Results

Initially, 82.3% of respondents had not heard of the Ultimate game or were unfamiliar with it and only 51% expressed interest in learning and playing a sports game that was new to them. Practice was beneficial because understanding the rules of the game and how to play it, as well as the lack of physical contact between players, attracted more participants, finally leading 74.2% of them to express interest in this game and a desire to share what they had learned with other interested people.

In order to better capture the learning benefits of combining the online course with playing the game during practical lessons, we compared the results obtained on items related to the theoretical knowledge of the Ultimate game. The comparison was made between the responses received to the questionnaire applied in the first stage and those received in the fourth stage.

When asked about the number of players in a team (Figure 2), most participants (81.9%) did not know the correct response before attending the course and the practical lesson. Following the two activities, 18.3% of respondents did not know or responded incorrectly, while 81.7% knew that the Ultimate team has seven players on the field.

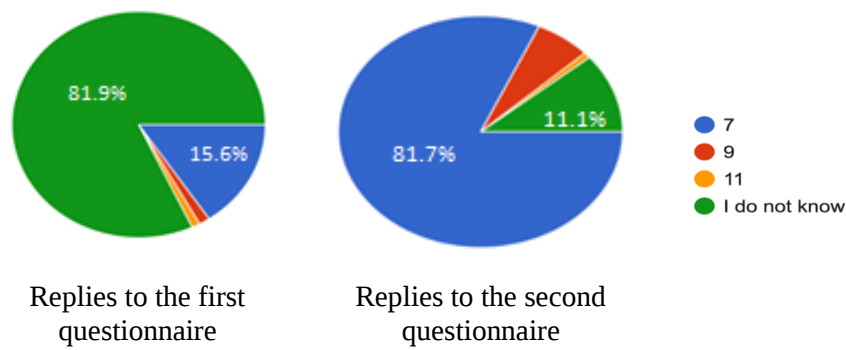


Figure 2. Number of players in a team

The possibility for the Ultimate game to be played on any surface was unknown to most respondents in the first stage of the study (Figure 3). At the end of the proposed learning activities, more than half of the participants (61.1%) remembered that Ultimate can be played on any surface provided it is flat, 100 m long and 37 m wide (Bălan, Bota, 2019).

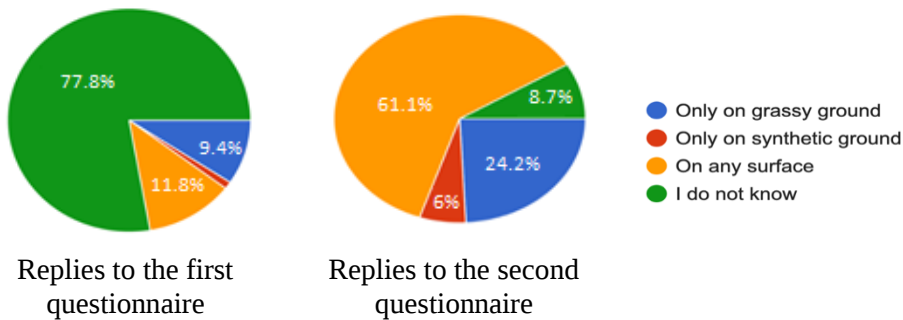


Figure 3. Type of surface on which Ultimate can be played

When asked about the presence of referees, 82.6% of respondents said they did not know the number of referees involved in the game (Figure 4). From their experience with other sports games, more than 9% of participants indicated two or four referees, and 8% responded correctly – no referees. Application of the questionnaire at the end of the study revealed that 63.9% of respondents remembered that refereeing is the players' responsibility. The number of incorrect responses was surprisingly high (more than 30%), given that participants also took part in practical activities where they played the Ultimate game. The participants may not have understood that the coordinators of the practical activities were not referees, but only people involved in project implementation, whose role was to facilitate learning and not to referee the game.

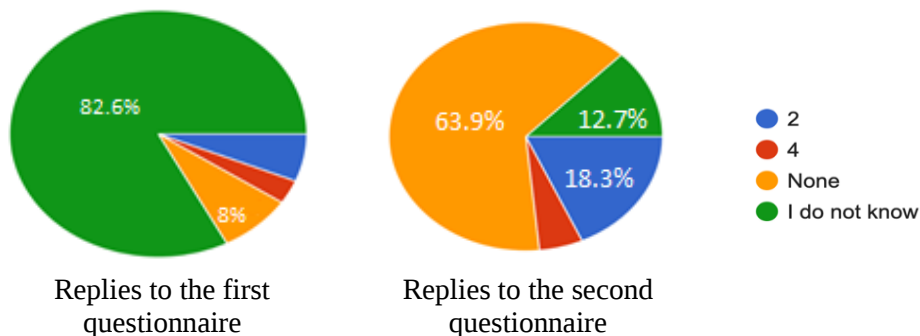


Figure 4. Number of referees involved in the Ultimate game

The number of seconds allowed for a player to hold the disc in their possession before throwing it to a teammate in a favourable position to score a point was unknown to 84.4% of respondents (Figure 5). In the second questionnaire administered, the situation was different, with 7.8% of participants indicating the correct number of seconds for a player to be in possession of the disc.

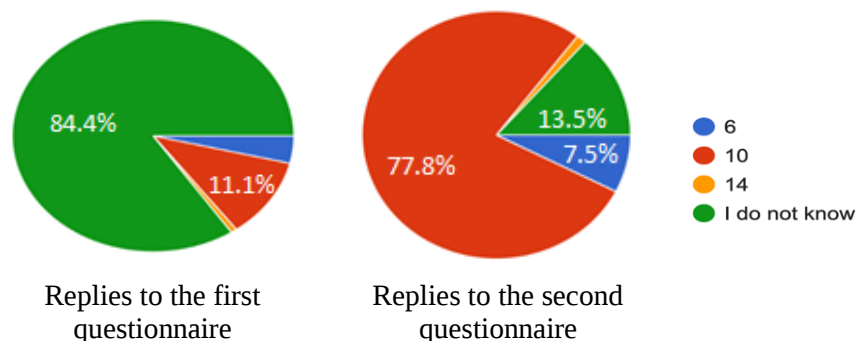


Figure 5. Number of seconds a player may hold the disc

Figure 6 illustrates the responses to the question regarding the total number of points a team needs to score in order to win a match. Once again, it was observed that a large number of respondents (85.5%) did not know this initially. After the online course and the practical activity, the situation changed, with 67.1% of participants responding correctly to this question.

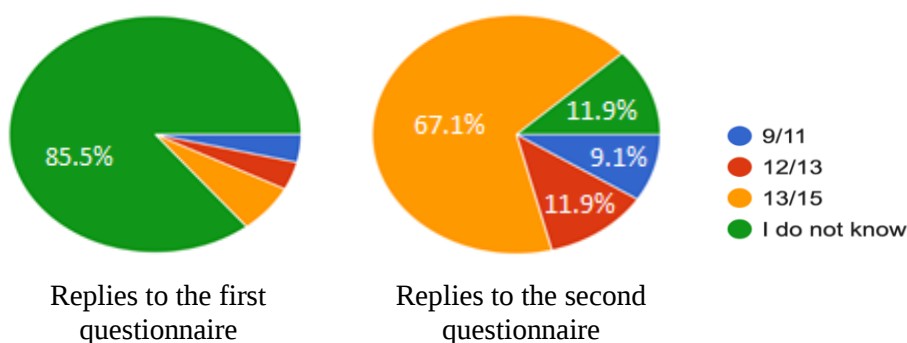


Figure 6. Number of points needed to win a match

Among the effects of playing this game, respondents identified 11 benefits that could be obtained. The most frequently mentioned benefits were: maintaining and improving health (78.2%), socialising (75.8%) and having fun (88.1%). Other benefits listed: gender equality (which corresponds to a current trend in leisure motor activities), social integration, promotion of fair play and systematic exercise throughout life.

Among the disadvantages identified by the study participants, we mention: the game can only be played in open spaces (42.5%) that meet the requirements related to the size of the field (100 m long and 37 m wide), a very good level of physical fitness (33.3%), too difficult rules (22.2%), the need for special sports equipment – Frisbee (17.9%). The important thing was that participants enjoyed playing this game, with

78.9% of them responding in the affirmative to this question.

Discussion

The study carried out highlighted the interest and openness of some social categories (especially young people) towards playing sports games where physical contact is not allowed, but which offer the possibility of forming mixed teams. This aspect was seen as a great advantage due to the multiple opportunities for communication and socialisation.

It is worth mentioning that the introduction of various sports and recreational activities during formal tertiary education can help to increase interest in movement in general and sport in particular. The constant assessment of theoretical and practical knowledge learned during physical

education lessons for students leads them to be more active and much more involved in what they do during physical education classes.

The Ultimate game played during physical education lessons can be transferred to leisure activities by organising matches in compliance with the official rules or based on ad-hoc rules established at the beginning of the match, but which must be followed throughout the game.

An important aspect reported by some respondents was their interest in introducing the Ultimate game into the physical education lessons provided in the timetable of students at non-specialised faculties. Thus, students would have the opportunity to learn new sports disciplines, strengthen their taste for movement and become aware of the benefits of motor activities for maintaining or improving their physical and mental health. Moreover, through attractive motor activities, young people could develop or maintain their mental, emotional, cognitive and social skills at high levels.

Initially, when asked about the Ultimate rules, most respondents said “I do not know”, which was normal because very few people knew this sport in our country. After completing the online course and engaging in the practical activity, the majority of participants gave correct responses to the questionnaire items. This had a positive impact on their activity, especially since some of them were physical education teachers who had both the opportunity and the necessary tools to teach their students the Ultimate game.

Conclusions

In pandemic times and the subsequent period, the online environment offered an alternative for teaching some sports played throughout the world for many years but less known in our country. In this context, the implementation team of the Erasmus Plus Sport 622885-EPP-1-2020-1-RO-SPO-SSCP (see also the web page) project had the opportunity to exploit the experience gained as members of the aforementioned project during which they had learned specific skills for such sports games, as well as the rules for playing them.

The interest shown by the study participants was due to the increased attractiveness of physical education lessons based on means that were new, unfamiliar but easy to apply and able to enhance their self-confidence through the results achieved.

Acknowledgments

The authors thank all respondents.

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