

PODIUM

Journal of Science and Technology in Physical Culture

UNIVERSITY EDITORIAL

Volumen 17
Issue 3

2022

University of Pinar del Río "Hermanos Saíz Montes de Oca"

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Translated from the original in Spanish

Original article

Setting goals as a motivational technique in athletes

Establecimiento de metas como técnica motivacional en deportistas

Estabelecimento de metas como técnica motivadora para esportistas

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Received: 2021-11-04

Approved: 2022-06-22

How to cite item: Cañizares Hernández, M., & Pérez Surita, Y. (2022). Setting goals as a motivational technique in athletes/Establecimiento de metas como técnica motivacional en deportistas. *PODIUM - Journal of Science and Technology in Physical Culture*, 17(3), 911-924. Retrieved from <https://podium.upr.edu.cu/index.php/podium/article/view/1215>

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Goal setting is a fundamental process in sports training and can be used as a motivational technique in sports to manage the resources of the athlete and the team in order to enhance cohesion and achieve their aspirations.

Objective: To analyze the relevance of the application of a psychological intervention program based on the establishment of goals as a motivational technique in the women's team category 13-14 years of Water Polo of the School of Sports Initiation School Eide "Marcelo Salado", of Villa Clara, Cuba.

Materials and methods: The methodology used includes various research methods



and techniques of a quantitative and qualitative nature. Analysis-synthesis, observation, interview, goal setting questionnaire, sentence completion technique, management style questionnaire, triangulation and pre-experiment were used. Descriptive measures of position such as the mean and mode were calculated. The Wilcoxon signed ranks nonparametric hypothesis test was used to test whether the changes before and after the intervention were significant.

Results: The measurable data were statistically processed using the SPSS software for Windows version 17.0. The results demonstrate the influence of the intervention program applied to improve the team's goal setting.

Conclusions: They value the contribution of the application of the psychological intervention program, in the establishment of goals in a more objective, clear and understandable way in the athletes and in the development of the motivational sphere when using the potentialities of the work of the sports team as a group.

Keywords: Goal setting; Psychological intervention; Motivation; Water polo.

RESUMEN

Introducción: El establecimiento de metas es un proceso fundamental en el entrenamiento deportivo y puede ser utilizado como una técnica motivacional en el deporte para manejar los recursos psicológicos del deportista y el equipo en aras de potenciar la cohesión y lograr sus aspiraciones.

Objetivo: Analizar la pertinencia de la aplicación de un programa de intervención psicológica sustentado en el establecimiento de metas como técnica motivacional en el equipo femenino categoría 13-14 años de Polo Acuático de la Escuela de Iniciación Deportiva Escolar Eide "Marcelo Salado", de Villa Clara, Cuba.

Materiales y métodos: La metodología empleada incluye diversos métodos y técnicas de investigación de naturaleza cuantitativa y cualitativa. Se utilizaron el análisis-síntesis, observación, entrevista, cuestionario de establecimiento de metas, técnica de completamiento de frases, el cuestionario de estilo de dirección, la triangulación y el preexperimento. Se calcularon medidas descriptivas de posición como la media y la moda. Se utilizó la prueba de hipótesis no paramétrica de rangos señalados de Wilcoxon para comprobar si los cambios antes y después de la intervención eran significativos.

Resultados: Los datos susceptibles de medición fueron procesados estadísticamente mediante el software SPSS para Windows versión 17.0. Los resultados demuestran la influencia del programa de intervención aplicado para el mejoramiento del establecimiento de metas del equipo.

Conclusiones: Valoran la contribución de la aplicación del programa de intervención psicológica, en el establecimiento de metas de manera más objetivas, claras y comprensibles en las deportistas y en el desarrollo de la esfera motivacional al utilizar las potencialidades del trabajo del equipo deportivo como grupo.

Palabras clave: Establecimiento de metas; Intervención psicológica; Motivación; Polo Acuático.



SÍNTESE

Introdução: O estabelecimento de metas é um processo fundamental no treinamento esportivo e pode ser usado como uma técnica motivacional no esporte para administrar os recursos psicológicos do atleta e da equipe, a fim de aumentar a coesão e alcançar suas aspirações.

Objetivo: analisar a relevância da aplicação de um programa de intervenção psicológica baseado no estabelecimento de metas como técnica motivacional na equipe de pólo aquático feminina de 13-14 anos da Escuela de Iniciación Deportiva Escolar Eide "Marcelo Salado", em Villa Clara, Cuba.

Materiais e métodos: a metodologia empregada inclui vários métodos e técnicas de pesquisa de natureza quantitativa e qualitativa. Foram utilizadas análise-síntese, observação, entrevista, questionário de estabelecimento de metas, técnica de preenchimento de frases, questionário de estilo de gestão, triangulação e pré-experimentação. Foram calculadas medidas descritivas de posição, tais como média e modo. O teste de hipóteses Wilcoxon não paramétrico assinado foi usado para testar se as mudanças antes e depois da intervenção eram significativas.

Resultados: Os dados mensuráveis foram processados estatisticamente usando o software SPSS para Windows versão 17.0. Os resultados demonstram a influência do programa de intervenção aplicado na melhoria da definição das metas da equipe.

Conclusões: a contribuição da aplicação do programa de intervenção psicológica no estabelecimento de metas mais objetivas, claras e compreensíveis para as atletas e no desenvolvimento da esfera motivacional, utilizando o potencial do trabalho da equipe esportiva como um grupo.

Palavras-chave: Definição de objetivos; Intervenção psicológica; Motivação; Polo aquático.

INTRODUCTION

Physical activity in general and sport in particular are forms of human activity relevant to the formation of personality. It is pertinent to highlight the motivational orientation of sports activity, that is, the role of those objectives and motives that drive man to practice sports.

Sport Psychology is a young science and a special branch of Psychology that offers theoretical support to apply scientifically based methodological and intervention programs. For this reason, studies of psychology applied to team sports are promoted, such as Schuster, *et al.* (2016), Nixdorf, *et al.* (2016), Alonso, I. (2017), Ekmekçi, *et al.* (2018), Nascimento *et al.* (2019), Cañizares *et al.* (2019) Ramirez, *et al.* (2020), and psychological intervention programs are applied in sports teams to contribute to performance in training and competition, Tran Thi, (2011), Villalobo, *et al.* (2020).

Goal setting is a fundamental process in sports training and can be used as a motivational technique in sports to manage the resources of the athlete and the team in order to enhance cohesion and achieve their aspirations. Castle, *et al.* (2000), Weinberg, R. (2003), García-Más and Gimeno F, (2008), Balaguer, *et al.* (2015), Eys, *et al.* (2015), Benson, *et al.* (2016), Sanchez *et al.* (2016), Suarez, *et al.* (2021). Suarez, *et al.* (2021).

Proper goal setting contributes to the achievement of results in sport.



Locke (1994) reviews 100 studies on goal setting where 90 % showed positive or partially positive effects of goal setting in the direction of athlete preparation.

Most of the research that addresses goal setting has been related to high-performance teams, however, little evidence of its study in sports initiation has been found, Castillo *et al.* (2000), a stage in which it is necessary to attend to its particularities, given the need to prepare the practitioner for the demands in higher categories. In Cuba, research related to this problem stands out (De la Caridad Suárez-Rodríguez, *et al.*, 2021; Suárez, *et al.* 2020; Villalobo, *et al.* 2020; Suarez, *et al.* (2021).

In the demands of the investigative work practice carried out at the "Marcelo Salado" Sports Initiation School, Sports Initiation School (Eide in Spanish) of Villa Clara, it was possible to work with the coaches of the Water Polo team, category 13-14 female years. These manifested the need to diagnose psychological problems that were affecting the dynamics of the team. For this reason, observations to the team and interviews with the coaches and the athletes were made and the following difficulties could be detected: the absence of a psychologist in the team, lack of knowledge of psychological management in the work of the team as a group, the athletes showed difficulties in the setting goals and did not express commitments or make efforts to achieve the established goals.

In this team, goal setting was done in a very general way. The goals were established by the coaches, without the participation of the athletes. In the latter, there was evidence of poor commitment, lack of will and individualism that had repercussions on interpersonal relationships. In addition, there were few experiences of group work in the team.

For this reason, the objective of the present work consists in analyzing the relevance of the application of a psychological intervention program based on the establishment of goals as a motivational technique in the women's team, category 13-14 years of water polo of the School of Sports Initiation School Eide " *Marcelo Salado*", from Villa Clara, Cuba.

That is why, the application of a psychological intervention program is justified, which can contribute to the improvement of the goal-setting process in the aforementioned team through the participation of all team members by using the scientific foundations of Sport Psychology, together with the importance conceived by many authors to these factors, López-Salvador *et al.* (2021) , which implies carrying out studies on the subject in this stage of sports initiation, de Suárez, *et al.* (2020), Rodríguez, RE (2017), Suárez, *et al.* (2021).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sample

The Water Polo team, category 13-14 years old, female from Eide "Marcelo Salado", Villa Clara, Cuba, participated in the study. All the athletes (18) and the two team coaches participated in the diagnosis, implementation and evaluation of the psychological intervention program. Consent was given, informing the participants of the research and the procedures followed, and they agreed with the ethical standards of the institution.



Methods and instruments

The approach and type of research assumed is essentially quantitative and various methods and techniques of a quantitative and qualitative nature were used. From the theoretical level, the method of analysis-synthesis, induction-deduction, hypothetical-deductive and the systemic approach were used. At the empirical level, scientific observation, the interview, the group goals questionnaire, the sentence completion technique, the management style questionnaire, triangulation and the pedagogical experiment were used. The experiment carried out was of a natural and formative type. Its design is of a pre-experimental type, it begins with an initial control, the intervention and the final control of the studied team.

The observation indicators and indices analyzed are the following:

Actual situation of the team:

- Good: when the real situation of the team shows satisfaction in the relationships between its members, a sense of belonging.
- Regular: when the real situation of the team manifests some inconvenience that affects normality, sense of belonging and total group satisfaction.
- Bad: when the real situation of the team is seriously affected and there is dissatisfaction in the group that affects the sense of belonging to the team.

Status of interpersonal relationships athlete-athlete, athlete-coach:

- Good: when there are satisfactory communication relationships between athletes and athlete-coaches.
- Regular: when there are some difficulties that interfere in the relationships between athletes and athletes-coaches.
- Bad: when there are great difficulties in the relationship between athletes and athletes - coaches.

The following indicators were defined for goal setting:

- Participation, satisfaction, adaptation, acceptance, specificity, clarity, expectation: feedback.

The statistical methods used were frequency distributions, contingency tables (double entry) to record the frequency of appearance of the values of two variables simultaneously. Graphical representations were added and descriptive measures of position such as mean and mode were calculated. Wilcoxon's nonparametric signed rank test of hypothesis was used to test whether the changes before and after the intervention were significant. The data that could be measured were statistically processed using the SPSS software for Windows version 17.0. The stated research methods and techniques are associated with the different phases through which the development of the research went through and are as follows: 1. Diagnosis phase; 2. Preparation phase of the proposal; 3. Implementation phase of the proposal; and 4. Evaluation phase of the proposal.



Procedure

Among the methods used in this second phase are the following: analysis-synthesis, hypothetical-deductive. These theoretical level methods were present throughout the research process, their application made it possible to systematize the conceptions related to the object of study, reveal dimensions and components of the intervention program.

Diagnostic phase: In this phase, the diagnostic techniques were applied: scientific observation, documentary analysis, interview, group goals questionnaire, sentence completion technique, management style questionnaire to know the situation of the team. before setting goals.

Implementation phase of the psychological intervention program

The experiment was brief and was carried out in a short time (around 45 days or a month, before the competition depending on the selected team), with three weekly sessions. An average of 11 intervention sessions were carried out in each of the teams studied with a duration of approximately 1 hour or 85 minutes depending on the development of the sessions.

The application was carried out through the group and individual guidance was provided depending on the situation; A total of 31 sessions were held, twice weekly for four months, each session lasting one hour.

Adequate conditions were guaranteed to carry out the sessions. In general, not only the aspects or behaviors to be changed in each athlete were assessed, but also the influence of the changes to be achieved in the team and the results to be obtained. To make the observations in the competition, there were 13 specialists who were required to comply with certain requirements mentioned in the report. In all of them, feedback techniques were applied at the end of each session where questions were formulated to facilitate feedback on the fulfillment of the proposed goals. Dialogue and participation were encouraged. Individual conversations were held with some athletes and coaches to assess their criteria about the intervention process and to determine compliance with the sessions.

A group of methods and techniques, games, group discussion, reflective participatory techniques, animation and activation techniques, simulations and dialogues were used.

Evaluation phase of the psychological intervention program

For the evaluation of its results, the same methods and techniques of the diagnostic phase and also the experimental method were used. The descriptive statistics processes exposed in the first phase were also used to analyze the behavior of the variable after the program was applied. A pre-experiment with a formative pedagogical nature was carried out. Statistical processing was performed using the Wilcoxon signed rank hypothesis test, which is a before and after test, applicable to ordinal variables.



RESULTS

A detailed analysis of the results obtained by applying each of the methods and techniques described for the first phase was carried out; the results of each method and applied technique are synthesized and finally the results of the triangulation are presented, among which are the following points: As can be seen in table 1, in the interviews with the athletes it is obtained that (Table 1):

1. 77.7 % of the athletes state that there is little knowledge on the part of the athletes of what a goal is.
2. 100 % of the athletes state that the goals are generally established by the head coach without consensus with the athletes.
3. 27.7 % of the athletes state that there is no systematic feedback on the establishment of goals.
4. 77.7 % of the athletes state that there are goals set that are too general and far from the category that is analyzed where the presence of ineffective ideals with little specificity is evident.
5. 100 % of the athletes state that there is poor motivation and little experience of group work in the team.
6. 88.8 % of the athletes present ambiguous sports ideals and with little elaboration.

Table 1. - Declaration of the athletes about the goals of their team

Athletes Statement on Goals	%
Little knowledge on the part of the athletes of what a goal is.	77.7%
The goals are established by the head coach without consensus with the athletes	100%
There is no systematic feedback on goal setting.	27.7%
There are goals set that are too general and far	77.7%
There is poor motivation and little experience of group work in the team.	100%
sporting ideals	88.8, %

In the interviews with the coaches, it is obtained that both state that there are problems in the development of some traits of will and motivation to achieve goals in some athletes.

In 90 % of the observations about the real situation of the team, it is observed that there are dissatisfactions in the group and a low level of commitment on the part of the athletes in the establishment of goals is appreciated.

In 90 % of the observations on the status of interpersonal relationships athlete-athlete, athlete-coach, it is appreciated that communication is affected by the difficulties and conflicts that interfere in the relationships between athletes and athletes-coaches and, therefore, thus, the goal-setting process is affected.

- The 50 % state feeling satisfaction for belonging to the team.



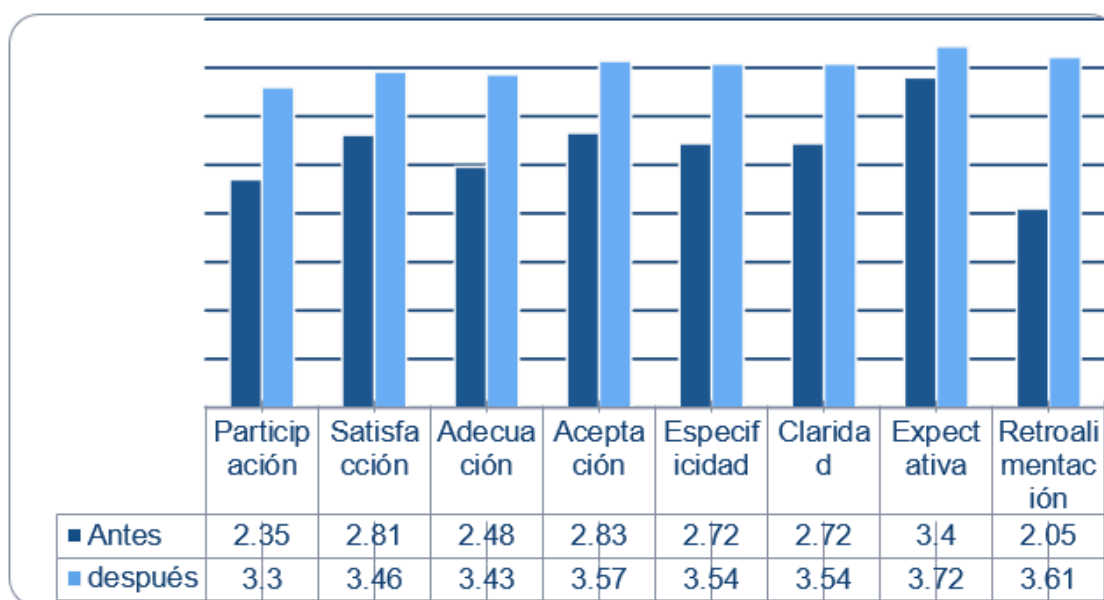
From the exploration carried out, it was found that there are difficulties in setting goals in the water polo team, female category 13-14 years of the "Marcelo Salado" School of Sports Initiation, in Villa Clara, Cuba.

As an anticipated response to the formulated problem, the *hypothesis* following that will lead the pre-experiment:

The application of a psychological intervention program based on the establishment of goals as a motivational technique in the women's team, category 13-14 years of water polo of the School of Sports Initiation (Eide) " *Marcelo Salado*", Villa Clara, Cuba, will improve team motivation as well as group work.

Next, the behavior of the goal setting indicators is presented before and after the application of the training experiment in the water polo team studied (Table 2).

Table 2. - Behavior of the goal setting indicators before and after application



These goals were expressed in the completion of sentences and in the psychological intervention sessions, whose indicators can be seen in Table 1 (Table 3).



Table 3. - Declared goals in the Water Polo team, female category 13-14 years old before and after the intervention program was applied

Indicators for goal setting	change favorably	Not change	change unfavorably	Significance of the changes
Stake	18	0	0	0.0000**
Satisfaction	16	2	0	0.0010**
Adequacy	16	2	0	0.0000**
Acceptance	17	1	0	0.0000**
Specificity	16	2	0	0.0010**
Clarity	16	2	0	0.0010**
Expectation	12	6	0	0.0020**
Feedback	18	0	0	0.0000**

**Very significant changes.

Table 4 shows some examples of individual goals of the athletes before and after the intervention (Tabla 4).

Table 4. - Some examples of individual goals

Athletes	Before	After
1	My biggest aspiration is to improve	My greatest aspiration is to pass the category and achieve my goals.
2	Be a member of the national team.	I aspire the other course to improve my difficulties and to make the regular team.
3	I would like to get high.	I would like to reach my short-term goals and then keep moving forward.
4	I aspire to reach the Cuba team	I aspire to reach category 15-16 with good results.
	I want to be a great Water Polo player	I want to improve my techniques more.
5	My goals as an athlete is to travel	My goals as an athlete is to train well
6	Sometimes I want to compete	Sometimes I would like to train well to be able to get to Espa.
7	I would like to be a national commissioner.	I would like to improve my flaws in technique.



Some examples of team goals before the intervention:

- Short-term goals: train daily.

Medium and long-term goals and in the competition: go to the championship to reach the medal and the participation of all.

Some examples of team goals after the intervention:

- Short-term goals: increase discipline, attendance and punctuality, take advantage of training, concentrate on what needs to be done.

Medium and long term and in the competition:

- Win the championship, stay united, enjoy, have fun in the game, maintain combativeness in the game, be the best, each play their role. Get first place in the fundamental competition.

According to the results obtained after applying the pre-experiment in a general sense, the implications of the psychological intervention could be appreciated, derived from the debates, discussions and reflections around the establishment of the goals that were carried out in the team. This was seen in:

- Real situation of the team: manifestations of satisfaction in the relationships between its members and a great sense of belonging to the team were appreciated. 88.8 % (16) of the athletes expressed themselves positively in this indicator.
- Improvement of the state of interpersonal relationships athlete-athlete, athlete-coach. In eight (72.7 %) of the observed sessions, an improvement in the interpersonal relationships of the team and in the motivation to achieve the goals in the athletes was appreciated.

This influences the increase in the commitment of the athletes in the achievement of group goals and the satisfaction and participation of the group members for the fulfillment of the goals was evidenced.

The goals are constituted as regulators of the behavior of the athlete and the team, in addition to encouraging responsibility, perseverance, orientation towards an end.

Some achievements of the psychological intervention program evidenced in the interviews with coaches and athletes were:

- 100 % of athletes are aware of what a goal is;
- 100 % state that the goals are established by the head coach and he offers greater participation of athletes in his establishment.
- In the psychological intervention sessions, in 81 % of the observations, the athletes' commitment to setting goals is appreciated, which contributes to enhancing the volitional qualities, the team's interpersonal relationships, and the athletes' motivation.

In 100 % of the observations, it is observed that the coaches perform systematic feedback on the establishment of goals, which favors better communication in the team.



DISCUSSION

The implementation of the psychological intervention program contributed to a higher motivation in the coaches, to the development of teamwork skills, to an improvement of the goal-setting work in team management.

In the research, the goal-setting theory is systematized according to the psychological peculiarities of adolescence and the use of the potential of group influence on its members at this stage. These results coincide with the [Tran Thi \(2011\)](#), [Weinberg, R. \(2003\)](#) studies, in which the benefits of psychological intervention programs as a motivational technique are appreciated, in addition, in the studies by [Suárez, et al. \(2020\)](#), [Rodríguez, RE \(2017\)](#), [Suárez, et al. \(2021\)](#), coincident results are observed in the sports initiation stage, which corroborates the need to continue applying systems of formative and developing influences that stimulate the development of grouping, of the team mentality in these stages, while they stimulate and motivate to increase sports performance in order to achieve individual and group goals.

The psychological intervention program developed to improve the establishment of goals in the water polo team, female category 13-14 years of the Eide "Marcelo Salado" was based on the stimulation of the participation of the team as a group, promoted discussion, reflection and debates in the sports team around the establishment of goals in training for the competition during and after its application, favorable transformations and significant differences in the indicators studied with respect to the process of establishing goals in the studied team are verified, before and after applying the psychological intervention, which contributes to raising the motivation to meet the team's goals, which corroborates the proposed hypothesis.

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Conflicts of interest:

The authors declare that does not exist an interest conflict.

Authors contribution:

Marta Cañizares Hernández: Conception of the idea, search and review of literature, preparation of instruments, application of instruments, collection of information, results of the instruments applied, statistical analysis, preparation of tables, graphs and images, preparation of database, general advice on the topic addressed, drafting of the original (first version), revision and final version of the article, correction of the article, coordinator of the authorship, translation of terms or information obtained.

Yanet Pérez Surita: Literature search and review, preparation of instruments, application of instruments, compilation of the information resulting from the instruments applied, statistical analysis, drafting of the original (first version), correction of the article, review of the application of the bibliographic standard applied.



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