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DEVELOPING LIFE SKILLS THROUGH PHYSICAL EDUCATION: SOCIAL SKILLS AND TEAMWORK IN MOROCCAN SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract Life skills are a combination of psychosocial and interpersonal skills that can have an impact on physical, mental and social well-being. Social skills include the ability to make judgments and act in different social situations. Physical education (PE) can play an important role in developing life skills in Moroccan secondary school students.

This cross-sectional study aims to examine the impact of handball on the development of social and teamwork skills in 150 Moroccan secondary school students, and to explore the relationship between social skills and teamwork.

In our research, we used two different methods to gain an in-depth understanding of students' views on how they perceived the development of their social and teamwork skills. To do this, we conducted mixed-method research using both the Sports Life Skills Scale (LSSS) and participant observation on a sample of 150 schoolchildren, including 76 boys and 74 girls aged between 14 and 20, in the rural BITT commune of El Hajeb (Morocco), during a 12-session handball learning cycle during the school season (2022/2023).

Data analysis was performed using multivariate analysis of variance, Pearson correlation and multiple regressions. The results showed that BITIT secondary school students felt they were developing their teamwork skills with (WM = 3.62, SD = 0.662) and their social skills with (WM = 3.54, SD = 0.740) through playing handball. There was a significant correlation ($r = 0.429$; $p < 0.01$) between social skills and teamwork skills.

The results of this study suggest that team sports can be an excellent medium for the development of social skills and teamwork in students. In this way, students not only improve their physical health, but also acquire essential skills that will be useful in all areas of their lives.

Key words: life skills, social skills, teamwork, physical education, Moroccan secondary school students, handball

Introduction

It is becoming increasingly clear that the development of life skills in young people is crucial. These skills do not only benefit individuals but also have positive effects on society as a whole. By helping young people acquire

essential life skills, we set them up for success and ensure they have the tools they need to meet the challenges ahead. From communication and problem-solving to time management and decision-making, life skills are essential to personal and professional growth. It's up to all of us to help young people develop these skills and reach their full potential. Life skills are influenced by a complex combination of family, social, educational, personal and socio-economic factors.

Life skills fall into three broad categories: thinking skills, social skills, and emotional skills. Social skills promote healthy relationships with others by developing an individual's ability to communicate, co-operate, and lead .Thinking skills enhance an individual's ability to make decisions, effectively solve problems, and think creatively, critically, and analytically (Prajapati et al., 2016).

According to the World Health Organization, "life skills are a set of psychosocial competencies that enable individuals to cope effectively with the challenges of everyday life. These skills play an essential role in promoting health in general, in terms of physical, mental and social well-being" (WHO, 1994).

Life skills are involved in a multitude of different contexts, such as health, education, sport, culture, art and the professional world. Life skills education is linked to major health and social issues (WHO, 1996).

Physical and sports education (P.E) as a teaching subject, provides an environment conducive to the development of life skills, through the practice of individual and collective physical activities. It gives young people the opportunity to learn from their own experiences, and from the experiences of others, through personal and interpersonal interaction. This method is described in the social learning theory developed by Bandura & Walters (1977). According to social learning theory, learning is seen as an active process involving the acquisition, processing and structuring of lived experiences.

Research has also found that the particular features of sport (demands for hard work, competition, social aspects) expose youth to lived experiences that can lead to life skills learning (Camiré & Kendellen, 2016; Holt et al., 2017).

It has now been widely demonstrated that sport in general, and physical education and sport in particular, is a tool for developing young people's life skills (leadership, teamwork and social skills). In fact, team sports athletes who train on a weekly basis perceive a higher degree of social competence (de Subijana et al., 2022). What's more, practicing soccer in high school can facilitate students' positive development through the acquisition of a set of life skills (Camiré & Trundel, 2013).

Teaching handball as part of physical education and school sport in Moroccan schools remains a propitious environment for the psychological and social training of learners through communication and interaction with team members. Moroccan schools teach handball, a collective sporting activity that develops a range of skills through interaction and confrontation. Each school year, it is planned with two practical sessions of two hours each week, separated by a minimum of 48 hours.

With this in mind, we set out in this study to identify the role of Handball in the development of two essential life skills: teamwork and social skills in a group of Moroccan high school students.

Material and methods

Sampling

The study involved 150 randomly selected high school students aged 14 to 20.

Research environment

The present study was carried out at the BITTI Qualifying High School, located in the rural commune of Ait Ouallal Bitit, in the province of El Hajeb, in the Fez-Meknes region of central of Morocco. According to the last census of 2014, this commune had a population of 14316 inhabitants, with predominantly agricultural activities.

Handball teaching in Moroccan secondary schools is based on the skills-based approach, a learning method that emphasises the acquisition of skills rather than knowledge. During the school season in which our research was conducted, 6 learning cycles of 12 sessions were programmed (3 individual activities: sprinting, long jump, and gymnastics; and 3 collective activities: basketball, handball, and volleyball). The handball lessons, which took place on a regulation court and lasted 2 hours a week, separated by at least 48 hours of rest, offered learning situations aimed at developing a set of skills linked to the activity and life skills, but in an implicit way, to mixed groups of 5 to 7 pupils. A match situation is proposed at the end of the session to mobilize and apply what has been learned during the situations.

Date of research

The study was carried out in November of the 2022–2023 school season.

Procedure

To answer our research questions, we carried out explanatory research based on a mixed-methods approach and chose handball as our support activity. The choice of this sporting activity is based on the fact that it calls on a range of skills (individual, communicative, social) enabling team members to achieve common goals.

Data collection and analysis

QUANTITATIVE APPROACH

We used the Life Skills Scale of Sport (LSSS), developed and validated by Cronin & Allen (2017), it is composed of 8 life skills. This scale uses the radical "This sport has taught me to...". Previous research has provided evidence regarding the factorial validity, test-retest reliability and reliable internal consistency of this scale in young participants involved in sports, as reported by Cronin & Allen (2017).

To meet our research objectives, we limited ourselves to two skills: teamwork skills (9 items) and social skills (10 items). These items are evaluated on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 "not at all" to 5 "very much". To answer the life skills scale, students were organized into groups. Explanations in Arabic dialect were given to the students before answering the scale items.

A preliminary test is set up and the (LSSS) methodology is applied. To ensure objective responses, participants were divided into heterogeneous groups of five students for the tests.

QUALITATIVE APPROACH

In order to gain a better understanding of the students' behavior and social interactions and their impact on the team's work during the learning sessions, we opted for the method of participant observation, which allows the researcher to become actively involved in the group. The fact that one of the researchers was the statutory teacher of the pupils involved in the research facilitated the implementation of all the stages of the participant observation

method, and it was him who taught the physical education classes. In addition, the circumstances were favorable for holding certain interviews with a heterogeneous group of randomly selected students involved in the research, and these interviews took place at the end of the last period of the learning session. Detailed notes were taken of observations, experiences, and interactions with team members, as well as informal interviews with learners, to obtain additional information. The participants were faced with several questions:

- Does handball help you develop your social skills? How?
- Does handball help you develop your teamwork skills? How?
- Is there a relationship between social skills and teamwork skills?

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Socials Sciences (SPSS), Version 25.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

One of the researchers, the legal physical education (PE) teacher of the group of students concerned, had the opportunity to discuss with them the possibility of participating in the study before it began. They were informed that the results of the study would be published, and they maintained their anonymity and privacy. They expressed their desire to contribute to the research. Oral consent was obtained.

Results and discussion

PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

The current study was carried out on a randomly selected sample of 150 student: 76 boys (50,67%); and 74 girls (49,33%).

Table 1. Distribution of the sample according to age, sex and school level (own work)

	Age		Sex		School level	
	14–17	18–20	Boys	Girls	Tc	1Bac
Frequency	112	38	76	74	62	88
Percentage	74.67	25.33	50.67	49.33	41.33	58.67

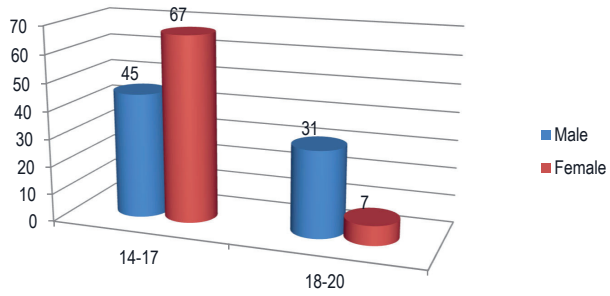


Figure 1. Distribution of the sample according to age, sex (own work)

Table 1 shows the distribution of participants by age, gender and educational level.

- The majority of participants were aged between 14 and 17, with 112 (74.67%) in this age bracket. This suggests that this research focuses primarily on adolescents. The 18 to 20 age bracket has 38 participants (25.33%), also indicating a strong representation of young adults, albeit slightly lower than the first bracket.
- The sexes are virtually balanced, with 76 boys (50.67%) and 74 girls (49.33%). This suggests that the study achieved a fairly equitable representation of both sexes.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Teamawork

- *Distribution by age group and sex*

Table 2. Distribution of response averages by age and sex (own work)

	14–17 years		18–20 years	
	Male	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**
Low	4	4	1	–
Medium	10	26	9	3
High	31	37	21	4

Table 2 shows the distribution of average scores for responses in terms of developing teamwork skills through handball.

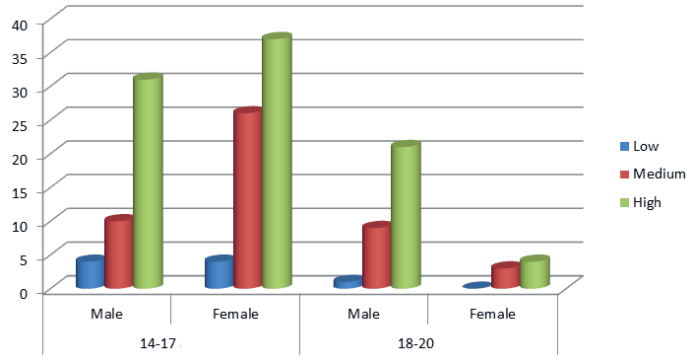


Figure 2. Distribution of response averages by age and sex (own work)

The results in Figure 2 show a distinct distribution of teamwork skill levels according to the age and gender of students practicing handball.

The majority of boys aged 14 to 17 achieve a high level of teamwork skills. This suggests that handball is highly effective for this particular group. Girls in the same age group also show a high level of teamwork skills.

For the 18–20 age group, boys show a high level of teamwork skills, while girls in the same age group show low levels of teamwork skills compared to younger girls.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the development of teamwork skills through team sport (own work)

N	Item		Not at all	A little	Some	A lot	Vey much	Mean	T test	Standard deviation	Rank
1	Accept suggestions for improvement from others	N	10	17	26	40	57	3.78	7.627	1.252	5
		%	6.7	11.3	17.3	26.7	38				
2	Cooperate with others	N	2	4	11	50	83	4.39	20.176	0.842	1
		%	1.3	2.7	7.3	33.3	55.3				
3	Change my behaviour for the good of the team	N	4	11	15	59	61	4.08	12.967	1.020	3
		%	2.7	7.3	10	39.3	40.7				
4	Work well withing a team	N	2	7	22	44	75	4.22	15.655	0.954	2
		%	1.3	4.7	14.7	29.3	50				
5	Accept criticism from others	N	35	35	40	23	17	2.68	-3.022	1.297	8
		%	23.3	23.3	26.7	15.3	11.3				
6	Give constructive criticism to others	N	40	43	28	24	15	2.54	-4.304	1.309	9
		%	26.7	28.7	18.7	16	10				
7	Resolve conflict with others	N	17	27	26	41	39	3.39	3.521	1.345	7
		%	11.3	18	17.3	27.3	26				
8	Work with others for the good of the team	N	7	14	18	57	54	3.91	9.909	1.129	4
		%	4.7	9.3	12	38	36				
9	Resolve conflicts between teammates members	N	18	15	22	48	47	3.61	5.542	1.341	6
		%	12	10	14.7	32	31.3				
Weighted mean								**3.62**			
Standard deviation										**0.662**	

Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics for the development of teamwork skills through handball, and shows that the values reported on this skill ranged from 2.54 to 4.39. Average scores on the LSSS 1–5 response scale revealed that BITIT high school students perceived that they were developing their teamwork skills through the practice of handball. From which we can see that the highest average was for item 2 (Cooperate with others) (M = 4.39, SD = 0.842), followed by item 4 (Work well within a team), (M = 4.22, SD = 0.954), followed by item 3 (Change behavior for the good of the team), (M = 4.08, SD = 1.020), with answers "Very much" (55.3%, 50%, 40.7%) and "A lot" (33.3%, 29.3%, 39.3%).

While the lowest mean was given to item 8 (Accept criticism from others), (M = 2.68, SD = 1.297), followed by item 6 (Give constructive criticism to others), (M = 2.54, SD = 1.309).

The weighted mean of the development of teamwork skills through handball was (M = 3.62) with a (SD = 0.662), indicating that the trend of (handball develops teamwork skills) is "Very much", as a general trend according to 5 points Likert scale, since 3.62 lie in the interval [3.4–5].So, the average of Handball develops teamwork skills is (3.62), which is considered a high level; since the intervals of level as follows:

Low: [1–2.6]

Medium: [2.6–3.4]

High: [3.4–5]

Social skills

– *Distribution by age group and sex*

Table 4. Distribution of response averages by age and sex (own work)

	14–17 years		18–20 years	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Low	4	4	1	0
Medium	10	26	9	3
High	31	37	21	4

Table 4 shows the distribution of average scores for responses in terms of developing social skills through handball.

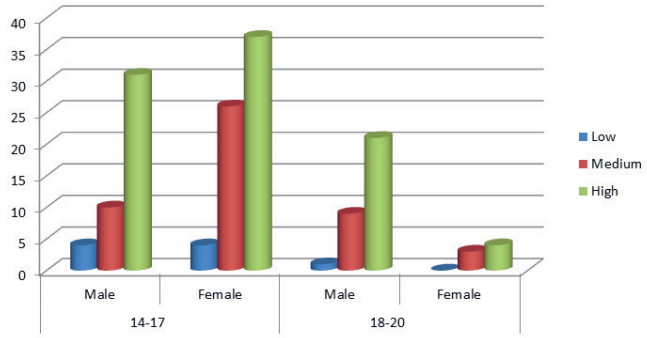


Figure 3. Distribution of response averages by age and sex (own work)

The distributions of average social skills scores by age group (Figure 3) shows that the majority of boys aged 14 to 17 were able to develop their social skills through handball. For girls in the same age bracket, a similar trend is observed. Girls even seem to outperform boys in terms of social skills development, which may indicate greater receptiveness or commitment to handball.

In the 18–20 age group, boys also show a majority having developed social skills. Whereas the development of social skills through handball practice among girls is low compared to younger girls. Suggesting that this group could benefit from additional educational strategies to improve their social skills.

Compared with boys, it seems that girls develop better social skills more often, especially between the ages of 14 and 17. This may be due to differences in social behavior, sensitivity to social and sporting activities, or socio-cultural expectations.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics for the development of social skills through handball (own work)

N	Item		Not at all	A little	Some	A lot	Very much	Mean	T test	Standard deviation	Rank
1	Make friends	N	10	11	27	44	58	3.86	8.747	1.204	**3**
		%	6.7	7.3	18	29.3	38.7				
2	Behave appropriately in social situations	N	5	25	28	59	33	3.60	6.649	1.105	**5**
		%	3.3	16.7	18.7	39.3	22				
3	Interact in various social settings	N	17	28	45	42	18	3.11	1.105	1.182	**9**
		%	11.3	18.7	30	28	12				
4	Maintain close friendships	N	8	24	28	41	49	3.66	6.539	1.236	**4**
		%	5.3	16	18.7	27.3	32.7				
5	Help others when they need it	N	3	10	19	58	60	4.08	13.407	0.987	**1**
		%	2	6.7	12.7	38.7	40				
6	Conduct myself properly when I am around others	N	9	23	36	47	35	3.51	5.258	1.180	**7**
		%	6	15.3	24	31.3	23.3				
7	Get involved in group activities	N	15	33	31	46	25	3.22	2.161	1.247	**8**
		%	10	22	20.7	30.7	16.7				
8	Help others without them asking for help	N	30	36	32	32	20	2.84	–1.472	1.331	**10**
		%	20	24	21.3	21.3	13.3				
9	Stand up for myself	N	4	10	27	40	69	4.07	12.183	1.072	**2**
		%	2.7	6.7	18	26.7	46				
10	Socialize with others	N	13	23	24	53	37	3.52	5.066	1.257	**6**
		%	8.7	15.3	16	35.3	24.7				
Weighted mean								**3.54**			
Standard deviation										**0.740**	

Table 5 shows Descriptive statistics for the development of social skills through handball, and shows that the values reported on this skill ranged from 2.84 to 4.08. Average scores on the LSSS 1–5 response scale revealed that BITIT high school students perceived that they were developing their social skills through the practice of handball. From that we find that the highest average was for item 5 (Help others when they need it), (M = 4.08, SD = 0.987) followed by item 9 (Stand up for myself), (M = 4.07, SD = 1.072), followed by item 1 (Make friends), (M = 3.86, SD = 1.204), with "Very mush" by percent (40%, 46%, 38.7% respectively) and "A lot" by percent (38.7%, 26.7%, 29,3% respectively).

While the lowest average was awarded to item 3 (Interact in various social settings), (M = 3.11, SD = 1.182), followed by item 8 (Help others without them asking for help), (M = 2.84, SD = 1.331). The weighted average of development of social skills through handball was (M = 3.44) with (SD = 0.670), which indicate that the trend of (Handball develop social skills) is "A lot", as a general trend according to 5 points Likert scale, since 3.54 lie in the interval [3.4–5].

So, the average of the handball develops social skills is (3.54) which consider a high level; since the intervals of level as follow:

Low: [1–2.6]
Medium: [2.6–3.4]
High: [3.4–5]

CORRELATIONAL ANALYSIS

In this study, we carried out correlation analyses between the different scales used. The results presented in Table 6 show that there is a significant positive correlation between social skills and teamwork ($r = 0.429$; $p < 0.01$). This indicates that an improvement in social skills is linked to better team collaboration, and vice versa, with a high degree of trust in this relationship.

Table 6. Correlation between the two variables of study (own work)

	Teamwork	Social skills
Teamwork	1.00	0.429**
Social skills	0.429**	1.00

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

Correlational analysis between the various teamwork and social skills items reveals that a certain teamwork items has a very strong relationship with social skills.

Figures 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 show this highly significant relationship:

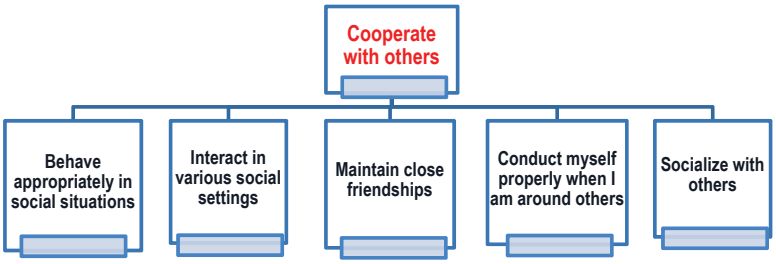


Figure 4. Social skills strongly correlated with teamwork skills: "Cooperate with others" (own work)

Cooperation with others is strongly linked to a variety of social skills. Students who cooperate well with their peers tend to be socially adept, maintain close relationships and behave well in a variety of social contexts.

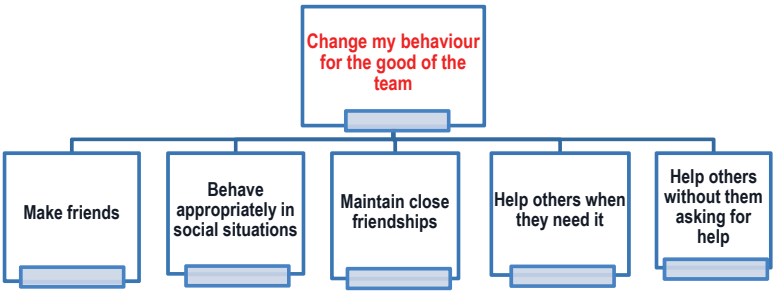


Figure 5. Social skills strongly correlated with teamwork skills: "Change my behavior for the good of the team" (own work)

Students with the ability to adapt their behavior for the good of the team show a strong correlation with their ability to form and maintain friendships, as well as proactively help others. This demonstrates that behavioral adaptability is a key skill for effective social interactions.



Figure 6. Social skills strongly correlated with teamwork skills: "Resolve conflict with others" (own work)

Conflict resolution is strongly linked to social involvement and mutual aid. Students who are able to resolve conflicts are also those who are actively involved in group activities and proactively offer their help.

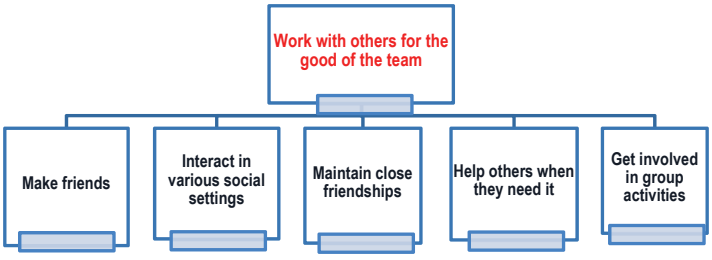


Figure 7. Social skills strongly correlated with teamwork skills: "Work with others for the good of the team" (own work)

Working with others for the good of the team is linked to social skills such as the ability to form friendships, engage socially and offer help. This underlines the importance of social engagement in effective teamwork.



Figure 8. Social skills strongly correlated with teamwork skills: "Resolve conflicts between teammates members" (own work)

Conflict resolution contributes to the development of social skills and the effective functioning of teams.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Based on the results of the qualitative data obtained from the participant observation method, and interviews conducted with students during the different phases of the learning session (the introductory part reserved for warm-ups, the fundamental part, and the final part reserved for regulation and calming down), it was found that the first factor affecting students' behavior towards their colleagues is the choice of members when forming teams, which is generally dominated by parameters such as friendly relations, level of practice and certain emotions.This often has a positive effect on all members and the performance of the team as a whole. It also helps to create an atmosphere of effective communication, cooperation, and solidarity, allowing students to demonstrate a range of collaborative, communicative, and conflict-management behaviors within their teams to achieve common goals. Having friends in PE class can make the experience much more enjoyable and can help alleviate any negative aspects that may come along with it (White et al., 2021).

While the teams formed randomly, the members showed antisocial behavior towards their teammates, and even towards the opposing team. This can sometimes lead to the exclusion of undesirable team members, requiring the intervention of the teacher to help team members overcome problems and encourage them to cooperate and accept each other, either by proposing appropriate solutions or by imposing standards that guarantee equal opportunities for all students.

It also turned out that some students who managed to overcome these difficulties relied on a set of personal skills, such as self-confidence, flexibility in handling situations, and making the right decisions at the right time.

The young high school students in our study felt that their practice of the handball activity enabled them to develop a range of social and teamwork skills, given that the handball activity is the first learning cycle programmed during the school year and that the other team sports programmed could in some way influence the development of students' social and teamwork skills, which could be studied in future research.

The lack of infrastructure enabling our teenagers to take part in other sporting, artistic, and cultural activities may explain the weakness in some life skills, such as interaction in various social contexts, and participation in group activities. From this point of view, physical education and sport remains ideal environment for young students to experience social interaction situations, enabling the development and transfer of a range of life skills that can facilitate school life both inside and outside the school.

In addition, numerous studies have shown the important role of physical education in the development of life skills and in the transfer of these skills to other areas of life, such as respect, goal-setting, concentration, leadership and teamwork (Pierce et al., 2017). A study about group cohesion and positive youth development in team sport athletes concluded that team sports play a positive role in youth development by promoting group cohesion and enhancing personal and social skills (Bruner et al., 2014).

This is clearly evidenced by the results of this study, which indicate that teamwork is associated with social skills.

Interestingly, participants in our study had slightly higher total scores for life skills (social skills, and teamwork skills (4.39 vs. 4.11) compared to the scores of participants in a UK study of young footballers (Mossman & Cronin, 2019).

As far as the relationship between social skills and teamwork is concerned, the results obtained show that there is a fairly strong relationship between these two social factors, but they do not depend solely on social skills, but rather on personal skills (self-confidence, decision-making, responsibility, psychological tone), and emotional skills (emotional intelligence, empathy and understanding of others' feelings, stress and pressure management).

At the end of the study, it emerged that the participants felt they had developed their social skills through their participation in physical education sessions, and more specifically in the learning handball.

Conclusion

Despite some of the difficult social and economic conditions they face, BITIT students' participation in physical education classes in general, and handball in particular, helps them to develop a range of life skills such as social and teamwork skills. Most of the students participating in this research expressed that their participation in physical education and sports activities, particularly team sports, helped them to develop their social skills, which in turn positively affected their teamwork.

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