

# Cyber Sports vs Traditional Football: Changing Interests of Modern Children and Its Impact on Sports

Sokhumi state university

Giorgi Gioshvili

<https://orcid.org/0009-0009-8843-1860>

Mail: ttengo747@gmail.com

## Abstract

This study examines the shift in children's interests from traditional football to cyber sports and its impact on sports development. The research investigates how parental perspectives influence children's choices, as well as the role of infrastructure in football development. A survey was conducted to assess parents' attitudes toward football and eSports, their concerns about children's physical and mental health, and the availability of football development plans in schools. The findings indicate that while football remains the dominant choice, eSports are gaining attention. However, concerns about physical activity reduction and psychological effects are prevalent. The study contributes to the ongoing discussion about the future of children's sports engagement and the balance between traditional and digital sports.

**Keywords:** Traditional sports, Esport, Teenager, Football, Parents

## Introduction

In recent decades, children's and adolescents' interests have changed significantly, particularly in the field of sports. Traditional football, which has been the most popular sport for centuries, now faces competition due to the rise of electronic sports—esports. The development of digital technologies and global internet connectivity has created new opportunities for young people who perceive sports in a different way (Johnson, 2021).

Esports is not only a new form of entertainment but also a potential professional career path. Many children and teenagers who once chose the football field now spend hours playing online games such as FIFA, League of Legends, and Counter-Strike (Smith, J., & Brown, K. 2020). However, this trend has raised numerous questions: How does it affect physical activity? To what extent does esports change the culture of traditional sports? And what impact does it have on adolescents' psychological and physical development?

The Pros and Cons of Traditional Sports Among Adolescents

The Pros and Cons of Children's Football

The Anthropology of Play Play is a fundamental and central aspect of human life. Its significance extends across all aspects of civilization. In fact, play is older than culture itself.

The Psychology of Play During play, individuals experience a momentary yet intense pleasure, an illusory sensation of controlling the external world. This world responds to the individual's desires, creating a profound psychological impact. – Sigmund Freud

The Role of Football in Human Life Scientific and technological progress, along with the advancement of modern technologies, has posed challenges to the development of sports. Each year, the number of children interested in sports decreases. One of the main reasons for this decline is the expansion of computer technologies, which have distanced children from outdoor activities. Adapting to a new environment is relatively easy for children, and they quickly become accustomed to digital innovations, making the transition to an active sports lifestyle more difficult.

Another significant challenge to the popularization of sports is the expansion of alternative ways to achieve social recognition. While in the 20th century, sporting success was the primary means of gaining popularity, today, there are many alternative paths. Moreover, achieving success outside of sports does not require the rigorous lifestyle that professional athletes must endure.

In the United States, in 2008, 45% of children aged 8 to 12 participated in sports. However, by 2018, this percentage had decreased to 38%. Research by the Aspen Institute indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic further dramatically reduced the number of children interested in sports. Three out of ten surveyed parents were firmly against their child returning to pre-pandemic sports activities. Most parents acknowledge the numerous health and fitness benefits of engaging in team sports, such as regular exercise, bone and muscle strength development, cardiovascular health improvement, maintaining a healthy weight, and learning proper nutrition. However, the mental, emotional, and social benefits of team sports, such as football, are often overlooked.

There is increasing research focused on these advantages, emphasizing the mental, emotional, and social skills that children develop through participation in team football. Scientifically speaking, children who engage in regular exercise tend to be happier (Australian Sports Camps, n.d.). Thus, let us explore some key benefits of children's involvement in football.

## Key Benefits of Football for Children

### Encourages Regular Physical Activity

The most obvious benefit is exercise. Children and teenagers over five years old need at least one hour of physical activity per day. This requirement can be easily met by attending football practice.

### Promotes a Healthy Lifestyle

Adults who played football as children tend to remain more physically active throughout their lives. Thus, early engagement in sports not only benefits children in their youth but also influences their long-term well-being.

### Develops Motor and Cognitive Skills

Football involves specific goals, such as scoring, accurate passing, and dribbling. Focusing on these objectives helps children enhance their motor and cognitive skills.

### Teaches Teamwork and Cooperation

Team sports, particularly football, help children learn teamwork, empathy for teammates, and how to handle both success and failure—essential qualities for future life challenges.

### Builds Resilience

"Playing competitive sports also helps you cope with setbacks, such as losing a game," says Emily Simonian, a licensed marriage and family therapist and clinical training leader at Thriveworks. "Resilience in the face of failure is an essential skill in life and relationships."

### Helps Children Build Friendships and Social Skills

Friendships formed through sports often last a lifetime. The shared experience of striving for a common goal fosters a sense of unity among teammates (Thriveworks, n.d.). Younger children typically enjoy football more when playing in a friendly, pressure-free environment (Healthy Living, n.d.).

Apart from these direct benefits, there is also a clear correlation between youth participation in sports and academic performance. Physical activity naturally increases blood circulation in the brain and activates endorphins, the "feel-good hormones," which improve mood and enhance cognitive performance, making football an essential activity for children (Metro YMCA, 2019).

## Respect and Responsibility in Football

Football teaches children to respect peers, referees, and coaches. Learning this at a young age is crucial, as lessons learned on the field can positively influence their behavior in later life. Children who play football are more likely to respect authority figures such as elders and law enforcement officers (SchoolDays, n.d.).

Playing as part of a team also instills a sense of responsibility. In individual sports, missing a practice session affects only the athlete. In football, however, one player's actions impact the entire team. Learning accountability by attending practice even when they do not feel like it is an important life lesson (SportsRec, n.d.).

The study results showed that a deliberately structured psychosocial learning model through traditional games and sports positively affects the psychosocial development of elementary school students. In particular, the progressive, deliberately structured psychosocial model is more effective, indicating that such approaches enhance children's social competence, emotional regulation, and teamwork skills (Julianti et al., 2025).

The study found that integrating circular games with auditory sequencing significantly improves fundamental motor skills in elementary school children. Furthermore, this method increased students' interest and active participation in physical activities, highlighting the importance of innovative approaches in motor learning (Aliriad et al., 2025).

## The Rise of Esports and Its Challenges

Esports is reaching new heights, attracting many children who are no longer interested in traditional football. The growing popularity of esports is not only linked to the substantial financial rewards that top players earn but also to its accessibility. Unlike traditional sports, esports requires only an internet connection, allowing participants to compete globally without physical barriers, often from the comfort of their homes using a smartphone (HowToAdult, n.d.).

Esports has become a major challenge to the mass development of traditional sports. Last year, the League of Legends World Championship finals had 80 million viewers. Major corporations, such as Walt Disney, have taken an interest in esports, seeing it as an opportunity to market their products. The involvement of such large companies further fuels esports' popularity, drawing more children away from traditional sports and a physically active lifestyle.

There is even speculation that virtual football could surpass real-world football in popularity. But what exactly is esports? It is an industry worth over a billion euros, involving both amateur and professional competitors on a global scale (Ollie Sports, n.d.).

### The Health Risks of Esports

Playing esports games and competing professionally can significantly impact players' health. As esports continues to grow rapidly worldwide, research on the health risks associated with esports competition and participation remains limited. A sedentary lifestyle, constant stress from lost matches, and prolonged screen time contribute to both mental and physical health issues.

To mitigate these risks, systematic scientific research is needed to develop evidence-based intervention strategies. These strategies should promote a healthy diet, regular exercise, and proper sleep hygiene. This is a public health priority (Telefónica, n.d.) .

This article explores the shifting interests of children, the rising role of esports, and its impact on sports and society. Consequently, our research aimed to examine trends in attitudes toward traditional sports and gather insights from parents on their perspectives regarding this growing issue.

### Research Methods

As part of the quantitative research, a survey was conducted with 46 respondents. Among them, 63% were mothers, and 37% were fathers. The primary objective of the study was to determine the opinions of surveyed parents regarding the advantages and disadvantages of children's football. Additionally, the research aimed to explore their perception of eSports and their potential response in the case of their child developing an addiction to eSports. The study was conducted in Tbilisi, Georgia.

## Results and Discussion

In response to the question, "Has your child made new friends or expanded their social circle after starting football?", 97.8% of respondents answered that their child had gained new friends through football.

Regarding the question about the primary goal of parents:

For my child to pursue professional sports.

For my child to train in a healthy environment and engage in more physical activity.

58.7% of respondents stated that their goal is for their child to play professional football, while 41.3% prefer their child to train in a healthy environment.

When asked whether there are issues with sports infrastructure in their area and how these issues affect the quality of children's football, 100% of respondents agreed that infrastructure problems, including the quality and shortage of stadiums, negatively impact the development of children's football.

In response to the question "Does the football school management have a development plan that is accessible to parents?",

52% answered that the management has a development plan that is accessible.

8.7% stated that there is no development plan.

41.3% said they could not find any information about it.

When asked how willing they would be for their child to pursue eSports instead of traditional sports:

68% of parents were against it.

18% had no definite answer.

14% were not opposed to the idea.

In response to the question, "Would you support your child in eSports the same way you support them in traditional sports (e.g., excusing them from school for tournaments)?", 100% of parents responded negatively.

Regarding the potential problems of eSports replacing traditional sports among adolescents:

5% saw no problem.

63% believed that it would negatively impact children's physical health.

32% thought that gaming addiction could lead to psychological issues.

The survey results clearly indicate that traditional football still plays a significant role in children's social development. An overwhelming 97.8% of respondents confirmed that their children made new friends through football, highlighting the importance of team sports in fostering social skills and expanding social circles.

Most parents (58.7%) believe that their child should pursue professional football, indicating that football is not just seen as a means of staying active but also as an investment in their child's future success. However, 41.3% prioritize their child's physical activity and a healthy environment over professional aspirations.

Infrastructure issues are a major challenge for children's football, as all respondents (100%) agreed that poor facilities, limited stadiums, and infrastructure deficiencies negatively impact the development of the sport. This suggests that despite the high interest in football, improvements in sports infrastructure are necessary to provide young athletes with better opportunities for growth.

Regarding football school development plans, parental opinions are divided. While 52% stated that such plans exist and are accessible, 41.3% were unaware of them, which points to a need for better communication between football academies and parents to ensure they understand their children's prospects in the sport.

Attitudes toward eSports are largely negative. A significant 68% of parents are against their child pursuing eSports, showing that digital gaming is viewed with skepticism compared to traditional sports. Additionally, 100% of parents stated that they would not provide the same level of support for eSports as they do for traditional sports, such as excusing their child from school for tournaments.

Moreover, 63% of parents believe that the rise of eSports could harm children's physical health, while 32% are concerned about potential psychological issues. Only 5% saw no problem with the growing popularity of eSports. This demonstrates that the prevailing societal belief is still that sports should primarily involve physical activity rather than virtual competition.

## Conclusion

The survey data clearly show that traditional football remains the dominant sport, offering significant social and physical benefits. However, infrastructure issues and a lack of complete information about development plans remain major barriers.

eSports is still not widely accepted by parents, and its perception is largely negative due to concerns about physical and psychological health. This suggests that further research and information dissemination will be necessary to explore how eSports and traditional sports can coexist in a balanced manner.

## References

**Aliriad, H., Da'i, M., Priadana, B. W., Wigantara, M. R., & Arifianto, M. R. (2025). Improving motor skills in elementary school children: A physical education approach using circular games with auditory sequencing. *Edu Sportivo*:**

*Indonesian Journal of Physical Education*, 6(1), 15-29.  
[https://doi.org/10.25299/es:ijope.2025.vol6\(1\).19149](https://doi.org/10.25299/es:ijope.2025.vol6(1).19149)

Australian Sports Camps. (n.d.). Benefits of team sports for kids. Retrieved from <https://australiansportscamps.com.au/blog/benefits-of-team-sports-for-kids/>

Healthy Living. (n.d.). Positive effects of sports on kids. Retrieved from <https://healthyliving.azcentral.com/positive-effects-sports-kids-5686.html>

HowToAdult. (n.d.). The negative effects of youth sports. Retrieved from <https://howtoadult.com/the-negative-effects-of-youth-sports-4473116.html>

Johnson, M. (2021). *Digital play and youth sports: The rise of esports in the 21st century*. Oxford University Press.

Julianti, R. R., Suherman, A., Ma'mun, A., Budiana, D., & Sari, E. F. N. (2025). Traditional games as an instrument for improving psychosocial development: A comparative study of structured and progressive learning models. *Edu Sportivo: Indonesian Journal of Physical Education*, 6(1), 1-14.  
[https://doi.org/10.25299/es:ijope.2025.vol6\(1\).18538](https://doi.org/10.25299/es:ijope.2025.vol6(1).18538)

Metro YMCA. (2019). Benefits of team sports for kids. Retrieved from <https://www.metroymcas.org/blog/2019/10/17/youth-programs/benefits-of-team-sports-for-kids/>

Ollie Sports. (n.d.). 5 huge problems with youth sports in the US. Retrieved from <https://www.olliesports.com/post/5-huge-problems-with-youth-sports-in-the-us>

SchoolDays. (n.d.). What kids learn from team sports—and it's not all about health. Retrieved from <https://www.schooldays.ie/articles/What-kids-learn-from-team-sports-and-its-not-all-about-health>

Smith, J., & Brown, K. (2020). *Traditional sports vs. esports: A comparative study of youth engagement*. Cambridge University Press.

SportsRec. (n.d.). Social benefits of team sports for children. Retrieved from <https://www.sportsrec.com/439213-social-benefits-of-team-sports-for-children.html>

Telefónica. (n.d.). What are e-sports and why are they so popular? Retrieved from <https://www.telefonica.com/en/communication-room/blog/what-are-e-sports-and-why-are-they-so-popular/>

Thriveworks. (n.d.). 6 positive effects playing sports can have on a child's health. Retrieved from <https://thriveworks.com/blog/6-positive-effects-playing-sports-can-have-on-childs-health/>

