

## **The Examination of Self-Talk Ability of Elite Fencers**

**Yusuf BARSBUĞA**

Selcuk University, Faculty of Sport Sciences, Konya, TURKEY

**Email:** [yusufbarsbuga@hotmail.com](mailto:yusufbarsbuga@hotmail.com)

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this research was to measure and evaluate self-talk ability. 100 athletes chosen randomly from 23 countries, who attended the Heracles Junior World Cup competition (29) held in Budapest, Hungary between the dates of 15-16/02/2014, junior and cadet fencing championship held in Plovdiv, Bulgaria (38) between the dates of 3-12/04/2014 which was included in the 2014 activity calendar of FIE (International Fencing Federation) and athletes among elite fencers (33) representing our country abroad attended in our research.

In this performed study based on the scanning (survey) method; the Self-Talk Questionnaire (S-TQ) which was improved by Zervas, Stavrau and Psychountaki (2007), whose validity and reliability in Turkish were performed by Engür (2011), was used. In order to evaluate the data and find the estimated values, the SPSS 16.0 statistical package program was used. The data were summarised giving averages and standard deviations. Since the data showed a normal distribution, for the dual group comparisons, independent group t-test was used for the determination of the difference between independent parameters, the error level was regarded to be 0,05 in this study.

Within the results of the survey, no statistically meaningful differences were observed. When the sub-dimensions of both motivational functions were evaluated in terms of age and experience time concerning self-talk abilities in the athletes attended in the survey. When self-talk ability was evaluated due to the gender parameter; while not seeing a statistically meaningful difference in the cognitive, functional sub-dimension among the athletes, a statistically meaningful difference was observed on the motivational, functional sub-dimension in favor of sportswoman. Furthermore, there was not a significant difference when comparing the self-talk ability of Turkish athletes and other countries' athletes who attended in the research in all sub-dimensions. Finally, it can be told that sportswomen attended in the research use self talk ability as a motivational tool in order to improve their performance and success more than sportsman.

**Keywords:** Sport, Motivation, Fencing, Self-Talk

## Introduction

Sportspeople, coaches, training scientists, sport psychologists, other people and institutions interested in sport always struggle for being successful at sport. Competitions and races where sportspeople often exhibit their high performances, are often organized. Sportive rivalry has increased as sport is seen an international propaganda tool. State politics are being constituted and high investments are done in order to increase the sportive people's success and provide them to represent their country better in fields (Turhan, 2009). However, nowadays, especially as seen in the countries developed through sport, only some of the young sportspeople, having approximately equal physical talents and equal training environment have succeeded to reach the highest performance. Thus, successes are distinctive although they have equal talents and opportunities. There are a lot of reasons for this distinctiveness. However, one of the most important reasons among them is individuals' motivation (Aktaş and et al, 2006).

It is possible to face with plenty of descriptions with regard to motivation, in other words, will power, as a concept in literature. Motivation is a concept that consists demands, desires, needings, impulses (like hunger, thirst, sexuality etc.) and interests. Motivation is identified by considering these terms. According to this, motivation is all the factors that direct people to certain conditions in certain situations (Güney, 2000). As for Coleman and Barries (2000), motivation helps people to be successful and manage personal satisfaction. One of the required conditions for sportspeople to show a good performance in competitions is to know the factors which provide them to get motivated well. Motivation has been at the head of sports and the psychology of sports. Therefore, someone who has a more or less interest in sports, must emphasize the term "motivation" and know it very well (Terzioğlu, 1992).

Motivations are generally separated into two basic categories as internal and external. External motivation consists of the outside effects on the individual. Internal motivation as for that is the reactions intended to the needs within the individual. Curiosity, need for knowing, desire for being adequate, desire for developing can be shown as examples of internal motivations (Selçuk, 1996).

There are plenty of external motivational tools that can be effective on sportspeople. In addition to the earnings like financial money, cup, reward in the result of the performance, the spiritual elements like achieving, enjoying, being appreciated can be considered among the external motivation tools. As to internal motivation, the situation thereby shows differences from person to person, is for the sport person to motivate himself for the sake of reaching his goal and success. Due to our study, it is suitable to give importance to the subject of self talk which is a kind of internal motivation.

Theodorakis et al. (2008) identify two wide dimensions as positive self-talk and negative self-talk. While positive self-talk has a structure using expressions involving praise and encouragement, negative self-talk consists of criticism and mental struggle. As it is possible to find studies emphasizing that self-talk has effects that decrease the performance, plenty of studies that show the ideas about the positive effects of positive self-talk in literature. In the research by Neil et al. (2006) about the psychological talents, it has been determined that elite sportspeople use positive self-talk for reducing the worriedness of competition with mental improvement and pause thinking.

It is possible to have a lot of usages of self-talk in sport and in exercises; individuals can use self-talk to correct the behaviors, focus on attention, organise simulation, create self-confidence and encourage participation in exercises (Williams and Leftingwell 1996).

Obviously, when it is used and directed properly, positive self-talk has positive effects on the performance of the sportspeople. But the studies on the self-talk and its effects are quite limited in our country. The effects of so-called self-talk ability on elite fencers who represent their country on an international platform will be examined and tried to be subjected to comments in our study.

## Materials and Methods

In this implemented study based on the scanning (survey) method; the Self Talk Questionnaire (S-TQ) which was developed by Zeuras, Stavrov and Psychountaki (2007), whose validity and reliability were performed by Engur (2011), was used. The related questionnaire consisted of 11 items and the Cognitive Function. Furthermore, while gathering data with the Self-Talk Questionnaire, some personal information about the sportsman who participated in the survey, was asked too. These were ages, gender and the sportive experience time. 100 sportsman randomly chosen among the athletes (38) who attended in the Heracles Junior World Cup fixture in Budapest, Hungary between the dates of 15-16/02/2014 World Cadet Fencing Championship held in Plovdiv Bulgaria which was included in the 2014 activity calendar of FIE (International Fencing Federation) and (33) athletes among elite fencers represented our country attended in our research. The Scale forms were distributed by hand with the permission of the sportsman before the competition or on the rest days throughout the competition; as the researcher stood still while the forms were being filled, it gave the opportunity to define the questions which were not understood by the sportsman. The SPSS 16.0 statistically package program was used to evaluate the data and to determine the calculated values. The datas were summarized by giving the average and standard deviations. Data showed a normal distribution so that the independent group t-test was used to determine the differences among the independent parameters for the dual league comparisons. The error level was 0.05 for this study.

## Findings

**Table 1.** the t-test results of the average points according to the gender parameter of participant Fencers on motivational-functional and cognitive-functional sub-dimensions

Sub-Dimensions	Gender	N	X	Ss	t	p
Motivational Function	Female	47	3,80	0,77	2,017	0,046*
	Male	53	3,42	1,05		
Cognitive Function	Female	47	3,58	0,90	0,777	0,439
	Male	53	3,43	0,97		

\*p<0.05

Table 1 showed that a statistically significant difference was not confronted owing to the gender parameter of participant fencers on the sub dimension of cognitive function. ( $t:2,055$  ;  $p>0,439$ ). Also, a statistically significant difference was confronted for the favour of female participants on the sub dimension of motivational function. ( $t: 2,017$ ;  $p< 0,046$ )

**Table 2.** The t-test results of the average points according to the age parameter of participant fencers on motivational-functional and cognitive-functional sub-dimensions

Sub-Dimensions	Age	N	X	Ss	t	p
Motivational Function	between 12-15 ages	46	3,56	0,98	0,308	0,759
	16 and over	54	3,62	0,91		
Cognitive Function	between 12-15 ages	46	3,39	0,91	1,044	0,299
	16 and over	54	3,59	0,95		

\* $p<0.05$

When Table 2 was examined, a statistically meaningful difference was not observed due to the age parameter among 12-15 year-old-participants and the participants over 16 on the sub-dimensions of motivational function ( $t: 0,308$  ;  $p> 0,759$  ) and cognitive function ( $t: 1,044$  ,  $p>0,199$ )

**Table 3.** The t-test results of the average points according to the experience parameter of participant fencers on motivational-functional and cognitive-functional sub-dimensions

Sub-Dimensions	Experience	N	X	Ss	t	p
Motivational Function	Between 1-6 years	37	3,69	0,97	0,737	0,463
	7 years and over	63	3,54	0,93		
Cognitive Function	between 1-6 years	37	3,54	0,85	0,310	0,757
	7 years and over	63	3,48	0,98		

\* $p<0.05$

When Table 3 was examined, a statistically significant difference was not observed due to experience period parameter among participants having experience period of 1 to 6 years and 7 years and over on the sub-dimensions of motivational function ( $t: 0,737$  ;  $p> 0,05$ ) and cognitive function ( $t: 0,310$  ;  $p> 0,757$  ).

**Table 4.** The Country and Total Dispersion of The Surveyed Fencers

Sequence	Country	Number of the participants sportsman	Percentage	Row	Country	Number of the participants sportsman	Percentage
1-	Turkey	33	%33	13-	Austria	3	%3
2-	Hungary	19	%19	14-	Jordan	1	%1
3-	Ukraine	7	%7	15-	Iran	1	%1
4-	Argentina	1	%1	16-	Finland	4	%4
5-	Italy	2	%2	17-	Armenia	1	%1
6-	Slovakia	1	%1	18-	Slovenia	2	%2
7-	Sweden	1	%1	19-	Bulgaria	2	%2
8-	Romania	2	%2	20-	Tunisia	1	%1
9-	Norway	1	%1	21-	Greece	3	%3
10-	Poland	3	%3	22-	England	3	%3
11-	Russia	3	%3	23-	Denmark	2	%2
12-	Germany	4	%4	Total	23	100	%100

**Table 5.** The t-test results of the average points according to the parameter of country of participant fencers on motivational-functional and cognitive-functional sub-dimensions

Sub-Dimensions	Country	N	X	Ss	t	p
Motivational Function	Turkey	33	3,39	1,174	1,480	0,142
	Others	67	3,69	0,88		
Cognitive Function	Turkey	33	3,40	1,108	0,704	0,483
	Others	67	3,54	0,846		

\*p<0.05

When Table 4 was examined, a statistically meaningful difference was not confronted between the motivational function (  $t: 1,480$  ;  $p > 0,142$  ) and cognitive function (  $t: 0,704$  ;  $p > 0,483$  ) sub-dimensions among the Turkish Fencers and the fencers participated from other countries

## Discussion and Conclusion

As a result of examining the self-talk ability of the elite fencers participating in this research or its usage on gender parameter, as a significant difference was not confronted among the female and male participants on motivational function sub-dimensions, on cognitive function sub-dimension, a significant difference was observed for the favor of female participants. By evaluating the participant sportspeople due to the parameters age and experience period, no significant difference was observed on any sub-dimensions. Furthermore, no significant difference was observed among the elite fencers forming the sub-research group, during self-talk.

About the studies by Katsikas et al. (2009) on the Greek athletes and by Cardenoso (2005) on the behavioral problems and depression devoted to teenagers, it has been stated that male sportsman use self-talk more than female sportsman. Also, the study by Engür (2011) on the physical education and sport academy students doing different sports branches, a significant difference in terms of gender was not observed on the usage of self-talk, the confrontation is that the female sportsman have higher point averages than male sportsman. About the study by Orhan (2012), it has been determined that female sportsman are in a higher level on the matter of talking and thinking of motivating themselves than male sportsman as they have a difficulty or an obstacle. Though studies supporting and conflicting our study exist in literature, this situation can be explained as the differences in the sample group and the different characteristics of the fencing branch. During fencing, defense and attack movements can change instantly so that it is an important case for an athlete to produce new tactics and direct his / her psychology with regard to the progress.

In accordance with the evaluation of the participant sportsman according to the age and experience period parameters; no significant difference was confronted on any sub-dimensions. The findings from the study by Hardy et al. (2005) on athletes and the study by Gammage et al. are qualified to support our findings. Furthermore, about the study by Üngör (2009) on amateur and professional football players, the factor of age and the duration of doing sport do not cause a significant difference in their expertness and performance. Also, Engür (2011)'s study about the physical education and sport academy students doing sports at different branches, as a result of examination of age and experience parameters, showed that both age and experience have a significant relationship. The difference between the mentioned study and the research findings can be explained as our example group consisting of elite sportsman, and even the participants whose experience period level is low, are professional to represent their country. In conclusion; we can state that among elite fencers, female sportsman use self-talk ability more than male sportsman on the purpose of motivating themselves, preparing themselves for competitions and stimulating their performances.

## REFERENCES

- Aktaş Z, Çobanoğlu G, Yazıcılar İ, Er N (2006). The comparison of sports related success motivation level among professional basketball players in terms of gender. *Spormetre the Journal of Physical Education and Sport Sciences*. IV (2) 55-59.
- Calvete E, Cardeoso O (2005). Gender Differences in Cognitive Vulnerability to Depression and Behavior Problems in Adolescents. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*,33, 2, 179-192.
- Coleman R, Barries G (2000). *The guide for the executive* (Translated: Harmancı M.) Remzi Publishing, istanbul, 163-164.
- Engür M ( 2011). Adaptation and application of performance failure appraisal inventory (PFAI) and self-talk questionnaire (S-TQ) into Turkish athletes population. The Aegean University, Doctoral Dissertation, 83-102.
- Gammage KL, Hardy J, Hall CR, (2001). A Description of Self-Talk in Exercise. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 2, 233-247.
- Güney S, (2000).*The Sciences of Attitudes*, Nobel Publishing , Ankara, 17.
- Hardy J, Hall CR, Hardy L (2005). Quantifying athlete self-talk, *Journal of Sports Sciences*, 23: 9, 905 - 917.
- Katsikas C, Argeitaki P, Smirniotou A (2009). Performance Strategies o Greek Track and Field Athletes: Gender and Level Differences. *Psychologist*,
- Neil R, Mellalieu S, Hanton S (2006). Psychological Skills Usage and the Competitive Anxiety Response as a Function of Skill Level in Rugby Union, *Journal of Sports Science and Medicine*, 5, 415-423.
- Orhan R (2012). Leadership self-perceptions of orienteering athletes. Kırıkkale University, Master Thesis, 103.
- Selçuk Z (1996). *Psychology of Education*, Pegem Publishing, Ankara, pg. 146.
- Terzioğlu AE (1992). ‘The concept of motivation on Education of sports’, *Atatürk Faculty of Education Sports Sciences Journal*. İstanbul, 2;2:10-18.
- Theodorakis Y, Hatzigeorgiadis A, Chroni S (2008). Self-Talk: It Works, but How? Development and Preliminary Validation of the Functions of Self-Talk Questionnaire. *Development*, (12), 10-30.
- Turhan M (2009). Investigating the relationship between competitive motivation and depression, anxiety levels, and personality characteristics in professional soccer players Maltepe University, Master Thesis, 47.
- Üngör G (2009). The relationship between goal orientation and perceived motivational climate in amateur and professional footballers. Ege University, Master Thesis, 44.
- Williams JM, Leffingwell TR (1996). Cognitive Strategies in Sport and Exercise Psychology. In J. Van Raalte and B. Brewer (Eds.). *Exploring Sport and Exercise Psychology*, . APA Press, Washington D.C, 51-73.
- Zervas Y., Stavrou N, Psychountaki M, (2007). Development and Validation of the Self-Talk Questionnaire (S-TQ) for Sports *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 19, 142-159.