



## Examination of the Relationship Between Motivation and Dispositional Flow in Team and Combat Sports Athletes

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### Abstract

**Aim:** This study aims to examine the relationship between motivation and dispositional flow in team and combat sports athletes. **Method:** Motivation in Sport Scale and the Dispositional Flow Scale-2 were used in the study. A total of 440 students (213 women and 227 men) studying at Yaşar Doğu Sports Sciences Faculty of Ondokuz Mayıs University participated in the study. The data were analyzed with independent t-test and Pearson Correlation analysis.

**Results:** An independent t-test showed significant gender-specific differences in extrinsic motivation ( $p < 0.05$ ) and amotivation subscales ( $p < 0.001$ ). No significant gender differences were found in intrinsic motivation to know and accomplish, intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation, introjected extrinsic motivation and identified extrinsic motivation ( $p > 0.05$ ). Significant differences were observed in intrinsic motivation to know and accomplish, intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation, introjected extrinsic motivation and amotivation subscales in terms of being engaged in team and combat sports ( $p < 0.001$ ). However, no significant differences were found in identified extrinsic motivation and external regulation among team sports and combat sports athletes ( $p > 0.05$ ). Combat sports athletes had lower values for amotivation and identified extrinsic motivation than team sports athletes. Dispositional flow had a positive effect on the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation dimensions and a negative effect on amotivation ( $p < 0.001$ ).

**Conclusion:** The study concluded that student athletes' motivation varies by gender and sport type, with dispositional flow increasing motivation and decreasing amotivation. It is recommended to improve the dispositional flow of sports faculty students in team and combat sports to increase motivation and decrease amotivation.

**Key words:** Amotivation, Combat Sports, Dispositional Flow, Motivation, Team Sports.

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## INTRODUCTION

Motivation is considered as the process that initiates, sustains and directs an activity (Wittrock, 1986) and refers to the underlying cause of behaviour (Guay et al., 2010). Schunk (1990) describes motivation as a process that directs behavior towards a specific goal and continues throughout that process. It can be considered as a process that initiates any activity and plays a role in its direction, degree and continuity. Motive is the power that activates behaviour (Aydin, 2010). Motivation, on the other hand, activates and guides behaviour as an internal state or sometimes as an internal desire (Erdem, 2008). It is defined as a guiding and empowering behavioural phenomenon that comes forward to manage, regulate and empower achievement behaviour (Roberts et al., 2007; Hagger & Chatzisaranti, 2007). Motivation can be thought of as a force underlying the occurrence of a movement or action (Ergin et al., 2019). A comprehensive examination of motivation may contribute to the development of strategies that will have a long-term positive impact on the lives of young individuals (Dereceli et al., 2024). While the concept of motivation is often explained in terms of initiating and maintaining activities, it is crucial to explore its role in driving performance, especially in the context of sports.

Motivation is a concept that is widely used in the field of sport performance (Balcioğlu, 2003). It is often classified into three distinct types: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation (Kazak, 2004; Morali et al., 2004). Intrinsic motivation arises from the individual's internal desire to engage in an activity, where success, learning new skills, and personal satisfaction are primary motivators. In contrast, extrinsic motivation is driven by external factors, such as rewards, approval from others (e.g., coaches, spectators), or external pressures (Doğan, 2005). Amotivation, the absence of motivation, occurs when individuals fail to see a connection between their efforts and the outcome

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(Turhan & Ağaoğlu, 2011). Unmotivated athletes may lack both internal and external direction towards their goals (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

In the context of sports, intrinsic motivation is generally considered more influential than extrinsic motivation (Şanlı, 2015). Athletes who do not comprehend the relationship between their actions and results may experience feelings of inadequacy or a lack of control, which can lead to amotivation (Yazıcı & İmamoğlu, 2024). Motivation is a critical component for achieving peak performance in sports, as it directs behavior and influences decision-making processes (Alexandris et al., 2002). Sport motivation not only impacts performance but also contributes to social factors and competition, which can influence both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Recours et al., 2004). Athletes who are motivated intrinsically engage in activities for pleasure, enjoyment, or personal satisfaction, without the need for material rewards or external gains. In contrast, extrinsic motivation involves external incentives, such as rewards (e.g., money or gifts) or the avoidance of punishment or criticism. Amotivation, being the lowest form of motivation, occurs when athletes lose their purpose and no longer find value in continuing their training or participation in sports (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Dispositional flow is the feeling of being engaged in the activity one is performing and feeling that one has cognitive competence and control over it. It is defined as a high degree of intrinsic pleasure and enjoyment from the activity (Moneta, 2004). In the field of sport and exercise, dispositional flow is the highest mental state that occurs in conjunction with the relationship between the individual's abilities during physical activity and the felt state, requirements or activity at that moment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Aşçı et al., 2007). Although not permanent, dispositional flow leaves positive emotional effects on people (Cheng et al., 2015). Increasing the dispositional flow increases the athlete's engagement in the activity. It even helps to create continuity in activity participation (Ada et al., 2012). When athletes experience a good dispositional flow, they remain focused, lose track of time, and derive enjoyment from their activities. This heightened state of intrinsic motivation helps athletes integrate with their task, leading to improved decision-making and a sense of control (Fournier et al., 2007; Yamaner et al., 2020; Şener & İmamoğlu, 2023). However, despite these theoretical foundations, the specific relationship between motivation and dispositional flow in athletes, particularly in team and combat sports, remains underexplored. For this reason, the present study has been conducted to contribute to literature by exploring this relationship and aims to investigate this relationship by examining how different forms of motivation—*intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation*—impact athletes' ability to achieve dispositional flow. Furthermore, this research seeks to provide insights into how motivation contributes to athletes' performance in team and combat sports, offering practical implications for coaches and trainers aiming to enhance their athletes' mental and emotional states. The first hypothesis of the study is that athletes' motivation will show differences in terms of gender and sport type, while the second hypothesis is that dispositional flow will increase motivation and decrease amotivation in athletes. Therefore, the aim of the present study is to examine the relationship between motivation and dispositional flow in team and combat sports athletes.

## **METHOD**

### ***Research model***

The present study has a descriptive correlational research model. A descriptive correlational study examines the relationship between variables as they naturally occur, without intervention or manipulation by the researcher (Creswell, 2014). The data were collected by using a survey method. Relational survey models were utilised for the sample to which the surveys would be applied. The relational survey model is a research approach used to determine the existence or degree of change between two or more variables (Karasar, 2018). In this regard, the theoretical relationship between motivation and dispositional flow was examined within the scope of this model.

### ***Population and sample***

Population of the study included students who were attending Ondokuz Mayıs University Yaşar Doğu Faculty of Sport Sciences and who were engaged in team and combat students, while the sample included student athletes who volunteered to complete the surveys, consistent with non-probability convenience sampling methods (Creswell, 2014). A total of 440 students, 213 females and 227 males,

were included in the study. These students were engaged in team sports (ball sports such as football, basketball, handball, volleyball, etc.) and combat sports (wrestling, boxing, kick boxing, taekwondo, karate, may tai, etc.). Mean age of the students was 22.29 for male students and 22.36 for female students; 213 of the students were male, while 227 were female. The data collection took place between June and July 2024. Data were collected using a mixed-mode approach, involving both face-to-face administration in classroom settings and online distribution via Google Forms.

### **Data collection tools**

**The Sport Motivation Scale:** It was developed by Pelletier et al. (1995) and adapted into Turkish by Kazak (2004). The purpose of the scale is to reveal the source of athletes' motivation by determining the level of intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and amotivation of the athlete in sports environment (Kazak, 2004). The 28-item and 7-point Likert type (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree) scale used in this study has six sub-scales: Intrinsic motivation is categorized into different dimensions, each represented by specific items in the survey. Intrinsic motivation to know and accomplish is measured through items 2, 4, 8, 12, 15, 20, 23 and 27, while intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation is measured by items 1, 13, 18 and 25. External regulation, which refers to behavior driven by external pressures or rewards, is reflected in items 6, 10, 16 and 22. Introjected regulation, which involves internalizing external values but still feeling pressure to act, is assessed through items 9, 14, 21 and 26. Identified regulation, where individuals engage in activities aligned with their personal identity, is measured by items 7, 11, 17 and 24. Lastly, lack of motivation, or amotivation, is represented by items 3, 5, 19 and 28. While the sub-scales of knowing, accomplishing and experiencing stimulation are included in intrinsic motivation, the sub-scales of external regulation, introjected and identified motivation are included in extrinsic motivation (Şanlı, 2015). High scores on intrinsic motivation subscale reflect high self-determination, high scores on identified regulation indicate that the person values the sport and sees it as personally important, high scores on introjected/external regulation indicate some level of extrinsic motivation, and high scores on amotivation subscale reflect low motivation, feelings of incompetence, or lack of value in the sport. On the other hand, low scores on suggests the individual does not enjoy or find internal satisfaction from the sport, low scores on identified/introjected/external Regulation may indicate low external or internal pressure or simply lack of extrinsic motivation and low scores on amotivation is usually a good sign, suggesting the athlete feels competent and motivated. As a result of the reliability analysis conducted in Kazak (2004)'s study, Cronbach's Alpha values were found to be between 0.70 and 0.88 for the scale and subscales. Cronbach's Alpha values in the present study were found to be 0.88 for intrinsic motivation to know and accomplish, 0.74 for intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation, 0.63 for introjection, 0.79 for identification, 0.85 for external regulation and 0.79 for lack of motivation.

**Dispositional Flow Scale-2:** It was developed by Jackson & Eklund (2004) to assess the individual's overall tendency to experience dispositional flow during physical activity. Aşçı et al. (2007) adapted the scale into Turkish. There are nine sub-scales and 36 items in the scale which is in the form of 5-point Likert (Each item ranges from "Never (1)" to "Always (5)"). Higher total score indicates that the person's dispositional flow is good, while low total score indicates that the dispositional flow is poor (Gözmen & Aşçı, 2016). As a result of the reliability analysis conducted in Aşçı et al. (2007)'s study, Cronbach's Alpha values were found to be over 0.70. Cronbach's alpha values for the Dispositional Flow Scale were similarly found to be over 0.80 in the present study.

### **Data analysis**

SPSS 25.00 package program was used to evaluate the data. Normality of the data was initially assessed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, and the results indicated that the data were suitable for parametric analyses. Further support for normality was derived from skewness and kurtosis values, which generally fell within acceptable ranges ( $\pm 1$ ), suggesting approximate normal distributions across the subscales. Skewness and Kurtosis values for the subscales show varying distribution characteristics. Intrinsic motivation to know and achieve has near symmetry with slight positive skew (0.047) and mild kurtosis (0.805). Intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation also shows a mild positive skew (0.201) and a slightly flat distribution (0.475). External extrinsic motivation is slightly left-skewed (-0.195) with a flat kurtosis (-0.142). Introjected extrinsic motivation is almost symmetrical (0.003) with normal kurtosis (-

0.080). Identified extrinsic motivation has near-zero skew (0.034) and kurtosis (0.013), indicating normal distribution. Amotivation is moderately right skewed (0.283) with a somewhat peaked distribution (0.782). Given that the assumptions for parametric tests were met, independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare the subscale scores between groups (e.g., team vs. combat sport athletes, or gender-based comparisons). Reliability analyses were performed for the scales and subscales and Pearson Correlation Analysis was conducted to measure the correlation between the scales used in the study.

## RESULTS

**Table 1.** Comparison of anthropometric characteristics of student athletes by gender

Variables	Gender	n	$\bar{X}$	SD	t	p
Age (Years)	Male	213	22.29	3.13	-0.61	0.540
	Female	227	22.36	2.34		
Height (cm)	Male	213	175.81	5.90	15.40	0.001**
	Female	227	165.76	5.70		
Body weight (kg)	Male	213	72.20	7.88	18.03	0.001**
	Female	227	57.39	6.52		

\*\*= $p < 0.001$

A significant difference was found in height and body weight variables between male and female participants ( $p < 0.001$ ).

**Table 2.** Comparison of student athletes' scores on sport motivation scale by gender

Sport Motivation Scale subscales	Gender	n	$\bar{X}$	SD	t	p
Intrinsic motivation to know and accomplish	Female	213	5.59	1.12	-1.48	0.138
	Male	227	5.74	1.97		
Intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation	Female	213	5.78	1.09	-1.55	0.117
	Male	227	5.94	0.98		
External extrinsic motivation	Female	213	4.50	1.30	-2.54	0.012*
	Male	227	4.82	1.33		
Introjected extrinsic motivation	Female	213	5.62	1.10	0.50	0.578
	Male	227	5.67	1.12		
Identified extrinsic motivation	Female	213	4.85	1.25	0.43	0.643
	Male	227	4.91	0.99		
Amotivation	Female	213	2.84	1.43	5.61	0.001**
	Male	227	2.16	0.99		

\*\*= $p < 0.001$ , \*= $p < 0.05$

External extrinsic motivation and amotivation scores of student athletes were found to be different in terms of gender ( $p < 0.05$  and  $p < 0.001$ ). Male participants were found to show higher levels of external extrinsic motivation, while females demonstrated higher levels of amotivation.

**Table 3.** Comparison of student athletes' scores on sport motivation scale by sport type

Sport Motivation Scale subscales	Sport type	n	$\bar{X}$	SD	t	p
Intrinsic motivation to know and accomplish	Team sport	221	5.37	1.19	-6.03	0.001**
	Combat sport	219	5.97	1.92		
Intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation	Team sport	221	5.66	1.12	-4.18	0.001**
	Combat sport	219	6.07	1.90		
External extrinsic motivation	Team sport	221	4.58	1.33	-1.21	0.216
	Combat sport	219	4.74	1.35		
Introjected extrinsic motivation	Team sport	221	5.42	1.12	-4.15	0.001**
	Combat sport	219	5.86	1.08		
Identified extrinsic motivation	Team sport	221	4.88	1.15	0.122	0.967
	Combat sport	219	4.87	1.09		
Amotivation	Team sport	221	2.81	1.12	5.39	0.001**
	Combat sport	219	2.16	1.14		

\*\*= $p < 0.001$

Motivation scores and amotivation scores, except for external extrinsic motivation and identified extrinsic motivation scores were found to be significantly different in terms of the variable of being engaged in team and combat sports ( $p < 0.001$ ). The amotivation and identified extrinsic motivation scores of combat athletes were found to be lower than the scores of athletes competing in team sports. In other dimensions, it was found that team sports athletes had higher scores than combat sports athletes.

**Table 4.** Comparison of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation scores by gender and sport type status

Type of motivation	Gender	$\bar{X}$	SD	t	p
Intrinsic Motivation	Female	11.37	2.14	-1.65	0.117
	Male	11.67	2.12		
Extrinsic motivation	Female	14.96	2.97	-1.58	0.125
	Male	15.38	2.93		
Intrinsic Motivation	Team sport	11.03	2.03	-5.51	0.001**
	Combat sport	12.03	1.67		
Extrinsic motivation	Team sport	14.88	2.97	-2.16	0.028*
	Combat sport	15.47	2.83		

\*\*= $p < 0.001$ , \*= $p < 0.05$

Significant differences were found between intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation in terms of the variable of competing in team and combat sports ( $p < 0.05$  and  $p < 0.001$ ). It was found that athletes competing in combat sports had higher motivation subscale scores than athletes competing in team sports.

**Table 5.** Relationship between dispositional flow total score and sport motivation scale sub-scale scores

Sport Motivation Subscales	Dispositional flow total
Knowing and accomplishing	$r = 0.481^{**}$
Experiencing stimulation	$r = 0.497^{**}$
External	$r = 0.358^{**}$
Introjected	$r = 0.393^{**}$
Identified	$r = 0.287^{**}$
Amotivation	$r = -0.169^{**}$

\*\*= $p < 0.001$

A positive and significant correlation was found between the sub-scales of “knowing and accomplishing, experiencing stimulation, external regulation, internalization, identification, and the total score of dispositional flow ( $p < 0.001$ ). A negative and significant relationship was found between “amotivation” and the total score of dispositional flow ( $p < 0.001$ ).

## DISCUSSION

There are few studies in literature examining the relationship between motivation and dispositional flow among team sports athletes and combat sports athletes. The most significant finding of this study is the observed gender difference in extrinsic motivation and amotivation subscales. Male participants exhibited higher levels of extrinsic motivation, while females demonstrated higher levels of amotivation ( $p < 0.05$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This suggests that men are more driven by external rewards or pressures, whereas women may face more challenges in maintaining motivation. These results are in parallel with the findings of Kieran et al. (2006), Pelletier et al. (1995), and Petherick & Weigand (2002), who similarly identified higher external regulation in men compared to women. Additionally, the findings are similar to those of Burcu (2019) and Uzun et al. (2018), who reported significant gender differences in motivation dimensions. A significant difference was reported in the extrinsic motivation and amotivation sub-scales of motivation in terms of gender by Burcu (2019). Similarly, extrinsic motivation and amotivation subscale scores of male and female participants were found to be significantly different in our study ( $p < 0.05$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

In contrast, no significant differences were found in the dimensions of intrinsic motivation to know and accomplish, intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation, introjected extrinsic motivation, and identified extrinsic motivation ( $p > 0.05$ ). This suggests that both male and female athletes share similar internal motivations for these factors, consistent with the results of studies such as Akyol & İmamoğlu (2019) and Ersöz et al. (2012). While some studies, such as Amorose & Horn (2001) reported higher intrinsic motivation levels in men, our study did not observe a significant gender difference. However, the presence of gender-specific motivations highlights the need for tailored motivational strategies in sports training, especially considering factors like social pressures, body image, and competition, as noted by Egli et al. (2011) and Koivula (1999).



In his study, Keleş (2013) found the lowest score in the Amotivation subscale for both male and female athletes and all participants. In the present study, the lowest score was found to be in the amotivation subscale. The results of the two studies are similar in this regard. It is a commonly reported finding that athletes have both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for motivation in sports (Bakker, 1993). Studies have shown that internal motivations such as fun and competition have a strong impact on sports commitment and continuity, while external motivations such as body-related motivations and rewards were not found to be very effective (Tiryaki, 2000).

In terms of the status of competing in team and combat sports, differences were found in intrinsic motivation to know and accomplish, intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation, introjected extrinsic motivation and amotivation in the present study ( $p < 0.001$ ). On the other hand, identified extrinsic motivation and external extrinsic motivation in team and combat sports were not found to be significantly different in terms of competition status ( $p > 0.05$ ). The amotivation and identified extrinsic motivation scores of combat athletes are lower than the scores of athletes competing in team sports. In other dimensions, the scores of team sports athletes are higher than the scores of athletes competing in combat sports. In Yıldırım's (2017) study, it was stated that students' general motivation scores did not differ significantly depending on the type of sport performed. Ersöz et al., (2012) found in their study that individuals engaged in team sports had higher averages in the sub-dimension of intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation than individuals engaged in individual sports. In their study, Almagro et al. (2010) found that basketball players had higher scores in intrinsic motivation to know and accomplish subscales than football players. In their study, Kucukibis & Gul (2019) found no difference between to know, to accomplish and to experience stimulation subscales, identified subscale and total scores among students who did individual sports or team sports. They found the difference between the two groups significant only in the amotivation subscale.

In this study, it was determined that dispositional flow had a positive relationship with the subscales of knowing and accomplishing, experiencing stimuli, external regulation, introjection, identification, intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation, and a negative relationship with the amotivation sub-scale ( $p < 0.001$ ). It can be said that increasing students' dispositional flow states will increase their positive motivation and decrease their amotivation. İlhan et al. (2021) found in their study that there was a statistically significant and negative relationship between identified extrinsic motivation and amotivation. There are studies which found a positive relationship between intrinsic motivation and dispositional flow (Kowal & Fortier, 2000; Fournier et al., 2007; Murcia et al., 2008; Altıntaş et al., 2010). They stated that intrinsic motivation is a determining factor in dispositional flow (Moneta 2004, Moreno et al., 2010). There are also studies reporting extrinsic motivation and dispositional flow to have a negative relationship (Kowall & Fortier 2000; İlhan et al., 2021).

The hypotheses of the present study that athletes' motivation will show differences in terms of gender and sport type and dispositional flow will increase motivation and decrease amotivation in athletes were confirmed by the results found in the study. However, the present study has some limitations. The results of the study are limited to only student athletes attending Ondokuz Mayıs University. Therefore, they cannot be generalized to all student athletes.

## CONCLUSION

It was concluded that the motivational status of student athletes who received sports training and competed in team and combat sports varied according to gender and the type of competition. Specifically, male athletes appear to be more motivated by extrinsic factors, while female athletes show higher levels of amotivation. These results suggest that gender differences in motivation may stem from differing external pressures and expectations in sports environments.

Additionally, it was determined that student athletes' motivation is positively influenced by dispositional flow (as measured by items reflecting intrinsic enjoyment and satisfaction) and negatively influenced by amotivation (items indicating disengagement or lack of purpose). This underscores the importance of fostering a positive psychological environment in sports to enhance performance and motivation, as athletes who experience a higher dispositional flow tend to stay more engaged and motivated, while those who experience amotivation struggle to maintain focus and effort.

## SUGGESTIONS

It is recommended to increase the dispositional flow of student athletes competing in team and combat sports to boost their motivation and reduce their amotivation levels. To achieve this, specific interventions can be implemented. For example, coaches can focus on creating training environments that foster intrinsic motivation by emphasizing personal growth, skill mastery, and enjoyment of the sport rather than focusing solely on external rewards. Mental training techniques, such as goal setting, visualization, and mindfulness, can also help athletes enhance their focus and emotional engagement during competitions. Overall, the present study makes significant contributions to the literature by emphasizing the gender-specific differences in extrinsic motivation and amotivation. However, further research is needed to explore the underlying reasons for these differences and how they may impact long-term athletic performance. Additionally, the study's limitations, such as the focus on a specific university population, suggest that future studies should include more diverse groups to generalize these findings.

## Ethical Approval and Permission Information

Ethics Committee: Ondokuz Mayıs University Ethics Committee  
Protocol/Number: 2024-643

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