



THE EFFECT OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL SKILLS AMONG REFUGEE CHILDREN

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Abstract:

Social adaptation of refugee children in host societies depends not only on formal education but also on opportunities to participate in structured group activities. Physical activity programmes may provide a supportive environment in which children can communicate, cooperate, regulate their emotions, and practise constructive responses to interpersonal situations. This study aimed to assess changes in refugee children's social skills during their participation in an organised football programme. Nine refugee children participated in the study. Their social skills were systematically assessed before and after a 16-week programme consisting of three 75-minute football sessions per week. The findings indicated positive changes across all assessed areas of social skills, including behaviour, communication, emotional awareness, self-awareness, self-control, stress management, and conflict resolution. The results suggest that systematically organised football activities may contribute to the development of refugee children's intrapersonal, interpersonal, communication, and activity-related skills and may support their social participation in the host society.

Keywords: physical activity, social skills, refugee children

1. Introduction

In today's world, issues related to refugee integration are becoming increasingly important due to forced migration caused by armed conflicts. In Lithuania, the growing number of people fleeing war has increased the need for innovative and effective solutions that facilitate their social integration and full participation in the life of the host

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society (Jakavonytė-Staškuvienė, 2023; Lunina & Jurgilė, 2025). In 2021, nearly 90 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced, many of whom had to flee their countries of origin because of conflicts and crises in countries such as Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, Afghanistan, Syria, Myanmar, Nigeria, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Furthermore, following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine on 24 February 2022, 8,108,448 people were forced to leave the country (Operational Data Portal, 2023), while more than 7.1 million people were internally displaced. Poland, which shares a border with Ukraine, received the largest number of refugees among European Union Member States (Nazaruk et al., 2024).

Children are among the most vulnerable refugee groups and account for a substantial proportion of the forcibly displaced population (Grandi, 2022; Jaroszewicz et al., 2022). Research indicates that 81.4% of individuals experience at least one traumatic event during their lifetime, such as a natural disaster, living in or fleeing a war zone, or sexual violence (Kvedaraitė et al., 2022). Exposure to traumatic events may lead to physical and emotional difficulties among refugees. Physical activity has been recognised as an innovative means of supporting refugees' safe integration into host societies and facilitating their adaptation to a new environment (Whitley & Gould, 2011). The number of sport-based programmes designed to facilitate various aspects of integration is rapidly increasing worldwide. Different forms of physical activity, particularly team-based activities, may provide an effective strategy for helping refugee children cope with a range of integration-related challenges (Stura, 2019; Anderson et al., 2019; Robinson et al., 2019).

In a rapidly changing global context, the development of children's social skills through physical activity is becoming increasingly important (Opstoel et al., 2020). Social skills are activated and enhanced through interaction with one's environment and direct engagement with the wider world (Aldridge et al., 2018). Wright et al. (2011) argue that developing social skills during childhood may promote more effective adaptation in adulthood. Research suggests that regular participation in physical activity can facilitate the development of children's social skills. Physical activity may also promote positive youth development by fostering life skills and psychosocial and behavioural competencies that can be sustained throughout an individual's life (Weiss, 2011). According to Opstoel et al. (2020), various forms of physical activity may serve as effective tools for promoting social skills among children from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Although research in this field is expanding, most studies focus on social integration in general rather than on the development of specific social skills. Longitudinal studies examining the effects of physical activity on changes in social skills remain scarce. Furthermore, most existing studies have been conducted in Australia, Canada, Sweden, and the United Kingdom (Spaaij et al., 2019), while this topic remains underexplored in the Baltic countries. Research specifically addressing the development of refugee children's social skills through physical activity is therefore still limited.

Consequently, new strategies and approaches are needed to help reduce the challenges these children face when integrating into society (Collison et al., 2017).

2. Literature Review

Societies worldwide are changing rapidly and increasingly encountering the complex challenges faced by refugee children in host communities. Social skills are becoming particularly important in helping these children overcome such challenges and achieve positive outcomes in social situations (Radley et al., 2022; Pannebakker et al., 2019).

Del Prette et al. (2021) define social skills as forms of social behaviour that are valued within a particular culture and are highly likely to produce favourable outcomes for an individual, a group, or a community. Such skills may contribute to socially competent interactions when performing interpersonal tasks. The conceptualisation of this construct varies across scientific studies. Researchers examining social skills (de Sousa et al., 2023; Mačėnaitė, 2024) provide broadly similar definitions, encompassing intrapersonal, interpersonal, activity-related, and communication skills. These skills are associated with an individual's ability to respond appropriately, understand and regulate their psychological processes, communicate verbally and non-verbally, and cooperate with others.

Children with social skills deficits are at greater risk of experiencing substantial difficulties both within and beyond the school environment (Panayiotou et al., 2022). Various methods may be used to assess social skills, including systematic observation, semi-structured interviews, sociometric assessment, self-report scales, role-play tests, problem-solving scenarios, and standardised behavioural rating scales (Whitcomb, 2022). Deficits in children's social skills may be associated with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Social skills development aims to enhance children's ability to demonstrate fundamental social behaviours that are essential for successful and productive participation in host communities (Spence, 2003). Wright et al. (2020) suggest that physical activity provides a favourable context for integrating social and emotional learning competencies, including self-awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Orr et al. (2021) note that children and young people with social skills difficulties encounter barriers that may restrict their participation in community activities and the development of physical literacy. Their study demonstrated that embedding physical literacy in everyday community activities may positively contribute to social skills development.

Social skills programmes for children and young people may positively affect the competencies being developed by enabling participants to acquire knowledge through physical exercise, strengthen trust in themselves and others, improve interpersonal skills, and recognise both positive and negative emotions (de Mooij et al., 2020). Physical activity programmes also provide opportunities for children to improve their physical fitness and psychological well-being. Furthermore, the development of social skills

through physical activity may contribute to stronger and more sustainable social relationships (Sibson et al., 2020).

Refugee children often experience not only the consequences of war, forced migration, family separation, and bereavement, but also post-migration stressors, including uncertain legal status, residence in reception centres, language barriers, disrupted educational routines, social isolation, and limited opportunities for safe leisure activities in the host country (Frounfelker et al., 2020). In this context, physical activity programmes for this vulnerable group should not be regarded solely as a means of promoting sport or health. They may also provide opportunities to develop social and emotional competencies, strengthen interpersonal relationships, facilitate cultural adaptation, and create a safe and inclusive environment. It is important to create a safe educational environment in which refugee children are regarded first and foremost as dignified, active individuals capable of growth, rather than merely as recipients of assistance. From a humanistic perspective, physical activity should provide a safe form of self-expression, particularly for children whose verbal communication may be limited. Physical activity- and movement-based programmes designed specifically for refugee children are gradually receiving greater attention in the scientific literature. The *TeamUp* programme, implemented in the Netherlands, is a movement-based psychosocial intervention designed for refugee children aged 6–17 years living in reception centres. The programme comprised structured movement-based games, various sports activities, body-awareness exercises, and sessions addressing emotional regulation and topics such as fear, anger, stress, respect, conflict, and friendship (Bleile et al., 2021). The study showed that the programme was perceived positively because it supported children's psychosocial learning and well-being. However, it also revealed practical challenges, including fluctuations in attendance, difficulties related to children's hyperactivity, and the need to strengthen facilitators' preparation and cooperation. Whereas the *TeamUp* programme combined different forms of movement and play, the *Kicking Goals Together* programme used football as its principal means of promoting social development. This programme was designed for refugee and migrant youth and incorporated football sessions and various group activities. Its findings suggest that participation may enhance competence, self-confidence, social connectedness, and character development (Pink et al., 2020). A six-week mindfulness programme was also implemented with refugee children living in a refugee camp in Türkiye. Its findings indicated that social skills development was associated with enhanced self-esteem and resilience (Kuru et al., 2024). Participation in physical activities facilitates the development of bonding social capital as children form relationships with their peers. Bridging social capital begins to emerge when refugee children interact with children from the host community. Linking social capital is developed through connections with coaches, schoolteachers, social workers, psychologists, and non-governmental organisations, which provide access to educational opportunities and support resources. A comparative study of two sport programmes implemented in the United States and Sweden demonstrated that refugee youths' participation experiences were associated with acculturation, a sense of belonging, and

relationship-building in their new host countries (Capalbo et al., 2024). Sport and psychosocial support programmes for refugee children combine physical activities with measures aimed at enhancing emotional well-being and strengthening social relationships. Games and sporting activities are used to foster children's self-confidence, self-regulation, sense of safety, and relationships with adults. These programmes seek to provide a safe environment, stable relationships, structured activities, and continuous social support (Estoura et al., 2019). In Australia, Block and Gibbs (2017) examined the inclusion of refugee children in physical activity and sport programmes. They identified three main types of provision: short-term sport programmes, ongoing programmes, and integration into mainstream sports clubs. Their study found that short-term programmes may be beneficial as an initial introduction to physical activity and as a means of experiencing a safe social environment; however, their effects are limited when opportunities for continued participation are unavailable. Ongoing programmes provide greater opportunities to build trust, strengthen social relationships, and maintain regular participation in physical activity. Integration into community sports clubs is considered potentially the most sustainable model. Nevertheless, its successful implementation requires a culturally responsive environment, reduced financial barriers, accessible transport, family involvement, and coaches who are appropriately prepared to work with refugee children. Overall, these types of programmes are important for social skills development because physical activity enables refugee children to participate in a group, learn shared rules, develop their relationship with themselves, others, and the activity, and experience a sense of belonging within the host community. In sport programmes, the development of appropriate behaviour among refugee children is supported through clear rules, structured activities, and a safe environment supervised by adults. Children learn to wait for their turn, adhere to agreements, respect one another, follow coaches' instructions, and take responsibility for their own actions (Opstoel et al., 2020).

A review of the scientific literature indicates that physical activity and sport programmes are particularly important for refugee children, whose opportunities to develop social relationships naturally are often limited by forced migration, family loss or separation, language barriers, and social isolation. The benefits of such programmes are most evident when activities are provided regularly, implemented in a safe and culturally responsive environment, financially accessible, and delivered by coaches who are appropriately trained to work with refugee children. Under these conditions, physical activity programmes may contribute to improved physical health, emotional well-being, self-esteem, social connectedness, a sense of belonging, and more successful integration into host communities.

3. Research methodology

3.1 Observation method

Observation is one of the qualitative research methods in the social sciences. As a scientific method, observation can be used as the primary research method or as one of

several complementary qualitative methods (Ciesielska et al., 2018). This method allows for the study of people in their natural environment, so the researcher spends a significant amount of time in that environment with the research participant(s) to gain a more detailed understanding of the subjects (Baker, 2006). According to Ciesielska et al. (2018), the term 'observation' encompasses several types, approaches and methods that must be adapted to the research problem and scientific context. Furthermore, observation can be regarded as the foundation of most people's everyday social life. During observation, we can not only observe but also evaluate (using evaluation criteria) and draw conclusions. The study employs direct observation, which takes place in a natural environment during physical activity sessions and for the assessment of activities (Gouveia et al., 2021). *The observation instrument* was developed based on theoretical analysis, highlighting the most important social skills, which consist of specific abilities. Social skills were assessed according to specific abilities on a scale of 1 to 5 (the observation protocol's assessment scores were based on a Likert scale: 1 – very poor skills, 2 – poor skills, 3 – satisfactory skills, 4 – good skills, 5 – very good skills). The average score for each of these skills indicates their level (level is understood here as the degree of quality of the skills measured by scores: from level 1 to level 5, etc.). The observation method aims to reveal the development of social skills during physical activity, such as adherence to rules, respect for oneself and others, self-confidence, verbal and non-verbal communication skills, and appropriate decision-making. The observation was conducted in accordance with Kardelis' (2016) recommendations. The study participants were observed at the start of the physical activity session, during the physical activity session, and at the end of the physical activity session. The study participants were unaware that they were being observed and therefore behaved naturally. The qualitative research observation protocol was developed based on studies conducted by researchers investigating social skills (Šniras et al., 2006) on essential (basic) social skills, which are most important for the positive socialisation of the child.

Participants in the observational study (hereinafter referred to as STD) were given pseudonyms and identified as *STD-Bogumilas*, *STD-Damazas*, *STD-Adalgis*, *STD-Dionizas*, *STD-Elfegas*, *STD-Fidelis*, *STD-Gildas*, *STD-Ipolitas*, *STD-Kanutas*, *STD-Judas*, *STD-Rufas*.

3.2 Sample selection method

The research participants were selected using a purposive sampling method. Researchers widely employ this method in qualitative research to identify cases containing more information related to the phenomenon of interest. Purposive sampling most commonly involves selection based on predetermined criteria (Palinkas et al., 2015), so the study participants selected were children with refugee status in the Republic of Lithuania. The characteristics of the qualitative study participants are presented in Figure 1.

The figure shows that the sample for the qualitative observational study consisted of 9 participants (N=9). Nielsen (2003) states that the sample size in qualitative research is not particularly relevant; a study can be conducted even with a sample of fewer than

five participants. Although the sample size is small (N=9), the chosen observation method allowed for data saturation to be achieved.

3.3 Study date

Observation of nine Ukrainian children during physical activity in 2022, 16 weeks, 3 times per week, 1 hour 15 minutes per session. The study was conducted in September-December 2022, at the X Football Club, in the outdoor and indoor stadium, three times per week, according to a pre-determined schedule of classes, in which children of Ukrainian nationality with temporary protection status in the Republic of Lithuania were observed (n=9 males, average age ± 9.63).

Figure 1. Characteristics of study participants (N=9)

STD-Adalgis*	STD-Dionizas*	STD-Elfegas*
8 Age (years)	7 Age (years)	10 Age (years)
6 In Lithuania (months)	5 In Lithuania (months)	3 In Lithuania (months)
STD-Fidelis*	STD-Gildas*	STD-Ipolitas*
14 Age (years)	9 Age (years)	8 Age (years)
5 In Lithuania (months)	5 In Lithuania (months)	2 In Lithuania (months)
STD-Kanutas*	STD-Judas*	STD-Rufas*
7 Age (years)	11 Age (years)	12 Age (years)
6 In Lithuania (months)	5 In Lithuania (months)	4 In Lithuania (months)

Note: (Person with refugee status, temporary protection, country of origin (Ukraine); gender (male));

*pseudonymized study participant code

4. Results

Figure 2 presents the mean social skills scores of the entire observed sample at *pre* and *post* of the educational experiment. The findings demonstrate changes in social skills developed through football-based physical activity between the *pre*- and *post*-assessments.

As shown in Figure 2, at *pre*, several essential social skills of STD-Adalgis were moderately developed: behaviour on the football pitch (M = 2.47), communication skills (M = 2.59), and self-awareness skills (M = 2.29). However, his conflict-resolution skills on the football pitch were insufficiently developed (M = 1.46). At *post*, positive changes were not observed across all essential social skills. The greatest improvement was recorded in conflict-resolution skills, which reached a mean score of 2.95, while self-awareness skills reached a mean score of 2.85. Behaviour on the football pitch received a mean score of 3.43, and communication skills received a mean score of 3.10. At *post*, behaviour on the football pitch received the highest score; however, the greatest improvement was observed in conflict-resolution skills.

As shown in the figure, none of STD-Dionizas's social skills were assessed as either undeveloped or very well developed at *pre*. At *pre*, the participant demonstrated moderately developed behaviour on the football pitch ($M = 2.28$), communication skills ($M = 2.25$), and self-awareness skills ($M = 2.00$). However, his emotional awareness ($M = 1.00$) and conflict-resolution skills on the football pitch ($M = 1.25$) were insufficiently developed. At *post*, positive changes were observed across all essential social skills.

The figure presents the mean scores for STD-Elfegas's essential social skills *pre* and *post* the main study. At *pre*, the participant's mean scores were as follows: behaviour on the football pitch ($M = 2.57$), communication skills ($M = 2.48$), emotional awareness skills ($M = 2.29$), self-awareness skills ($M = 2.26$), self-control skills ($M = 2.23$), stress-management skills ($M = 2.54$), and conflict-resolution skills on the football pitch ($M = 2.28$). At *post*, positive changes were observed across all skills: behaviour on the football pitch ($M = 2.85$), communication skills ($M = 3.25$), emotional awareness skills ($M = 4.00$), self-awareness skills ($M = 2.50$), self-control skills ($M = 2.33$), stress-management skills ($M = 3.50$), and conflict-resolution skills on the football pitch ($M = 3.00$). During the study, STD-Elfegas actively participated in the sessions and responded constructively to the coach's feedback.

The results for STD-Fidelis's essential social skills at *pre* and *post* are presented. At *pre*, several skills were assessed as poorly developed: communication skills ($M = 1.25$), emotional awareness skills ($M = 1.50$), self-awareness skills ($M = 1.25$), and conflict-resolution skills on the football pitch ($M = 1.70$). Other skills were assessed as satisfactorily developed: behaviour on the football pitch ($M = 2.46$), self-control skills ($M = 2.23$), and stress-management skills ($M = 2.28$). At *post*, positive changes were observed in the skills that had been assessed as poorly developed at *pre*: communication skills ($M = 2.56$), emotional awareness skills ($M = 2.34$), self-awareness skills ($M = 2.37$), and conflict-resolution skills on the football pitch ($M = 2.50$). Positive changes were also observed in behaviour on the football pitch ($M = 4.00$), self-control skills ($M = 4.00$), and stress-management skills ($M = 3.50$), which had received lower scores at *pre*.

The figure presents the mean scores for STD-Gildas's essential social skills at *pre* and *post*. At *pre*, emotional awareness skills were assessed as poorly developed ($M = 1.50$), whereas the following skills were assessed as satisfactorily developed: behaviour on the football pitch ($M = 2.47$), communication skills ($M = 2.41$), self-awareness skills ($M = 2.22$), self-control skills ($M = 2.34$), stress-management skills ($M = 2.30$), and conflict-resolution skills on the football pitch ($M = 2.04$). At *post*, positive changes were observed in the skills that had been assessed as poorly or insufficiently developed at *pre*: emotional awareness skills ($M = 2.08$), behaviour on the football pitch ($M = 3.00$), communication skills ($M = 3.00$), self-awareness skills ($M = 2.75$), self-control skills ($M = 4.00$), stress-management skills ($M = 3.50$), and conflict-resolution skills on the football pitch ($M = 4.00$).

The results for STD-Ipolitas's essential social skills at *pre* and *post* are presented. At *pre*, most of the participant's essential social skills were assessed as satisfactorily developed: behaviour ($M = 2.71$), communication ($M = 2.60$), emotional awareness ($M = 2.63$), self-awareness ($M = 2.45$), self-control ($M = 2.55$), stress management ($M = 2.68$), and

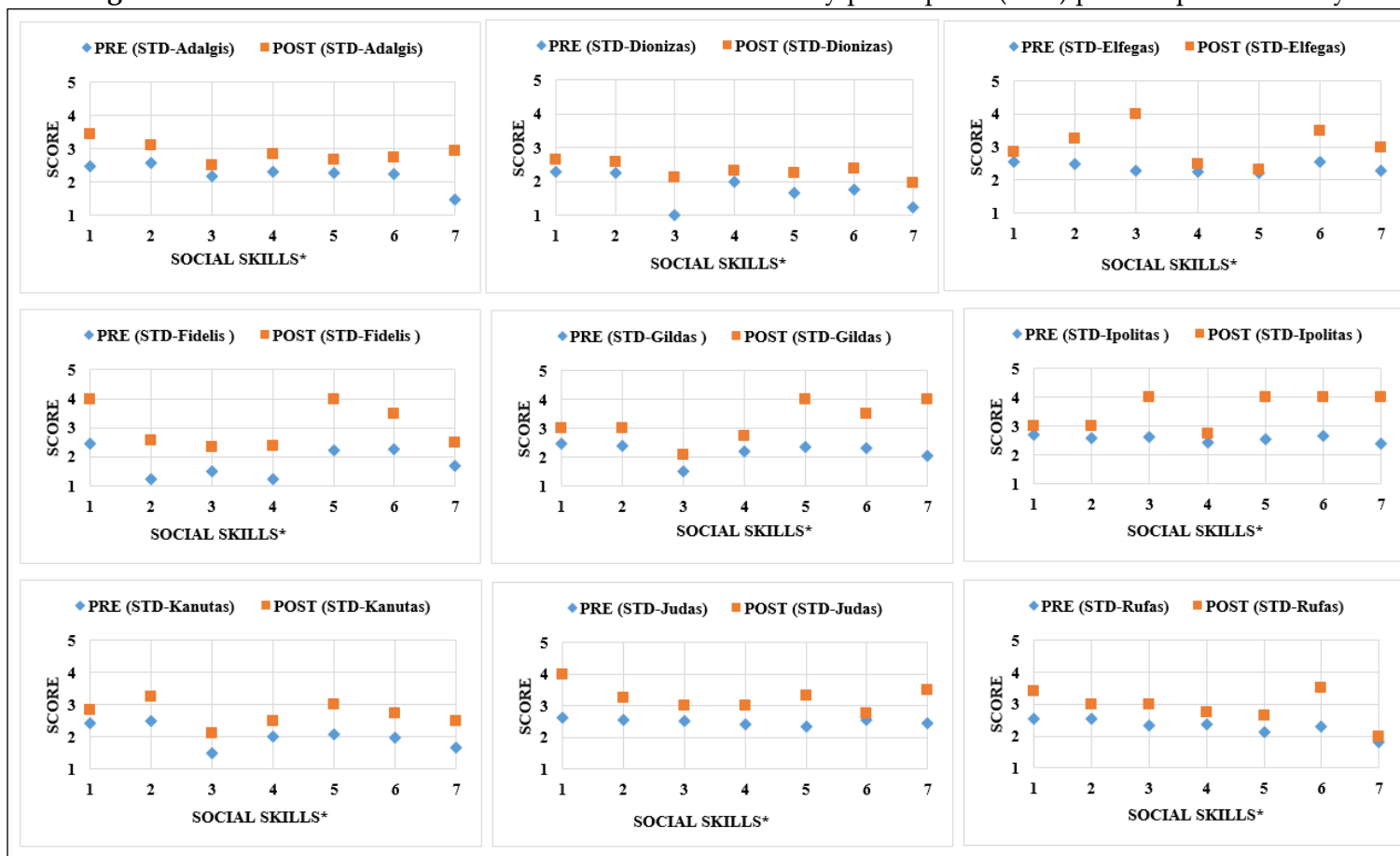
conflict resolution ($M = 2.40$). These findings indicate that STD-Ipolitas's social skills were generally developed to a satisfactory level. At *post*, positive changes were observed in all skills that had been assessed as satisfactorily developed at *pre*: behaviour increased from $M = 2.71$ to $M = 3.00$; communication from $M = 2.60$ to $M = 3.00$; emotional awareness from $M = 2.63$ to $M = 4.00$; self-awareness from $M = 2.45$ to $M = 2.75$; self-control from $M = 2.55$ to $M = 4.00$; stress management from $M = 2.68$ to $M = 4.00$; and conflict resolution from $M = 2.40$ to $M = 4.00$.

As shown in the figure, at *pre*, STD-Kanutas demonstrated poorly developed emotional awareness skills ($M = 1.50$), stress-management skills ($M = 1.97$), and conflict-resolution skills on the football pitch ($M = 1.68$). The following skills were assessed as satisfactorily developed: behaviour on the football pitch ($M = 2.43$), communication skills ($M = 2.48$), self-awareness skills ($M = 2.00$), and self-control skills ($M = 2.07$). At *post*, positive changes were observed across all essential social skills.

The figure presents the mean scores for STD-Judas's essential social skills at *pre* and *post* the main study. At *pre*, the overall mean score across all skills was 2.48. At *post*, positive changes were observed across all skills, with the overall mean score increasing to 3.26.

As shown in the figure, at *pre*, none of STD-Rufas's social skills were assessed as either undeveloped or very well developed. At *pre*, the participant's conflict-resolution skills on the football pitch were assessed as insufficiently developed, with a mean score of 1.81. At *post*, positive changes were observed across all essential social skills. However, the improvement in conflict-resolution skills on the football pitch was small, with the mean score increasing from 1.81 to 2.00.

Figure 2: Evaluation of core social skills of observational study participants (STD) pre and post the study



Note: Social skills* 1 – behaviour on the football pitch; 2 – communication skills; 3 – emotional awareness skills; 4 – self-awareness skills; 5 – self-control skills; 6 – stress management skills; 7 – conflict resolution skills on the football pitch.

5. Discussion

The observational method chosen for this qualitative study helped to reveal changes in the development of social skills through physical activity. The data obtained from our educational experimental study show that changes in social skills occur through physical activity. Observation of the study participants revealed that children lack social skills relating to both their relationships with others (interpersonal skills) and their relationship with themselves (intrapersonal skills). The results of a study conducted by Levent et al. (2017) showed that the main challenge for refugees in Turkey in successfully integrating into society is a lack of verbal communication; similarly, Alkalay et al. (2021) state that refugee children experience language difficulties during their adaptation in a foreign country. Temel et al. (2023) state that refugee children in host countries face language difficulties and tend to be shy, with weak social skills, whilst Barry et al. (2018) highlight that every individual requires social skills for effective conflict resolution, the ability to ask for help when needed, establishing and maintaining connections, and fostering mutual interaction. Gülceğül (2020) notes that the problems experienced by refugees do not differ according to their nationality. Behroz-Sarcheshmeh et al. (2017) state that individuals acquire social skills during the socialisation process, and note that the development of social skills has a positive impact on self-control and cooperation skills. The results of the study suggest that refugee children, after attending football sessions for sixteen weeks, strengthened not only their interpersonal but also their intrapersonal skills. The nine Ukrainian refugee children who participated in the study improved their conflict resolution (6 children), communication (4 children), behaviour (4 children), emotional awareness (5 children) and stress management (6 children). The results clearly show that the development of social skills through physical activity helps to effectively resolve conflict situations and express feelings confidently (Gökel et al., 2017).

Ebin et al. (2024) state that football is a valuable physical activity during which children are able to remain calm during disputes, and it encourages constructive dialogue and maintaining good relationships with others. Cronin et al. (2017) analysed the social skills necessary for life. During their analysis, they noted that communication skills are very important for any individual, as they enable the establishment and maintenance of friendly relationships with people in any environment. They also highlighted stress management skills, which help individuals respond appropriately to their own behaviour in any stressful situation. Of the 9 refugee children who participated in physical activity, 6 showed an improvement in their stress management skills, whilst 3 showed no change. Zhang et al. (2024) state that physical activity is recognised not only as an important stress management strategy but also as a means of improving an individual's well-being, and that individuals who regularly engage in any form of physical activity demonstrate improved cognitive functions. Bernstein et al. (2017) also stated that any form of physical activity promotes greater emotional flexibility and thus improves resilience when recovering from stressful events.

The results of our study show a consistent improvement in all social skills among one participant through participation in physical activity (football sessions). Weiss (2011) argues that children can develop social skills through regular participation in any form of physical activity. Opstoel et al. (2020) mention that various physical activities can be considered a suitable tool for developing social skills when educating children from any culture. According to Gillham et al. (2000), social skills are one of the key factors that help children adapt effectively to any environment. Programmes designed to teach children social skills have a positive impact on the development of social skills, such as conveying knowledge through physical exercises, building self-confidence and trust in others, improving interpersonal skills, and to distinguish not only positive but also negative emotions (de Mooij et al., 2020). The benefits of physical activity programmes provide an opportunity for every child to strengthen themselves physically on a personal level; psychological well-being improves, and through the development of social skills via physical activity, it has been observed that social relationships become stronger and more sustainable (Sibson et al., 2020).

Nagda et al. (2018) emphasised the importance of social skills for an individual's purposeful activity. During the sixteen-week observation period, the participants' positive attitude towards the activities became evident. Refugee children willingly engaged in the activities offered to them (football sessions). Olliff (2008) noted that physical activity can provide a space where refugee children can regularly participate in their chosen physical activities, build trust with peers and adults, and reflect on their experiences. Participation in such physical activities serves as a form of therapy that helps them escape the daily challenges of life in a foreign country, learn more about the community into which they are integrating, and fosters a supportive environment for their activities. Whitley et al. (2018) argue that sport can have a positive impact on the lives of refugee children if the right environment is created, along with opportunities to develop physical, personal and social skills, and meaningful interaction with adults and peers. In a physical activity setting, children can gain positive experiences, such as a sense of community, and develop various skills, such as personal responsibility, time management, emotional regulation, teamwork, self-confidence, leadership skills and conflict resolution skills. Children can also gain benefits unrelated to the immediate physical activity setting (e.g. social capital, transfer of life skills). Physical activity can help refugees learn the social skills needed to adapt to life in the host community (Kaya et al., 2022).

6. Conclusion

The analysis of scientific literature reveals that the development of social skills among refugee children during physical activity sessions in organizations is characterized by integrality, where physical activity becomes a platform for the expansion of intra-personal and inter-personal competencies. The main features of this development manifest through direct social interaction, allowing children to cultivate self-awareness,

emotional control, and the ability to cooperate, which directly reduces adaptation challenges within the host community. Physical activity acts as a holistic tool that helps overcome language and cultural barriers through game-based and structured situations, strengthening self-confidence and encouraging responsible decision-making. It is observed that any form of physical activity provides a safe space for building social connections, helping children transform negative emotions into constructive behavior and sustainable interpersonal relationships.

In this study, we found that 16 weeks of physical activity (football) had an impact on changes in the social skills of refugee children, relating to intrapersonal, activity-based and communication skills, which helped them to integrate more easily into the host community.

We believe that these findings may be useful to researchers analysing social integration issues related to the development of social skills through physical activity among refugee children, and will encourage further research into various physical activities for refugee children, as, to date, researchers have shown relatively little interest in the development of social skills in refugee children through physical activity, and this area remains under-researched.

Institutional Review Board Statement

The research was conducted in accordance with the Helsinki Declaration and was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Lithuanian Sports University, approval number-SMTEK-60. Approval Date: 14 September 2021.

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Conflicts of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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