



PRACTICE PROBLEMS OF THE KIDS' ATHLETICS PROGRAM IN TURKEY

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study is to determine the problems encountered in Turkey in the carrying out of the Kids' Athletics Program developed by the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) and discussing the solution suggestions. Between 2000 and 2017, the studies and cases conducted on the Kids' athletics were described by using descriptive screening method. The articles about the Kids' athletics and the internet search engines were scanned and a descriptive design was created. As a result, the IAAF Kids' Athletics Program which is thought to contribute significantly to the education of 7-12 year old children through sports is carrying great importance in cooperation with the relevant institutions in order to be implemented in our country as well as in almost two hundred countries around the world.

Keywords: kid, athletics, Kids' Athletics Program

1. Introduction

In spite of the technological development today, the reach of the health problems to children's ages prod the international institutions into action. The European Union, one of these institutions, made various advisory jurisdictions regarding to measures must be taken in this field and these were sent to member countries. The most important one of these is the announcement of the year 2004 as the "European year for training through sports" by the European Council and the European Parliament (session decision no. 291 dated 6.02.2003). UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) which serves within the United Nations, aims to raise awareness of other countries in the world with similar decisions (United Nations, 2005). In our country in 2005, in accordance with the understanding of "Sports and Physical Education Campaign" in cooperation with related institutions and organizations, in order to establish sports culture in all segments of society and to accelerate the efforts to

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spread to the base, to organize various activities for this purpose circulars were prepared and published (GSGM'nin 2005 /17 sayılı Genelgesi).

In 2007, the European Union Sports Commission has invited the member states in take the necessary measures to spread and place the concept of active lifestyle through national education systems in the "White Book" published as a report (CEC, 2005) A few years before the beginning of these developments, IAAF created a study group in 2001 to create a kids'-specific athletics program. The first arrangement of the Kids'-specific athletics program" prepared by this study group, was published on the official website in 2002. As a reason for the preparation of the program; in the competitions organized for children it was emphasized that, the standard of the competition conditions often puts children into a dangerous trap called privatization just as in the adults' athletics. Classical athletics competitions create a situation that conflicts with the principle of multiple competitions for children in terms of physical development. Besides, it is stated that limitation with one branch creates a loss of interest in the child (Gozzoli, Simohamed, El-Hebil, 2007).

In 2005, the IAAF decided to pursue a policy of making athletics in the school environment, the world's most popular sport in the world. Within the framework of this decision; with the aim of preparing the athletics-related future of children and young people in the most reliable way, they published a new program called "IAAF Kids' Athletics" for children aged 7-12. In this program, team games that include basic movement forms of athletics such as running, jumping and throwing are explained in an organization proper to school environment. Practices create the possibility of learning, discovering and practicing new things in every environment regardless big or small (schoolyard, playground, gym, park, land and various empty spaces). Provided games enable all children to benefit from the acquisitions of doing athletics in terms of health, education and personal development (Gozzoli, Simohamed, El-Hebil, 2007). With this structure, it has a different content from the athletics of adults. The general purpose can be interpreted as taking athletics to the world of children rather than taking them to the world of athletics.

All activities that created according to the new athletic concept designed to deliver motivational, attractive, easily accessible and educational athletics. The advantages of kids' athletics practices compared to other sports branches in terms of similar practices can be listed as:

- Ability to a large number of children present in the same event at the same time,
- Ability to test all movement forms of athletic branches (runs, jumps and throws),
- The implementation of athletics in the mixed team format (male-female mixed) .
- Simple implementation of the games and scoring simply based on the performance of the teams,
- Variation of technical requirements according to children's age and require different coordination and skills.

As a continuation and complement to this athletic training system, "13-15 Age Team Competitions" program is published. This new training system of the IAAF is a universal education program that addresses children and young people aged 13-15,

between the ages of 7-12, where the first steps to athletics are taken, in the age of entering the adult training period (Gozzoli, Simohamed, El-Hebil, 2007).

Nowadays IAAF's children and young athletics programs are now widely used in around 200 countries around the world. It has been transformed into official programs by many member federations. In parallel with the IAAF's work in Turkey, IAAF Kids' Athletics Program was brought up with the efforts of the Naili Moran Athletics Training Foundation in 2003. Volunteer activities by the members of the foundation, starting with the regional-oriented applications to schools and continuing education studies, drew the attention of the Athletics Federation of Turkey in 2008. The institution of sports activities of the Ministry of Education was also involved in the cooperation with the Foundation's Athletic Federation. The joint training activities, which were carried out in order to spread the Kids' athletics program in schools, were started with great excitement but the implementations were not successful. In this study, the problems encountered in achieving the objectives of the program will be examined and solutions will be tried to be prepared.

2. Method

This study was carried out with descriptive survey method in order to create solution suggestions with researching the problems encountered in the practices of "IAAF Kids' athletics" which was developed by IAAF, in Turkey. A descriptive design was created by articles written on children athletics and researching "kids' athletics" on internet search engines and researching electronic media.

3. Results

It was agreed that children's abilities should be investigated, developed and directed to the branches that they are capable of in a long term planning for success in sport (Balyi of, Way, Higgs, 2013). Especially in the early years of preschool and elementary school ages, with the development of basic movement skills it's aimed to gain movement literacy. Then, sportive literacy training, which is taught by teaching basic technical skills for various sports branches, is accepted as the determinant of future sportive success level. The athletics sport which carries basic movement skills within its structure, can make a significant contribution to the development of country sports when it is widely implemented with the game-based child athletics form. In addition, the importance of raising a healthy generation should be taken into account.

In the framework of these opinions, the education studies were initiated in framework of protocols that made between Naili Moran Athletics Training Foundation and Turkey Athletic Federation and he School's Physical Education and Sports Scouting Department (OBESID) and Ministry of National Education. Although the necessary training was given to the National Education Athletics Provincial Coordinators, the targeted success could not be achieved due to the lack of training materials to be provided by the federation to the pilot schools determined in the provinces. Despite the

negativities, the regional practices continued for a few years with the personal efforts of the coordinators in thirty provinces but the continuity was not achieved. In order to keep the program on the agenda and not to lose interest, “Kids’ Athletics Symposiums” were organized in 2009 and 2011 in cooperation with the Foundation and Federation. Abdel Malek El-Hebil, a member of the commission developing the IAAF Kids’ athletics program, attended the Symposium in 2009. During the meeting with him, IAAF support was requested in order to spread the program in our country. As a result, in 2011, the IAAF was organized tier training course under the coaching of A. Malek El-Hebil. It was planned that the trainers who completed the course to carry out the Kids’ athletics training courses organized by the federation in Turkey. However, nobody worked in the project except the two trainers who completed the course.

Within the scope of IAAF’s World Athletics Project, IAAF signed a five year protocol with Nestle company and became the main sponsor of the Kids’ athletics program with the aim of “*Let’s make athletics in schools a number one participation sports*”. With this cooperation, IAAF decided to help the member federations. In line with this decision, Turkey has been selected as one of the priority countries to carry out this project starting from 2012. Accordingly, in 2012, the IAAF made a four-year protocol with the Athletics Federation and provided approximately \$ 25,000 of financial support and 20 sets of training materials. According to the protocol, at least 12 courses should be made in Turkey and detailed reports were requested to be sent to the IAAF at two-month intervals for each completed course (IAAF letter dated 27 February 2012). However, after the IAAF’s warning letter on the reports, it was understood from the records of the federations that only four courses could be held until 2014.

When we evaluate the process between 2011 and 2014, we observe that the efforts of the federation to expand the Kids’ athletics program despite the cooperation with the IAAF has gradually decreased. One of the main reasons for this, on 05.11.2010, the General Directorate of Youth and Sports (SGM) and the Ministry of National Education signed the “Protocol on Cooperation on Youth, Physical Education, Sport Services and Activities ((GSB-MEB Protocol, 2010). With this protocol, school sports activities were transferred to the General Directorate of Sports and The School’s Physical Education and Sports Scouting Department under Ministry of National Education had no effect on it anymore. As a result, the cooperation protocol with the federation was disabled.

Another reason could be explained the federation’s focus on the Olympic Games in London in 2012 and the doping scandals after the Olympics. The first and second place medal in 1500 meters at the London Olympics created extraordinary happiness in the whole country. However, the developments in the following doping scandal resulted in the resignation of the president of the federation Mehmet Terzi on 1 August 2013. According to the Grand National Assembly of Turkey in sports events in the doping commission of inquiry report, Youth and Sports Ministry data, the number of athletes who had steroids last 10 years were 356. It is seen that 46 of these, are the athletes in athletics branch (Şahin, 2018). Especially the doping events involving champion athletes are very disappointing for children and young athletes who take

them as examples. They can create a perception that the way to achieve success is through the use of doping. In addition to this, it can create an obstacle for children to be directed to sports with the idea that the sport has deviated from the aim in the public.

As a result of the extraordinary congress held on 28 September 2013, Mehmet Terzi who was forced to resign after the doping events in athletics, former national athlete and sports director Fatih Çintımar was brought to the position of federation president. In 2014, the president of the federation, Çintımar, decided to protect the program. During his meeting with the IAAF, he stated that the protocol between 2012 and 2014 is not fully adhered to, but that the Kids' athletics project is important for the future of Turkish athletics and that necessary studies will be initiated to spread throughout the country. Çintımar appointed Necdet Ayaz, one of the former national athletes who worked as a bureaucrat under the Ministry of Sports, in order to plan and conduct these works as coordinator. "IAAF Kids' Athletics Training and Working Group" was created under the coordination of Ayaz. Especially, the intensive courses for preschool and primary school teachers, university students who study at sports education department, teachers of physical training and sports and first and second stage coaches were carried out from 2014 to 2016. With these courses, the IAAF was delivered with more than 12 courses for four years. After 2016, the courses are being carried out intensively within the Athletics Federation.

With the decision taken in 2013 within the structure of SGM, school sports activities carried out in 2014-2015 academic year were restructured. Especially in the context of sports games in primary schools, The sports festival, which includes "Kids' Athletics" practices for children aged 7-10, was put into the program. It is known that Aydın Cetin, a former national athlete who works in the unit which plans sports activities in SGM, is effective in taking Kids' athletics into the primary school program (Okulsportal, 2014-2015). This practice is regularly included in the programs (Okulsportal, 2015-2018). However, provincial and district organizing committees that organize school sports activities throughout the country cannot be said to be active in the implementation of this program. We observe that only teachers and coaches who have adopted the program from the beginning have been practiced in certain regions.

In response to this athletic-looking boy living in the age group 11-12 is located, is still based on elitism and Turkey Championship Group level, it is seen that the winner is rewarded and made Interclub interscholastic championship. Such competition organizations are pushing the children in the age of learning to the basic technical skills of more sports branches to become specializing at an early age. It is known that this situation decreases the level of performance to be achieved in the future and leads to an early age away from sports (Istvan Balyi I., Way R. Higgs C., 2013).

In the case of in-school practice, there are five hours of Physical Education activities in the first three years and five hours a week in a primary school education programs. In the fourth grade, the time allocated to this course falls into two hours. Moreover, these courses are only left to the class teachers. In primary schools, there are no field specialist physical education teachers. However, Religious Culture and Ethics,

Visual Arts and English courses can give field specialist branch teachers in primary schools.

In 2016, there was another significant development for the expansion of the Kids' athletics program. The Ministry of Education provided the opportunity to open courses with the IAAF Kids' athletics program as part of the Public Training Centers under the General Directorate of Lifelong Learning on the persistent initiatives of the Athletics Federation. (T.C. MEB HBÖGM, 2016). However, the opening of these courses is limited to the view of the program as they are in the competence of the directors of Public Education. In order to open a course, they must have a certificate of instructor from the Kids' athletics courses that the federation opens. Special attention is required to obtain permission to start a course and work. Initially, they have to create the working groups themselves. For this, first of all they should start working with the school principals who are looking to open a course in this area. After obtaining the permission of the school principals, it is compulsory to obtain the permission certificates from the parents of the students who will take part in the study group. They must also provide the training area and materials to be used in training. After the completion of these stages, it is possible to obtain permission to open the application file from the Public Education Center. Under these conditions, it is difficult to say that courses are widely opened.

As a result of the efforts made in 2014 about kids' athleticism, it can be said that there are positive developments in our country. However, it is difficult to say that the practices made are under the control and spread at desired level in throughout Turkey. Because, starting with basic sports training such as children athletics program, teaching the basic technical skills of the athletics branches and introducing the branch-specific skills requires a long-term study organization. After this stage, a period of 12-15 years is needed when determination and development of the elites are taken into account ([Istvan Balyi I, Way R Higgs C, 2013](#)). It should also be noted that the success of such a program depends on the cooperation of organizations such as federations, clubs, schools, families and the media.

One issue that needs to be addressed in terms of federations and clubs is that the athletes with high-level performance are made as Turkish citizens. Clubs which compete in the super league has right to make compete three foreign athletes according to the Athletics Federation (TAF, 2018). Clubs who want to be Turkey champion and be successful in European Championships, benefited from the relevant law articles and take actions to made athletes who have international success in their branch Turkish citizens briefly and to the point (Göçmenbüro, 2018). In 2000, a foreign athlete became a Turkish citizen and this number increased to four in 2008, ten in 2012 and eighteen in 2016. The athletes, who were briefly made Turkish citizen by the clubs, have also gained the right to represent our country in international competitions with Turkish passports (Hürmeriç Altunsöz ve Koçak, 2017). This practice causes intense discussions in the sport public. In fact, the issue that needs to be discussed and focused is what should be done to raise the better than these athletes who were made as Turkish citizens. It is necessary to create skill models that proper the conditions of our country which has 12 million children potential under 14 ages and based on scientific data and practice this

patiently. The project work which has been put forward at regular intervals in the SGM, has not been successful since it was planned to cover the whole country instead of starting with pilot studies.

3. Conclusions and Recommendations

To educate high-level athletes, it is necessary to develop the sports culture of the individuals in the society. The Ministry of Sports, the General Directorate of Youth and Sports, Federations, Sports Clubs aims and objectives require joint action as defined by written rules. When the institutions and stakeholders of the state do not have the ability to act jointly on issues such as “kids’ athletics”, the future of the youth risks the future of society. In the societies where the majority of the total population are given the opportunity to play sports, it is seen that talents naturally occur. In order to practice of The IAAF Kids’ athletics program, which is thought to be an important contribution to the education of children aged 7-12 years, widely in our country as well as other about two hundred countries in the world, it can be suggested that relevant institutions should be act in cooperation and following measurements should be taken.

- For the continuity and success of the program, it is important to start the studies with a controllable group. For this purpose, priority pilot provinces should be determined and pilot schools should be selected where regular practices can be made in these provinces.
- All children, including persons with disabilities, should be included in the organization without discrimination in these schools.
- In-service training should be provided to primary school class teachers and secondary school physical education teachers who are selected as pilot about children athletics.
- The equipment to be used in the organization of children athletics for pilot schools should be provided by the Athletics Federation.
- In these schools, the participation of families should be ensured in and out of the school and kids’ athletic organizations.
- For the efficiency of physical education and play lessons and kids’ athletics practices in the primary schools chosen as pilots, firstly, field specialist physical education teachers who are equipped with special knowledge should be assigned. Besides, physical education teachers should be appointed to all primary schools throughout the country.
- In the pilot primary and secondary schools, kids’ athletic activities should be organized between the classroom, between the classes and between the close schools. These organizations can be applied in the school garden or in the sport halls.
- The sports training model should be benefited for contribute to the development of sports culture in general and athletics culture in particular.

- Beginning after the first phase of the practices, basic test batteries for the predisposition to sports should be determined and applied to the children and their development should be followed.
- After the practices within the schools are completed, children who are interested in athleticism and whose abilities are observed should be directed to fieldwork that will be carried out throughout the year under the supervision of specially trained coaches.
- It is important to repeat the general and special test batteries which are determined according to age, at appropriate intervals throughout the training stages in the field.
- The evaluation of the test results should be followed by the development of children and their branch-specific abilities.
- By guiding the branch to the appropriate age, quality training environments should be created and the athletes who will represent Turkish athletics in international organizations should be worked on in order to reach the potential of the athlete.
- Studies that start with pilot provinces and schools should be extended in a controlled manner to include other provinces.

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