



Acceptance of Cheating, Gamesmanship, and Winning Proportionality: A Gender-Based Comparative Study in Youth Sports

Syarifatunnisa*

Indonesia University of Education, Indonesia

Article Info

Article History:

Received August 2024

Revised August 2024

Accepted September 2024

Available Online October 2024

Keywords:

Acceptance of cheating, gamesmanship, proportionality in winning, young athlete, gender differences

Abstract

Moral decision-making in youth sports is a critical area of research that explores the ethical attitudes of young athletes. This study examines gender-based differences in three dimensions of moral decision-making: Acceptance of Cheating (AC), Acceptance of Gamesmanship (AG), and Keeping Winning in Proportion (KWIP) among children aged 12–13 years actively participating in sports. This study employed a comparative research design with a purposive sampling method. A total of 223 participants completed the AMDYSQ-2 (Attitudes to Moral Decision-Making in Youth Sport Questionnaire). Data were analyzed descriptively and using the Mann-Whitney U Test to assess gender differences. The findings revealed significant gender differences in AC and AG, with males exhibiting higher acceptance of cheating and gamesmanship compared to females. No significant differences were found for KWIP, indicating a shared perspective between genders on maintaining proportionality in winning. Additionally, trends showed higher acceptance of unethical behaviors in the "Poor" category for both genders. These results underscore the importance of addressing gender-specific attitudes in moral decision-making through targeted interventions that promote fairness and ethical reasoning. Future research should explore broader age ranges and cultural contexts to generalize findings and develop tailored interventions for fostering moral values in youth sports.

*Correspondence Address : Jl. Dr. Setiabudhi No. 229, Bandung. , Indonesia
E-mail : syarifa@upi.edu

INTRODUCTION

Youth sports serve as a vital platform for fostering positive youth development (PYD), encouraging not only physical competence but also the internalization of core values such as respect, fairness, and teamwork. Within this context, ethical development emerges as a central concern, particularly as young athletes frequently encounter situations requiring moral judgment. However, alongside these developmental opportunities, youth sports are increasingly challenged by the normalization of unethical behaviors, including cheating, gamesmanship, and an excessive emphasis on winning at all costs (Hurst et al., 2023; Özsarı & Görücü, 2023). Such practices risk undermining the pedagogical value of sport and threatening its integrity.

Recent studies have emphasized the importance of understanding moral decision-making processes in young athletes, particularly in relation to the factors that shape ethical attitudes and behavior. Research highlights that moral disengagement—a cognitive mechanism that allows individuals to rationalize unethical behavior—is a key predictor of antisocial conduct in sport settings (Danioni et al., 2021; Hurst et al., 2023). Although some forms of unethical behavior are often framed as strategic or normative within competitive contexts, they remain fundamentally at odds with the principles of sportsmanship and fair play (Alemdag, 2019).

Moreover, gender differences in moral reasoning have been consistently observed. Male athletes are more likely to tolerate or justify unethical behaviors, whereas female athletes typically demonstrate stronger commitments to fairness and prosocial behavior (Gürpınar et al., 2020; Özsarı & Görücü, 2023). These patterns are commonly attributed to differential socialization, with males being encouraged to value competitiveness and assertiveness, while females are often steered toward relational and ethical considerations (Kavussanu & Stanger, 2017).

Despite this growing body of research,

there remains a significant gap in studies focusing on younger adolescents, particularly those aged 12–13, who are undergoing critical stages of moral and identity development. Existing research tends to focus on older youth or elite athletes, leaving early sport experiences underexplored in relation to moral growth (Özsarı & Görücü, 2023).

Given these gaps, the present study aims to examine gender-based differences in moral decision-making among 12–13-year-old athletes, particularly regarding their attitudes toward cheating, gamesmanship, and fairness. By integrating insights from recent empirical work, this study seeks to inform the design of ethical interventions in youth sport that are both developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive.

METHOD

This study employs a comparative research design, aiming to examine differences across three indicators of attitudes toward moral decision-making in youth sports based on gender. In this context, the study focuses on understanding how male and female participants differ in their ethical attitudes and decision-making processes in sports, providing valuable insights into gender-specific behaviors and perspectives in youth sports environments.

Participants and Sample

The population for this study consists of primary school students aged 12 to 13 years who have actively participated in organized sports activities over the past year. This age group represents a critical stage of moral and ethical development in sports. A total of 144 participants were selected through purposive sampling, ensuring a balanced representation of both male and female athletes.

Procedure

The data were collected using the Attitudes to Moral Decision-Making in Youth Sport Questionnaire-2 (AMDYSQ-2) (Whitehead et al., 2013). This instrument evaluates partici-

pants' attitudes toward moral decision-making in youth sports across three dimensions: Acceptance of Cheating (AC): Measures participants' willingness to justify dishonest actions that violate the rules of the sport for unfair advantage, reflecting a lack of adherence to fair play principles (Adell et al., 2019).

Acceptance of Gamesmanship (AG): Assesses the extent to which individuals endorse manipulative tactics that, while not explicitly breaking rules, undermine the spirit of fairness and ethical conduct in sports (Lee et al., 2007).

Keeping Winning in Proportion (KWIP): Captures the ability to maintain a balanced perspective on the importance of winning, emphasizing ethical behavior and sportsmanship over achieving success at any cost (Ntoumanis, 2013).

Before data collection, informed consent was provided to the school principal, teachers, and participants, outlining the purpose, procedures, and confidentiality of the study. After reading and understanding the informed consent, participants and their guardians gave their approval to take part in the research voluntarily.

Participants completed the questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale, where higher scores reflected stronger agreement with moral or ethical behavior in sports. The AMDYSQ-2 has demonstrated strong psychometric properties, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.80, confirming its reliability and validity as a tool for assessing ethical attitudes in youth sports.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data were first analyzed descriptively to provide an overview of trends for each indicator. Scatter plots were used to visualize gender-based trends across categories of "Excellent," "Good," "Fair," and "Poor," highlighting key patterns in attitudes toward moral decision-making.

The main analysis utilized the Mann-Whitney U Test to determine whether signifi-

cant gender differences exist across the three dimensions of AC, AG, and KWIP. This non-parametric test was chosen due to the non-normal distribution of the data (Dixon & Woolner, 2016). A significance level of $p < 0.05$ was applied to identify statistically significant differences.

RESULTS

Based on the descriptive analysis, the mean score of AC (acceptance of cheating), AG (acceptance of gamesmanship), and KWIP (keeping winning in proportion) among children were $M = 40.8$ ($SD = 14.955$), $M = 47.15$ ($SD = 14.061$), and $M = 77.05$ ($SD = 13.481$) respectively. The mean score based on gender are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Comparison of AC, AG, and KWIP based on Gender

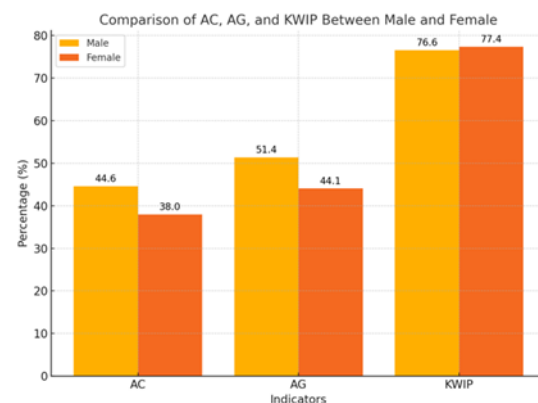


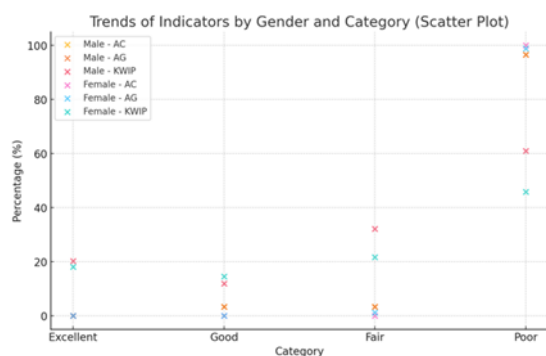
Figure 1 shows the comparison of males and females across the three indicators highlights key gender-based differences. For Acceptance of Cheating (AC), males demonstrate a higher tolerance at 44.6% compared to females at 38%. Similarly, for Acceptance of Gamesmanship (AG), males score 51.4%, surpassing females at 44.1%, indicating a greater acceptance of unethical strategies. In contrast, both genders exhibit similar values for Keeping Winning in Proportion (KWIP), with males at 76.6% and females at 77.4%, reflecting a shared commitment to maintaining proportionality in winning.

The descriptive analysis highlights that males demonstrate higher acceptance of unethi-

cal practices such as cheating and gamesmanship compared to females. This aligns with previous studies, such as those by Alemdag (2019), which indicate that boys often rationalize unethical behaviors as necessary for competitive success. Bandura's theory of moral disengagement further supports this, suggesting that individuals, particularly males, may justify unethical actions by cognitively reconstructing the behavior to appear morally acceptable (Hurst et al., 2023).

Moreover, the trends of indicators are analyzed based on gender regarding the percentages of AC, AG, and KWIP (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Trends of Indicators by Gender and Category



The scatter plot reveals notable trends in the three indicators—Acceptance of Cheating (AC), Acceptance of Gamesmanship (AG), and Keeping Winning in Proportion (KWIP)—across gender and categories. For both AC and AG, the acceptance levels are near zero for categories "Excellent" and "Good," indicating very low tolerance for unethical behavior among students in these groups. However, there is a sharp rise in the "Poor" category, with males at 96.6% and females even higher at 100% for AC, and similarly high values for AG (96.6% for males and 98.8% for females).

This suggests that students in the "Poor" category are significantly more accepting of unethical practices in sports. In contrast, KWIP demonstrates a more varied pattern. While males show higher proportions of maintaining balance in the "Excellent" (20.3%) and "Fair" (32.2%) categories, females display slightly better scores in "Good" (14.5%). How-

ever, in the "Poor" category, males exhibit a higher imbalance (61%) compared to females (45.8%), highlighting greater difficulty in managing the importance of winning. Overall, the trends suggest that students in the lower categories are more likely to accept unethical behavior, with gender-specific differences observed in how students manage the proportionality of winning.

DISCUSSION

The descriptive analysis highlights that males demonstrate higher acceptance of unethical practices such as cheating (AC) and gamesmanship (AG) compared to females. This aligns with previous studies, such as those by Alemdag (2019), which indicate that boys often rationalize unethical behaviors as necessary for competitive success.

The relatively consistent scores for Keeping Winning in Proportion (KWIP) across genders suggest that both males and females uphold intrinsic values of fairness and proportionality in winning. This finding is consistent with Mortimer et al. (2020), who noted that moral values, such as fairness and respect, are universally acknowledged in sports. However, the gender disparity in AC and AG scores emphasizes the need for targeted educational interventions that address how boys perceive and justify unethical behaviors. Programs like True Sport and Sport Values in Every Classroom, which promote ethics in sports, could be effective in fostering a stronger adherence to fair play among male athletes.

The scatter plot trends demonstrate that students categorized as "Poor" exhibit significantly higher acceptance levels of cheating and gamesmanship. This is consistent with Shields and Bredemeier's (Bredemeier & Shields, 2019) findings that lower moral reasoning often correlates with higher tolerance for unethical behaviors, particularly in less skilled or lower-performing athletes. The greater acceptance in the "Poor" category may reflect reduced emphasis on moral development or less exposure to ethical coaching practices in these groups.

In contrast, KWIP scores are more balanced across categories, indicating that the intrinsic value of proportionality in winning is less influenced by performance levels. This aligns with Kavussanu's (2013) argument that intrinsic motivations, such as respect for fairness, remain stable across varying skill levels. However, males in the "Poor" category showed higher difficulty managing the importance of winning compared to females. This imbalance could reflect social norms that pressure males to prioritize success over ethical considerations, further highlighting the need for tailored interventions that address these societal expectations.

The Mann-Whitney U test results confirm significant gender differences in AC and AG, reinforcing earlier findings that males are more likely to accept unethical behaviors in sports. The higher tolerance for cheating and gamesmanship among males is consistent with research by Whitehead et al. (2013), which emphasizes that boys are often socialized to prioritize competitiveness and outcomes over fairness. Additionally, Hurst et al. (2023) found that moral identity significantly influences the likelihood of cheating, with males demonstrating weaker moral constraints in competitive scenarios.

In contrast, the lack of significant gender differences in KWIP highlights a shared value for fairness in prioritizing winning among both males and females. This consistency aligns with Mortimer et al. (2021), who identified fairness as a universally recognized principle in youth sports. The findings suggest that while boys may rationalize unethical practices more readily, both genders uphold the broader ethical perspective that winning should not come at the cost of integrity.

Overall, these results underscore the importance of addressing gender-specific attitudes toward moral decision-making in sports through educational initiatives that emphasize fair play, ethical reasoning, and the intrinsic value of sportsmanship. Integrating moral education into coaching practices can help reduce

the acceptance of unethical behaviors and foster a more equitable sports environment.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals significant gender-based differences in moral decision-making in youth sports, with males showing higher acceptance of cheating (AC) and gamesmanship (AG) compared to females, while both genders demonstrated consistent attitudes toward keeping winning in proportion (KWIP). These findings emphasize the importance of fostering ethical behaviors and reducing tolerance for unethical practices through targeted interventions. However, the study is limited by its focus on a narrow age group (12–13 years), the absence of cross-cultural comparisons, and the use of cross-sectional data, which limits the ability to observe changes over time. Future research should expand the age range, incorporate cross-cultural perspectives to explore sociocultural influences, adopt longitudinal designs to track the evolution of moral attitudes. Additionally, experimental studies could investigate the effectiveness of value-based interventions in fostering ethical behavior in youth sports.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to Direktorat Riset, Teknologi, dan Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat, Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Tinggi, Riset dan Teknologi Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset dan Teknologi Tahun Anggaran 2024 Grant Number: Number 082/E5/PG.02.00.PL/2024. We also thank the Indonesia Endowment Funds for Education (LPDP) Center for Higher Education Funding (BPPT) for sponsoring the publication of the research.

REFERENCE

- Adell C. F. L., Castillo, I., & Álvarez Solves, O. (2019). Personal and sport values, goal orientations, and moral attitudes in youth basketball. *Revista de psicología del deporte*, 28(3), 100-105.
- Alemdag, E. (2019). The relationship between

- moral decision-making attitudes and fair play behaviors of student-athletes. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 8(4), 100–106.
- Alemdag, S. E. R. D. A. R. (2019). Investigation of prosocial and antisocial behaviors of young athletes in terms of moral decision making attitudes. *Pedagogics, psychology, medical-biological problems of physical training and sports*, (3), 112–117.
- Bredemeier, B. L., & Shields, D. L. (2019). Social justice, character education, and sport: A position statement. *Quest*, 71(2), 202–214.
- Danioni, F., Barni, D., & Rosnati, R. (2021). Moral disengagement and antisocial behavior in sports: A systematic review. *Journal of Human Sport and Exercise*, 16(4), 902–916.
- Dixon, P., & Woolner, P. (2012). Quantitative data analysis: using SPSS. RJ Briggs, M. Coleman, & M. Morrison (Ed.). *Research Methods in Educational Leadership & Management*, 340–363.
- Gürpınar, B., Karakoc, O., & Eroglu, M. (2020). Moral decision-making attitudes in sport: A study on gender and playing position. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 8(1), 45–52.
- Gürpınar, B., Mutlu, T., & Ayvalli, M. (2020). Investigation of the Relationship between Attitudes to Moral Decision Making and Moral Disengagement in Youth Student Basketball Players. *Pamukkale Journal of Sport Sciences*, 11(3), 20–27.
- Hurst, J., Hall, S., & Kavussanu, M. (2023). Moral disengagement and antisocial sport behavior: The role of motivational climate and goal orientation. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 64, 102368.
- Hurst, P., Kavussanu, M., Swain, J., & Ring, C. (2023). The role of moral identity and regret on cheating in sport. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 21(2), 230–248.
- Kavussanu, M., & Stanger, N. (2017). Moral behavior in sport. *Current opinion in psychology*, 16, 185–192.
- Kavussanu, M., Stanger, N., & Boardley, I. D. (2013). The Prosocial and Antisocial Behaviour in Sport Scale: Further evidence for construct validity and reliability. *Journal of sports sciences*, 31(11), 1208–1221.
- Lee, M. J., Whitehead, J., & Ntoumanis, N. (2007). Development of the attitudes to moral decision-making in youth sport questionnaire (AMDYSQ). *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 8(3), 369–392.
- Mortimer, H., Whitehead, J., Kavussanu, M., Gürpınar, B., & Ring, C. (2021). Values and clean sport. *Journal of sports sciences*, 39(5), 533–541.
- Ntoumanis, N. (2013). How important are ethical attitudes?: Development of the Attitudes to Moral Decisions in Youth Sport Questionnaire. In *Values in Youth Sport and Physical Education* (pp. 66–84). Routledge.
- Özsarı, T. A., & Görücü, A. (2023). Examining moral decision-making attitudes of pre-adolescent athletes in terms of gender and type of sport. *Journal of Human Sport and Exercise*, 18(2), 330–341.
- Whitehead, J., Telfer, H., & Lambert, J. (2013). Values in youth sport and physical education. In *Values in Youth Sport and Physical Education*. 230–237