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Social participation through sports: Discourse analysis through innovative teaching techniques

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Βιβλιογραφική αναφορά:

Social participation through sports: Discourse analysis through innovative teaching techniques

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Abstract

Nowadays, the world is experiencing an intense and prolonged socio-economic crisis, which has been enhanced by the health crisis due to coronavirus. These crises had also a huge effect on the educational system. The academic world had to adjust rapidly and shift its teaching methods and tools to the demands of remote learning. These new circumstances are even more challenging in educational programs and courses that promote pluralism and include students from all over the world. In this paper, we study the opinions of the students at the Master Degree Program with the title "Olympic Studies, Olympic Education, Organization and Management of Olympic Events" offered by The Department of Sports Organization and Management of the Faculty of Human Movement and Quality of Life Sciences of the University of Peloponnese with the support of the International Olympic Academy for the academic year of 2021-2022. Our study aims to draw conclusions about students' feelings about distance education, participation and how they understand leadership and the relationship between sports and active social participation. Furthermore, we attempt to correlate the participation in sports with the active social participation and the contribution of sports to create a more transparent framework to the social integration of weak social groups.

Keywords

Distance learning, active social participation, social integration, sentiment analysis.

1. Introduction

Due to the pandemic, social life has been confined by restrictive measures and has become more introspective and individualistic. As the protests for democratic human rights and social justice grow, the political polarization is deepening. The increasing social inequalities and the hard competitive working conditions create to citizens an attitude of denial for active involvement and participation in public affairs, especially in groups who live in poverty, are unemployed or immigrants who do not speak the official language of the host country. The potential of sport as a means of social integration has been sufficiently documented (Green & Hardman, 2000; Niessen, 2000). The opportunities provided by sport programs to support the social integration and social cohesion in host communities are increasingly being exploited in many European Union member states. A wide range of innovative programs are already being implemented.

The Master Degree Program titled "Olympic Studies, Olympic Education, Organization and Management of Olympic Events" ¹ offered by The Department of Sports Organization and Management of the Faculty of Human Movement and Quality of Life Sciences of the University of Peloponnese with the support of the International Olympic Academy is an innovative educational program that includes the three main axis of the Olympic Movement: Education, Culture and Sports. The objectives of the program are to provide the necessary knowledge and contribute to the research on issues of Olympic philosophy, Olympic Pedagogy, Olympic Education, organization and management of Olympic Games, Mega sport events and in general Olympic and sport studies. Thus, the future executives that will organize and direct Olympic and athletic institutions and events will be able not only to promote the growth of Olympic education on an international level and create a scientific background for the growth of sports, but to support the diffusion of the Olympic ideal about equal participation worldwide.

Under normal circumstances, the courses take place at the facilities of the International Olympic Academy in Ancient Olympia. Due to the conditions created by the pandemic the curriculum was conducted for 2021 remotely. The rapidly changing academic world demands flexibility and agility for sustainable education and methodological training. Students should be encouraged to pay attention and participate during the courses. For this purpose, during the course "Qualitative Research Methods", we utilize google forms, videos, brainstorming, role plays and the platform Klaxoon, which allows interaction and immediately provides statistical results about students' participation, debates, scores in tests etc. The main axis is the perception of sport as a means that could function in its participatory form in order to deal with the difficulties of social integration and active participation. The most important goal is to bring together young people from different backgrounds (ethnicity, nationality, religion, career, gender expression etc.), the development of cooperation, reconciliation and sustainable relationships between them. Every boundary that separates them becomes bridges of peace, development and sustainability and promotes peace, coexistence and acceptance of diversity. The basic theories in this course are about participatory governance, consultation, leadership and actor centered institutionalism theory.

Besides the general objectives the course also aims to promote teamwork and collaboration. In the digital age we live in today, communication and collaboration can become extremely challenging. At the same time, young students enjoy the opportunity to achieve communicational skills combined with administrative knowledge that will enable them to understand the world, develop into future leaders capable of

¹ <https://olympicmaster.uop.gr>

communicating and implementing artistic and social programs for the common good. Critical thinking and active listening aim to create inspired characters and types of active young leaders, who strive to create a better community based on peace, acceptance, and respect for diversity. This will be the answer to whatever global shifts mean for governments, nations, communities and individuals. Our study aims to draw conclusions about students' feelings about distance education, participation and how we can better educate and pass on the necessary knowledge to future organizers of sporting events, executives close to children, and young people involved in sports, in order to cultivate Olympic values and active political participation. Furthermore, we attempt to correlate the participation in sports with the active social participation and the contribution of sports to create a more transparent framework to the social integration of weak social groups. The data used were collected in November 2021.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows: Section 2 presents the related work, while Section 3 discusses our research goals and the methodology we used. Section 4 presents in detail the results of our research. Conclusions and future work are discussed in Section 5.

2. Related work

Upon the spread of Covid-19 pandemic the domain of online teaching and learning is experiencing great changes as universities need to urgently adopt tools and practices of distance education. Universities are implementing emergency plans towards the fully digital transformation of their educational modules, to assist students in smoothly adapting to this new learning process, the so-called *online academic era*². Traditionally, distance education refers to the exploitation of online teaching methods and tools, alone or in a combined/blended learning mode in order to offer pedagogical concepts. Today, distance education does not only refer to online education, but to a wide spectrum of technologies used in teaching and learning (Bozkurt & Sharma., 2020). Distance education usually includes Internet-based online learning and teaching practices, which refer to educational activities conducted solely via the Internet (Allen et al., 2016). Recently, Hodges et al. (2020) explained that online learning relies on pedagogical design principles adopted to Internet technologies.

In this online educational environment, the most frequently experienced emotions of students are joy, frustration, boredom, and anxiety. These emotions tend to be experienced in technology-mediated learning activities like for instance educational games and intelligent tutoring systems. Obviously, the reasons that affect emotions in online learning are different than those in the traditional learning mode. For instance, Stephan et al. (2019) have found that students who attended an online course reported higher levels of boredom, anxiety, and anger, and lower levels of enjoyment compared to students who attend a traditional course. Therefore, it is a big research challenge on how to motivate students in online learning in order to increase the level of joy and simultaneously decrease the level of boredom, anxiety, and anger. Towards this end, several online educational platforms, like Klaxoon³ and Kahoot⁴, have been developed,

² https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=120_120544-

[8ksud7oaj2&title=Education_responses_to_Covid-19_Embracing_digital_learning_and_online_collaboration](https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=120_120544-8ksud7oaj2&title=Education_responses_to_Covid-19_Embracing_digital_learning_and_online_collaboration)

³ <https://www.klaxoon.com>

⁴ <https://www.kahoot.com>

which offer game-based learning activities to capture students' interest and increase the level of their positive emotions.

For the second research question, according to previous studies, the social integration of individuals is enhanced by their participation in sports activities (whether they are athletes or sports agents, executives etc.) and by their voluntary activity and action. In this process of socialization, characteristics such as gender, nationality, religion, etc. are overshadowed by collective and voluntary action, which create the framework of social inclusion. In his book *Bowling Alone* (2000), Robert Putnam mentions how the rates of non-participation and alienation of citizens from public institutions (church, cultural associations, sports clubs and political organizations) have increased in the United States of America. Putnam believes that participation in social networks and voluntary organizations is very important for the completion and satisfaction of public life. Citizens' engagement and participation in social networks allows independent subjects to express and communicate their views to the local government. Citizens become more responsible and take on responsibilities and thus develop a sense of good citizenship. They learn to consult, acquire communication skills, develop dialogue and disagree constructively and, above all, think in terms of the common good. In general, sport is a tool of well-being and fitness, which proves to be beneficial for improving the self-esteem and efficiency of people involved in sports. As various studies have shown, sports people draw strength for constant participation in public affairs (Campbell & Jones, 1994; Martin, 1999; Green & Hardman, 2000).

The debate over the concept of "good citizen" is extensive, and there is no undisputed general model of "good citizen." On a large scale, the prevailing concepts in the philosophical and academic debate (Conover 1995; Denters et al., 2007; Gabriel & Torcal, 2007) are: in the traditional-elitist view, a good citizen obeys the law, trusts the political institutions and is loyal to the society. Other perspectives, on the other hand, agree that the good citizen is also required to have a sense of activism: in the liberal view the elements of the traditional-elitist view must go hand in hand with participatory values (Denters et al., 2007). This strengthens the participation in elections and procedures for the formation of bodies. The Community's view, on the other hand, focuses on the relationship between members of the community. In this view, active participation in public space and solidarity are key elements of a good citizen. In addition, a key characteristic of a good citizen is active participation in political decision-making processes (Denters et al., 2007; Kymlicka & Norman, 1994). Participation in institutions shapes and educates good citizens. At the second level, citizens feel involved and responsible for political decisions that concern them as members of a wider whole. Finally, the legitimacy that results from participation leads to the peaceful acceptance of political decisions and ultimately creates a strong social fabric and strong social cohesion which is the main issue in a modern intercultural society that shifted the government to governance (Pateman, 1970; Barber, 1984; Haus & Heinelt, 2004; Cain et al., 2006).

3. Research statement and Methodology

We summarize the goals of our study in the following research questions:

RQ1: Will distance learning for students from all over the world, who have not previously met and worked together, be a new and exciting experience? What teaching methods can we utilize to keep students active, taking into account that these students are involved in sports?

RQ2: How do students understand the correlation between sports and active social participation?

The first research question is about the teaching technique and tools we will utilize for teaching qualitative research methods remotely and simultaneously encourage students to participate, show interest and get involved in the teaching experience. We take under consideration that our students consist an audience that comes from all over the world, as Figure 1 shows, is involved with sports (former athletes, coaches, etc.) and above all, they expected an exciting educational experience in Ancient Olympia, but due to the pandemic the whole Master's program has been carried out remotely. To reach this goal we used the platform Klaxoon which allows interaction and provides a variety of educational tools (videos, presentation) and tests not only about the evaluation of knowledge, but to reveal students' attitude and mood towards the course. Additionally, we created different groups and separate "rooms" in the Teams platform for each group. Each group had to think of a topic about qualitative research, create the main framework and present it in the classroom so the others would make comments according to the theory.

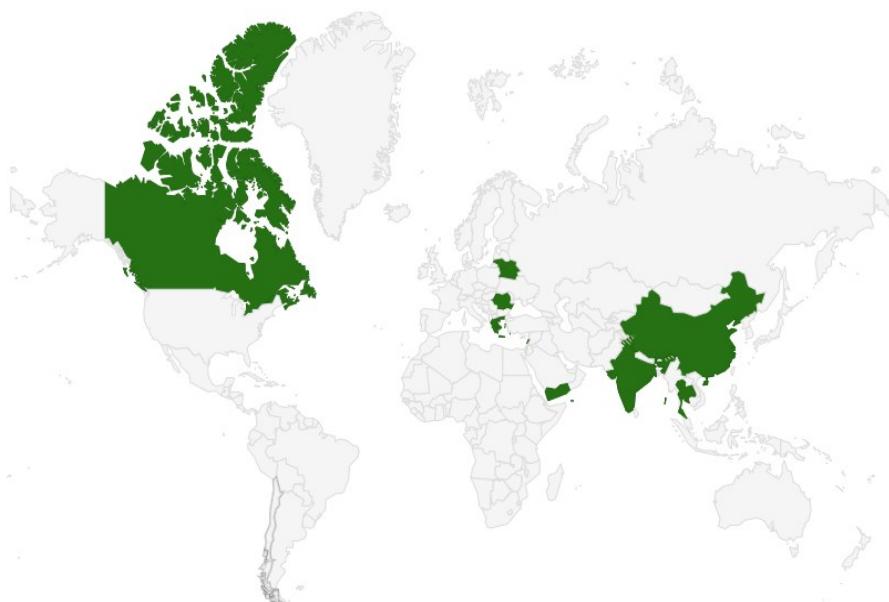


Figure 1. The countries of residence of the students (Algeria, Belarus, Botswana, Canada, China, Greece, India, Lebanon, Lithuania, Romania, Thailand, and Yemen).

The second main research question refers to the way this certain audience understands the correlation between sports and active social participation. Thus, their perception over this topic is very important, given the fact that our students will be the future executives who will organize big athletic events and have a close relationship with children and young people who practice sports. The course aims to assist students in deepening their understanding on active participation in political matters through sports. Most specifically, this course focuses on the preparation of individuals to develop skills of moderators in local societies between different actors (political leaders, stakeholders, cultural operators, athletes, citizens, immigrants, refugees etc.) dealing with the perspective of multicultural societies in the midst of social, political and economic upheaval that portend significant transformations across the globe. To address this research question, we utilized a google form questionnaire with open questions. The data were qualitatively processed and analyzed.

In order to measure (a) how much excitement the process of distance learning conveys to the students and (b) whether the specialized teaching methods that are utilized keep the students active, we conducted a sentiment analysis by capturing their emotional states through their answers of the questions included in that form. The questions and the corresponding answers will be presented in Section 4.

This study was based on primary research that constitutes its originality and contribution. The structure of the course was through the Klaxoon platform. Through this we presented the theoretical framework. This was followed by a script which the students read and answered a series of comprehension questions. In between there were questions about how students feel during the course, if they have any wishes or suggestions and more generally interactive activities. The students were then divided into groups and separate rooms per group. Each group presented their own proposal for quality research related to sports issues and then presented it to the whole class accepting comments and answering questions. At the end there was a quiz that included comprehension questions from the entire content of the course and an anonymous Google form questionnaire. The primary research was conducted in the answers through the Klaxoon platform and a Google form questionnaire with open questions to all students. The purpose was to record the opinions and assessments of students about the connection between participation in sports and participation in the public. The answers were then grouped and the results of the questions under investigation were presented in order to draw conclusions about the main research question. The combination of the above methods and techniques that constitute the methodology of empirical research was necessary for the integrated approach and research of the basic working hypotheses, as mentioned in a previous section.

We analyzed the answers to the questions posed using natural language processing techniques, and more specifically sentiment analysis (Liu, 2010), which is the process of detecting positive or negative sentiment in text. Sentiment analysis is one of the most important and commonly used natural language processing features. Sentiment is the classification of emotions extracted from a piece of text, speech, or document. While we typically analyze emotions to capture feelings, such as anger, sadness, joy, or fear, sentiment is a higher-level classifier that divides the spectrum of emotions into positive, negative, and neutral. There are a variety of use cases that need natural language processing to extract key insights and determine key business decisions. In this analysis, we used the IBM Watson Natural Language Understanding⁵ engine (NLU). We submitted each answer to the NLU API using the Python programming language (version 3.8.8) and the corresponding libraries. NLU replied in terms of JSON objects, which included the sentiment and emotion scores.

4. Evaluation

In this section, we analyze the answers provided to the questions posed. Moreover, we perform a sentiment analysis (a) to identify the most important entities annotated by sentiment scores, and (b) to detect the emotions conveyed by the corresponding answers.

5.1 Analysis of the Answers

As mentioned in the first research question, one of our main goals was to find out if and to what extent the distance learning techniques we applied satisfied our students. All our students were satisfied by these distance learning techniques and this was reflected

⁵ <https://www.ibm.com/cloud/watson-natural-language-understanding>

in their answers. “*It was a unique learning experience, very interactive and interesting. I really enjoyed it.*”, “*It was a very communicative teaching session and it helped me understand and concentrate through the whole lesson*”, were some of the answers.

Among the first questions, arose the question as to why the students chose this particular postgraduate program. Almost all the answers refer to the willingness to understand the evolution of sports from ancient times, to learn about the Olympic values and Olympic education and in general to gain knowledge about organizing big athletic events. Almost one tenth of the students express the desire of an academic or research career in the domain of sports. One fourth of our students declared that the main reason for choosing this Master’s Degree program was the desire to broaden the knowledge on specific topics such as gender issues and sports, how to further develop the Olympic Education program in schools and connect my education background to sports in order to help develop future sports education programs. The Olympic values have been a source of great inspiration especially through hard times and they also believe in the educational and social power of sports. They strongly believe that sports have a great social role and sports programs around the world can help create a better world, better people and communities. “*Sports can be a solution to social problems and political problems in a modern society that needs solutions on large scales more and more*”, says one of our students. “*The reason why I want to pursue the program is more than gaining the knowledge I need in order to be a part of the social change through sports, but the desire to have a community and network of my own of people dedicated to sports and its ability to produce solutions for the challenging world we are living in*”, writes another student.

Subsequently, we posed a question about the feelings that arise when an athlete or a sports team of the students’ country participates in a big athletic event. Almost all the answers from students who come from small or poor countries showed the same feelings: pride, enthusiasm and joy. “*I always feel proud about all the athletes of my country that participate in big athletic events even if they don't make it to the finals or win any medal. The fact that they are competing and participating in sports events regardless of all the crises that we are enduring, that makes me so happy and actually gives me hope in this small country*”, writes a student from Lebanon. “*It is a proud moment for me to see athletes or teams from my country participating and performing well at international level as it marks your country's presence at global level*”, declared a student from Romania. On the other hand, students from bigger countries seem to be more restrained and declare that their feelings depend on the respect they pay for certain athletes.

Regarding the question whether an athlete could be an appropriate political leader and under which circumstances, the opinions differ. Most of the students believe that an athlete is a well-balanced person in terms of physical, mental, social and emotional equilibrium. Consequently, this well balanced person can lead any organization well and tend to build peace and develop the world. Also, there are certain traits such as group cohesion, leadership qualities, fair play, respect and a motivator which can help an athlete to be an appropriate and successful political leader. “*Yes, I do think that an athlete could be an appropriate political leader because well-known athletes with values and integrity are already people that others look up to. Many Olympic level athletes have experienced political issues and worldwide matters within their sports, and definitely offer a unique view and perspective. Example- Black Lives Matter- George Floyd- Colin Kaepernick takes a knee in protest of police brutality on unarmed black citizens and other more recent athlete protests*”, is the answer of a student. Other students believe that the result of one’s athletic achievements is not the criteria for a

political career. Some students say that there is a difference between being a good leader and a good athlete. *“Being a country leader means taking a lot of responsibility not only within your own country, but also taking a similar position on a global scale. Although athletes often have more respect in society, in my opinion, they lack competence in public administration. The only option is authoritarian rule, where there is essentially no democratic election and an athlete can be appointed as a leader”*, writes a student. Another student refers to the importance of education. *“I think an athlete could be an appropriate political leader with the appropriate education. Being an elite athlete is giving you important values in life, but being a good leader requires appropriate education as well”*, is the response of a student. The students note that an athlete could be an appropriate political leader as he/she is also a citizen and a part of society. So, the athletes have their own right to express their political position and action anytime. However, these actions are not supposed to be present during the game's time.

For the question concerning the students' opinion about the social contribution of sports, all the answers show that our students believe that sports increase morality of a person, such as understanding of others (religion, gender, race etc.), promote teamwork, values of fair game, brotherhood, unity, equality, friendship and mutual respect in the society, reduce discrimination and ethnic tensions and increase empathy, team spirit, tolerance, respect for both teammates and opponents as well as a healthy way of living. Many students note that sports should not be a means to consume products or a control tool by political personnel. *“I think sport can contribute to social change, but the major sports federations and institutions don't focus on that at the moment. I really appreciate sports programs that have social improvement as a goal (for example Homeless World Cup or charity tennis games). I think the social contribution of sports needs to change focus from consumerism to social positive impact - raising awareness, decreasing poverty, raising women's confidence”*, writes one student. *“The worst part is when dictators are hiding behind sports to cover their shortcomings...that is when sports hurt”*, writes another student. *“Sport is a driving force that promotes social change, human and social development, and also makes an invaluable contribution to maintaining peace and achieving mutual understanding both in high-income countries and in developing countries, ”* is another answer.

Referring to the last question about whether sports could help citizens become more active and willing to participate in public affairs, all our students agree that sports develop strong social bonds and build strong characters with self-esteem. Additionally, they emphasize the importance of sports in creating personalities that care for the community, support diversity, inclusion and “fair game”, which are main principles for a responsible citizen. Our students mention that all sports people –athletes, participants, organizers and volunteers- can more easily become active citizens because in sports collaboration and teamwork, listening to others and respecting different opinions are basic values. Half of our students report that in order for sports to function as a means of wider socialization and politicization, the individual must be willing and interested to participate in parallel with the support of the institutional framework of each country. Furthermore, one third of our students believe that sports is an excellent platform for organizing a dialogue between the leaders of the countries and between the government and the citizens.

5.2 Sentiment Analysis

We performed sentiment analysis using IBM NLU, which provides a model that returns a sentiment score ranging from [-1, 1], with -1 being negative, 0 being neutral and 1 being positive. The mean value of the sentiment score of the answers is 0.74, which

shows clearly that the positive sentiment dominated the answers. NLU also extracted the most important entities, which are people, companies, location, or general classifications made by the NLU, annotated by the corresponding scores of sentiments. Figure 2 illustrates these entities and the corresponding scores, whose bars have been painted with the green or red color; the green color indicates that the corresponding entity has been classified with a positive score, while the red color shows that the corresponding entity has been classified with a negative score. We observe that “George Floyd” exhibits the largest sentiment score, namely 0.99. Entities “organizer”, “Homeless World Cup”, follow with scores equal to 0.91 and 0.89, respectively. Then, two countries followed, “Romania” and “Canada”, which scored 0.88 and 0.83, respectively. These countries were extracted due to the feelings of pride the students who come from these countries share for their place of origin. In the bottom of the positive entities, we observe three variations of the “leader” entity, which are “political leader”, “country leader”, and mere “leader”, with scores 0.72, 0.69, and 0.65, respectively. Entity “public affairs” is very close to the “leader” scoring 0.62. In the area of negative entities, “politician” is the top entity followed by “arena” and “dictators”, which score -0.93, -0.79, and -0.72, respectively. NLU detects the following emotions: anger, disgust, fear, joy, or sadness, which are conveyed in the content or by the context around target phrases. An emotion scores in the range of [0, 1]; a score of 0 means the text does not convey the emotion, while 1 means that the text definitely carries the emotion.

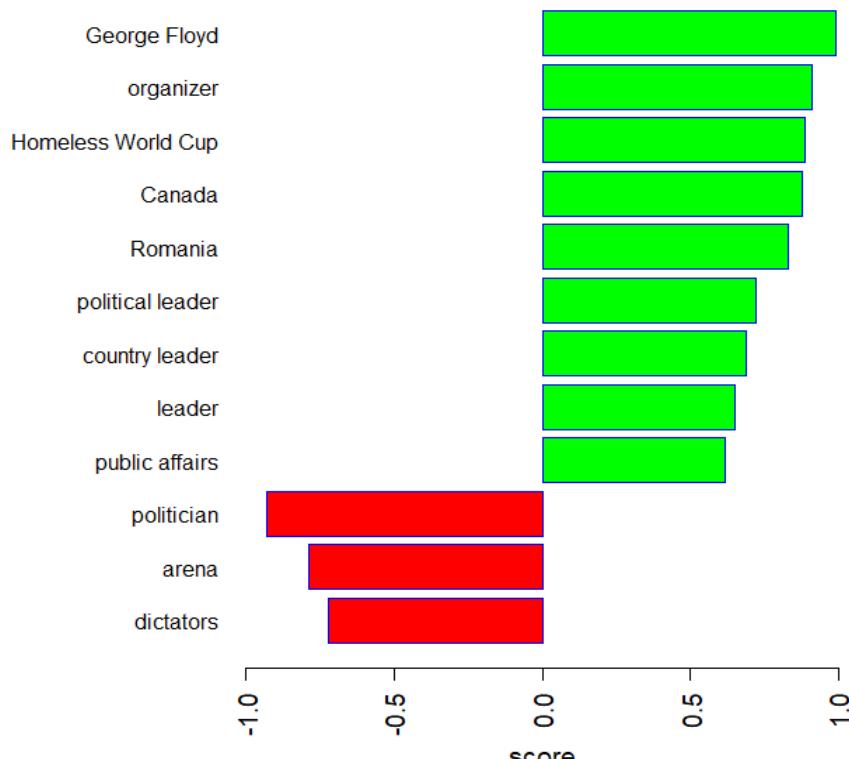


Figure 2. The entities extracted and the corresponding sentiment scores.

Figure 3 shows the mean score of each emotion, which has been conveyed by the answers submitted. We clearly observe that “joy” outperforms the rest of the emotions by a large margin, namely their percentage difference is almost equal to 126%. The

intermediate emotions, namely “sadness”, “disgust”, and “anger” score between 0.15 and 0.10, while “fear” exhibits a very low score equal to 0.06.

We used RAKE (Rose et al., 2010), which is a shorthand for “Rapid Automatic Keyword Extraction” algorithm, to extract keywords from the answers. RAKE is a domain independent keyword extraction algorithm, which tries to determine key phrases in a body of text by analyzing the frequency of word appearance and its co-occurrence with other words in the text. The top keywords extracted are shown in Figure 4, where we observe that “sports” and “athlete” dominate over the rest of the keywords.

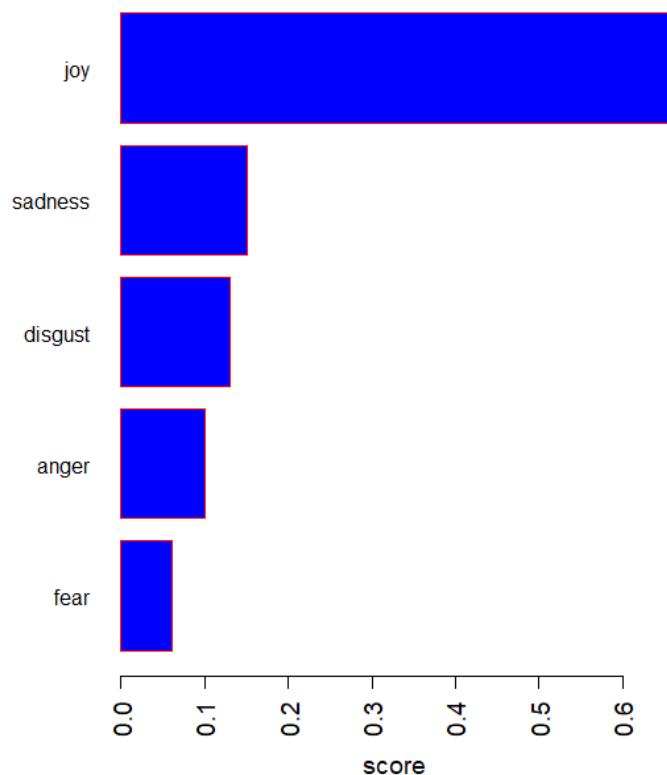


Figure 3. The mean score of the emotions conveyed by the corresponding answers.



Figure 4. The mean score of the emotions conveyed by the corresponding answers.

5. Conclusions and Future Work

In this study we focused on researching students' views on some innovative distance teaching techniques and on the relationship between participation in sports and participation in public affairs. The answers to our research questions showed that distance learning, even in an audience that has a sporting background and expectations from the postgraduate program to participate in physical presence activities, could be an exciting experience and fulfill their learning expectations. Nowadays, people, especially young people, are so involved with technology. Distance education, which was suddenly and very quickly imposed due to the circumstances, must be in line with the demands of the students and become attractive and interesting. About the second research question, the answers reflected our students' belief that sports help social inclusion and social participation. As a future work, in order to align with International Olympic Academy's goals and values of respect for access, dialogue, diversity and inclusion, we are going to proceed in further scientific research and investigate whether popular online platforms, like Kahoot or Klaxoon, help or alleviate certain emotions like anxiety or boredom. Furthermore, we aim to perform a more detailed sentiment analysis on students, who reside and study in geographically different countries, and use these platforms. Our target universities will be ESCE International Business School in France, the University of Peloponnese and the Hellenic Open University, which are both based in Greece.

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