

STUDENTS' FEAR AND BEHAVIOR IN THE BEGINNING OF SKI TRAINING

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(Original scientific paper)

Elena Kantcheva

St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria

Abstract

Learning the skiing technique can happen quickly or it can take longer, and the set of mind of a beginner skier may very much affect the learning speeds. In this article, we will observe the behavior of beginner skiers and their fears through: the reasons that lead to fear while learning to ski; creating a model for bringing the beginner skier back to an effective learning state. In the analysis of the results, using the "Discussion in Focus Group - Poll Discussion" method, three types of fear of initial ski education were identified. Exploring the fear of falling, we conclude that this fear is provoked by the sense of collision with the earth, not the actual activity itself. The second one is the fear of the unknown. We often waste time worrying about what can happen to us, and this fear has a lasting impact on how we act and what our behavior is on the ski track. Fear of failure is an attitude that leads to stiff and tense movements and a low probability of dealing with the element studied. This fear also causes great mental tension - thoughts are changing in uncertainty in well familiar movements and doubts in one's abilities. Summing up, we can note that with a sense of security on the ground, with confidence built by the ski teacher, with emotional comfort in interpersonal relationships that exists in the lesson, each fear can be overcome and the beginner skier returns to an effective state of learning skiing techniques.

Key words: *ski, fear, student*

Introduction

People who enjoy the advantage of being in nature and clean air and who like to keep their top physical condition by skiing, enjoy an abundance of emotions and health. It is a well-known fact that participating in sports means being healthy!

One may ask "Is it easy to learn skiing?" Mastering skiing techniques can be either quick or it may take a longer time, and the set of mind of a beginner skier may greatly influence the rate of learning and mastering such skiing techniques.

Hypothesis: Someone who has been living by the same stereotype "home-school/work-home" for years, may be afraid of starting a new activity, because in general, such a person is fully aware of the danger and risk involved (picturing the steep ski slopes with skiers and snowboard riders shuttling on it or the dreary images of falling and resulting traumas), and that poses quite a serious obstacle to that person's ability to learn skiing.

What is fear? Fear is a natural reaction caused by environmental factors. It tampers with the pursuit of a dream and the striving for success, holds back one's actions and suppresses one's determination. In this context, the ability to overcome arising fear is a very important life ability. How to master this skill while learning to ski?

We suppose that the application of a model, consisting of the creation of a mental picture of skiing-related skills and movements, shall chase away the fearful thoughts of the unknown, the unfamiliar or failure, and shall make skiing a favorite outdoor activity in natural environment.

Purpose and objectives:

This article studies the behavior of beginner skiers and their fear notions in terms of:

- the reasons that arouse fear while they are learning to ski;
- designing a model intended to bring back the beginner skier to a condition which is effective for learning.

Study methods: The study is conducted on 125 first year students (the contingent) (105 men and 20 women) (62 full-time students and 63 part-time students) attending the specialty of Pedagogy in Physical Education Teaching (PPET) of St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo in Bulgaria. All of them are required by the academic program to train in the winter sports course in the town of Bansko.

The subject of this study is the students' attitude toward fear and how they overcome such fear in the beginning of their training in alpine skiing. This requires the use of the following methods:

1. Theoretical and logical analysis of literary sources.

In order to gather knowledge about the current state of the problem, in particular to get an idea of the extent to which the different aspects of that problem have been studied by Bulgarian and foreign authors, we made a review of existing literature.

2. Structural observation

Targeted observations were made during the training course along the ski slopes near the town of Bansko and the town of Dobrinishte.

3. Polling method – discussion in the focus group.

We investigated the problems subject to this study by conducting discussions with the students of the specialty of Pedagogy in Physical Education Teaching (48) – part-time attendance.

4. Method of inquiry

We made inquiries with the purpose to outline the main problem underlying the mastering of skiing techniques, which is fear and the emanations of fear. We obtained the opinion of all 125 students who participated in our study. The questionnaire used to investigate the fear and the behavior of students in the beginning of their ski training (Appendix 1) is attached hereto.

5. Mathematical and statistical analysis by benchmarking.

6. Simulation

This method was used to create a model enabling them to attain effective condition for learning the movements that are typical of alpine skiing techniques.

Results

The analysis of the results obtained from the questionnaire used to investigate the fear and behavior showed that men defined themselves most of all as athletes and said to have self-confidence – “I know what my strengths are” (68.7%). “I have my own concerns” and “I am aware of my shortcomings” was expressed by almost 19.5%, and 11.8% had no opinion. That is how students answered to questions 1. “Who am I?” and 4. “Do I have self-confidence?” (fig. 1).

In the group of women-students prevailed average self-confidence based on the answers of “I am aware of my shortcomings” and the self-definition as “a young person with his/her own concerns” (about 57%) – almost three times more than men. Those who demonstrated high self-confidence were 36.2% of the women-students whereas 7.8% of the women-students had no opinion.

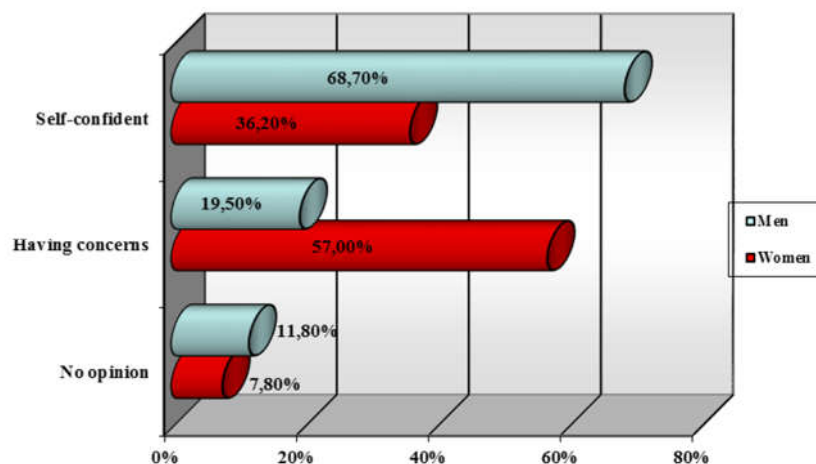


Fig.1. Students' opinion on the questions: “Who am I?” and “Do I have self-confidence?”

To our opinion the awareness of the inner need to do well, as well as the believing in one's self, can be achieved by identifying the students' desires and needs for targets achievable within one lesson. Needless to say, the role of the coach for creating an environment that promotes self-confidence is paramount. The self-confidence to keep going, to make a step further, or to attain a target can enable students to evaluate and manage his/her needs, which results in a productive and exciting training. Students who perform on such level are often on active communications while being in learning environment.

Grouping the questions about the feeling of fear (questions 6, 7 and 11) all participants (100%) answered that they were afraid because skiing is "a very different type of sport and something quite new". 45.8% - men and women together both part-time and full-time students showed high level of personal anxiety fearing falling, 36.6% of them feared failure, and the remaining 22 students (17.6%) – feared the unknown (fig.2).

Most diverse are the shapes that young people give to fear. Here are some of them: a monster, ice, frost, myself, something that looks like me, a bird of prey, etc.

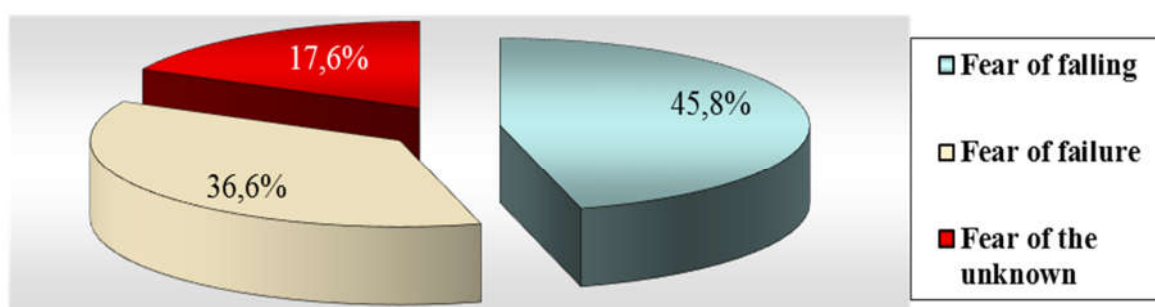


Fig.2. What fears do we face in the beginning of our ski training?

To our opinion the established fear notions determine students' behavior during their skiing training. It is perfectly normal for a beginner skier to fear falling. It is also normal to feel fear while sloping down for the first time or making his/her first parallel turn on skis. Fear starts to subside with each next exposure to the fearful situation. The same principle applies to the fear of falling. As soon as a student begins to fall he/she gains experience and gets used to the process, which in its turn results in attenuation of the feeling of fear and the building of fear-resistance.

To eliminate the imaginary fear of falling the right thing to do from a methodical point of view is to train falling – a series of controlled falls. The idea is to train several falls in the course of a lesson in order to develop a stable mental state that would not yield to any unreasonable fears. For instance, let us imagine that you want to learn to ski. The first time you stand up on your skis you would almost inevitably fall, but your body gets a bit more accustomed. The second time you are able to stand up in starting position and you move a little, you fall again. You fall a third time, but before that you have been able to move a little further. The hundredth time you slope down from the top of the slope and the thousandth time ... well, you easily slope down from the steepest slope "without batting an eyelid".

Let us analyze the second most common type of fear for skiers – the fear of failure. Ironically, the fear of failure sets the pattern for failure because one is distracted from the thoughts on possible outcomes and loses focus, which renders skiing ineffective.

The fear of failure is a mental attitude that manifest itself in stiff and tense movements and offers little chances of mastering the trained element of skiing technique. This fear causes enormous mental tension – thoughts are diverted into being insecure in already mastered movements and into doubting one's capabilities.

The fear of failure springs from a result-oriented attitude where the effects in case of success are constantly judged against the effects in case of failure. Therefore, this fear can be overcome by directing the focus at 100% on the process of skiing (the stance, the inclination, the eyes, etc.) and one's awareness should not fluctuate to and from possible results. When attention is focused like this the worrying skier will have no opportunity to think of any failure or success.

The fear of “what will others think of me” can be trained by creating a situation where students would feel uncomfortable. The things to do in such cases are as follows:

- listening to the critics of others – to train the fear of being criticized;
- making the movement (the element) in a way that others would not expect to see – to train the fear of inconformity with the opinion of others;

By every instance of overcoming the fear of failure, fear-resistance increases. It is said: “This fear is not real, it is nothing but an illusion, and it exists only in my mind”. When dozens of such fears are overcome, fear disappears. Our body and mind have the congenial capacity to adapt! Adaptation forms the basis of survival.

It is important to note that unlike the fear of falling, which may sometimes be even useful, the fear of failure has no other purpose but to safeguard one's ego. The fear of failure is entirely based on auto-suggestion, which means that the elimination of this fear is entirely in the hands of oneself.

What will happen on the ski slope or in the cableway? This is the fear of the unknown. It exists only in one's mind and in the exuberant imagination. Since this fear is groundless, unreal, it often arouses for no reason or occasion and drives one to do things that are often ridiculous. The fear of the unknown has one more peculiarity worth mentioning – it may win a victory in case one delays the making of a decision or the taking of an action under its influence. This fear has the tendency to grow bigger when dealing with it is postponed. And one more thing that is typical of the fear of the unknown – it will immediately disappear when action starts. Needless to say, this is much easier said than done.

Ignoring the fear of the unknown may be achieved by making a conscientious differentiation between one's personal observation and the imaginary image. The first time you fear death and it seems to you that if you dare do it your life will end. But yet, you dare do it and your life does not end and you understand that it is not that frightful. The second time it is something like half-fear and once again it seems like it is way beyond your powers to do it. But still you keep doing it and it's not that frightful after all. Each next time you try, you understand that your action is not that frightful as your mind may be depicting it.

Many risks originate from the inexperienced skier's imagination. The fear that either something of the outfit may be defective or the cableway may stop and leave you hanging in the air or the ski slope is very steep, are very common imaginary fears that worry many beginner skiers. In such situations negative thoughts should be put to questioning and one should try to overcome them by reasoning. Naturally, the outfit has been tested and guaranteed as strong, furthermore you can trust your skiing coach counting on his/her knowledge and experience. Thoughts should be directed towards the movements performed on the ski slope by repeating in one's mind phrases like “relax“, “you are doing great, “don't stop“.

Once provoked, the negative emotions may lead to the occurrence of stronger doubts, the level of self-confidence drops, and self-esteem inevitably falls down. Stop! Your determination is your guarantee that you will overcome every fear. What is the main difference between fear and determination? Fear activates negative emotions and directs them to thought of failure. Determination, on the contrary, provokes positive emotions and directs them to favorable concurrence of circumstance. The fear-instigated negative thought begins to “multiply” in an increased rate but this is nothing for people who are used to saying: „eyes fear but hands are doing it“.

One of the most important steps in fighting fear is the preparation to fight. So far we defined what types of fear prevail in students and that is a great advantage for our study.

The average values for men when asked about the methods they use to manage their fears (question 8, 9, 10 and 12) are within the “tenths” range in the upper percentage scale (89.4%, 89.2%, 88.9% and 89.8%), which is directly related to the better and more successful coping with tasks, namely: „I forget about fear” by playing a game; by using the trick of „I can do it” which motivates them; they are convinced that by stepping on the skis „everything will be fine”, and the answers to question 12 “Let me make one more step” – “I'm doing it on my own” show their approach to reality by saying “this is a great opportunity for me” (fig. 3).

We also asked the twenty female students the same questions in an informal conversation (discussion). Here are the results: 92.2% of them would not think about their fears when the elements of skiing technique are mastered “by playing a game”, for 38.4% of them fear was still there even after they were repeating “I can do it” but the encouraging thing was that the remaining 61.6% of them were “ready to win”. The most preferred answer to the question “What will happen when you step on your skis?” (question 10) was “I am entirely focused on the skiing I am about to do but I am still worried” – 74.7% whereas 25.3% of them answered “I am very concerned about the skiing I am about to do”. Unanimously all women (100% of

them) answered that they were willing to make “one more step” in order to be successful and to overcome their fears.

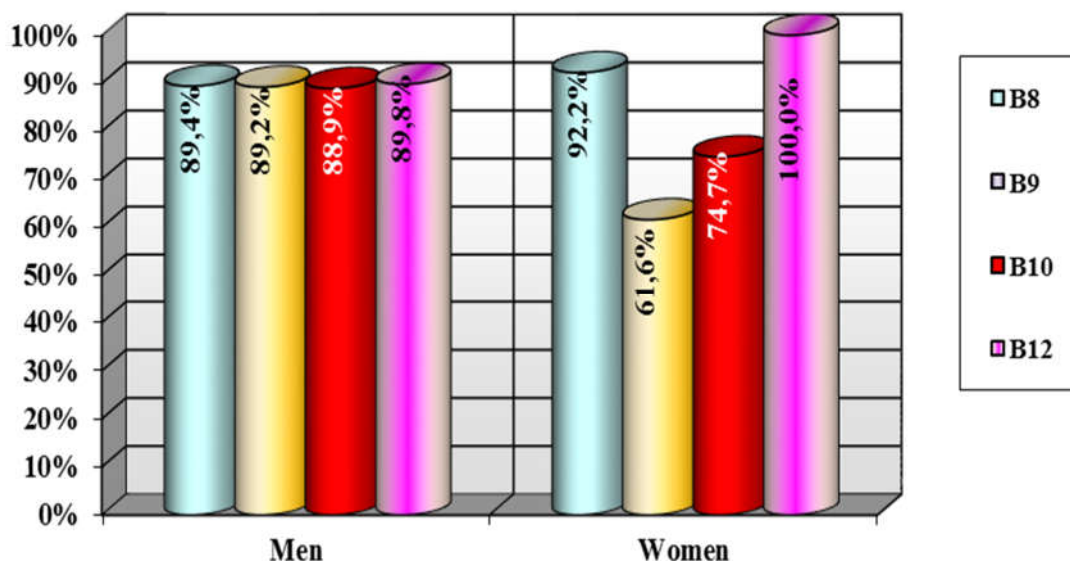


Fig. 3. Average values of the methods to manage fear

Ski schools have been integrated into the service provision section of winter tourism. Whether or not a guest to the resort is going to return and become a regular visitor of the resort, greatly depends on the effective performance of the skiing coach (instructor) because the time spent on the ski slope is the most time-consuming part of the guest’s stay in the resort. This is important for our students – the future sport specialists should have the passion to sport and mountains as good skiing coaches.

Comparison of the opinions of students from the two forms of attendance – full-time and part-time – regarding any “noticed concerns/worries of the skiing coach“ showed that 12.2% and 17.6% of them (part-time and full-time accordingly) thought that the coach had some concerns/worries with respect to the “environmental and weather conditions”, “he/she was afraid of failure” was the preferred answer for 5.1% of the full-time and 2.9% of the part-time students. The students of both forms of attendance who answered that “everybody is afraid sometimes, it is only normal” were about 10%. The other 44.9% of the part-time and 67.3% of the full-time students were convinced that the skiing coach showed no signs of being afraid of anything.

We are convinced that the skiing coach has accepted the responsibility to influence the student’s behavior. The mastering of mobile skills and movements such as the ones associated with skiing bears a clear and structural information about the direction and time of practicing but also some concerns about the safety and discipline of students. The skiing coach should be able to play different roles in order to ensure a successful lesson.

The preferred “strategies used by the students in order to be able to overcome their worries and fears when learning to ski” were almost equally proportioned in percentage rating – about 25% each. Four groups of 25 students chose to manage their fear: by paying games, by training, by the feeling that “I am not alone” (the skiing coach, my friends are next to me), by “having the others understand my problem“ and the remaining 25% of them had their own management strategy – by sharing, by saying that things can always get worse, by dividing the problem into pieces, etc.

Based on the result analysis we created a model of the strategies for managing the fear of falling, the fear of failure and the fear of the unknown during the ski training (fig. 4). Although it is not always possible to do a lot in order to change the way people see things that could be changed, still an attempt can be made to build a better mental frame.



Fig. 4 Model of fear management strategies

Inferences

1. The feeling of touching the ground is what causes the fear of falling and not the particular movement or action taken alone.
2. The safe practicing of trained falls contributes to the gaining confidence in one's mobility skills.
3. The fear of failure is a mental attitude that manifest itself in stiff and tense movements and offers little chances of mastering the trained element of skiing technique.
4. Coping with the fear of the unknown starts by identifying the problem and by taking appropriate action to reduce the risk in a given situation.

To summarize, let us mention that every fear can be overcome by feeling secure on the slope thanks to the trust built by the skiing coach and the emotional comfort of one's relationships with others that prevail in the lesson so that the beginner skier could restore his/her effective condition for learning to ski.

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Appendix

QUESTIONNAIRE THE FEAR AND BEHAVIOR WE EXPERIENCE IN THE BEGINNING OF OUR SKI TRAINING

1. "Who am I?"

- a) I am a young person ready to face challenges.
- b) I am an athlete and I always strive to win.
- c) I have my own concerns.

2. "How well do I know myself?"

- a) rather Yes;
- b) rather No;
- c) I can't tell.

3. "Am I able to adjust, to adapt?"

- a) Yes;
- b) rather Yes;
- c) rather No;
- d) No;
- e) I can't tell.

4. "Do I have self-confidence?"

- a) I love myself;
- b) I know what my strengths are;
- c) I am aware of my shortcomings;
- d) I am sleeping through my life;
- e) I don't know.

5. "What is my attitude to real life?"

- a) It is a great opportunity for me;
- b) A fear that I will not be successful;
- c) It is a challenge/jump into the unknown;
- d)

6. "Why am I afraid in the beginning of my skiing training?"

- a) because it is only human;
- b) the unusual outfit bothers me;
- c) because it is done outdoors;
- d) because it is a quite different sport for me;
- e)

7. "What are my fears?"

- a) falling;
- b) trauma;
- c) failure;
- d) the unknown
- e)

8. "How can I forget about fear?"

- a) When I take a deep breath, time after time, I feel my body truly relaxed.
- b) While playing I can't think about fear.
- c) I feel do difference – fear is still there.
- d)

9. Repeating "I can do it!"

- a) If I repeat it 10 times using increasing voice strength, I forget about fear.
- b) This trick is used in other sports too and this motivates me to win.
- c) I feel do difference – fear is still there;

10. "What will happen when you step on your skis?"

- a) I am very concerned about the skiing I am about to do.
- b) I am entirely focused on the skiing I am about to do but I am still worried.
- c) I redirect the focus of my thoughts because I know that everything will be fine.

11. "If you were able to give your fear a specific shape or face, for instance a despicable person, a monster, etc., what would it look like?" The better you describe it the easier you will overcome it.

.....
.....
12. "Let me make one more step!"

- a) If you are afraid, for instance, to climb a Christmas tree up to a marked level, would you make one more step to overcome your fears.
- b) I'm not afraid to try and I will go to the end because the ski coach is right next to me.
- c) I'm doing it on my own.

13. "The ski coach is also afraid/worried sometimes. Have you noticed?"

- a) Everybody is afraid sometimes, it is only normal.
- b) He/she is afraid of failure.
- c) He/she is afraid of the environmental and weather conditions.
- d) He/she shows no signs of being afraid.

14. "How would you describe your problem if it had not been yours?"

- a) I would try to judge how serious the problem is by imagining that it was mine.
- b) I would show my friend that it is only normal to feel fear sometimes.
- c) Looking at it from a distance I would judge if it is worth worrying about or not.

15. "Which strategy of fear management would you like to use at this time?"

- a) by playing a game;
- b) by sharing;
- c) by the feeling that I am not alone (the coach, my friends are next to me);
- d) by having the others understand my problem;
- e)

Sex: a) M

b) F

Age: a) younger than 25 years

b) younger than 30 years

c) older than 30 years

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME!