



Impact of the ITF Tennis Play and Stay campaign on 10-and-under tennis: The views of top National Federation experts

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ABSTRACT

The ITF Tennis Play and Stay campaign has been a crucial initiative to increase the number of tennis players in the world and promote tennis as easy, fun and healthy to all ages, genders, playing standard and physical abilities. The aim of this study was to find out the views on this campaign of those responsible for the participation programmes of the 35 national federations with the largest number of recreational players. These 35 experts responded to a questionnaire developed specifically for this study. The results showed that the 10-and-under competition rule change, implemented by the ITF in 2012, was well communicated to coaches and brings benefits in terms of increased participation, learning and performance improvements in beginner players. In addition, most countries reported that they have implemented the concepts of the campaign both in training and competitions, as well as in coach education programmes. Therefore, it is concluded that, in general, the opinions of the experts within national federations who are responsible for the participation directive and for implementing programmes related to the concepts of the ITF Tennis Play and Stay campaign obtained through this study are extremely positive.

Key words: development, participation, tennis, federations.

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INTRODUCTION

The International Tennis Federation (ITF) is the world's governing body of tennis. The development of tennis in its 213 member nations is one of its functions as it is the only global organisation that allocates budget to the development of tennis in the world (ITF, 2022). Increasing the number of people playing tennis has traditionally been a fundamental pillar of its development focus, and since 2017 is one of two objectives for Development under ITF2024 through the Development Strategy - Increase participation in tennis worldwide for all ages, genders, playing standard and physical abilities (ITF 2017; 2021). One of the programmes implemented by the ITF to achieve this goal is the ITF Tennis Play and Stay campaign.

The campaign that was established by the ITF in 2007 has attracted considerable research interest (Miley, 2007). Indeed, it has been presented as an example of a participation-oriented programme, having adopted some of the research findings that support the importance of attracting and retaining as many players as possible by providing them with a positive and active introductory tennis experience (Crespo & Reid, 2007). Research also sees it as an initiative that supports the use of a new teaching methodology based on the use of scaled equipment (Buszard, et al., 2014; Timmerman, et al.,

2015), and adapted facilities (Goldfine, 2013) and constraints (Fitzpatrick, et al., 2017). Its importance has even been recognised in coach education in some countries (Athaniilidis, 2020) and its effect on the modification of tennis rules has been studied (Giménez-Egido et al., 2020).

Other research has studied specific benefits of the application of the campaign in the acquisition of different skills, such as Kozak, & Ibraimova (2014) who emphasised the importance that this devotes to the development of coordination skills in 5–6-year-old tennis players, an aspect that coincides with the thesis of Khaniukova et al. (2012) who highlighted its use as an extracurricular activity to develop the physical qualities of 9–10-year-old players. Similar conclusions regarding the satisfaction of players of these ages participating in the programme were reached by Koronas (2018).

Similarly, Zetou et al. (2012) studied the impact of the campaign on the learning of the serve and the satisfaction of a group of Primary School students. The authors concluded that the students who participated in the programmes learned the serve while having fun and enjoying the process, which motivated them to continue playing tennis. These same authors replicated their previous study by analysing the application of the campaign to the improvement of the backhand shot (Zetou et al., 2014) while relating it

to the teaching for understanding methodology and the improvement of the players' self-efficacy. Authors such as Kist and Ben Makhoulouf (2017), Cabral (2010), or Sanz (2017) reflected on its practical application in tennis beginner programmes around the world.

Furthermore, Krylov & Shesterova (2017) analysed the advantages of the implementation of the campaign and concluded that it was very suitable for the development of 10-and-under tennis players but that a fundamental aspect was the appropriate use of the equipment, especially the adapted balls. In fact, this aspect had already been indicated by Farrow and Reid (2010) who suggested that the campaign was based on the principle of using the adapted equipment as a constraint strategy and demonstrated the benefits of its use from the point of view of game development and satisfaction. In the same line, Schmidhofer et al. (2014) and Bayer, et al. (2017) emphasised the importance of the use of scaled courts, Kachel et al. (2015) of balls, and Limpens, et al. (2018) corroborated the relevance of adapting the height of the net to facilitate the development of tennis at these ages as proposed by the campaign. For a summary of the aspects learned, see Buszard et al. (2017).

From a psychological benefits perspective, Ishihara, et al. (2017) demonstrated the benefits of the use of this campaign on the executive functions of 6–12-year-old players. In addition, Fitzpatrick et al., (2018) studied the influence of regulatory and equipment modifications on the performance of these players and Gonçalves et al. (2017) studied it from the point of view of competition. On the other hand, aspects related to the progression in skill acquisition have also been studied by Cortela et al. (2019) and Elderton (2009), among others. For a summary of the general benefits, see Vilches (2017).

The implementation of the campaign has already been the specific subject of an earlier research conducted by Buszard et al (2020) who studied the perceptions of coaches and national federation staff members on the impact of implementing programmes focused on the participation and skill development in children and adults. The study concluded that the concepts of the campaign was positively associated with increased and sustained participation, skill learning, talent development and people's attitudes towards tennis. It was also noted that participants felt that the success of the campaign was due to both the implemented 10-and-under competition rule change to the ITF Rules of Tennis in 2012 (ITF, 2012) and the campaign's core messages (ITF, 2022).

The aim of this study was to find out the views of those responsible for the participation programmes of selected national federations on the ITF Tennis Play and Stay campaign.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample consisted of a total of 30 male and 5 female national federation experts, with an average age of 48.06 years. Of the 35, 21 had more than 15 years of experience within the tennis industry, 4 between 11 and 15 years and 1 between 5 and 10 years. The experts represented 35 different countries (Table 1) and all of them held a position related to participation or

coach education programmes in their national federation. The criteria for selecting the countries of origin of the experts was based on the number of tennis players in each nation. The sum of the players from the countries participating in our study accounts for more than 99% of the total number of players in the world according to the ITF Global Tennis Report (ITF, 2021).

Table 1
Country of origin of experts.

Countries
Argentina
Austria
Belgium
Brazil
China
Colombia
Croatia
France
Hungary
India
Indonesia
Iran
Israel
Italy
Mexico
Poland
Portugal
Russia
Spain
Sweden
Switzerland
Tunisia
Turkey
United States
Vietnam

Instrument

Data were obtained through a questionnaire designed ad-hoc for this study. A discussion took place between the authors to reach an agreement on the selected items, their definitions, and an initial draft of the questionnaire. The next step consisted of a quantitative and qualitative evaluation by 5 tennis directors, certified coaches and coach educators who analysed, evaluated, and suggested changes to the proposed definitions and items. Based on these improvements, a final version of the instrument was designed. The final questionnaire consisted of 11 items that included communication, benefits, implementation, availability, improvements, impact of the Tennis Play and Stay campaign for 10-and-under players, and the 10-and-under competition rule change implemented by the ITF in 2012 (Table 2).

Table 2
Categories and subcategories included in the questionnaire.

Category	Subcategory	Item
Communication	Knowledge	I was aware of the 10-and-under competition rule change implemented by the ITF in 2012.
	Communication	The ITF has communicated the 10-and-under competition rule change effectively to its stakeholders.
Advantages	Participation	The change of the rules for 10-and-under players has obvious advantages for increasing the level of participation of beginner players.
	Learning and performance	The change of the rules for 10-and-under players has obvious advantages for the improvement of learning and performance of beginner players.
Implementation	Training	Coaches in my country implement the 10-and-under competition rule change in most of their training sessions.
	Competition	Competitions in my country implement the 10-and-under competition rule change in most tournaments.
	Training of trainers	My country's coaching certification programme includes information on the rules for 10-and-under players in most courses.
Availability	Material	The equipment (red, orange, and green balls) related to the 10-and-under competition rule change is generally available in my country.
	Facilities	The facilities (red, orange, and green courts and nets) related to the 10-and-under competition rule change are generally available in my country.
Improvements	Changes	More changes should be made to the Rules of Tennis to make it easier for 10-and-under players to play.
	Research	More research on 10-and-under tennis is needed to increase knowledge about the rules for 10-and-under players.
Impact	Overall impact	Overall, I believe that the 10-and-under competition rule change has had and will continue to have a considerable positive impact on 10-and-under tennis.

Procedure

With the support and assistance of the Participation and Education area of the ITF Development Department, the online questionnaire was sent via email to the participation or coach education departments of the selected national federations, requesting to be completed by the person with the noteworthy knowledge and competence in 10-and-under tennis in that organisation. At the beginning of the online questionnaire, respondents were shown a description of the study and were informed about the confidentiality and voluntary nature of the research in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki.

Data analysis

The data obtained through the online questionnaire were exported to Microsoft Excel, where they were processed for formatting, analysis, and graphing.

RESULTS

Figure 1 shows the opinions of the experts regarding each of the questions included in the survey, related to the study variables.

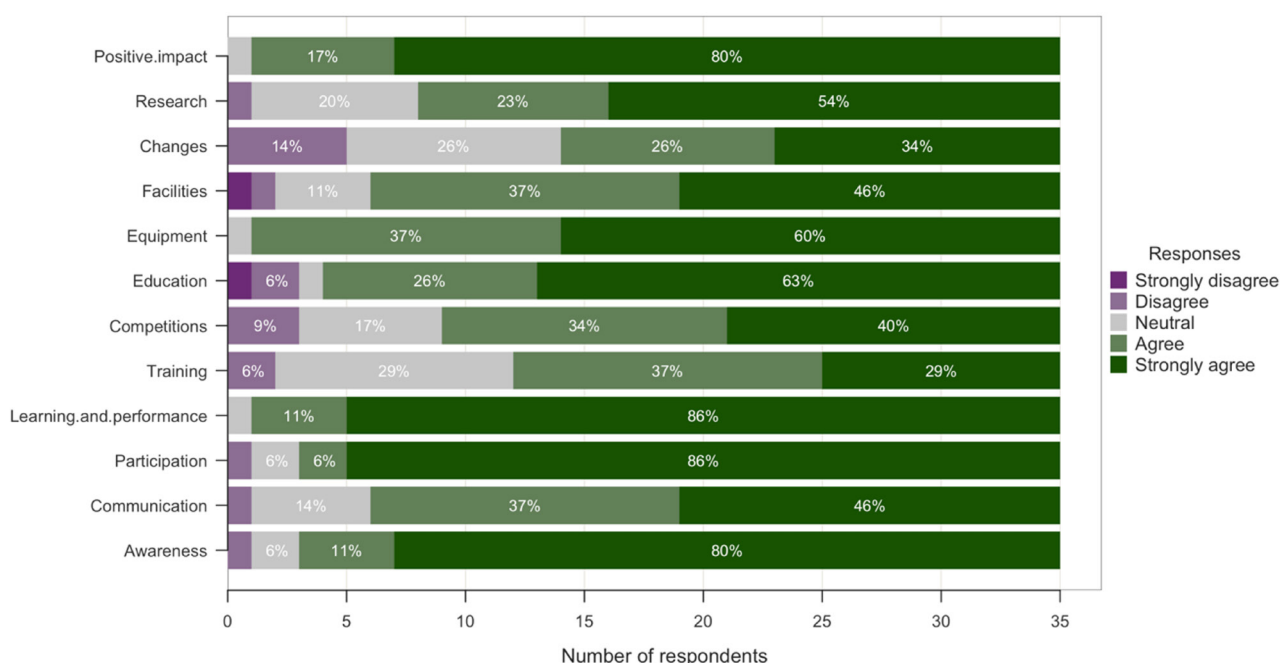


Figure 1. Expert's opinions regarding the variables analysed.

Regarding the communication of the ITF Tennis Play and Stay campaign for 10-and-under players, and the competition rule change implemented by the ITF in 2012. Overall, experts in most countries indicated that they were aware of this rule change and that communication to stakeholders by the ITF was effective. Discrepancies were noted from only two experts. One indicated that he was unaware of the rule change, and another disagreed with the ITF's effectiveness in communicating the rule change.

In terms of increased participation and learning and performance at beginner levels. Most experts were in full agreement that this change was an advantage, both in terms of increased participation and in terms of learning and performance for beginner players. One of the experts was against this trend, disagreeing that this change in the rules would be an advantage in terms of increased participation.

In general, regarding the implementation of the 10-and-under competition rule change in training, competitions and coach education, experts agreed that the rule is implemented in all three areas, although a significant number of experts were neutral. In addition, a small number of experts (n=3) indicated that they did not agree that it was being implemented, either because the rule was not implemented in training or competitions, or because it was not included in the information in the coach education courses.

Most experts agreed on the positive availability of facilities and equipment to implement the 10-and-under competition rule change. While some countries were neutral, a single coach indicated that he disagreed with having access to facilities to implement the rule.

Regarding the introduction of more rule changes, most experts surveyed were in favour of making more changes, although there was a significant percentage of experts who were neutral, and a smaller percentage who disagreed. In terms of the need for more research on the 10-and-under competition rule change, most experts indicated that they agreed with this statement.

Finally, except for one expert, who was neutral, the rest of the experts indicated an agreement or strong agreement in that, overall, the rule change has had and will continue to have a positive impact on tennis for 10-and-under players.

DISCUSSION

This study has analysed the opinions of those responsible for the participation programmes of selected national federations on the ITF Tennis Play and Stay campaign. The results showed that the 10-and-under competition rule change, implemented by the ITF in 2012, has been well communicated to tennis coaches and brings benefits from a participation point of view, as well as from a learning and performance perspective. In addition, most countries have implemented the concepts of the campaign in training and competitions as well as in their coach education programmes. On the other hand, regarding the availability of equipment and facilities, it has been shown that in most countries there is a high level of availability. It has also been observed that there is a high level of interest on the experts in the introduction of further rule changes, as well as in carrying out further research. Finally, it is considered that the implementation of the ITF Tennis Play and Stay campaign has had and will continue to have an overall positive impact on tennis for 10-and-under players.

The results obtained in the study are in the same line as the conclusions reached by previous research. In fact, with respect to the influence of the ITF Tennis Play and Stay campaign on participation and learning, the results are in full agreement with those obtained by Buszard et al. (2020), who concluded that the campaign was positively associated with increased and sustained participation, skill learning and talent development. Furthermore, they also agree with a significant number of studies that have analysed the influence of the campaign on learning and performance (Kozak, & Ibraimova, 2014; Khaniukova et al., 2012); Koronas, 2018; Zetou et al., 2012; Zetou et al., 2014; Cortela et al., 2019; Elderton, 2009; Vilches, 2017).

Regarding its implementation in competitions for 10-and-under players, previous studies have shown its advantages (Giménez-Egido et al., 2020; Gonçalves et al., 2017), which reinforces the fact that it is widely implemented in different countries. On the other hand, some studies have recognised the importance of including the ITF Tennis Play and Stay campaign in their coach education programmes (Athaniilidis, 2020), which also supports the inclusion of the concept in the national curriculum of most countries.

Regarding the equipment and facilities related to the ITF Tennis Play and Stay campaign, the fact of its high availability is very positive to sustain the impact that it can have on the development of players aged 10-and-under. According to several studies, the use of adapted balls, racquets and courts is one of the most important aspects that determine the success of the campaign (Buszard, et al., 2014; Timmerman, et al., 2015; Goldfine, 2013; Krylov & Shesterova, 2017; Farrow and Reid, 2010; Schmidhofer et al., 2014; Bayer et al., 2017; Kachel et al., 2015; Limpens, et al., 2018; Buszard et al., 2017).

The fact that most experts are in favour of further rule changes and research projects reinforces the campaign's philosophy of presenting itself as an evolving initiative that is open to changes and adaptations based on research feedback. A good example is the recommendations referring to net height modifications for 10-and-under competition, which was recently trialed as an amendment to the ITF Rules of Tennis (ITF, 2021) after several research studies determined the ideal height (Buszard et al., 2017).

Finally, as it happened with the studies carried out by Kist and Ben Makhoul (2017), Cabral (2010), or Sanz (2017), the results we have obtained in this study are very positive regarding the impact this campaign is having for the development of 10-and-under players worldwide.

CONCLUSION

The opinions of those responsible for the participation programmes of the national federations with the largest number of amateur players about the ITF Tennis Play and Stay campaign obtained through this study are, in general, extremely positive.

However, some limitations of this work can be noted, such as the fact that the sample was limited to 35 of the 213 ITF member countries and that no in-depth interviews were conducted that could provide a more accurate picture of the views of the participants in the study. On the other hand, the results obtained in this research suggest new lines of study aimed to gain a better understanding of possible differences in the impact of this campaign in different countries and to analyse the particularities of its management and implementation on a global scale.

We can conclude that the views of the experts in this study are in line with the results from different research regarding the various benefits of implementing the ITF Tennis Play and Stay campaign to increase tennis participation worldwide.

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