

Cross-cultural comparison of fundamental motor skills in children from Belgium and the United States

Ali Brian¹, Farid Bardid², Lisa M. Barnett³, Frederik J.A. Deconinck², Matthieu Lenoir²,
Jacqueline D. Goodway⁴

¹ *Department of Physical Education and Athletic Training, University of South Carolina, US*

² *Department of Movement and Sports Sciences, Ghent University, Belgium*

³ *Faculty of Health, Deakin University, Australia*

⁴ *Department of Human Sciences, Kinesiology Division, The Ohio State University, US*

Abstract

Fundamental motor skills (FMS) play a crucial role in the physical activity (PA) levels of children. Yet, many children across the globe demonstrate below average skill levels. Cross-cultural research on FMS is limited due to the adoption of different motor assessments. The aim of this study was to investigate the actual FMS as well as the association between FMS and skill perceptions of children from Belgium and the United States (US). The study sample consisted of 197 (57.4% boys) Belgian and 171 (44.4% boys) US children, aged 3 to 5 years. Children's FMS were assessed with the Test of Gross Motor Development–2nd edition and their skill perceptions (PMC) were assessed with the Pictorial Scale of Perceived Movement Skill Competence for Young Children. Multilevel regression analyses were conducted to examine country differences and the role of skill perceptions in children's FMS. Results show that Belgian children scored significantly higher on both locomotor skills ($\beta=10.45$; $SE=1.86$; $p<.001$) and object control skills ($\beta=4.55$; $SE=1.34$; $p=.01$) than US children. Children's object skill perceptions were positively related to their actual object control skills ($\beta=0.36$; $SE=0.09$; $p<.001$); there was no significant relationship between children's actual and perceived locomotor skills ($\beta=0.13$; $SE=0.12$; $p>.05$). Country status did not influence these relationships. The cross-cultural difference in FMS between Belgian and US children may be accounted for by the fact that Belgian children receive physical education (PE) from a specialist starting at 3 years of age and US children only receive well-equipped free play. The lack of country differences in the relationship between actual and perceived FMS may be because PMC is just emerging at this age and country differences in self-perception may not occur until children are older. Future research may consider exploring cultural differences in PA contexts such as PE and access to playgrounds and organized sports to provide appropriate recommendations for practitioners and policy makers.