

HOW TO SOLVE PROBLEMS OF STUDENT MOTIVATION, INAPPROPRIATE STATUS AND CONDITIONS FOR PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORT AT CROATIAN UNIVERSITIES?

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SUMMARY

Numerous studies confirm the concern regarding insufficient physical activity of young people, and the increasing frequency of the “couch potato society” phenomenon. Past research conducted on the Croatian student population revealed that 80% of students were not engaged in any other sports and recreational activities in their free time, apart the two regular physical education (PE) classes a week. The most frequent reasons of this situation are lack of free time and heavy study loads at higher education institutions. The fundamental tasks of this research are the following: 1. to determine the attitude towards physical education classes at the Faculty; 2. to determine students’ preferences regarding the introduction of sport as an elective course in higher study years; 3. to determine students’ opinion concerning the influence of classes on health, well-being, communication, self-confidence and study success. The research was conducted in the beginning of the 2004/05 academic year on a sample of 233 students (176 females and 57 males) of the Faculty of Agriculture of the University of Zagreb. A questionnaire intended to determine students’ interests, opinions and preferences regarding PE classes was applied. The following conclusions could be drawn: 1) The clear need and importance of regular physical education classes at the university; 2) A support by the students in introducing sport as an elective course in higher years of study, and the need for evaluation; 3) Students are conscious of the positive effects of physical education classes for health, satisfaction and relaxation, as well as of the influence of such tuition on improving self-confidence, communication and study success.

Key words: Physical education, sport, interests and attitudes, future directions

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ÖZET

HIRVAT ÜNİVERSİTELERİNDE BEDEN EĞİTİMİ VE SPORDA ÖĞRENCİ MOTİVASYONU VE UYGUN OLMAYAN KOŞUL SORUNLARI NASIL ÇÖZÜLÜR?

Çok sayıda çalışma gençlerde yetersiz fiziksel aktiviteyi ve artan “patates toplumu” olgusunu ortaya koymaktadır. Geçmişte yapılmış çalışmalar Hırvat öğrencilerinin %80’inin haftada iki derslik düzenli beden eğitimi dışında boş zamanlarında bir spor veya benzeri aktivite göstermediklerini ortaya koymuştur. Bu durumun en önde gelen nedenleri yüksek öğrenim kurumlarında yetersiz boş zaman ve ağır eğitim yükleri olarak gösterilmektedir. Bu çalışmanın temel hedefleri şunlardı: 1. Üniversitede beden eğitimi derslerine olan tavrı ortaya koymak. 2. Öğrencilerin ileri yıllarda seçmeli spor dersi almaya karşı tavırlarını belirlemek. 3. Bu derslerin sağlık, kendini iyi hissetme, iletişim, kendine güven ve eğitim başarısına etkileri hakkında öğrencilerin düşüncelerini belirlemek. Çalışma 2004/05 akademik yılı başında Zagreb Üniversitesi Ziraat Fakültesi öğrencisi olan 176’sı kadın, 57’si erkek toplam 233 kişilik bir örnekleme gerçekleştirildi. Öğrencilerin beden eğitimi derslerine ilişkin görüş, ilgi ve tercihlerini belirlemek amaçlı bir sorgu anketi uygulandı. Şu sonuçlara ulaşıldı: 1) Üniversitede düzenli beden eğitimi ve spor derslerinin gerek ve önemi vurgulandı. 2) İleri yıllarda seçmeli bir spor dersinin alınıp değerlendirmeye girmesi fikri destek gördü. 3) Öğrenciler beden eğitimi derslerinin sağlık, fiziksel tatmin, mental gevşemeye olumlu etkilerinin yanı sıra kendine güven, iletişim kurma ve eğitim başarısını ileriye götürücü etkilerinin bilincinde idi.

Anahtar sözcükler: *Beden eğitimi, spor, ilgi ve tutumlar, gelecek hedefleri*

INTRODUCTION

In the last few years the Republic of Croatia has been introducing significant changes into the whole educational system. Croatian universities are in the course of experimental implementation of the new programmes according to European standards established by the Bologna Declaration. Physical education (PE) is a compulsory course at first two years of study and it is suggested as elective course at higher study years. Numerous studies and recent research confirm the concern regarding insufficient physical activity of young people as well as the increasing frequency of a phenomenon popularly called a “couch potato society” (3,4).

In the United Kingdom a range of publications in recent years has attested to the alleged desirability of utilizing PE in order to promote lifelong participation in sport and physical activity (UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2000) (6,8). According to available indicators, Croatia is one of the rare European countries which have recognized the importance of PE, and included it as a compulsory course in university education. Past research conducted on Croatian student population showed that 80% of female and male students apart from two lessons of regular PE a week do not engage in any other sports and recreational activities in their free time (1,2). The most frequent reasons of this situation are the lack of free time and a heavy study load at college.

The experience of PE teachers at faculties confirms the phenomenon of the increasing interest and participation of students of higher study years in different attractive programmes of PE (5,7). Fraser-Thomas, Cote and Deakin presented in 2005 how youth involved in organized sport could benefit from a better quality of life and develop numerous social skills. It is important to recognize that positive youth development through sport is not automatic, but, on the contrary, is dependent upon a multitude of factors that must be considered when planning and designing youth sports programmes (2).

A questionnaire was used for that purpose. Making and applying this questionnaire is motivated by practical reasons of determining attitudes, interests and opinions of female and male students concerning the organization of PE classes at the faculty. On the other hand, there is a need for the teacher to determine the framework of classes at all study years. On the basis of the stressed issues, the fundamental tasks of this research are the following: 1. to determine the attitude towards PE classes at the faculty as well as the interests and preferences of students according to individual teaching practices, 2. to determine students' preferences regarding the introduction of optional sport as elective course on higher study years, and 3. to determine students' opinion concerning the influence of classes on health, well-being, communication, self-confidence and study success.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The research was conducted in the beginning of 2004/05 academic year on a sample of 233 students (176 female and 57 male students) of the Faculty of Agriculture of the University of Zagreb. The students were aged 19 to 22 and they came from all parts of the Republic of Croatia. A questionnaire intended for determining students' interests, opinions and preferences regarding PE classes at university

level was applied. The two-page questionnaire that the respondents were provided on nominal scale, included students' opinions for PE in high school and preferences of PE organization at the faculty. Finally, the students were asked to select one of the five possible response options (Likert 5 point ordinal scale: very low, low, moderate, high, very high) to assess their opinion towards PE influence on health, well-being, communication, self-confidence and study success.

The frequencies of students' answers were calculated and presented in Tables 1 and 2. Cronbach's alpha coefficients as the indicator of reliability of a sum scale for students' opinions (nominal scale) and a part that assesses students' opinion towards PE influence (Likert 5 point ordinal scale) were calculated. The differences in the frequency of answers concerning students' interests and attitudes with regard to gender, and the influence of PE classes on health, well-being, communication, self-confidence and study success were tested by χ^2 test for each variable. All analyses and graphic presentations were done in the statistical package STATISTICA 7.1 and Microsoft Excel (9).

RESULTS

The authors of the research were interested in students' attitude and interests regarding PE classes at higher education institutions. Respondents had a positive attitude towards the significance and need for PE classes at higher education institutions: 83.3% considered it as a necessary subject, 64.1% as an elective subject, and 75.6% as a compulsory subject. Important feed-back for PE teachers is the interest of students (55.9%) for an optional sport to be introduced as elective course at higher study years. Only 37.2% would have preferred that it was placed in every year of faculty study.

The other part of the questionnaire refers to the estimate of students' opinion regarding the influence of PE classes on health, well-being, self-confidence, quality communication and study success. The analysis of results in Table 1 clearly shows positive opinion of PE influence especially on students' health, improved communication, as well as on well-being.

Table 1. Frequencies of answers regarding the influence of PE

| Likert level | Well-being | Self-conf. | Commun. | Health | St. success |
|--------------|------------|------------|---------|--------|-------------|
| Very high | 9.8 | 6.8 | 10.7 | 24.8 | 15.0 |
| High | 44.8 | 36.0 | 44.4 | 44.9 | 33.8 |
| Moderate | 23.0 | 26.5 | 20.1 | 15.3 | 28.1 |
| Low | 17.9 | 22.2 | 18.4 | 12.4 | 18.8 |
| Very low | 4.5 | 8.5 | 6.4 | 2.6 | 4.3 |

The results of χ^2 tests show that there are no statistically significant differences in answers for, according to the authors, the most important issues where the difference in gender could be relevant: $\chi^2(1)=0.116$, $p=0.734$ for the need for PE classes at the higher education institutions, and $\chi^2(1)=1.656$, $p=0.198$ for introducing optional sport as elective course on higher study years. So in further analysis, genders were not observed separately. There is statistically significant difference in the distribution of answers (H_0 : there are no differences between distribution of answers for each question, i.e. all the probabilities in the same column are equal to each other) regarding the influence of PE classes on health, well-being, communication, self-confidence and study success: $\chi^2(16)=67.9$, $p<0.001$.

The biggest difference between obtained and expected answers is noticed in the question which referred to the influence of classes on health, and in that about how much influence the classes have on improved communication and getting acquainted with other students. The results confirm our expectations according to which the distributions of answers for individual questions regarding the influence on health, well-being, communication, self-confidence and study success are not equal. The biggest difference between obtained and expected answers refers to the influence of PE on students' health (Table 2).

Table 2. The differences in the distribution of answers regarding the influence of PE classes

| Fo-Fe | Well-being | Self-conf. | Commun. | Health | St. success |
|-----------|------------|------------|---------|--------|-------------|
| Very low | -2.2 | 7.8 | 2.8 | -6.2 | -2.2 |
| Low | 0.0 | 10.0 | 1.0 | -13.0 | 2.0 |
| Moderate | 1.0 | 9.0 | -6.0 | -17.0 | 13.0 |
| High | 9.6 | -11.4 | 8.6 | 9.6 | -16.4 |
| Very high | -8.4 | -15.4 | -6.4 | 26.6 | 3.6 |

PE at higher education institutions is a unique course which enables students to have time for PE classes in Croatia, and which contributes to improved social communication as some sports activities require team work.

DISCUSSION

Despite all the benefits linked to physical activity, current levels of physical activity among many Croatian college students are low. Croatian universities recognized the importance and unique value of PE, and included it as compulsory course at the first two years of college. PE is recognized as the only university course which contributes to students' health and at the same time prevents the negative effects of

sedentary lifestyle and the consequences of insufficient physical activity of the Croatian student population.

Finally, on the basis of the results, the following conclusions can be made: 1. The research revealed the need and the importance of regular PE classes at university, 2. Students who participated in the research support introducing optional sport as elective course at higher years of study and the need for ECTS evaluation, and 3. Students are conscious of the positive effects of PE classes for health, satisfaction and relaxation, as well as of the influence of such tuition on improving self-confidence, communication and study success.

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