



P-ISSN: 2394-1685
E-ISSN: 2394-1693
Impact Factor (ISRA): 5.38
IJPESH 2016; 3(5): 326-329
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www.kheljournal.com
Received: 25-07-2016
Accepted: 26-08-2016

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Understanding attitude: The game changer towards increased participation in physical activities and better health

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Abstract

Attitude developed during physical education classes are decisive about involvement in physical activities in later life. If not approached at its infancy stage, a negative attitude can prove harmful to one's health and way of living. This article focuses on how primordial it is to understand attitude and its importance in physical education. It focuses on previous research findings that provide an overview of the current situation around the world, and how these data can be used to solve issues which crop up due to improper attitudes toward the subject and help motivate a higher level of participation in physical activities.

Keywords: Attitude, physical activity, physical education, health

1. Introduction

Thirty years ago international nutritionists were focusing on childhood malnutrition, the 'protein gap' and how to feed the world's burgeoning population, and medical services in the developing world were concentrated on the fight against infectious diseases. Today the World Health Organization finds itself needing to deal with the new pandemic of obesity and its accompanying non-communicable diseases while the challenge of childhood malnutrition has far from disappeared, TB and malaria rates are escalating, and the scourge of AIDS has emerged^[1].

Recent statistics by the World Health Organization (WHO 2014) indicated that worldwide prevalence of obesity more than doubled between 1980 and 2014. These WHO global estimates indicate that in 2014, more than 1.9 billion adults, 18 years and older, were overweight. Of these over 600 million were obese. It further states that in overall, about 13% of the world's adult population (11% of men and 15% of women) were obese in 2014. In 2014, 39% of adults aged 18 years and over (38% of men and 40% of women) were overweight. In 2013, 42 million children under the age of 5 were overweight or obese. It has been projected that in the next decade, there will be a worldwide increase (15%) in death rates from cardiovascular diseases: Africa will record over 20% increase^[2].

High body mass index (BMI) among children and adolescents continues to be a public health concern in the United States. Children with high BMI often become obese adults, (Serdulla *et al.* 1993 in Odgen 2010) and obese adults are at risk for many chronic conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and certain cancers. High BMI in children may also have immediate consequences, such as elevated lipid concentrations and blood pressure (Freedman *et al.* in Odgen 2010)^[3].

Morbidity and mortality from preventable, non-communicable chronic disease threatens the health of our populations and our economies. The accumulation of vast amounts of scientific knowledge has done little to change this. New and innovative thinking is essential to foster new creative approaches that leverage and integrate evidence through the support of big data, technology and design thinking^[4].

Despite the numerous benefits of physical activities, physical activity levels are reported to be decreasing among young people in countries around the world, especially in poor, urban areas where it is estimated that less than one-third of young people are adequately engaged in physical activities.

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This decline is believed to be largely due to increasingly common sedentary lifestyles, lack of emphasis on the importance of physical education and reduction in other school-based physical activities. The downward trend in the physical activity pattern found in adolescents could also be attributed to the fact that the pre-adolescence adolescence stage of life marks the beginning of a critical development transitional stage during which many youths have a tendency to become sedentary^[5].

The goal of physical education is to develop physically literate individuals who have the knowledge, skills and confidence to enjoy a lifetime of healthful physical activity. To pursue a lifetime of healthful physical activity, a physically literate individual should know the skills necessary to participate in a variety of physical activities, the implications and the benefits of involvement in various types of physical activities, participate regularly in physical activity and be physically fit and Value physical activity and its contributions to a healthful lifestyle (SHAPE America 2014)^[6]. According to an International market research by the Australian Sports Commission (2016), the strength of the relationship between sport participation and physical activity early in life and during adulthood appears across many cultures. It says that the basis for this relationship appears to be the development of positive attitudes and providing opportunities during childhood that establish sport and physical activity as a 'fun' thing to do. The Commission further states that competence in one's ability to perform fundamental movement skills as a child also tends to strengthen the probability of participation later in life. The research maintains that factors that influence sports participation can have social, psychological, physical, or economic origins^[7].

Attitude is a predisposition or a tendency to respond positively or negatively towards a certain idea, object, person, or situation. Attitude influences an individual's choice of action, and responses to challenges, incentives, and rewards (together called stimuli)^[8]. A student's attitude toward a particular subject in school can be shaped by his/her perception of the teacher or instructional setting^[9]. Attitudes toward physical activity and perceptions about physical education classes are important to understand as they can influence an individual's decision to begin or to continue participation in an activity (Silverman and Subramaniam, 1999)^[10].

In human life, attitude is an attribute learned subsequently, which could vary and change perpetually during the process of socialization (Levent and Umuzdas 2013)^[11]. Positive attitudes speed up the learning process and enhance student's motivation, especially in the learning-teaching process in which computer technology is involved (Shneiderman 1980 in Aydin 2012)^[12].

Besides having the potential to influence achievement in physical education, an attitude can also influence student's engagement in physical activities outside school, during leisure time (Carlson, 1995; Portman, 1995; Subramaniam, & Silverman, 2000)^[13-15]. According to Eraslan (2015), students' parents doing exercise and the residential areas of the students affected the attitude towards physical education course. When the purposes of physical education course in education system are taken into consideration, no matter what the students' gender, grade level, residential area or other socio-demographic characteristics are, precautions should be taken to enhance the attitudes towards physical education course of all students^[16].

In a cross National study (Chung and Philips 2013), data analysis showed significant relationships between attitudes

towards physical education and leisure time exercise. Male students were found to have more positive attitudes towards physical education than females and boys had higher leisure time exercise scores than girls^[17]. Lazaveric's (2015) study showed that younger adolescents in conditions of education have a positive attitude towards PE of moderate intensity, which means that there is room to further improve PE teaching in order to make students' attitudes more positive. An important finding relates to the connection between the attitudes towards PE and frequency of exercising in their leisure time. This finding indicates that PE teaching has a potential to become a mediator in developing active lifestyle.^[18] Studies conducted both in the world and in Serbia show that there is a decline of the level of physical activity with age, which is particularly notable during adolescence, from early towards late adolescence (Troost, 2002; Kamtsios, 2011)^[19, 20]. With regard to gender differences in the level of physical activity, results of studies point to the fact that adolescent male students are significantly more physically active and more engaged in sport compared to female students (Troost 2002)^[21]. Several studies indicate that a large number of students have positive attitudes and experiences of physical education (Subramaniam & Silverman, 2007)^[22].

Research conducted by Lauritsalo, Sääkslahti, & Rasku-Puttonen (2012), however, outlined some factors that determined both positive and negative attitudes towards Physical Education^[23]. Research indicates a significant lack of physical participation and involvement among adolescent girls in physical education classes. Some girls exhibit avoidance and resistance behaviors (skipping class, going to the nurse's office, not bringing appropriate clothing, etc.) so that they do not have to participate. Current research explains this behavior by suggesting that physical education and physical education teachers may inadvertently foster a gender dichotomy by deploying learned ideologies of femininity in the physical education curriculum that are produced and reproduced in the physical education classroom^[24].

In a study to identify attitude among adults on physical activity and also identify key constraints in physical activity among gender, most respondents had positive attitude and believe that physical activity help to improve their health and fitness. They also reported that they were busy with family and friends and therefore they didn't have enough time to do physical activities. The study showed that even though the participants had positive attitude towards physical activity, they still perceived constraints and hence their physical activity participation was low^[25].

Greenfield's study (2015) found that males participated in more physical activity during a day than females. Adolescents in all types of school were worryingly short-changed on physical activity provision, possibly encouraging poor attitudes towards physical activity; the repercussions of which may bring about higher chances of compromised health in later life^[26].

The school environment provides a good opportunity to influence children's physical activity and create positive attitudes towards physical activity and sport. More needs to be done to enable our teenagers to be more active during the school day and therefore promote good health and well-being, which will have benefits in the long term. The study of Roemmich *et al.* (2012) showed that providing opportunities to engage in game environments while exercising can increase the autonomy and enhance intrinsic motivation to keep engaging in general physical activity. Their study proves that providing participants with autonomy to choose in which

environment they wanted to exercise increased the duration and intensity of physical activity, especially for women^[27].

The United States Congress recognized the potential role that schools can play in promoting student health, combating problems associated with poor nutrition and physical inactivity, and ultimately preventing childhood obesity^[28]. Changes in dietary and physical activity patterns are often the result of environmental and societal changes associated with development and lack of supportive policies in sectors such as health, agriculture, transport, urban planning, environment, food processing, distribution, marketing and education^[29].

It is therefore important to understand students' attitudes and perceptions toward physical education since they will be future members of the workforce who will need to use their knowledge to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Mirsafian (2014) states that sport programs should be organized around students' dominant attitudes toward regular activities. In addition, planning and organizing sport programs with regard to the wide attitudinal differences between male and female students could be a big step toward improving students' participation rate in sporting activities^[30].

Active video games, or exergames, which require the physical movement of the participant's body, are being recognized as one possible solution to a diminishing interest in childhood physical activity. Exergaming extends beyond the home and arcade and into the education sector, where it is being used as part of the physical education (PE) curriculum^[31].

A study in 2012 suggests that physical education classes that are appealing to both boys and girls and emphasize a focus on learning and improvement foster positive attitudes and intrinsic motivation. In addition, physical education teachers should provide a range of choices within their classes in order to promote a sense of autonomy and increase levels of self-determination in their class^[32].

Escot and Passaga (2007) proposed that individual, activity and environmental aspects of teaching/learning were inseparable, and that content in physical education must be considered through this multidimensional perspective^[33]. A more complete understanding of how environmental factors act to determine physical activity behavior would contribute important knowledge to the field, but requires a research effort of considerable scope and complexity^[34]. Student performance is both dynamic and temporal within the context of physical education, and a key to success here is the ability of the teachers to see, understand and make connections between students' backgrounds and their behavior in class. This reinforces the importance of good teaching skills as a potential means to help all students in the class. The large variation among individual students shows that each student should be treated separately and that a "one size fits all" approach to teaching physical education doesn't work^[35].

Additional supports for the use of active games as a means by which to meet the American College of Sports Medicine's (ACSM) recommendations for physical activity include the ability to exercise in the home, especially for those with low self-confidence, and participants' attraction to video games as opposed to traditional forms of exercise. It has been shown that immediate satisfaction can be improved through the selection of enjoyable exercise activities. Research suggests that incorporating the use of exergames or game-based activities into routine training may be an option for increasing the duration and quality of physical activity and aid in reversing inactivity^[36].

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