PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THE INTEGRAL DEVELOPMENT OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract. *The paper entitled "Physical education and its contribution to the integral development of university students" analyzes the fundamental role of physical activity in the balanced physical, mental, and social formation of students in higher education. Physical education, as an essential component of the educational process, contributes to the adoption of a healthy lifestyle, the improvement of concentration abilities, and the enhancement of resilience to academic stress. The study highlights the importance of regular participation in motor activities, both within physical education classes and extracurricular programs, in order to develop lasting habits of movement and self-control.*

Based on data collected through questionnaires applied to students from non-sports faculties, the paper emphasizes their perception of the benefits of physical activity and identifies the main barriers to regular exercise. The results confirm the necessity of promoting a culture of movement within the university environment as a premise for the integral, harmonious, and responsible development of future graduates.

In addition, the research points out that physical education supports emotional well-being by reducing anxiety, improving mood, and fostering positive social interactions. Students who engage consistently in physical activities demonstrate better time management skills, higher motivation for learning, and increased capacity for teamwork. Encouraging diverse and accessible physical programs within the university can also help prevent sedentary lifestyles, reduce the risk of chronic diseases, and contribute to long-term health. Universities have the opportunity to create an environment that integrates movement into daily routines, promotes awareness of health benefits, and inspires students to adopt lifelong healthy habits.

Cuvinte cheie: physical education, university students, integral development, health and balance, physical activity, healthy lifestyle.

Introduction. In today's society, characterized by a fast pace, high levels of stress, and a growing tendency toward sedentary lifestyles, university physical education represents a fundamental pillar in the formation of young people. Its role extends beyond the purely motor dimension, having significant implications for the harmonious development of the individual, the maintenance of health, and the cultivation of values such as discipline, perseverance, and responsibility toward one's physical condition. Through systematic physical activities, students strengthen not only their motor skills but also their ability to concentrate, adapt, and manage stress, which contributes to improved academic performance and overall well-being.

For students from non-sport faculties, physical education often represents the only organized opportunity for regular exercise. In this context, physical education instructors play a crucial role in shaping positive attitudes toward movement and in promoting an active lifestyle. The present paper aims to highlight the contribution of physical education to the integral development of university students by analyzing the physical, psychological, and social benefits of motor activity, as well as identifying the main factors that encourage consistent participation in physical exercise.

Research Objectives. This paper aims to highlight the role of physical education in the integral development of university students by analyzing the connections between motor activity, health, psychological balance, and social adaptation. The main objectives are:

To identify the level of participation of students from non-sports faculties in regular physical activities.

To analyze students' perceptions regarding the benefits of university physical education.

To assess the impact of motor activities on health status and academic performance.

To determine the main obstacles that limit participation in physical exercise.

To formulate proposals for improving physical education programs designed for non-sport students.

Working hypotheses. Regular participation in physical activities significantly improves students' health and psychological balance.

There is a positive correlation between the level of physical activity and academic performance.

Students from non-sports faculties show low motivation for physical activity due to academic overload and lack of time.

Adapting physical education content to students' specific needs can increase their interest and active participation.

Research purpose. The main purpose of the research was to analyze how university physical education contributes to the integral development of students from non-sports faculties by identifying the relationships between physical activity, health, psychological balance, and academic performance.

Participants. The study was conducted at Titu Maiorescu University on a sample of 120 students, including 60 female and 60 male participants, aged between 19 and 24 years. All participants were enrolled in non-sport faculties, where physical education is included in the curriculum as a one-hour weekly activity.

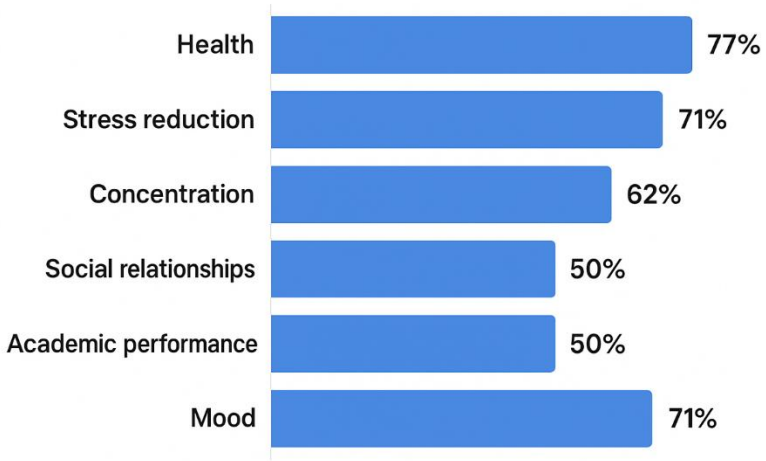
Instruments and procedure. Data were collected through a sociological questionnaire specifically designed for this research, focusing on the frequency of physical activities, motivation for exercise, perception of benefits, and main barriers encountered. Additionally, physical fitness tests (endurance, strength, and flexibility) were administered according to standard university physical education methodology.

The research was carried out over one academic semester (14 weeks) during mandatory physical education classes.

Data analysis. The collected data were statistically processed using descriptive (means, percentages, standard deviations) and correlational methods to identify the relationships between the level of physical activity, students' perceptions, and their overall health status. The results were interpreted from an interdisciplinary perspective — educational, psychological, and social.

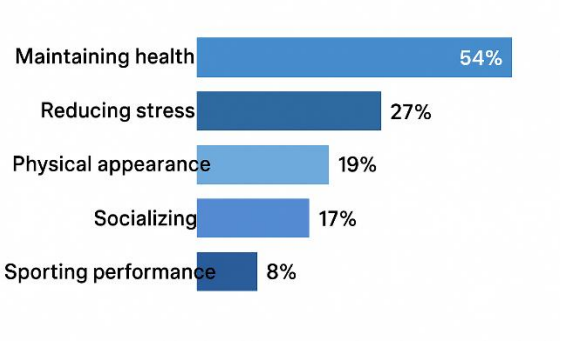
Results and discussion. The analysis of the collected data revealed several relevant trends regarding the relationship between university physical education and the integral development of students.

Participation level and motivation. Approximately 62% of students reported regular attendance at physical education classes, but only 38% engaged in additional physical activities outside the university framework. The main motivations were maintaining health (54%) (graphic 2), psychological relaxation (27%), and improving physical appearance (19%). Lack of time and academic workload were identified as major limiting factors.



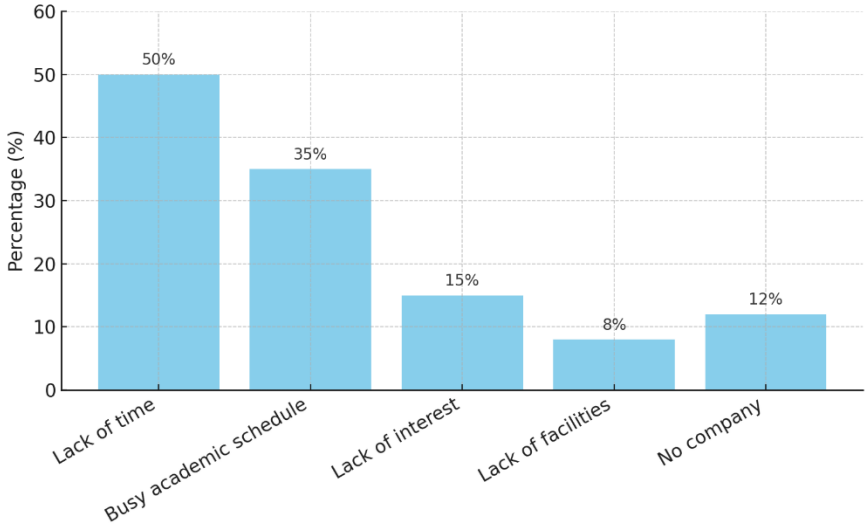
Graphic 1. Perception of benefits

The analysis of students' participation levels revealed significant variations influenced by individual, social, and environmental factors. Most students from non-sports faculties reported engaging in physical activity once or twice a week, primarily during mandatory physical education classes. However, only a small percentage maintained consistent extracurricular participation. This discrepancy suggests that institutional involvement remains the main motivator for many students, while intrinsic motivation—the personal desire to stay active—requires further development.



Graphic 2. Motivation for physical activity

Motivational patterns were analyzed according to Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory, which distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsically motivated students participate in physical activity for enjoyment, stress relief, or personal growth, while extrinsically motivated students do so mainly to meet course requirements or social expectations. The study found that intrinsic motivation was closely associated with higher levels of satisfaction, emotional balance, and academic engagement.



Graphic 3 Obstacles in physical activity

Furthermore, gender differences emerged in motivational drivers. Female students tended to value physical activity for its aesthetic and health benefits, while male students were more motivated by competition and social recognition. Access to modern facilities, the presence of supportive instructors, and the variety of offered activities also played a crucial role in maintaining participation.

To increase motivation, universities should implement diversified programs that address multiple motivational needs. Encouraging autonomy, providing positive feedback, and integrating technology-based tools such as fitness trackers or gamified challenges can enhance engagement. By fostering an internalized appreciation for movement rather than external obligation, institutions can cultivate sustainable participation and improve students' holistic development.

Perceived benefits. Results showed a positive correlation between the level of engagement in physical activities and students' perceptions of well-being, focus, and stress resistance. Physically active students reported better adaptation to academic demands and a more balanced overall mood.

Impact on academic performance. The correlational analysis indicated a moderate but significant association between regular physical exercise and consistent academic performance.

The results of the study revealed that the majority of students perceive physical activity as a key factor in maintaining mental clarity, emotional stability, and academic productivity. Participants emphasized that engaging in regular exercise helped them improve concentration, reduce fatigue, and manage stress during demanding academic periods. These findings align with numerous studies in the educational and psychological literature,

which demonstrate that moderate physical activity stimulates neurocognitive processes, enhances memory, and increases attention span.

Students also reported improvements in self-confidence and time management, as regular exercise instilled a sense of discipline and personal responsibility. Group-based activities contributed to the development of communication and teamwork skills, essential for academic and professional success. In addition, students noticed positive changes in sleep quality and general well-being, which indirectly supported their capacity to perform better in academic tasks and examinations.

A significant correlation was observed between physical activity frequency and students' self-perceived academic efficiency. Those who exercised at least two to three times a week tended to show greater persistence in study habits and higher motivation to complete assignments. This relationship confirms that physical activity not only benefits physical and emotional health but also acts as a catalyst for intellectual performance.

Therefore, universities should view physical education not as an ancillary discipline but as an integral component of academic success. By fostering a culture that values movement as part of the learning process, higher education institutions can promote both academic excellence and the long-term well-being of their students.

Discussion. The findings confirm the hypothesis that university physical education plays a complex formative role, influencing not only the biological dimension but also the psychological and social aspects of student development. Regular participation in physical activity fosters autonomy, teamwork, and the adoption of a balanced lifestyle. These conclusions support the need to modernize university physical education programs by diversifying their content and adapting them to the interests and needs of students from non-sports faculties.

Literature review. Recent studies have consistently shown that physical education at the university level has multiple benefits beyond physical fitness. Bailey et al. (2013) highlight that even short-term, structured physical activity can improve cognitive performance and memory retention. Similarly, Biddle and Asare (2011) argue that exercise reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression among young adults, contributing to a more resilient student population. According to Fox (2016), physical activity enhances self-esteem, emotional regulation, and social interaction, particularly in environments where students experience high academic stress.

Research also emphasizes the importance of designing physical education programs that are enjoyable and adaptable. Stamatakis and Coombs (2017) recommend the inclusion of diverse activities such as group fitness, recreational sports, and mindfulness-based movement sessions, as these increase adherence and long-term participation. Furthermore, the World Health Organization (2020) stresses that integrating movement into daily routines is more effective when universities actively promote a supportive culture, including access to facilities, social encouragement, and flexible scheduling.

Practical implications. Implementing effective physical education programs in non-sports faculties requires several practical steps. First, universities should assess students' interests and motivations to tailor activities that appeal to a wide range of participants. Programs that combine individual and team-based exercises are likely to develop both physical and social skills.

Second, academic schedules should accommodate exercise opportunities, possibly integrating short activity breaks during long lectures or offering online guidance for home-based exercises. Third, continuous monitoring and feedback can help students track progress and stay motivated.

Digital platforms or apps for logging activity, gamified challenges, and peer support groups have shown positive effects on adherence and engagement. By applying these strategies, universities can significantly enhance students' physical, mental, and social development.

Limitations and future research. Despite the positive findings, this study has several limitations. The sample size was limited to 120 students from a single university, which may affect the generalizability of results. Self-reported questionnaires may also introduce bias in reporting activity levels or perceived benefits.

Future research should explore longitudinal studies that track students over multiple years to assess the long-term impact of physical education. Additionally, comparative studies across different faculties and cultural contexts could provide insight into the most effective program designs. Investigating technological interventions, such as virtual exercise classes and wearable fitness trackers, may also enhance understanding of strategies that increase student participation.

Conclusions and recommendations. The results of the research confirm the major importance of university physical education in the integral development of young people.

Systematic motor activity has positive effects on health, psychological tone, concentration ability, and social relationships, contributing to the development of responsible behavior toward one's well-being. Physically active students show better adaptation to academic demands and a higher level of psychological resilience.

More over, motivation for engaging in physical activity is significantly influenced by teachers' attitudes, the diversity of available activities, and access to adequate sports facilities. Lack of time and limited interest in movement remain major barriers, especially among students from non-sports faculties.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

Diversify the types of physical activities offered during university classes (aerobics, recreational games, functional training).

Introduce attractive extracurricular programs based on voluntary participation.

Promote health and movement education through periodic university-wide campaigns.

Strengthen collaboration between physical education instructors, academic counselors, and university administration to support an active lifestyle on campus.

By implementing these directions, physical education can become an essential tool in shaping a balanced, healthy, and responsible university generation.

General conclusion. The paper Physical education and its contribution to the integral development of university students, demonstrates that physical education is not merely a formal component of the curriculum but an essential tool for the holistic development of students.

By analyzing the involvement of students from non-sports faculties in physical activities, their perceptions of the benefits, and the barriers they face, it was shown that regular exercise supports physical and mental health, enhances concentration, and contributes to the development of social skills.

The results suggest that to maximize the impact of physical education, it is necessary to diversify activities, implement attractive extracurricular programs, and promote a culture of movement within the university environment.

Collaboration among instructors, educational counselors, and university administration is essential to create a setting conducive to the integral development of students. This paper can serve as a guide for optimizing physical education programs and designing strategies to encourage an active lifestyle among university students.

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