

ATTITUDES OF LOWER SECONDARY STUDENTS TOWARD DISTANCE LEARNING IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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Abstract

The state of emergency, imposed due to the Covid 19 pandemic, posed a serious challenge to the Bulgarian education system. Opportunities to provide the necessary physical activity for students were limited even further. Teachers had to implement new approaches to working in Physical Education classes, which were conducted in an electronic environment at a distance. In turn, the approach to online teaching was very different from traditional teaching. This provoked us to conduct the present study, which aims to investigate the attitudes of students of the lower secondary stage of primary education toward conducting Physical Education classes in an electronic environment. In order to achieve this goal, we administered a questionnaire survey composed of 15 questions. A total of 134 students aged 11-12 years were surveyed, stratified by gender. From the results obtained, we found that students have a positive attitude and feel more motivated, develop their potential better, and have a higher sense of achievement when they are taught in a face-to-face environment. The availability of a large and safe space, the use of facilities, the wide variety of activities, etc., all contribute to building a lasting interest in active involvement in Physical Education classes.

Keywords: secondary school, students attitudes, distance learning

INTRODUCTION

Numerous issues and studies related to student motivation in PE classes have been described in the research literature (Jenkins & Nelson, 2005). The characteristics of the learning environment, the teaching methods, and the teacher's attitudes toward students in the classroom are among the most studied factors of student motivation, but relatively little research has been conducted in the field (Bennett et al., 2001; Cheung, 2009; Salta & Tzougraki, 2004), and data from Bulgaria is scarce.

In the last three years, along with the consequences of the development of information technologies, a new factor has emerged, influencing human motor activity even more negatively. This factor stems from the Covid 19 crisis and the damage it is causing is mostly associated with the inability to freely practice sport and to conduct training within the school. But as some scholars say, every crisis is also a 'new opportunity' (Mair, 2009), a 'time for decision making' and a 'turning point for change for the better ...' (Liddell & Scott, 1996).

In our practice, we have become convinced of the effectiveness of fitness exercises for the improvement of students' physical capability (Balevski, Marinov & Mavrudiev, 2014; Marinov & Naumov, 2014; Nancheva, 2019). In recent years, there has been a natural increase in research on the problem of the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic on the physical capability and health of students (Mileva & Popeska, 2021).

„Planned learning that normally occurs in a place other than the place of instruction and as a result requires planning, teaching and communication methods by electronic and other technologies, and specific organizational and managerial means“ (Moore & Carsley (Мур & Кибърсли), 1996).

„Distance learning is instruction by print or electronic media to a person who is being taught at a different place or time from that of the instructors or other learners“ (Hill, 1997).

„Distance learning is a method of instruction in which the learner is physically separated from the instructor and the institution“ (Mielke 1999).

In any distance education, there must be an instructor, one or more learners and a course or program the instructor teaches to the learners. The requirement and need for testing, grading, assistance, and exam preparation for learners is the same as in traditional learning, and two-way communication remains of the utmost importance. Learning can be individual or group-based, and in either case, it can take place without the physical presence of the teacher. The learning material should be structured in such a way as to allow distance learning.

„Distance learning occurs when the instructor and learners are physically separated and when technology (sound, picture, print, etc.), often combined with direct communication, is used to connect the two parties“ (Willis & Dickinson, 1997).

Aim and objectives of the study:

The purpose of this study was to investigate the attitudes of students of the lower secondary stage of primary education toward conducting Physical Education classes in an electronic environment.

To achieve it, the following tasks were realized:

1. Investigating the state of the problem on the studied topic.
2. Developing a questionnaire to investigate the attitudes of lower secondary students towards e-learning in PE classes.
3. Conducting a survey to reveal the students' attitudes towards learning PE in an electronic environment.
4. Analysing of the survey results.

The subject of the study is students' attitudes toward learning in an electronic environment.

METHODS

A total of 134 students from the 81st "Victor Hugo" High School, Sofia, aged 11-12 years were surveyed. The closed-ended questionnaire contained 15 questions and was conducted in an electronic environment, using Google Forms. It was made accessible to students through the Microsoft Teams platform.

The study involved 134 students from grades V – VI who underwent e-learning since the start of the Covid 19 pandemic. Their online learning was initially conducted through established Viber groups. The study was conducted during the school year 2021/22. A complex methodology was applied to realize the aim and objectives of the study:

- Literature review and analysis;
- Methods for collecting empirical information through separate methodologies - observation and survey.
- Mathematical and statistical methods for quantitative processing and analysis of the results obtained:
 - frequency analysis- to reveal the relative proportions of students' responses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 1. presents the number of students who participated in the survey, based on which we found that 63% of them were girls and 37% were boys. All the individuals studied answered the survey questions.

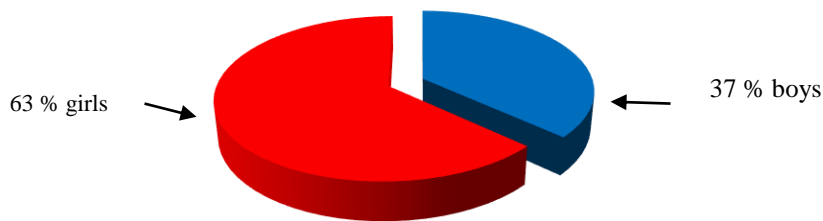


Figure 1. Distribution of respondents by gender

As can be seen in Figure 2., when asked "Which lessons do you prefer, traditional lessons at school or lessons in the ORES (Education at a distance in an online environment)?" an overwhelming percentage of students, 80%, indicated that they prefer the traditional lessons in physical education and sport because their lessons at school are more varied, emotional, associated with fun movement games, group and team activities in different sports, and

an opportunity to demonstrate one's abilities in front of others. There is a noticeable lack of teamwork, sharing ideas, and working on common projects; the environment at home does not always predispose and motivate the student to give his best to solve group problems. 15% indicated that they prefer online lessons. 5% of the students indicated the prefer blended learning.

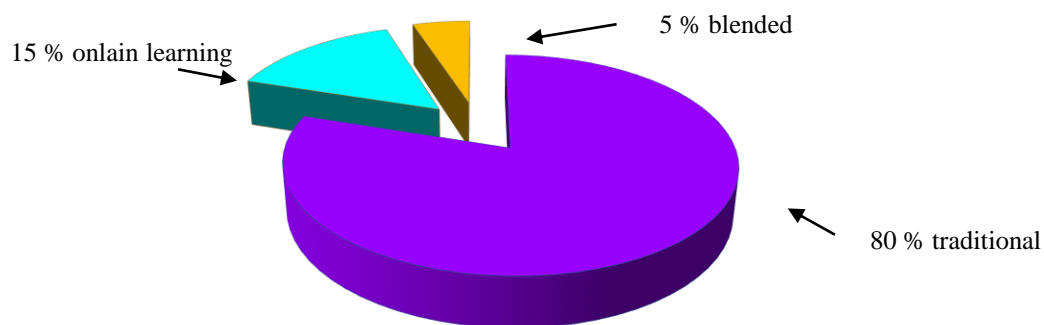


Figure 2. "Which lessons do you prefer, traditional or Education at a distance in an online environment?"

To question 8. "How often did you perform the tasks set in the PE lesson?" the leading answer was "always". In the lower secondary stage, the lack of enough movement, the need for variety and the responsible attitude towards the school rules and distance learning lead to 56% of the students strictly performing the tasks set asynchronously by their teacher. However, in no small percentage of students, the frequency of choosing to conscientiously complete

assignments in an asynchronous environment still varies: "only sometimes if I feel like it" – 22%, "almost always" – 14%, "at a parent's insistence" – 6%, and "never" – 2%. This shows that a large number of students leave themselves various "loopholes," when they have the opportunity, to find reasons, in their opinion logical and justified, not to complete the tasks set for independent work (Fig. 3.).

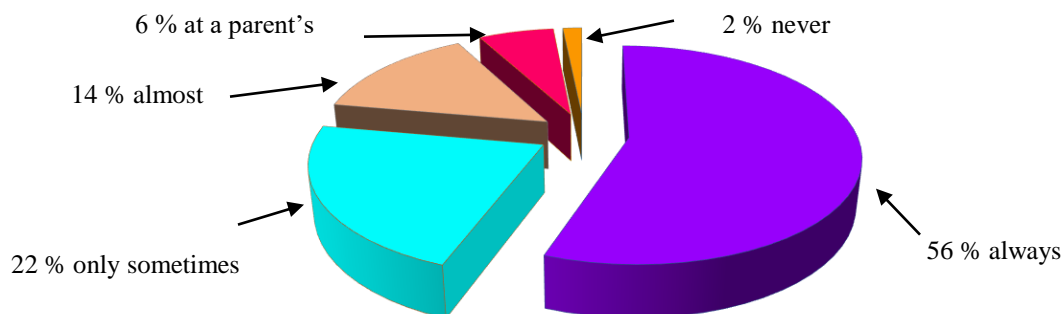


Figure 3. "How often did you perform the set tasks independently?"

Responses to question №9 – "Where do you do the assignments better?" showed that a frequent problem was the lack of adequate and safe space to conduct the lesson (55%). On the basis of this, students indicated that the face-to-face form of instruction is preferred. 30% of the respondents answered that they do well in both forms and only 15% answered that they do better in ORES.

learning process, higher achievement, more intense and prolonged workloads, variety of sports activities, free space, variety of sports equipment and supplies, sense of greater freedom and autonomy in actions and interactions, change from the home environment, broader scope for expression at many levels, and others led a noticeably high percentage of respondents – 89% – to express a strong preference for in-person lessons. For 9% of respondents, the type of learning is irrelevant and, quite logically and predictably, only 2% have an overriding affinity for distance learning.

The results shown in Figure 4 refer to the question, "Do you prefer lessons in Education at a distance in an online environment?". The social environment, interaction with other participants in the

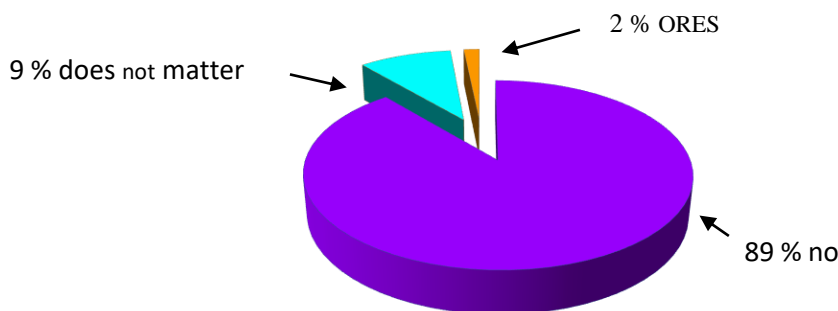


Figure 4: "Do you prefer the PE lessons in Education at a distance in an online environment?"

Figure 5. reflects the responses related to students' motivation to participate in PE activities, specifically during distance learning through ORES. Nowadays, adolescents have a microclimate different from most previous generations; the fact of this difference is often driven by the technology in their lives. The reason for this is the rapid development of technology and the digitalization of everyday life, the wide availability of information at any given time through the Internet, the popularization of a number of popular applications that capture the interest of students and also shift the modes of

communication from live contact to communication through digital devices. The students surveyed at this age, however, had had some time to gain experience in a face-to-face learning environment, to gather initial knowledge about the role of movement and sport in their physical and mental health, and subsequently to gain experience in learning in an electronic environment. These factors allow them to make comparisons between the two learning environments and experience their positive aspects as well as their disadvantages. This experience and awareness help students realize that in the given

(online learning) environment, active participation in physical education lessons is important to maintain their health. They show understanding and a responsible attitude towards lessons – 50% (for maintaining health), 30% (for ensuring movement in pandemic conditions) and 20% (for goals set by the teacher). However, in the lower secondary stage, many other motivating factors are often needed to get the most optimal result, namely that students find learning fun, engaging and interesting. Distance learning offers

opportunities for this, but they are limited and often incomparable to the possibilities of creating such face-to-face PE lessons. Then, to maintain a high percentage of activity, other factors such as respect for rules, the parent's position on the importance of the learning process, the teacher's authority, and other common features characteristic of this period of mental development – remain important.

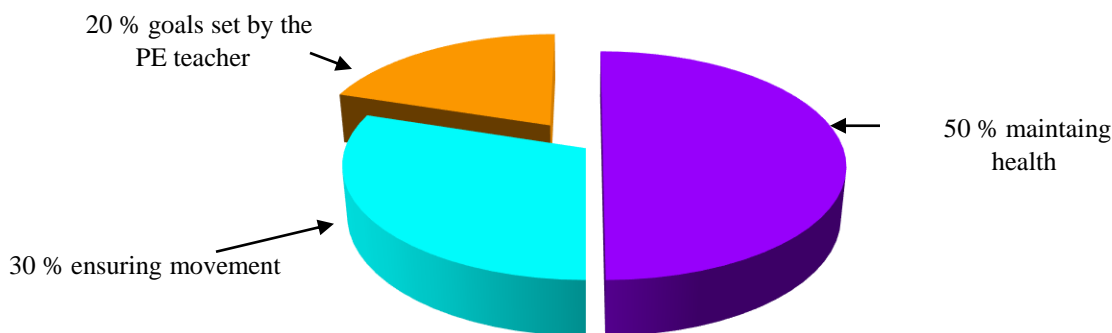


Figure 5. "What motivates you most to participate in Education at a distance in an online environment?"

The pandemic and the measures taken against it transformed Physical Education to a certain extent and provided new opportunities for its development and application, but among education professionals and other circles of society, they have also raised some vital questions about the level of change needed in the education system. One of these is whether distance learning, with all its advantages, has the capacity to provide a complete substitute for face-to-face learning. Both in the survey conducted and in the numerous conversations and discussions held in groups and individually with students of different age groups, it is clear that the answer is negative, except only in specific isolated cases. Some of the limitations and difficulties occurring in the implementation of physical education lessons and sports-training activities in different sports in a distance form are subject to improvement, but cannot be completely overcome to provide the necessary social interaction and sufficient socio-psychological development. Technology cannot displace the human factor. It can only be a short-term complete substitute in extreme situations and the rest of the time a complementary and enriching educational factor, occupying a necessary modern and innovative niche in the face-to-face form of education.

CONCLUSIONS

In recent years, there has been a natural increase in research on the problem of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the physical fitness and health of students (Boncheva, 2022; Kostova, 2022). But these studies are mostly of a descriptive nature. Few works present the results of experiments conducted to prove the beneficial influence of the means and methods of physical education on the multifaceted development of students. Therefore, our work is

valuable in the practice of Physical Education. Physical Education classes in Education at a distance in an online environment provide opportunities for motor activity, but they definitely cannot provide the necessary amount of motor activity as in the case of the face-to-face form of education. We believe that the Physical Education teacher is the main factor influencing students' motivation to participate actively in lessons.

Both from the results of the survey and from our personal observations and conversations with students, we found that no matter how interesting, varied and innovative lessons are created in distance and/or e-learning form, the overwhelming preference of students is for face-to-face learning.

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