


Chapter 20

Global Perspectives on Physical Activity: Navigating Cultural Influences for Health and Wellness

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this chapter is to present the importance of physical activity and movement for people of all ages, with special attention to school-aged children and adolescents. The chapter begins with a description of physical activity in cultural contexts. Next, the chapter examines the role of physical education in promoting physical literacy. It concludes with workable solutions and recommendations for the physical education classroom to promote lifelong physical activity and healthy lifestyles. According to the World Health Organization, physical inactivity is rising globally along with the rates of obesity. Therefore, this chapter examines ways to promote physical activity using culturally relevant practices.

INTRODUCTION

Physical inactivity has become a global problem (Bull et al., 2020). According to the World Health Organization (2022), approximately 1.4 billion people worldwide are not sufficiently active. Adolescents, in particular, do not meet current guidelines

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for recommended aerobic activity (Bull et al., 2020). Therefore, the World Health Organization (2022) has advocated for increased emphasis on movement, physical activity, and health in their newest guidelines. According to Bull et al. (2020), there has been no real change in the levels of physical activity globally over the last two decades. At the same time, obesity rates worldwide have risen at alarming rates for all ages, with the number of obese children and adolescents rising from 11 million in 1975 to 124 million in 2016 (World Health Organization, 2017). However, the issue of physical activity is complicated. While it is a simple concept traditionally defined as “*any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that results in energy expenditure*” (Caspersen et al., 1985), the implementation of the guidelines on an individual basis is less simple. There are significant health benefits to physical activity (Dale et al., 2014), but people are not always persuaded to change their lifestyle behaviors to improve their physical health (Warbrick et al., 2020). To address the need to instill healthy lifestyle behaviors from an early age, the World Health Organization has recommended that schools present a holistic approach to physical activity (McMullen et al., 2022).

MAIN FOCUS OF THE CHAPTER

It is known that physical activity is important for maintaining physical and mental health across the lifespan (Acut et al., 2024; Barber et al., 2024; Nozaleda, 2024). However, it is not known how culture impacts the physical activity of people or the way culture affects the incorporation of physical activity into daily life. Therefore, the main objective of this chapter is to discuss the importance of incorporating physical activity and movement for people of all ages and cultures, with special attention to school-aged children and adolescents. The chapter begins with a description of physical activity in cultural contexts. Next, this chapter examines the role of physical education in promoting physical literacy. It examines research into best practices for physical education classrooms and technological interventions that assist in promoting physical activity. It concludes with workable solutions, interventions, and recommendations for the physical education classroom to promote lifelong physical activity. This chapter is significant because of the importance of physical activity to overall health and the importance of culture in helping people meet physical activity guidelines.

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