

Pupils' opinions on motor activities in early school education

Zajęcia ruchowe w nauczaniu wczesnoszkolnym w ocenie uczniów

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Summary

Introduction: Lower grades students participate in Physical Education lessons mainly for pleasure, as well as for emotional and utilitarian reasons. For many students at this educational stage their attendance in Physical Education classes is the only form of participation in organized physical activity. Therefore, motor activities should provide children with the opportunity for experiences of different kind and motivate them to physical activity. The aim of the research was to find out what are the opinions of early school students on physical activities.

Material and methods: The research covered 256 students at the age of 7-10, 128 girls and 128 boys. The method of open categorized interview was applied to collect the empirical material.

Results: The results of the survey have shown that the vast majority of children expressed their positive opinions on their participation in physical activities. The students enjoyed team games and various exercises most. Nearly 9% of the examined were dissatisfied with the lack of discipline during the lesson and not observing fair play principles by their classmates during exercises. The said dissatisfaction increased with age. The examined did not show much interest in swimming classes, and the 9-10 age group showed no interest in them at all.

Conclusions: The large majority of students, irrespective of their age, are willing to participate in motor activities.

Key words: early school education, physical activities, students, opinions

Introduction

The aim of physical education in early school teaching is intended, among others, to stimulate pupils' physical development, develop hygienic habits and arouse interest in various forms of motor activity [1], and the measure of effectiveness of this process should be the durability of health improving habits in further life [2].

Physical Education classes, at this stage of education called motor activities, are the basic means to meet the above objectives. Despite the fact that motor activities in early grades have a fundamental significance for the comprehensive child development [3], they still strongly rely on the biotechnical version of physical education, as many early school education teachers do not understand fully the essence of contemporary physical education

[4, 5]. For many pupils at this educational stage, their attendance in Physical Education classes is the only form of participa-

tion in an organized physical activity. Therefore, motor activities should provide children with the opportunity to get different kinds of experiences [6]. It is also important to remember that pupils of lower grades attend Physical Education classes mainly for pleasure, as well as for emotional and utilitarian reasons. In consideration of the above, when designing motor activities, one should plan such solutions as to provide children with joyful experiences and generate positive emotions. Considering the health aspect, Physical Education classes in this age group should as frequently as possible be run outdoors, which is clearly emphasized in the core curriculum.

The purpose of the study was to check the opinions of early school education pupils on motor activities. The study was to provide answers to the following more specific questions:

1. How do early school education pupils perceive the motor activities in which they participate?
2. What content of motor activities is preferred by pupils?
3. Does the age of the respondents differentiate their opinions on motor activities?

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Material and methods

The study covered 256 pupils (128 girls and 128 boys) from grades 1–3 in 64 randomly selected Cracow primary schools. During the study the total of 64 Physical Education classes were run (21 in grade 1, 23 in grade 2 and 20 in grade 3). The basic criterion of participant selection was the level of their motor skills and fitness. After consultation with the teacher, two pairs were selected from each grade under study – a girl and a boy, who represented different types of participants of Physical Education classes [7]. One pair stood out among other pupils due to above average skills and fitness, and the other pair included pupils with a low level of fitness. Such a scenario of respondent selection resulted from the fact that good and bad pupils in terms of physical activity usually present different opinions on Physical Education classes [8]. “As the qualitative research resigns from sample representativeness (which allows for wide generalisations) as well as from reliability (which allows to repeat the research with the use of the same instrument), the selection is based only on grounds of merit” [9]. What it means is that researchers usually decide to use target sample selection instead of random sample selection, characteristic of the quantitative research. “However, it is always done after a thorough identification of the persons qualified for research” [10].

The empirical material was collected with the use of an open categorized interview as children at this age could find it difficult to freely report their own experiences and reflections on Physical Education classes. The open categorized interview consisted in “asking mainly close ended questions and always (...) in accordance with previously prepared set, i.e. with obligation to ask them in the same order as in the questionnaire text and with no possibility to ask respondents additional questions” [11].

The interviews were carried out directly after motor activities, individually with each child, following the rules applicable in standard interviews, where “individuals give answers

mental level, range of vocabulary and language form” [11]. The questions referred both to their feelings about Physical Education classes in which they participated and their general attitude towards class activities. In order to obtain reliable data the interview was organized in such a way that the pupils who finished their conversation with the interviewer could not communicate with the participants waiting for an interview. In this way, the transfer of information between the interviewees as well as the influence of the answers provided by previous interviewees were supposed to be eliminated. At the last stage of this part of the study the recording was transcribed to prepare the obtained data for analysis and interpretation.

The results of the study were statistically processed with the use of SPSS 21 program (IBM Corp., 2012). The description of the qualitative data was presented with the use of contingency and percentage tables. Whereas, for the analysis of the relationship between variable estimates (ordinal variables – pupils’ age) and quantitative variables or variable estimates the Spearman nonparametric *rho* correlation was applied [13]. Statistically significant correlations at the level $p < 0.05$ were marked with one asterisk, and at the level $p < 0.01$ with two asterisks.

Results

The study revealed that most commonly classes were run in the form of activity fun and games (78.1%). There were also classes with team sports games and gymnastics. Therefore, pupils’ opinions on Physical Education classes refer only to the said three kinds of activities, with the great majority of activity fun and games. It is worth noting at this point that the domination of this kind of activities at the early school education stage is fully justified (Table 1).

Irrespective of the type of motor activities run, nearly all the pupils (above 97%) in each age group were satisfied with their participation in Physical Education classes. Only few respon-

Table 1. Types of motor activities run during the study (%)

Types of motor activities in examined grades	N	%
Activity fun plays and games	50	78.1
Team sports games	9	14.1
Gymnastics	5	7.8
Total	64	100

in nearly identical conditions, as a result the said answers are comparable: they can be counted and presented in the form of frequency distribution” [12]. The utterances of the interviewees were recorded with a voice recorder, to the use of which all the respondents gave their consent. The questions asked to the pupils were carefully formulated “so that they did not exceed their

at the age 7–8 and 8–9 did not like the PE classes. Such opinions were not recorded in the age group 9–10 but in this group a small percentage of the respondents were not able to precisely express their opinions on the said issue (Table 2).

The majority of pupils while answering the question *What did you like the most in the PE class?* gave really precise answers

(Table 3). Indecisiveness while expressing the opinion on the structure of a PE class was more typical of students at the age 8–9 (30.5%) than in other age groups. The obtained data show that the surveyed pupils from lower grades were most satisfied with their participation in team games. Children's satisfaction with all kinds of activities offered by the teacher decreased with age, and the interest in activity fun increased. The said correlations were statistically significant at the level ($p < 0.05$). Older pupils more often preferred activities with a ball. On the other hand the youngest ones liked running and competing.

The question *What didn't you like in the PE class?* was much more difficult for the surveyed children to answer. Among all the respondents as many as 68% did not define their attitude (Table 4). The younger the pupils the more indecisive they were in answering the above question (level of statistical significance $p < 0.05$). The older the pupils, the more increasingly they expressed their dissatisfaction with the lack of discipline and not observing fair play principles by their peers while performing motor tasks. The said correlation turned out to be statistically

significant at the level $p < 0.01$. Older pupils also expressed their dissatisfaction with competing (statistical significance $p < 0.05$). It may have been connected with the fact that some participants did not observe the established rules. The respondents from the oldest group (age 9–10) did not accept the fact that the teacher left out team games while running motor activities.

While being interviewed the vast majority of pupils, what is important from each age group, confirmed that they always willingly participated in PE classes. There were some, however, who expressed their reluctance to participation in motor activities. The most considerable percentage of those disinterested in physical education was recorded among 9–10 year olds, and the lowest in the age group 8–9. There was no statistically significant correlation between the analyzed variables and pupils' age (Table 5).

The results obtained from the interview (Table 6) showed that in early school education during motor activities children would be most willing to participate in all kinds of team games and activity fun and would like to perform varied activities. The

Table 2. Answers the surveyed children gave to the following question: *Did you like the PE class you had participated in?*

Kind of answer	Age						Spearman's <i>rho</i> correlation
	Age 7–8		Age 8–9		Age 9–10		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Yes	82	97.6	90	97.8	78	97.5	0.001
I have no opinion	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	2.5	
No	2	2.4	2	2.2	0	0.0	
Total	84	100	92	100	80	100	

Table 3. Answers the surveyed children gave to the following question: *What did you like the most in the PE class?*

Kind of answer	Age						Spearman's <i>rho</i> correlation
	Age 7–8		Age 8–9		Age 9–10		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
I do not know	10	11.9	28	30.5	14	17.5	0.060
Team games	14	16.7	20	21.7	12	15.0	-0.016
Various activities	18	21.4	20	21.7	6	7.5	-0.146*
Activity fun	12	14.3	6	6.5	22	27.5	0.142*
Running	12	14.3	7	7.6	10	12.5	-0.025
Competition	11	13.1	9	9.8	9	11.3	-0.026
Activities with a ball	8	9.5	3	3.3	9	11.3	0.041

Percentage values do not add up to 100 because the surveyed persons were allowed to give many answers *: $p < 0.05$

Table 4. Answers the surveyed children gave to the following question: *What didn't you like in the PE lesson?*

Kind of answer	Age						Spearman's ρ correlation
	Age 7–8		Age 8–9		Age 9–10		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
I do not know	62	73.8	76	82.6	38	47.5	-0.222**
Competition	4	4.8	10	10.9	12	15.0	0.136*
Various activities	12	14.3	6	6.5	10	12.5	-0.027
Lack of discipline and fair play rules	5	5.9	3	3.3	14	17.5	0.186**
Activities with a ball	4	4.8	0	0.0	6	7.5	0.067
No playing a game	0	0.0	0	0.0	4	5.0	0.112

Percentage values do not add up to 100 because the surveyed could give many answers

*: $p < 0,05$

** : $p < 0,01$

Table 5. Answers the surveyed children gave to the following question: *Do you always participate willingly in PE lessons?*

Kind of answer	Age						Spearman's ρ correlation
	Age 7–8		Age 8–9		Age 9–10		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Yes	72	85.7	88	95.6	66	82.5	0.04
I have no opinion	2	2.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	
No	10	11.9	4	4.4	14	17.5	
Total	84	100	92	100	80	100	

Table 6. Answers the surveyed children gave to the following question: *What would you be most willing to do in PE lessons?*

Kind of answer	Age						Spearman's ρ correlation
	Age 7–8		Age 8–9		Age 9–10		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
I do not know	12	14.3	2	2.2	4	5.0	-0.148*
Play different team games	32	38.1	50	54.4	36	45.0	0.058
Participate in different plays	24	28.6	22	23.9	26	32.5	0.033
Perform different activities	16	19.0	18	19.6	18	22.5	0.034
Participate in competition	2	2.4	10	10.9	2	2.5	0.006
Swim	2	2.4	8	8.7	0	0.0	-0.045

Percentage values do not add up to 100 because the surveyed could give many answers *: $p < 0,05$

expectations increased with age. It should be noted that the respondents revealed little interest in swimming activities, and no interest at all was shown in the age group 9–10. The children's age differentiated their indecisiveness in answering the question *What would you be most willing to do during a PE class?* The older the child the more rarely answered *I don't know* (level of statistical significance $p < 0.05$).

Discussion

The study results constitute primarily an important source of information for PE teachers who run classes with early school education children. It turned out that early school children were willing to participate in motor activities. Only one in ten children shows a sceptical attitude towards PE classes. The beneficial attitude of the respondents towards physical activity results, among others, from ontogeny as children at this stage of development possess an inner need for movement, also called "hunger for movement". The said phenomenon facilitates teacher's work in terms of motivating pupils to participate in motor activities during PE classes. Teachers, however, are still obliged to creatively plan PE classes to meet children's needs and expectations, which was clearly confirmed in the study. Well-planned and run PE classes enable the development of children's creativity, their social skills and positive behaviour regarding an active and healthy lifestyle and the participation in physical activity seems to be the most natural and spontaneous "transmitter" of learning and gaining experience in many fields of theoretical and practical knowledge [14].

The study shows a beneficial impact of physical activity on school results and achievements, such as memorizing, observation, problem solving, decision making, and on the improvement of attitudes, discipline, behaviors and creativity [15].

The survey revealed that students were mainly interested in team sports games. Some expressed their dissatisfaction with competing during motor activities. It seems likely that the teachers who ran those fragments of the class where competition occurred, did not make the children observe the established rules, which resulted in the dissatisfaction of a group of pupils. Teachers should particularly pay attention to these moments in their work with children when emotions, in this case connected with competing, disturb or completely eliminate correct and honest task performance. It was also found that not all pupils willingly participated in PE classes. There may be many reasons for the reluctance of this group of children, e.g. individual aversion to physical exercises, not meeting children's expectations towards their motor activity, bad class management, not attractive exercises, etc. What is also important is the attitude of the teacher during motor activities. It particularly regards observing discipline and fair play principles during competition, which was highlighted by the respondents. It requires consistency in the teacher's behavior.

Conclusions

1. In accordance with the data obtained in the interview, the PE classes are very popular among pupils from grades 1–3 in primary school.
2. The respondents have clearly specified opinions on the PE classes and their participation in them. They are able to express critical opinions as well. Therefore, it is recommended that the teachers who run motor activities in early school education prepare for them with more devotion as early as at the planning stage.
3. The opinions on the PE classes expressed by the respondents were in many cases varied depending on their age. Therefore, this factor should be considered while designing motor activities.

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Streszczenie

Wstęp: Dzieci klas młodszych uczestniczą w zajęciach wychowania fizycznego głównie ze względów przyjemnościowych, emocjonalnych i utylitarnych. Dla wielu uczniów tego etapu edukacyjnego, udział w zajęciach wychowania fizycznego jest jedyną formą uczestnictwa w zorganizowanej aktywności fizycznej. Dlatego zajęcia ruchowe powinny stwarzać dziecku możliwość zbierania różnego rodzaju doświadczeń i motywować go do aktywności fizycznej. Celem badań było sprawdzenie opinii uczniów nauczania wczesnoszkolnego na temat zajęć ruchowych.

Material i metody: Badaniami objęto 256 uczniów w wieku 7–10 lat, w tym 128 dziewcząt i 128 chłopców. Do zebrania materiału empirycznego zastosowano metodę jawnego wywiadu skategoryzowanego.

Wyniki: Wyniki badań wykazały, że zdecydowana większość dzieci wyraziła pozytywne opinie na temat udziału w zajęciach ruchowych. Uczniom najbardziej podobały się gry zespołowe i różnorodne ćwiczenia. Niespełna 9% badanych było niezadowolonych z braku dyscypliny na lekcji i nieprzestrzegania przez kolegów i koleżanki zasad fair play podczas wykonywania ćwiczeń. Niezadowolenie to rosło wraz z wiekiem. Badani wykazali niewielkie zainteresowanie zajęciami z pływania, a całkowity jego brak stwierdzono w grupie 9–10 lat.

Wnioski: Zdecydowana większość uczniów, i to bez względu na wiek, chce ćwiczyć na zajęciach ruchowych.

Słowa kluczowe: edukacja wczesnoszkolna, zajęcia ruchowe, uczniowie, opinie
