

THE PURPOSE OF THE SUBJECT PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORT IN THE SYSTEM FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA

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Abstract. A number of reports of organizations of world, national and regional levels, state poor health condition of people, and especially of children and youth, due to low physical activity. In response, all existing organizations and national Governments have adopted and signed charters and plans for action. As an expression of the Bulgarian State policy, and in accordance with EU recommendations, the Bulgarian Physical Education and Sport Act defines that the subject Physical Education and Sport is integral part of Bachelor and Master education, in the form of compulsory, elective and optional classes, with a minimum workload of 60 compulsory classes per academic year. In contradiction, the Higher Education Act defines that the subject's curricula is developed according to the profile of the university and the proposals of the Students' Council. The study aimed to establish the subject PE and Sport's status in University "St. Kliment Ohridski" Faculties programmes' curricula and how it affects the students' activity and participation in sport classes. The results show that the subject is included in Bachelor programmes only. Furthermore, each Faculty and even programme apply the Low loosely and selectively, which does not contribute for fulfilling the subject's main purpose of accustoming young people to regular exercise thus improving their health and creating knowledge, skills and habits for future healthy lifestyle.

Keywords: higher education; physical education; purpose; PE and Sport subject's status

Introduction

The immobilization of humanity is a global problem for which worn scientists from all over the world. A number of studies have long established that the lack of physical activity is a main cause for the non-communicable diseases (NCD) such as coronary heart disease, hypertension, atherosclerosis, diabetes, respiratory diseases, osteoporosis, increased cholesterol levels, cancer neoplasms, metabolism disorders, obesity, muscle atrophy, spinal distortions, Alzheimer disease, etc. It is also bounded to a number of psychiatric problems such as depression, anxiety,

low self-esteem, mental and emotional fatigue. It lowers the working capacity. The sedentary lifestyle is now considered as one of the four major causes of mortality in the world¹⁾.

Targeted researches by UNESCO and many scientific institutes have proven that one of the most powerful factors to combat the arising, due to hypodynamia problems, is the influx of wide spreading the physical exercise and sport into people's lifestyle as a main component of the modern model for a healthy life, in the broadest sense of this notion. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines this model as: "A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, not just a lack of disease". For improving or maintaining good health, it recommends for adults aged 18 – 64 years, at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity throughout the week, or at least 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity physical activity throughout the week, or an equivalent combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity activity. For additional health benefits, adults should increase their moderate-intensity physical activity to 300 minutes per week, or equivalent. Muscle-strengthening activities should be done involving major muscle groups on 2 or more days a week¹⁾.

In response to the above-mentioned alarming findings, all existing international, continental, intergovernmental and governmental organizations have long adopted and signed charters and plans for actions related to accustoming the population to regular physical exercises and active lifestyle. Since its establishment, European Union also leads an active policy for improving its nations' health through physical activity, and emphasizes the sociological, physiological and psychological benefits of sport.

The facts about Bulgaria are particularly worrying. The project "It is never too late for a new beginning" of the Ministry of Youth and Sport²⁾, has published the following medical facts:

Eurobarometer – Bulgaria's study (2010) showed that 82% of the Bulgarian population did not exercise at all or did it once a month and this rate was the highest among the European Union's member states. Barely 3% exercised regularly (3 to 5 times a week);

A nationwide study on the factors of the risk of non-communicable diseases (NCD), held in 2007, declared similar data regarding the physical activity's frequency and intensity of our population (aged 25 – 64), as well as their knowledge, skills and will for an active lifestyle. The results showed that more than 80,0% of the respondents had insufficient physical activity during their leisure time.

Similar is the data about the level of physical activity among the Bulgarian population aged 25 – 64 years, in the zones of the program CINDY – Bulgaria (2007). Their study found that only 19,2% of men and 15,3% of women had physical exercise with moderate intensity and lasting for more than 30 minutes, on a weekly basis. The frequency and duration of energetic physical exertion was also low.

In 2015 the Bulgarian Council of Ministers adopted a report on citizens' health status³). The document stated that over 70% of the population, aged 20 years and over, had insufficient physical activity.

The lack of physical activity and the obesity in childhood and adolescent are prerequisites for the emergence of health problems at a later period of life. Therefore, the need for physical activity is much greater in children and adolescents (Peltekova, 2010). Accordingly, in all plans and strategies of the European Union is highlighted that the subject Physical Education and sport should be an integral part of the educational process at all levels of the educational systems in its member States. The Theory and Methodology of Physical Education clearly says that teaching to regular exercises should start at the earliest childhood, so that the sport and active lifestyle can subsequently become a need for a lifetime (Rachev et al. 1998).

Due to a number of well-known problems in the system of Physical Education in Bulgaria, in recent years there has been a tendency ever-increasing percentage of the newly admitted university students to have an ever-lower physical activity and low motivation for active exercise and sport activities. According to the Bulgarian Ministry of Youth and Sport⁴), the tendency for the ever-growing immobilization of the rising generation is unfavorable – 51.0% of the total adolescents are highly immobilized. The level of their physical development and fitness, compared to previous generations of their peers, is significantly reduced.

Therefore, the purpose of the subject Physical Education and Sport in the system for higher education is to accustom as many young people as possible, to a regular exercise thus preserving and/or improving their health and create knowledge, skills and habits for future healthy lifestyle. Higher education is the final stage of the educational system and accordingly, the last chance to perform this important task (Tumanova, 2016).

As an expression of the Bulgarian State policy, and in accordance with EU recommendations, the Bulgarian Physical Education and Sport Act⁵) (into force since 18.01.2019), defines:

Art. 57: (1) Physical activity, Physical Education and sport subject at higher education institutions in Bulgaria, is integral part of Bachelor and Master education, in the form of compulsory, elective and optional classes, with a minimum workload of 60 compulsory classes per academic year. (2) The system for assessment and evaluation of students' skills in physical activity, Physical Education and sport is determined by each university and in accordance to the Higher Education Act.

In contradiction, the Higher Education Act⁶ defines: “The subject Physical Education and Sport’s curricula is developed according to the profile of the university and the proposals of the Students’ Council”, which gives the universities the freedom of decision on the status of the subject PE and Sport in their curricula.

The consequence of these contradictory texts is that there is no unified policy towards the subject Physical Education and Sport at the Bulgarian higher education institutions. With one exception, the subject presents in Bachelor studies' programmes, only. Even within one university, there is difference in the subject's curricula and status in the different faculties and their programmes. In many of them, the subject is only elective, optional or not included at all. Generally, no one university fulfills the Physical Education and Sport Act's requirement of 60 compulsory sport classes per academic year for the whole course of Bachelor and Master Studies.

University "St. Kliment Ohridski" of Sofia is the biggest in Bulgaria, and in its 16 Faculties each academic year educates thousands of young people from all over the country. As professors in PE and Sport in this institution, we consider it very important to analyze what is the university's policy towards the subject and does it contribute for fulfilling its main purpose, namely: to accustom young people to a regular exercise, and thus preserving and/or improving their health and create knowledge, skills and habits for future healthy lifestyle.

Aim of the study

To establish the subject PE and Sport's status in University "St. Kliment Ohridski" Faculties programmes' curricula and how it affects the students' activity and participation in sport classes.

Methods and instruments

1. Pre-study methods – informative studies of literary, documentary and internet sources related to the importance of health enhancing physical activity as well as EU and Bulgarian Government policies in the field.

2. Content analysis of documentary and internet sources related to the subject Physical Education and Sport's status and curricula, in the different faculties and programmes of University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

3. Content analysis of Sport Department's statistical data on the number of students participating in sport classes for the past three academic years, in correlation with the status of the subject PE and Sport in their programmes' curricula.

4. Theoretical-logical methods: analysis; synthesis; induction; comparison.

Results and discussion

Our research's results show that like in most Bulgarian higher education institutions, the subject PE and Sport is included only in the full time Bachelor programmes' curricula of University "St. Kliment Ohridski". Master students are not offered to take part in scheduled sport classes. Our further analysis is focusing on the status of the subject in the different Faculties' Bachelor full time programmes (Table 1):

Table 1. Subject PE and Sport's curricula in University "St. Kliment Ohridski" full time Bachelor programmes

Faculty	Programme	Semester								Curricula	Assessment	
		I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII			
1	FESA	All programmes	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	8 x 30	yes
2	FSS	Balkan studies	E	E	-	-	-	-	-	-	2 x 30	yes
		Slav philology	O	O	-	-	-	-	-	-	2 x 30	yes
		Bulgarian philology	O	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	30	yes
		Russian philology	-	O	-	-	-	-	-	-	30	yes
3	FPH	All programmes	O	O	O	O	-	-	-	-	4 x 30	yes
4	FL	Low	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	240	yes
		International relations	C	C	C	C	C	C	O	O	180	yes
5	FPH	LIS	C	C	C	C	-	-	-	-	120	yes
		Cultural studies	C	C	C	C	-	-	-	-	240	yes
		European studies	O	O	O	O	-	-	-	-	4 x 30	yes
		Philosophy	O	O	O	O	-	-	-	-	4 x 30	yes
		Public administration	-	O	-	O	-	-	-	-	2 x 60	yes
		Political science	E	E	E	E	-	-	-	-	4 x 30	yes
		Psychology	C	C	-	-	-	C	C	-	240	yes
Sociology	-	-	-	-	C	C	-	-	120	yes		
6	FTH	Theology	O	O	O	O	-	-	-	-	4 x 30	yes
		Religion in Europe	O	O	O	O	-	-	-	-	4 x 30	yes
7	FP	All programmes	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	8 x 30	yes
8	FMI	All programmes	E/O	E/O	E/O	E/O	E/O	E/O	E/O	E/O	8 x 30	yes
9	FB	Biology	O	O	-	-	-	-	-	-	2 x 30	yes
		Molecular biology	O	O	-	-	-	-	-	-	2 x 30	yes
		Biotechnologies	O	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	30	yes
		Ecology	O	O	-	-	-	-	-	-	2 x 30	yes
		Biology/Chemistry	O	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	30	yes
		Biology/Geography	O	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	30	yes
		Biology/English	O	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	30	yes
		Bio-management	O	O	-	-	-	-	-	-	2 x 30	yes
Agro-biotechnology	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
10	FCP	Pharmacy	E	E	E	E	O	O	O	O	8 x 30	yes
		All other 7 programmes	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	8 x 30	yes
11	FM	All programmes	C	C	C	C	-	-	-	-	120	yes
12	FCMP	All programmes	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	8 x 30	yes
13	FEBA	All programmes	C	C	C	C	-	-	-	-	120	yes
14	FJMC	All programmes	C	C	C	C	-	-	-	-	120	yes
15	FGG	Geology	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	8 x 30	yes
		Geography	E	E	-	-	-	-	-	-	2 x 30	yes
		Tourism	E	E	-	-	-	-	-	-	2 x 30	yes
		RDP	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	8 x 30	yes
		Geography/English	O	O	-	-	-	-	-	-	2 x 30	yes
16	FH	All programmes	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	8 x 30	yes

Note: C – compulsory subject; E – elective subject; O – optional subject; “-“ – not included

As seen in Table 1, the result of the universities' autonomy regarding the status of subject PE and Sport is valid for University "St. Kliment Ohridski" too. There is a difference in the subject's curricula and status in the different faculties and their programmes. Of all sixteen Faculties, only four have the subject set as a compulsory but not in all programmes. Noticeably, even within one faculty, there is no unified policy towards it. In many cases, the subject is only elective, optional or not included at all. Generally, except for the programme Low, no one Faculty (programme respectively), fulfills the Physical Education and Sport Act's requirement of 60 compulsory sport classes per academic year for the whole course of Bachelor's studies.

Our further analysis show how such a policy affects the students' activity and participation in sport classes (Tables 2, 3, 4):

Table 2. Students' participation in sport classes during 2017 – 2018 academic year

Faculty year		ALL SPORTS				2017-2018 ACADEMIC YEAR														TOTAL
		FPH	FSS	FH	FCMF	FGG	FE	FESA	FCF	FMI	FB	FPH	FEBA	FJMC	FL	FM	FM Engl	FTH		
Bachelor	I	225	62	23	44	52	18	33	117	102	29	75	153	189	409	143	38	0	1 712	
	II	65	4	13	16	31	2	11	74	38	16	36	122	178	352	119	36	0	1 113	
	III	108	9	5	4	9	3	9	2	18	11	9	11	8	367	5	2	0	580	
	IV	81	3	5	16	17	4	7	4	17	6	4	7	12	295	14	27	0	519	
Master students own choice		8	4	4	3		1	2	2	10		1	2	5	23	3		0	68	
Total students in sport classes		487	82	50	83	109	28	62	199	185	62	125	295	392	1446	284	103	0	3 992	
Bachelor students																			3 924	
Bachelor Compulsory		479							191			111	275	367	1423	262	74		3 182	
Bachelor Elective/ optional			78	46	80	109	27	60	6	175	62	13	18	20		19	29		742	
Total students 2018 - 2019																			14 482	
Total without Teacher in PE students																			14 355	

During 2017/2018 academic year, the total number of Bachelor and Master students (after secondary education and in a full time form of studying) in Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” was 14 482, of which 127 were in the programme “Teacher in Physical Education and Sport” ($14\,482 - 127 = 14\,355$). The Sport Department’s statistical data shows that only 3992 of them took part in sport classes, which is 27.81% of all students. As seen (Table 2), there were 68 Master students, who participated by their own choice and 742 Bachelor students, who chose the subject as elective or optional, which is only 20.29% of all participants in sport classes and only 5.64% of all students for that academic year. Noticeably, the majority – 3182 participants were Bachelor students, for who the subject was compulsory, which is 79.71% of all who took part in sport classes but only 22.17% of all students in the university for that year.

For 2018/2019 academic year (Table 3), the total number of Bachelor and Master students (after secondary education in a full-time form of studying) in Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” was 14 566, of which 163 were in the programme “Teacher in Physical Education and Sport” ($14\,566 - 163 = 14\,403$). The Sport Department’s statistical data shows that only 2852 of them took part in sport classes, which is 19.80% of all students. For that academic year (Table 3), 15 Master students, participated by their own choice, and 451 Bachelor students chose the subject as elective or optional, which is only 16.34% of all participants in sport classes and the tiny 3.24% of all students for that academic year. Again the majority – 2386 participants were Bachelor students, for who the subject was compulsory, which is 83.66% of all who took part in sport classes but only 16.57% of all students in the university for that year.

Table 3. Students’ participation in sport classes during 2018 – 2019 academic year

Faculty		ALL SPORTS				2018 – 2019 ACADEMIC YEAR													
		FPH	FSS	FH	FCMF	FGG	FE	FESA	FCF	FMI	FB	FPH	FEBA	FJMC	FL	FM	FM Engl	FTH	TOTAL
Bachelor	I	162	23	11	23	61	6	8	87	60	24	66	132	177	316	109	26		1 291
	II	68	4	2	10	15	3	3	48	59	6	42	110	135	311	89	8	4	917
	III	54	2	6	9	7	1	1	9	14	7	2	11	21	212				356
	IV	32	1	3	1	5	1	3	1	5	6	6	3	3	202	1			273
Master students own choice		5		1	1				1	1				3	3				15
Total students in sport classes		321	30	23	44	88	11	15	146	139	43	116	256	339	1044	199	34	4	2 852
Bachelor students																			2 837

Bachelor Compulsory	316							135			108	242	312	1041	198	34		2 386
Bachelor Elective/ optional		30	22	43	88	11	15	10	138	43	8	14	24		1		4	451
Total students 2018 - 2019																		14 566
Total without Teacher in PE students																		14 403

For the present 2019/2020 academic year (Table 4), the total number of Bachelor and Master students (after secondary education in a regular form of studying) in Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” is 14 674, of which 177 in the programme “Teacher in Physical Education and Sport” ($14\ 674 - 177 = 14\ 497$). The Sport Department’s statistical data shows that 4146 of them participate in sport classes, which is 28.60% of all students. For this academic year, 26 Master students, take part by their own choice, and 815 Bachelor students chose the subject as elective or optional, which is only 20.28% of all participants in sport classes and the tiny 5.80% of all students for this academic year. And again, the majority – 3305 participants are Bachelor students, for who the subject is compulsory, which is 79.72% of all who take part in sport classes, but again only 22.80% of all students in the university for this year.

Table 4. Students’ participation in sport classes during 2019 – 2020 academic year

		ALL SPORTS				2019 – 2020 ACADEMIC YEAR													
Faculty	year	FPH	FSS	FH	FCMF	FGG	FE	FESA	FCF	FMI	FB	FPH	FEBA	FJMC	FL	FM	FM Engl	FTH	TOTAL
		Bachelor	I	179	22	33	40	70	21	13	95	81	19	87	143	187	343	131	37
II	87		8	17	16	22	4	7	85	54	9	76	143	474	416	133	27	1	1418
III	108		3	4	9	13	3	4	8	35	4	16	24	47	296	11	1	1	587
IV	49		7	5	14	7	3	50	9	19	4	4	13	31	209	26	3		453
Master students own choice		7		1	1		1			1	1		2	4	8				26
Total students in sport classes		430	40	60	80	112	32	74	197	190	37	183	325	743	1272	301	68	2	4 146
Bachelor students																			4 120
Bachelor Compulsory		423							180			163	286	661	1264	264	64		3 305

Bachelor Elective/ optional		40	59	79	112	31	74	17	189	36	20	37	78		37	4	2	815
Total students 2019 - 2020																		14 674
Total without Teacher in PE students																		14 497

Conclusions

The specific environment of sport classes place big challenges to participants. The active physical activity requires a motivated attitude and voluntary efforts. As mentioned earlier, due to a number of problems in the system for Physical Education and Sport in Bulgaria, the majority of today’s young people do not have established habits for regular exercise, which results in an ever-lower fitness level and low or no motivation for exercise and sport activities. Therefore, the purpose of the subject Physical Education and Sport in the system for higher education to accustom as many young people as possible, to a regular exercise thus preserving and/or improving their health and create knowledge, skills and habits for future healthy lifestyle, is very important.

Our analysis shows that most Faculties and programmes in University “St. Kliment Ohridski” do not comply with the Law’s requirement of 60 compulsory sport classes per academic year for the whole course of Bachelor and Master Studies, and have the subject PE and Sport in the form of elective, optional or not included at all in their curricula. In practice, very small number of students choose the subject, when it is set up as an elective or optional discipline (Tables 2, 3, 4). Such a policy does not contribute to stimulating students to be active and exercise on a regular basis and thus to create habits and knowledge for future healthy lifestyle.

Recommendations

In order to fulfill the purpose of the subject Physical Education and Sport in the system for higher education in Republic of Bulgaria, we consider that there should be a firmer State policy in the field, expressed in:

1. Clearer definition of the form for applying the minimum curricula of the PE and Sport compulsory classes in the art. 57 (1) of the Physical Education and Sport Act’s text, by specifying that they should be carried out “in classroom (sport hall)”.

2. The same clear definition presenting and in the Higher Education Act, explaining the options for the implementation of "compulsory and optional PE and

Sport's classes with minimum workload of 60 compulsory classes per academic year: as compulsory only; as a combination of compulsory and elective/optional, but never as only elective/optional.

3. An effective system and control mechanisms on the compliance with art. 57 of the Physical Education and Sport Act to be established by the government's bodies such as the Parliament's Commission for universities' accreditation.

4. Implementing a theoretical element as a compulsory part of the Physical Education's process for educating young people on the importance of health enhancing physical activity (Vasileva, 2015).

5. Adopting a unified national testing battery for annual determining and evaluating university students' fitness levels (Plyakov, 2017).

6. Clarifying and adopting a clear and regulated system for funding the Physical Education and sport activities at the universities.

7. Adopting a national programme for preserving and modernizing the existing sport facilities, used by the universities.

NOTES

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