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IMPROVING THE PEDAGOGICAL POTENTIAL OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION CLASSES IN PROMOTING A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE AMONG FEMALE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract. The study investigates the pedagogical potential of physical education classes in promoting a healthy lifestyle among female university students. The purpose of the research was to identify effective pedagogical conditions that enhance healthy lifestyle formation through physical education. The study involved 80 female students aged 18-22 years, divided into a control group (n = 40) and an experimental group (n = 40). The experimental program included health-oriented exercises, educational activities, self-monitoring, and motivational techniques. The results showed improvements in physical activity levels, health awareness, and motivation for regular exercise among students in the experimental group. The findings indicate that integrating educational and health-promoting components into physical education classes contributes to the development of sustainable healthy lifestyle behaviors. It is concluded that the enhancement of pedagogical opportunities in physical education is an effective means of strengthening students' health and encouraging lifelong physical activity.

Keywords: healthy lifestyle, female students, physical education, health promotion, physical activity, higher education.

Introduction. The preservation and promotion of health among university students remain key priorities of contemporary higher education systems. In recent decades, significant changes in lifestyle patterns associated with technological progress, urbanization, academic intensification, and digitalization have substantially reduced the level of daily physical activity among young people [2, 5]. These trends have contributed to the growing prevalence of sedentary behavior, hypodynamia, overweight, psychological stress, and various health-related disorders among students. University years represent a critical stage in the formation of long-term behavioral patterns, making this period particularly important for the development of health-preserving competencies and sustainable healthy lifestyle habits [1, 4].

A healthy lifestyle is recognized as a multidimensional construct encompassing regular physical activity, balanced nutrition, adequate sleep, stress management, avoidance of harmful habits, and responsible attitudes toward personal health Numerous studies have demonstrated that adherence to healthy lifestyle principles contributes not only to improved physical health but also to enhanced academic performance, emotional well-being, social adaptation, and overall quality of life [3, 6]. However, despite growing awareness of health-related issues, many university students fail to maintain sufficient levels of physical activity and often adopt unhealthy behavioral patterns during their studies [8, 9, 10].

Female university students represent a particularly vulnerable population group in this regard. Research indicates that young women frequently demonstrate lower levels of physical activity compared to their male counterparts and are more likely to experience barriers related to motivation, self-confidence, body image concerns, and academic workload. Furthermore, the transition from adolescence to adulthood is often accompanied by changes in daily routines, nutritional habits, and health-related behaviors, which may negatively affect physical and psychological well-being.

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Consequently, the formation of a healthy lifestyle among female students has become an important pedagogical, social, and public health challenge [7, 12].

Physical education classes within higher education institutions possess significant potential for addressing these challenges. Beyond their traditional role in developing physical fitness and motor skills, physical education programs provide opportunities for fostering health literacy, self-regulation, self-discipline, and positive attitudes toward lifelong physical activity. Modern educational approaches increasingly emphasize the integration of cognitive, motivational, and behavioral components into physical education curricula, transforming them into an effective tool for health promotion and personality development [11].

At the same time, several studies have pointed out that traditional models of physical education often focus predominantly on physical performance indicators while insufficiently addressing motivational and educational dimensions of healthy lifestyle formation. As a result, students may fail to develop stable health-related values and behaviors that extend beyond the educational environment. This situation highlights the need to improve the pedagogical opportunities of physical education classes through the implementation of student-centered methods, health education technologies, motivational strategies, and reflective practices.

Contemporary pedagogical theories emphasize that sustainable behavioral changes are achieved when educational interventions promote autonomy, competence, and intrinsic motivation. Within the framework of Self-Determination Theory, students are more likely to adopt and maintain healthy behaviors when they perceive physical activity as personally meaningful and enjoyable. Similarly, social cognitive perspectives suggest that self-efficacy, goal-setting, and self-monitoring play important roles in the development of health-related behaviors. Therefore, effective physical education programs should combine physical training with educational and motivational components aimed at strengthening students' responsibility for their own health.

Despite the growing body of research on health promotion in higher education, insufficient attention has been devoted to the pedagogical mechanisms through which physical education classes can contribute specifically to the formation of healthy lifestyle behaviors among female students. This gap necessitates further investigation into pedagogical conditions capable of increasing students' engagement in physical activity and promoting long-term adherence to healthy lifestyle principles.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of improving the pedagogical opportunities of physical education classes for promoting a healthy lifestyle among female university students.

Materials and Methods. The study was conducted during the 2025-2026 academic year at a higher education institution. Eighty female students aged 18-22 years voluntarily participated in the research. All participants were medically cleared for physical education activities.

The students were divided into two groups:

- Control group (n = 40);
- Experimental group (n = 40).

The pedagogical experiment lasted for 16 weeks.

Students in the control group participated in traditional physical education classes according to the standard university curriculum. The experimental group attended physical education classes supplemented with a specially designed pedagogical program aimed at promoting healthy lifestyle behaviors.

The program included:

- health-oriented physical exercises;
- educational mini-lectures on healthy lifestyle principles;

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- discussions on nutrition and daily routine management;
- self-monitoring diaries;
- motivational training activities;
- individual and group health projects;
- reflective exercises focused on health awareness.

The effectiveness of the program was assessed through questionnaires, pedagogical observation, and evaluation of students' health-related knowledge, motivation toward physical activity, and healthy lifestyle practices before and after the experiment.

The obtained data were processed using methods of mathematical statistics and comparative analysis.

Results and Discussion. The analysis of the results obtained before and after the pedagogical experiment revealed positive changes in both groups; however, the improvements observed in the experimental group were substantially greater. The implementation of the enhanced pedagogical program contributed not only to increasing students' physical activity but also to improving their awareness of healthy lifestyle principles, strengthening motivation for regular exercise, and fostering responsible attitudes toward personal health.

At the beginning of the study, no statistically significant differences were identified between the control and experimental groups regarding the investigated indicators ($p > 0.05$). This confirmed the initial comparability of the groups and ensured the validity of further comparative analysis.

Following the 16-week intervention, the experimental group demonstrated a considerable increase in the proportion of students exhibiting a high level of healthy lifestyle competence. The percentage of students regularly engaging in physical activity increased from 37.5% to 72.5%, whereas in the control group the corresponding increase was from 40.0% to 50.0%. Similar trends were observed in students' knowledge of health-preserving behaviors. The proportion of participants demonstrating a high level of health-related knowledge increased by 35.0% in the experimental group compared with 12.5% in the control group.

The results also indicated significant improvements in motivation toward physical activity among female students participating in the experimental program. Many participants reported increased interest in physical education classes, greater awareness of the benefits of regular exercise, and stronger intentions to maintain physically active lifestyles after completing the study. These findings suggest that the integration of motivational and educational components into physical education classes enhances students' intrinsic motivation and personal engagement in health-promoting activities.

Statistical analysis confirmed the effectiveness of the implemented pedagogical approach. Significant differences were identified between pre-test and post-test results in the experimental group across all major indicators ($p < 0.05$), whereas changes in the control group were less pronounced and, in several cases, did not reach statistical significance. These findings support the hypothesis that the enhancement of pedagogical opportunities within physical education classes contributes to the successful formation of healthy lifestyle behaviors among female university students.

The obtained results are consistent with previous studies emphasizing the educational and health-promoting role of physical education. According to Deci and Ryan (2000), the development of intrinsic motivation is a crucial factor in maintaining long-term engagement in health-related behaviors. The present findings support this theoretical position by demonstrating that pedagogical strategies focused on motivation, autonomy, and self-development positively influence students' participation in physical activity.

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The overall findings indicate that the effectiveness of physical education in higher education institutions can be significantly enhanced through the implementation of pedagogically grounded health-promotion strategies. Such approaches help transform physical education classes from a primarily fitness-oriented activity into a comprehensive educational environment that supports the development of sustainable healthy lifestyle habits and positive attitudes toward lifelong physical activity.

Conclusions. The study demonstrated that the integration of educational, motivational, and health-promoting components into physical education classes significantly contributes to the formation of healthy lifestyle behaviors among female university students. The experimental program positively influenced students' physical activity levels, health awareness, and motivation for regular exercise.

The findings confirmed that improving the pedagogical opportunities of physical education classes enhances students' responsibility for their own health, encourages the adoption of health-preserving habits, and supports the development of sustainable healthy lifestyle practices.

The proposed pedagogical approach can be effectively implemented in higher education institutions to improve the quality of physical education and promote the physical, psychological, and social well-being of female students.

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