



Motivation and Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction in Physical Education Among Grade 9 Students in Costa Rica

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Abstract

Background: Ntoungamis (2005) found that more positive self-determined motivation predicted participation in physical education and students' intention to engage in optional physical education in the future. Informed by knowledge users' (Costa Rican school administrators and physical educators) concerns about high school students' lack of interest in physical education and by self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), we examined students' motivations, and whether feelings of competence, autonomy, and relatedness predicted intrinsic motivation toward physical education. We also examined students' feelings about physical education and changes they would like to see.

Methodology: A mixed-method descriptive design was used. Costa Rican grade 9 students ($n = 118$) completed surveys regarding their motivations and basic psychological needs. Two open-ended questions were included in the surveys. Linear regression analyses predicted students' intrinsic motivation toward physical education. Qualitative responses were coded openly and inductively and subsequently using a deductive a priori template of codes based on Sallis and colleagues' (2006) ecological model of active living. The University of Victoria's Human Research Ethics Board (Protocol Number 24-0078) and Vice Minister of Costa Rica's Ministry of Public Education Academic Office provided approval for the study.

Results & Conclusion: Students' intrinsic and extrinsic levels of motivation were relatively strong, and levels of amotivation were low. The regression model predicting intrinsic motivation toward physical education was statistically significant, with students' perceptions of their competence the only significant predictor. Two major themes emerged from the qualitative data 1) Experiences in physical education could be better, and 2) The physical environment undermines experiences in physical education. At a proximal level, the quantitative findings indicated that students were generally motivated toward physical education and that their basic psychological needs were being met; but the qualitative results suggested that grade 9 students found physical education boring and repetitive. Students suggested more outdoor and team-building activities, in contrast to the current focus on team sports. Students' perceptions of their competence influenced how they felt about physical education. These findings are important since physical educators can help students develop their competence, self-efficacy, and how they view their competence. At a more distal level, students characterized the physical environment as unpleasant due to the heat and rain, and they indicated this resulting in crowded learning environments due to inadequate spaces. Looking across levels of the ecological model, students seemed motivated toward physical education, but the curriculum and physical environment were undermining their experiences.

Keywords: Intrinsic motivation; Autonomy, Relatedness, Competence; Self-determination theory



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