

# Satisfaction and preferences of PE students and the head of the PE department: meeting the new curricular expectations

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## ABSTRACT

Balázs, F., Susan, C. Dancs, H. & József, B. (2016). Satisfaction and preferences of PE students and the head of the PE department: meeting the new curricular expectations. *J. Hum. Sport Exerc.*, 11(1), 1-18. There has been increasing emphasis worldwide on raising educational standards and improving opportunities for young people. Physical education programs are under strong pressure to demonstrate that their practices are effective in preparing students for successful healthy active living. In Hungary the Act on National Public Education (2011) is designed to achieve these purposes. The aim of this study was to understand how students perceive the daily PE program and how the heads of PE departments perceive students' perceptions as a result of this act. A total of 1,073 10-14 year-old students from 13 schools in a university city were given a questionnaire and the heads of PE at these schools were interviewed. A large number of students stated that the purpose of PE is conditioning, it is an important subject, and they will be able to utilize what they have learnt in PE later on in their lives. Heads of PE perceive that students have no clear understanding of what PE is about and they do not want thinking and fitness components in PE. Findings demonstrate a clear disagreement between students' and the heads of PE perspectives. Teachers need to adapt their practices in order to help students acquire skills and attitude for lifelong physical activities as stated in the Hungarian Curriculum (2012).

**Key words:** STUDENT PERCEPTIONS, HEAD OF DEPARTMENT PERCEPTIONS, PRIMARY PHYSICAL EDUCATION, CONTENT PREFERENCES.

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## INTRODUCTION

### **Challenges and development in PE curriculum**

Over the last 20 years or so, there has been considerable, and increasing, emphasis worldwide on raising educational standards and improving opportunities for all young people. One way of achieving this is through curriculum reform and development. Reform and revision of school curricula has been undertaken in many countries to better educate students (Ha et al., 2004; Oh et al., 2013).

Physical education (PE) is no exception to this, as reported by O'Sullivan (2013) who stated 'there have been significant curricular developments internationally in recent years'. Many of these progresses revolve around health-related aspects of the curriculum. In England, for example, Cale, Harris and Chen (2014) state that 'various government policies, strategies and responses ... over the years have highlighted schools and PE to be instrumental in addressing health and the focus on health has been strengthened within subsequent revisions of the National Curriculum'. The authors continue that it is not surprising that there is an increasing recognition of the role of schools and PE in promoting health given the growing concerns over young people's health, physical activity and physical fitness levels in recent years. As a result, one important objective of PE is promoting health enhancing lifestyles and also increasing physical activity and the level of fitness.

Political and societal pressures are placing PE programs under strong pressure to demonstrate that their practices are effective in promoting learning and preparing students for successful healthy active lifelong living (Lauritsalo, Saakslanti, & Rasku-Puttonen, 2012). Ha et al. (2004) highlighted that certain curricular changes are aimed at transforming PE from a skill-oriented curriculum to a more comprehensive educational-developmental and health-related curriculum. Skill-oriented curriculum models focus on teaching correct forms and techniques of movement skills and efficiency so they can be applied to sports and game situations. Developmental curriculum models emphasize optimal development, competence, integration of experience and preparation for society and health-related curriculum models and emphasize an individualized approach for health promotion in the form of personal and social skills (Siedentop. & van der Mars, 2012).

It is widely understood that every student should benefit from regular PE regardless of ability, skills and talents towards the subject or physical activity itself (Capel, 2000). In order to do so, students need to be motivated and have a sense of ownership in the learning process (Chen, 2001). According to research findings, students generally have a positive attitude towards PE if it is fun, if they like the activity offered or if they generally enjoy participating in physical activity programs (Rikard & Banville, 2006). If PE teachers are to provide students with those positive, educational and developmentally appropriate experiences that meet both their needs and interests (MacPhail, 2010), and improve their attitude and satisfaction, a wide range of activities should be offered that are consistent with different expectations (Thompson, Beauchamp & Darst, 1991).

For undertaking appropriate planning and practices in order that PE curricula can meet political and societal expectations, and create meaningful learning experiences for students in lessons (Glasby & Macdonald, 2004), it is important to understand how students perceive a PE program and its content (Graham, 1995) and what beliefs they hold towards PE and physical activity (Dyson, 2006). According to Rikard & Banville (2006) students' views and opinions can improve PE content and pedagogy, increase motivation and participation. How students perceive PE and what experiences they have in school PE are also of key importance for the foundations of lifelong healthy behaviour (Trudeau & Shephard, 2005).

### **The National Curriculum in Hungary**

The Hungarian Parliament adopted a new Fundamental Law of Hungary (25 April 2011) and also the Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education (19 December 2011). In consideration of the tasks defined in the Fundamental Law of Hungary and in the Act on National Public Education, it was necessary the change the school curriculum to meet new expectations.

The main declared goal of the Hungarian National Core Curriculum (NCC, 2012, p.1) is "...to disseminate and preserve national general knowledge and the culture of Hungary's national minorities, disseminate universal culture and deepen students' ethical sense as well as their intellectual and emotional openness". Through the different developmental areas (intellectual, emotional, social, physical), NCC also highlights that lifelong learning, health, personality and moral development is of key importance throughout the years of public education (ages 6 to 18).

Similar to curriculum reforms internationally (see for example Yli-Piipari (2014) on curricular reform in Finland), one of the key strategic objectives of the PE and sports subject area in the Hungarian NCC (2012) is to help students develop and maintain health conscious and physically active lifestyles throughout their whole life. Among others, one main goal of school PE and sports is to emphasize the importance of prevention and a healthy and active lifestyle in the students' value system. It is expected that students know the values of health and physical activity by regularly using different types and means of physical activities. Learning motor skills, fitness, play with enjoyment and fun, and also competition is all included as useful means to promote healthy active living throughout life (NCC, 2012).

Before the curriculum reform took place in 2012, there were 3 PE sessions a week with a focus mostly on proper sport techniques and skills in different contents (e.g., ball games, athletics, gymnastics, outdoor activities, swimming) and less on promoting healthy active lifestyle and cross-curricular connections. Our earlier study demonstrated that students perceived that PE is for learning specific sports, doing conditioning and fitness, and had no or very little relation with the academic subjects (Bognár, Tóth, Baumgartner, & Salvara, 2005). As part of the introduction of the NCC in 2012, with a couple of exceptions outlined in the Act on National Public Education (2011), all primary (P1-8, ages 6 to 14 years) and secondary (S1-4, ages 15 to 18 years) students are to be provided with five PE lessons per week – one per day, each of 45 minutes. Out of the five lessons per week, a student may be excluded from a maximum of two lessons a week due to either afternoon sport activities within school premises or pursuing competitive sport in out of school sports organizations or sport clubs. According to the NCC (2012) guidelines, it is expected that participation in daily PE will reduce the public health problems in society and also encourage families to live healthier and more active lives.

The content of PE and sports in schools comprises of physical exercises and also a set of knowledge, values and functions related to and supporting other areas of interest in the educational process. It is also expected that the area of PE and sport promotes students' physical, motor, psychological, intellectual, emotional and social development through close relationship with other subject areas. NCC (2012) delineates clear expectations towards PE regarding its contribution to the development of critical thinking, problem solving and creativity, to the improvement of self-knowledge, self-control as well as cooperation. An expected result through regular PE is personality and character development, both individual and societal values and norms, effort needed for both improvement and success, and also positive body image will enhanced.

### **Purpose of the study**

With the new concept of daily PE, schools and PE teachers face pressure in order to meet governmental and societal expectations. It is widely accepted that students' perceptions are of great importance in providing quality teaching and learning, however, more research is needed which focuses on students' perceptions and recommendations in PE (Dyson 2006; Ennis & McCauley, 2002), in a variety of PE and physical activity contexts (Fisette, 2013), and in different of students and cultural settings.

Younger students in the primary system tend to be more motivated and more competent towards PE and physical activity than older ones (Digelidis & Papaioannou, 1999; Van Wersch, Trew, & Turner, 1992). There also seems to be gender differences in how students' experience and express importance towards physical activity (Žnidarec Čučković & Ohnjec, 2015). It is reported that boys feel more competent, show more interest in PE, and generally positive towards physical activity than girls (Barić, Vlašić, & Cecić, 2014; Brustad, 1996; Hagger, Biddle, & Wang, 2005).

Hence, it seems important to find out how younger and older primary students, and also boys or girls differ in their experiences and preferences. Due to lack of research, the majority of PE teachers do not know how students feel about PE, how they value PE and physical activity and what expectations they have towards PE in Hungary. Without such information, PE teachers cannot develop effective and meaningful practices to engage young people in PE (Booker & Macdonald, 1999). The purpose of the study was to understand how students perceive the daily PE program and how the heads of PE perceive students' perceptions as a result of the NCC (2012).

## **METHODS**

### **Participants**

A total of 1,073 primary students aged between 11 and 14 years (grades 5 to 8) participated in this study. This sample comprised all students in those public primary schools in and around one medium size city in Hungary (N=13) that serve as cooperating schools for a local university PE student teacher program, with the exception of those students who were absent from school during the data collection process. Table 1 shows the grades and gender distribution of participating students.

In addition to students, each head of PE department (N=13; 7 female; 6 male) was included in the study. Their age varied from 25 to 52 years ( $M=39.92\pm 9.61$ ) with their teaching experience ranging from 4 to 33 years ( $M=19.23\pm 10.02$ ).

Table 1. Students' characteristics (N=1073).

Levels (grades) of pupils (ages 11-14)	N of Pupils	N Male - Female
5	331	169 - 162
6	263	128 - 135
7	259	141 - 117
8	220	132 - 88
Total	1073	100.0%

**Data collection**

Data from students were collected through a questionnaire survey. Open-ended questions were created so students were able to record their perceptions without any limitations or influences. Students were asked to be as specific as possible with their answers. Questions focused on: What is the purpose of PE? Is school PE important? Do you like PE? What do you like/not like to do in PE? What have you learned/ in PE? How does PE impact academic subjects? Will you be able to utilize what you have learned in PE later in your life?

All data collection in a given school took place on the same normal school day. Researchers were allowed to use the beginning 20 minutes of each class's lesson on that day. One of the authors was always present during data collection to explain the aim of survey and the characteristics of the questionnaire.

In addition to the questionnaire survey of students, each head of PE was interviewed individually in-depth on the same day (1.5-2 hours each). During the structured in-depth interviews, open-ended questions were posed to understand perceptions of students' experiences about, attitudes and expectations towards school PE and how heads of PE departments (heads of PE) incorporate students' suggestions into their planning and teaching practices. This method was chosen in order to understand the heads of PE views and perceptions without influencing their thinking (Patton, 1990). All of the interviews (N=13) were conducted by the same researcher and were recorded and transcribed. Before data analysis, participants were provided a chance to read and modify their answers.

**Data analysis**

All answers from the questionnaire were recorded, organized and prepared for analysis. Similar meanings in the answers were identified, grouped into one category before statistical analysis. Researchers first separately studied 50-50 questionnaires, classified the answers, identified the themes, then grouped students' answers into specific categories for all questions. At the end researchers discussed, cross-checked, come to a consensus and mutually agreed on the categories. Once the categories were finalized, each answer was given a code for statistical analysis. Prior to data analysis, all of the answers of the fifth and sixth graders and those of the seventh and eighth graders were compared and contrasted with independent T-test and no differences were found ( $p>.05$ ). As a result, grades 5 and 6 (students aged 11-12 years, N=594) and grades 7-8 (students aged 13-14 years, N=479) were combined for further analysis and comparison.

Due to the nominal level data, answers were analysed with appropriate non-parametric statistics. Besides descriptive statistics, Chi-square was used to compare the results within each question. Mann-Whitney test was utilized for exploring differences between boys and girls, and between grades 5-6 and 7-8.

Interviews were carefully analysed in order to help understand the relevant issues and experiences and views emerged. During the analysis, patterns, relationships and sequences were looked for, explanations were checked and generalizations were created (Creswell, 2009). Generating knowledge and understanding important constructs first included perceptions, examples and reflections of what an individual teacher believes and experiences about teaching and learning. Later, through constant comparisons in the thematic coding, similarities and differences were contrasted in these categories, until finally researchers came to a consensus.

During research design and implementation, trustworthiness, rigor, value and establishing truth in the qualitative paradigm were assumed and maximized reliability and validity (Golafshani, 2003). This was

carried out by obtaining feedback from participants and checking their understanding. Also, researchers' record keeping, discussions on understanding and beliefs, and regular reflections on own experiences and perspectives helped reduce bias and enhance the credibility of research.

### **Ethical considerations**

The study was ethically approved by the University's Ethical Committee and ethical consent was gained from every student, their parents and also from interviewed heads of PE department. Parents were contacted in a teacher-parent conference prior to data collection and no objections were made regarding their child/children participation in this study. All students voluntarily participated in this study. The research was based on the anonymity of the participants.

## **RESULTS**

### **Students' perceptions**

Table 2 shows students' perceptions about the purpose of PE in school. More than a third (37.8%) said that the main purpose of PE is *Conditioning*. Answers which were included under the conditioning category included working out, strengthening and stamina. Approximately 30% of students said the purpose of PE in school is to learn *Specific activities*. This included for instance throwing a ball, running a specific distance, doing certain exercises, playing football or basketball, etc. In addition, 23.1% of students said the purpose of school PE is to work towards *Healthy active lifestyle*, which involved prevention of cardio-vascular diseases, obesity and health-related. All the other categories had a relatively low combined percentage ( $\Sigma=9.3\%$ ). Significantly more students stated that the purpose of PE is *Conditioning*, *Specific activities*, and *Healthy active lifestyle* than all the other answers ( $\text{Chi}^2=1063.022$ ;  $p<.05$ ).

There was a significant difference between boys and girls (Mann-Whitney  $U=121253.000$ ;  $p=.001$ ). A significantly higher percent of boys than girls mentioned *Conditioning* and *Specific Activities* and a significantly higher percent of girls than boys mentioned *Healthy lifestyle* as purposes of PE. There was no significant difference between grade levels ( $p>.05$ ).

Table 2. What is the purpose of PE? (%).

	Sum	Boys	Girls	Level 5-6	Level 7-8
Conditioning	37.8	43.0	32.0	41.9	32.8
Specific activities	29.8	27.7	32.0	24.3	36.6
Healthy active lifestyle	23.1	18.8	28.0	24.5	21.4
Enjoyment, fun	3.3	4.2	2.4	2.6	4.3
Motor learning in sports/games	3.3	3.3	3.4	2.6	4.3
Other	2.7	3.0	2.1	4.1	.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

In relation to whether school PE is important, most students said that PE is important in school (84.8%), while 11.6% said it is not important. A small percentage (3.6%) said they were not sure if it is important or not. Significantly, more students said that PE is important in school than those who did not ( $\text{Chi}^2=2006.447$ ;  $p<.05$ ).

There was a difference between boys and girls (Mann-Whitney  $U=127297.000$ ;  $p=.026$ ), with a significantly higher percent of girls perceiving PE is important and a significantly higher percent of boys perceiving PE is not important. There was no significant difference between grade levels ( $p>.05$ ).

Table 3. Is school PE important? (%).

	Sum	Boys	Girls	Level 5-6	Level 7-8
Yes, it is	84.8	82.3	87.5	85.9	83.4
No, it is not	11.6	14.2	8.6	10.6	12.7
Not sure	3.6	3.5	3.9	3.5	3.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Fifty-nine percent of the students stated that they like their school PE. On the other hand, 12.5% stated they do not like PE. Also, more than a quarter of the sample (27.9%) said they were not sure if they like PE or not. Significantly more students stated that they liked PE than all other answers ( $\chi^2=358.962$ ;  $p<.05$ ).

There was a significant difference between boys and girls (Mann-Whitney  $U=119362.500$ ;  $p=.000$ ). A significantly higher percent of boys than girls stated that they like PE and a significantly higher percent of girls than boys stated they were not sure if they liked PE. There were no significant differences between the grade levels ( $p>.05$ ).

Table 4. Do you like school PE? (%).

	Sum	Boys	Girls	Level 5-6	Level 7-8
Yes, I do	59.6	65.1	53.4	58.0	61.5
Not sure, so-so	27.9	23.4	33.0	27.8	28.0
No, I do not	12.5	11.5	13.6	14.2	10.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

In relation to what students like about PE, the highest percent of students say they enjoy *playtime, playing games (fun)* (32.9%), followed by *I like everything* (13.4%) in PE. Ten percent said they liked *Athletics* and a total of 22.7% said they liked at least one of the four most popular *Team sports* in the country (soccer, handball, volleyball and basketball). More than ten percent of the students (11.2%) did not indicate any specific content preferences. Significantly more students stated they like *playtime, playing games (fun)* than the other answers ( $\chi^2=1480.207$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

There was a significant difference between boys and girls (Mann-Whitney  $U=121502.500$ ;  $p=.011$ ). A significantly higher percent of girls than boys like *gymnastics* and *playtime, playing games (fun)* and a significantly higher percent of boys than girls prefer *soccer* and *like everything* as well as having no preferences. There was no significant difference between grade levels ( $p>.05$ ).

Table 5. What do you like to do in PE? (%).

	Sum	Boys	Girls	Level 5-6	Level 7-8
Athletics	10.0	9.3	10.6	11.4	8.1
Gymnastics	4.6	2.4	7.2	5.2	3.9
Soccer	8.3	13.4	2.5	6.9	10.1
Basketball	8.3	7.7	9.0	5.5	11.8
Volleyball	1.4	-	2.9	.5	2.4
Handball	4.7	3.7	5.9	4.5	5.0
Conditioning	3.5	2.0	5.1	3.9	2.8
Playtime, playing games (fun)	32.9	29.9	36.4	36.4	28.4
I like everything	13.4	15.6	11.0	12.6	14.4
I like nothing	1.7	2.9	.4	1.4	2.2
No preferences	11.2	13.2	9.0	11.5	10.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Nearly half (45.0%) of students do not like *running* in PE; in addition, 16.2% *dislike nothing* and 13.2% do not like *Calisthenics*. Also, 9.3% of respondents had no preferences. *Running* appeared significantly more than all the other answers ( $\text{Chi}^2=968.963, p<.05$ ).

There were no significant differences between gender and grade levels.

Table 6. What is it you do not like to do in PE lessons? (%).

	Sum	Boys	Girls	Level 5-6	Level 6-7
Running	45.0	41.7	46.5	46.9	42.7
Gymnastics	3.4	4.5	2.2	3.8	2.9
Conditioning	4.2	4.1	4.4	3.3	45.3
I dislike nothing	16.2	17.8	14.4	16.8	15.5
Skipping rope	13.7	13.5	13.9	12.4	15.2
No preferences	9.3	12.8	5.7	8.2	10.7
Various specific PE content	8.2	5.7	10.9	8.6	7.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

When asked about what they learned in PE, the majority of students stated that they have learned *specific skills and rules from the curriculum* (55.3%). 32.8% stated that they have learned *how to play a lot of activities and sports*.

*Specific skills and rules from the curriculum* and *how to play a lot of activities and sports* were mentioned significantly more than all the other answers ( $\text{Chi}^2=1964.164, p<.05$ ). However, there were no significant differences between genders and grade levels.



Table 7. What is it you have learned in PE? (%).

	Sum	Boys	Girls	Year 5-6	Year 7-8
Specific skills and rules from curriculum	55.3	56.8	53.6	55.9	54.6
How to play a lot of activities/sports	32.8	30.8	35.0	32.1	33.7
Conditioning	5.2	5.9	4.3	5.3	5.0
Nothing	3.5	4.1	2.9	3.9	3.0
Theoretical knowledge	1.7	.9	2.5	1.1	2.4
Character development (perseverance, self-discipline)	1.6	1.5	1.6	1.8	1.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Almost half of the students (43.6%) said that there is *no relationship between and no impact* on academic subjects from PE. 18.6% of students stated that PE is *refreshing so they can focus better on academic subjects*. A smaller percentage said that PE is *as important as any other subject in school* and 10.3% gave *specific examples of how PE and physical activity can contribute to success in academic subject areas*. Answers like 'it helps me when learning calculations/quotations', or 'after sport I can better/faster learn physics/biology' or 'facilitates my understanding'. No relationship and no impact was mentioned significantly more than the other answers ( $\text{Chi}^2=802.823, p<.05$ ).

There was no significant difference between boys and girls but there was a significant difference between grade levels (Mann-Whitney  $U=111198.000; p<.05$ ). A significantly higher percent of grade 7-8 students stated that *there was no relation between and no impact* on academic subjects from PE, and also that PE *refreshes them so they can focus better*. On the other hand, a significantly higher percent of grade 5-6 students said that PE is *equivalent in importance to academic subjects* and also they were *not sure*.

Table 8. How does PE impact academic subjects? (%).

	Sum	Boys	Girls	Year 5-6	Year 7-8
No relation, no impact	43.6	45.8	41.1	40.3	47.6
Equivalent importance	11.8	11.4	12.3	14.5	8.7
It wears me out so I cannot focus on academic subjects	3.1	3.0	3.3	3.0	3.3
Refreshing, so I can focus better on academic subjects	18.6	19.3	17.8	16.3	21.3
Specific content-related examples	10.3	8.8	11.9	10.4	10.2
Not sure	12.5	11.6	13.6	15.6	8.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

In response to how much of the experiences in PE students perceive they will be able to utilize in the future, the highest percent of students (64.8%) said that they *would be able to utilize what they have learned* in PE, whilst 20.9% were *not sure*, and 14.4% said they *will not be able to utilize* their learning. According to the results, significantly more students mentioned *they would be able to utilize what they have learned* than the other answers ( $\text{Chi}^2=8, p<.05$ ).

There was a significant difference between boys and girls (Mann-Whitney U=126685.000;  $p<.05$ ) and also between grade levels of students (Mann-Whitney U=125490.000;  $p<.05$ ). A significantly higher percent of boys than girls said they *would be able to utilize what they have learned* in PE whilst a significantly higher percent of girls than boys *were not sure*. Also, a significantly higher percent of grade 5-6 students than grade 7-8 students said they will be able to *use their learning in PE in the future*.

Table 9. Will you be able to utilize what you've learned in PE later in your life? (%).

	Sum	Boys	Girls	Year 5-6	Year 7-8
Yes	64.8	67.2	61.9	67.7	61.1
No	14.4	15.1	13.6	13.5	15.4
Not sure	20.9	17.7	24.5	18.8	23.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

### **Heads of departments' perceptions**

All heads of PE perceived that 10-14 year-old students have no understanding of and are not connected to PE and physical activity altogether. Every head of PE was of the opinion that a large segment of students (particularly most girls, non-athletic students, and older students) would not be able to define the purpose of PE in their own words and do not believe that PE is an important part of education.

*Those smarter students can understand the relationship among health, fitness and skills...the rest probably don't see the main goals of PE... do not see the big picture... (KÁ).*

*There is less problems with some of the younger ones and with the athletes, of course... with students at 13-14 years of age we face more difficulties in helping them understand what PE is about and what the main points are (KLN).*

*Boys in most cases are OK in PE.... I see more problems with girls in grades 7-8 (HT).*

*Most (students) see it as an easy break from the classroom and probably don't think that it is important (GM).*

Ten heads of PE perceived that students like PE mostly because it is not in the classroom and is a nice change compared to academic lessons. However, they perceived that some students feel isolated and left out due to ability, skill level or obesity. According to heads of PE, most of these students are girls.

*Most kids like PE for sure...there are a number of different reasons for it, it is fun, more casual and friendly... (MZS).*

*Those who are skilful, find it [PE] fun and rewarding ... and so can more easily connect and see the benefit of regular physical activity...(HT).*

*Quite a few students do not want to participate much... excuse themselves from PE a lot... most of them girls...they want to be left alone... How can I help them to improve if they have negative feelings about PE? Probably bad experiences in the past... (BT).*

*Low-skilled and obese students have no fun and not much success and so I'm sure they are not fond of physical activity at all (AP).*

All heads of PE perceived that the most popular activity in PE is games. They plan for game-time each lesson, usually at the end of the lesson. However, some heads of PE perceived that students view PE as

positive and fun when there is competition. They also perceive that a large number of students are not fond of running, skill development, and skill practices.

*All they want is to play, play, play... (BM).*

*They are okay with ballgames... any kind as long as there is a ball in the game (DZS).*

*If I have a competition in the lesson, they are more motivated and nobody wants to be left out (LT).*

*They come and tell me: teacher, can we play today? Then we negotiate... we have some sort of a game every lesson...(KL).*

Most heads of PE find that students do not like monotony, long runs, conditioning, gymnastics and repetitive, lengthy tasks. Seven of them mentioned that complex tasks are not so popular because the success rate is lower. Fun is important in all parts of the lesson. If there is no fun, it becomes rather boring and the participation rate lowers.

*As long as I keep changing and modifying the tasks, they are fine...different things for girls, for the skilful ones... of course I need to motivate a lot and praise a lot...(MZS).*

*Except for some, long distance running is what they don't like...gymnastics is the other one; it is probably too strict and demanding for them...(ST).*

*If there is an element of fun, everything is just fine...otherwise they get bored easily... not many like skill development and conditioning ...and they are upfront about that...(KÁ).*

New and popular sport activities and tasks were perceived as something students would like to do in PE by most teachers. However, students do not actively suggest activities; rather, they expect teachers to entertain and provide them with quality practices. Also, 11 heads of PE perceived that students would prefer more ball-games and playtime and 8 of them perceive students need more feedback, motivation and clear instruction to play better.

*They (students) don't really come up with new ideas, they are happy if I bring new tasks and games. It is not easy to plan new tasks on a regular basis (KLN).*

*Some would ask for new sports they had seen on television...but it's rare (BT).*

*Every once in a while I ask them what they would like to do... sometimes I give them more playtime... (HT).*

*They would be very happy to play the same games every day... they are happy if I pay attention and give cues and hints ... (PA).*

Ten heads of PE do not regularly ask student what they would like to do but tend to be open to their suggestions. They would not put structure and skill/content development at risk, but there is some degree of flexibility in the content of the PE program. The high teaching load is also a factor when listening to students' needs; heads of PE see allowing students to play games as an opportunity to lessen their burden in planning.

*As long as I can fit their ideas into a lesson, I'm okay with students' ideas... but they don't suggest a lot (KL).*

*If it is safe and educational, I am willing to include their recommendations ... but it doesn't happen often ... they rather tell me what they don't want to do... (ST).*

*They all want different things and cannot come to conclusions many times... mostly boys tell me what they want... so it is not easy... I don't ask about it... but I am generally open to students' expectations and ideas... (BM).*

*It's quite demanding to fill all the lessons educationally and enjoyably... with the daily PE, there is a lot of work ... giving students a chance to play a game in the lesson is an easy way out for the teacher (KLN).*

Nine heads of PE emphasized the theory, meaning and usefulness of PE in their teaching, but perceived that most of the students are not much interested and find it difficult to foresee what will happen in the future — how they will be able to apply the skills and knowledge they have gained from PE to real life. Only those students who need that particular information due to their health status pay attention.

*Not sure how much they (students) know and will be able to utilize... we talk about what's behind it and why it is important ... how it should be done... (KLN).*

*In some cases there are good questions, so I know that some of them are thinking ...(KLN).*

*When I tell them why they need this or that skill for the future, quite a few just don't care... 'It is too far away' and 'Hey sir, can we play already,' they say (AP).*

*Those who have health problems... want to know more; the others don't care for theories much...(BT).*

Eleven heads of PE perceived that most students have difficulty understanding the relationship between PE and other subjects and the impact of PE on thinking and learning in academic subject areas. They reported that frequently students ask for easier and less demanding lessons when there is a difficult test afterwards.

*Sometimes students mention that it is something they learned in biology, physics, or health education... and they have questions... so we talk about it...but it is rare, most just don't get interested much (LT).*

*Most see PE as a more flexible subject... they ask for an easier work out if there is a test right after our lesson... I have no problem with that, if it is not regular...(HT).*

## DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of the study was to understand how students perceive the daily PE program and how heads of PE departments perceive students' perceptions as a result of the NCC (2012). The results suggest that the two main purpose of PE identified by students are conditioning, followed by learning specific activities. A small percentage of students mentioned healthy active lifelong living, development and enjoyment as purposes of PE. On the other hand, most of the heads of PE perceive that most students do not know the purpose of PE in school and are mostly unaware of the real benefits of regular PE and physical activity, although there are some exceptions. Thus, these results suggest that some of the students understand the purpose of PE in school but heads of PE are unaware of this. So, heads of PE might need to communicate better and make the purposes clearer to students in order to help them understand more fully students' experiences and perceptions of the subject. This might give them a different perspective from which to develop their teaching to enhance students learning in daily PE.

Most students report that PE is an important subject and over half of students like PE. Most heads of PE perceive that although most students like PE there are some exceptions. Further, their reasons for liking the subject are varied. In relation to what students like in PE students and heads of PE are largely in

agreement. Approximately one third of students report they prefer playing games, although some report they like everything or have no specific preferences and some identify specific activities they like in their PE lessons. They also state that they would like to play more games in PE lessons. Similarly most heads of PE are aware that students like to play games as much as possible. They are also aware that students need enjoyment in the lesson, and they report that in a typical lesson they make content, task and methodological modifications as needed. Quite often they plan a game or fun element at the end of the lesson because it is known that students are more motivated in taking part in the lesson if it is fun and have some ownership in the lesson (Wang & Liu, 2007). On the other hand, the majority of students report they do not like running and conditioning, with a lower percent stating skipping rope, which is linked to the conditioning. Likewise, heads of PE said that students do not like long runs or conditioning, nor do they like gymnastics, monotony or repetitive, lengthy tasks and they make planning accordingly.

The majority of students reported that they have learned specific skills and movement content in PE, with only a small percent saying they have learned about conditioning and none about healthy active lifestyle and living. On the other hand, the heads of PE were less sure about what students had learned. However, the heads of PE report that students are mostly interested in games and not as much in health, fitness and other meaningful principles regarding physical activity, although there are some exceptions. Although the heads of PE report concepts and plans for a health-conscious life are important, they state that it is not easy to make students interested in working or thinking in the lesson as the majority of students do not see the long-range health impact of PE on their lives. Those students with serious health problems who may immediately benefit from asking questions and carefully listening to answers are exceptions. Nearly two thirds of students report that they will be able to utilize what they have learned in PE in future. However, the heads of PE were less assured about what students would be able to utilize in future. Both students and heads of PE report limited relationships between PE and academic subjects. Most heads of PE do not see the importance of this and/or are not interested in making meaningful connections. According to heads of PE one reason for this might be that for students PE should be enjoyable; a break from the classroom. However, as it is written in the Hungarian NCC (2012) PE should be more than this. A central goal of PE is to educate students with the necessary knowledge related to physical activity in order for them to make conscious decisions for healthy active living, and learning in some academic subjects could enhance learning in PE and is also part of the goal of the development of the NCC (2012). This is in line with many PE curricula worldwide (see, for example, Ennis, 2007). These results suggest that learning in PE has not been enhanced to meet the goals of the NCC (2012), despite students having daily PE lessons. They also suggest that further work is needed for students to develop knowledge, skills and understanding and develop attitudes and dispositions to engage in a healthy, active lifestyle once they leave school.

The heads of PE report the influence of the early PE and physical activity experience of students as very powerful and having a long-lasting impact. They find it difficult to change students' beliefs and attitudes towards physical activity and healthy active living from age of 11 onwards. They report they gave up on those students who lost their motivation and interest towards PE and physical activity. Besides age, heads of PE report skill level influences motivation towards and also success in PE. This supports findings of previous research that has found that teachers lack understanding about low-skilled students' PE views and experiences in various physical activities (Portman, 1995). However, lower-skilled students could eventually demonstrate higher accomplishments with appropriate support from teachers (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). These results suggest agreement between students and heads of PE as to what students like and do not like about their PE lessons. However, they also suggest that heads of PE need to look at reasons why some students are not motivated at age 11 onwards, consider whether they need to work more closely with

the elementary schools and also consider their own teaching so that students remain motivated in PE both as they progress through the school and irrespective of their skill level.

According to the heads of PE, they do not ask for student input. Although they are open to students' ideas and recommendations, they report that students do not often bring specific ideas and content suggestions to class. Not encouraging student input may be explained, at least partially, by teachers' workload and demanding tasks with preparation. To maintain motivation and challenge for the same class five days per week in daily PE lessons requires considerable preparation of content and pedagogy, giving challenges in planning appropriate and challenging tasks. As a result, heads of PE may be less open to changes to the curriculum to respond to suggestions from students. Further, some kind of a game might be "an easy option" for heads of PE, especially as they are popular with students. They report that competition motivates students to fully take part and excel in their tasks. Since motivation is a key element for engagement and learning (Rink, 2001), all influential factors need to be considered to meet higher levels of participation and success. However, previous research has found that student voice is a valuable tool to encourage participation, increase motivation and higher level achievements (Lewis, 2014). Thus, this is an area in which further progress could be considered.

### **Gender and age differences**

Results of this study suggest some gender differences. A higher percent of boys than girls report they like PE, like soccer and would like to do more soccer in PE, like everything in PE and have no preference about the content of the class. However, a higher percent of boys than girls consider PE is not an important subject area but also report they will be able to utilize what they have learned in PE later in their lives. On the other hand, a higher percent of girls than boys report that the purpose of PE is to live a healthy lifestyle, that PE is an important subject in school, either do not like PE or are unsure whether they like PE and like playing games (fun) and gymnastics. The heads of PE also report some differences in gender with some girls having less positive perceptions of PE than boys. The results of this study are generally in line with results of other studies of gender differences in PE (see, e.g. Vescio et al., 2005).

Results of previous research suggest that many students become disengaged from PE as they progress through school (see, e.g., Lewis, 2014). However, results of this study only partially support findings from previous research as there were only a few differences in results between students in grade levels 5-6 and those in grades 7-8. A higher percent of students in grade levels 5-6 report the purpose of PE is developing healthy active lifestyles, they would prefer to *play games* and *soccer*, that *PE is equivalent* or *they are not sure if it is as important as academic subjects* and that they will be able to *use their learning in PE* in the future. On the other hand a higher percent of students in grade levels 7-8 report in relation to what they would like to do in PE that *nothing is good* or they are *not sure*, that *there was no relation between and no impact* on academic subjects from PE, but that *PE refreshes them so they can focus better*.

Results therefore suggest that although gender differences persist, there may be some encouraging signs in the differences between responses by grade 5-6 and grade 7-8 students.

### **Recommendations for further research**

PE teachers are expected to best facilitate the achievement of the national learning goals with environment, communication, means and methods (Redelius, Quennerstedt & Öhman, 2015). However, to offer positive, educational and developmentally appropriate experiences through a wide range of activities that are motivating, consistent with different expectations and improve attitude and satisfaction (Thompson, Beauchamp & Darst, 1991), meet the needs and interests of the students (MacPhail, 2010), and create

meaningful learning experiences for students in lessons (Glasby & Macdonald, 2004), it is important for students to have a sense of ownership (Chen, 2001). This requires understanding of what beliefs students hold towards PE and physical activity (Dyson, 2006) and how they perceive a PE program and its content (Graham, 1995). Understanding students' experiences, their perceptions of the purposes of PE and their expectations is considered an important area to research (Wang et. al., 2008). According to Rikard & Banville (2006) students' views and opinions can improve PE content and pedagogy, increase motivation and participation. How students perceive PE and what experiences they have in school PE are also of key importance for the foundations of lifelong healthy behavior (Trudeau & Shephard, 2005). Teachers need this information in order to develop the teaching-learning process in PE as decisions regarding content or skill development, pedagogy and methodology are based on this understanding. However, students in schools also need to be actively involved in sharing experiences and exchanging information in a hope that it would serve as a change agent. This study has gone some way to understanding students perceptions in one mid-sized town in Hungary. However, results suggest that heads of PE do not understand students perceptions. Hence, if the purpose of PE in NCC (2012), through daily PE are to be achieved, further research is needed to understand why heads of PE do not encourage student input, why students do not input into their lessons to take more ownership and what could encourage this. It might also be worthwhile to find out what difference the level of ownership makes when allowing students to recommend content. Further, the perceptions of other teachers in the departments are not known. It is worth looking at the perceptions and practice of other teachers in the department.

Other potential areas for research include differences between gender and grade levels. Although there are differences between genders, there were only a few differences between the grade levels. It will be interesting to further look into this aspect of PE. The learning context, setting or teaching style might shed light on these results.

## CONCLUSIONS

Similar to qualitative studies, there are limits to generalizing the experiences of these results. However, the findings demonstrate a clear pattern and raise a few questions.

PE programs around the world are under strong pressure to demonstrate that their practices are effective in preparing students for successful healthy active lifelong living (Lauritsalo, Saakslanti, & Rasku-Puttonen, 2012). Hungary is no exception. With daily PE, teachers have sufficient time to help students master sport specific skills and gameplay, to understand health related aspects and develop cognitive, personal and moral aspects. The findings of this study do not confirm a successful teaching-learning process in this area a few years after the initiation of the new law with daily PE. More is therefore expected from daily PE than a break from the other lessons. As daily PE becomes further embedded, teachers may be better able to plan for an appropriate learning experience.

However, according to Ennis (2013) 'implementing change within the complex world of PE pedagogy and assessment presents opportunities that are both intellectually stimulating and fraught with challenge and frustration'. For example, Cale, Harris, & Chen (2014) highlight that many PE teachers' have narrow, limited and even flawed knowledge and understanding of health and/or health promotion and that many deliver a health focus through 'sport', 'performance' and 'fitness' foci which is dominated by practices such as fitness testing. To overcome these challenges and provide students quality physical education, developing the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment all needs to be improved in line with the new law with daily PE in a way which makes a higher level of success and motivation in place (Penney, Brooker, Hay, & Gillespie,

2009). As Ha et al (2004) point out 'to cope with demands for school-based curriculum development and accountability, school administrators and teachers are becoming increasingly involved in seeking and taking advantage of opportunities to improve their professional skills and teaching effectiveness'. Such professional development is likely to be needed in Hungary to ensure effective use is made of the daily PE programme.

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