

## **The Qualitative Survey of Effective Factors on Students' Participation in Extracurricular Sport Activities**

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### **Abstract**

**Background:** The purpose of this research was the qualitative survey of effective factors on students' participation in extracurricular sports activities. **Method:** The research methodology was qualitative, the kind of phenomenology with targeted sampling gathered through in-depth interviews with 16 students from Allameh Tabataba'i University of Tehran, Iran. The number of students in this university (research population) was about 18,000 in the academic year 2016-17. All interviews were carefully recorded, and then the analysis of the text of the interview was carried out by Smith's method. **Results:** Findings from the interviews with students was extracted in three main themes, including: Students' enthusiasm for sports activities, motivational factors of sports participation, and barriers to sports participation. 30 sub-themes are also included. **Conclusions:** Based on the results of this study, it is recommended that authorities and managers of extracurricular sports activities of universities pave the way for the development of extracurricular sports activities for students by removing barriers to sports participation and improving the factors of motivation and enthusiasm for sports.

**Keywords:** Extracurricular sports activities, Qualitative survey, Sports participation, Students

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## INTRODUCTION

The issue of students' leisure time has always been one of the concerns of university authorities and students at all levels (Tondnevis, 2008). Inadequate motivation for students' participation in organized and regular sports activities and their doing different and sometimes destructive activities (including virtual entertainments) and their consequences can lead to physical and mental problems for the students. In addition, students' ignorance about the importance of leisure time in their everyday programs and its impact on their physical and mental health shows how important it is for university officials to present information about and make planning for leisure time with a focus on sports activities. Those involved in sports activities are engaged in social relationships and, as a result, get rid of isolation, which in turn can help reduce depression and increase mental health. Exercise also helps people to discover their mental talents, overcome social problems, if they have any, and improve certain human characteristics such as mood, self-confidence, self-esteem, socialization, and social adjustment (Pronk, Crouse, & Rohack, 1995; Shahiandi et al., 2014; Pooladi et al., 2011). In addition, sports participation can bring a higher level of happiness and satisfaction with life for individuals (Stubbe, De Moor, Boomsma, & De Geus, 2007).

Physical activity and sport in students' leisure time during their studies has a great impact in the creation of student's personal identity and quality of life in the future (Ignatov, 2016). Extracurricular activities are defined as those that students undertake apart from those required to earn a degree. They may include hobbies and social, sport, cultural, or religious activities. They have some benefit and possess, and some structure/organization. Extracurricular activities are expected to enrich students' experience, develop students' soft skills, help them cope with stress, and provide them with added advantages to increase their employability (Veronesi & Gunderman, 2012; Thompson, Clark, Walker, & Duncan Whyatt, 2013).

The main goal of the extracurricular sports activities of universities is to enable students enhance their sense of responsibility and have effective participation in social activities as citizens. This can play an important role in general education and improvement of students' physical, motor-activity, emotional, rational, moral, and social

dimensions through voluntary healthy and amusing activities (Tejari, Esmaeili & Hojatkah, 2011). In general, attending university sports activities will make students benefit from the recreational sports programs and services. These activities, which take place in the leisure time of students only for entertainment and free from any material goals, play a major role in creating a sense of social participation and are considered a powerful tool for students' interaction with one another and with the university environment. Studies show that students who make use of these facilities are more self-confident and self-reliant than those who do not benefit from these services. Moreover, recreational sports have many benefits such as stress reduction, self-esteem creation, student progress, and social facilitation and integration (Jun, 2011).

Emami, Heidarinejad and Shafi Nia (2013) concluded in their research that the five priorities of students for participation in extracurricular sports activities include motivation for health, social interaction and recognition, sports competition, vitality and happiness, and progress in skills. Moreover, Nazarian Madavani and Ramazani (2013) conducted a study entitled *Evaluating the barriers and strategies for the development of the share of students' sports activities in their leisure time as prioritized by students*. They concluded that the barriers to the development of the share of sports activities in students' leisure include lack of equipment, space, attention to physical education courses in schools, and awareness about the benefits of regular physical activities.

Ignatov (2016) also examined the role of exercise and physical activity in the leisure time of students at the University of Sofia (166 people), 51% of whom expressed their own motivation regarding exercise to be rooted in health and well-being, and 36% of the students chose exercise for leisure as a personal choice, their alternatives including swimming, football, volleyball, aerobics and juggling. 56% of these students exercised outside college. Also, Sarraf, Mohammadsalehi, Kheirolahi, Rahimi, & Mohammadbeigi (2017), in their research, with the aim of assessing and prioritizing the activities of the students of Qom University of Medical Sciences in their leisure time, showed that most of the students of this university do not make effective use of cell phones, social networks, and computer games. Also, sport and studying activities

do not have a considerable place in their leisure activities, which necessitates providing accurate planning.

Physical education and sport to maintain the optimum development of the community depend on many factors, one of which is work force. As dormitory students spend most of their time indoors without a pre-designed leisure plan, and since the functions of social networks and virtual entertainment have developed while the level of physical activities and healthy recreation, based on motion, cheerfulness and group activity, has decreased, it is more important to plan students' leisure time with the workgroup approach in most physical activities. Nowadays, leisure time with a physical activity approach is no longer considered a peripheral phenomenon, but regarded as one aspect of the new civilization that has changed cultural and research products (Tondnevis, 2008).

Therefore, university officials at all levels seek to develop programs for students' leisure time, in general, and for their sports activities, in particular. In this regard, considering that students are the main focus of all cultural, social, economic and political development programs, one of the primary requirements for human development to achieve perfection is having physical health, physical and mental exhilaration, and moral virtues. Therefore, considering physical education and exercise during formal education can prove very constructive with positive outcomes.

Therefore, this important issue should be considered when organizing and planning for students' physical education and sports, because if it is not considered adequately, wasting students' energy and its immediate damage will cause future damage to the society and may lead to abnormalities within this society. It should also be noted that physical education and sports have a special place in students' lives and leisure time. Therefore, the main goal of this research is to determine the factors affecting students' participation in extracurricular sports activities.

## **METHOD**

The research methodology was qualitative, the kind of phenomenology with targeted sampling gathered through in-depth interviews with 16 students from Allameh Tabataba'i University. The number of students in this university (research population) was about 18,000 in the academic year 2016-17. Phenomenology is a philosophical category and research

method developed to understand phenomena through human experiences. This research method seeks to clarify the structure and essence of phenomena by analyzing people's experiences meticulously. All interviews were carefully recorded, and interview transcripts analysis was done via Smith's method. Smith (2008) has proposed three steps for analyzing data in the phenomenological method: a. Data generation, b. data analysis (this phase includes the following steps: 1. Initial encounter; reading and revising the categories; 2. recognizing and labeling the categories; 3. listing and clustering the categories, and 4. creating a summary table); and c. combining the categories.

## **RESULTS**

Findings from the interviews with students was extracted in three main themes, including: students' enthusiasm for sports activities, motivational factors of sports participation, and barriers to sports participation. Several subthemes described below were also included.

### **Students' enthusiasm for sports activities**

Exercise is a priority in life about which there is no room for controversy and excuse. The problem is not whether we have or do not have time for exercise, but the problem is creating this time. If we are to wait for a free opportunity, we will never get it. We have to create this opportunity ourselves. People who exercise regularly on most days of the week are not necessarily sports lovers, but they understand that they need to exercise. Some have the good fortune to enjoy the sport they are doing, while some others do not have such a sense, but they try their best to keep exercising because they have a strong motive and a particular goal when they exercise.

Sport pleasure is an effective and positive response to participation in sports activities based on previous sport experiences, which reflects the generalized emotions and feelings based on pleasure, communication and entertainment. Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson, & O'Conner (1987) asserts that sport commitment depends on attractive experiences in sport and the motivating factors for continuing to do it among people.

Exercise commitment, as a psychological structure, reflects one's desire to continuously engage in sports activities. Exercise commitment reflects one's motivation to continue participating in exercise and indicates the importance of psychological infrastructure based on the insistence on continuing a certain behavior or activity. Exercise commitment can be related to a sports program, a sport field (for example, football), or commitment to continuous participation in a variety of sports activities (Johnson, 1982, cited by Parsamehr, 2011).

One of the main themes obtained in this study was the students' enthusiasm for sports activities. According to the students participating in the interviews, this main theme encompassed several sub-themes as follows: Habit, interest and commitment, recreation and entertainment, feeling and pleasure, healthy competition, inner satisfaction, promotion of fair play, promotion of sport ethics, manifestation of the championship sports, feeling of group ownership and consistence, tension reduction, and establishing communication.

### **Motivational factors for sports participation**

The motivation to participate in sports activities depends on individual differences. Depending on the individual differences and various sports fields, the type of people's motivation to achieve the sports goals is of particular importance.

Enshel (1993) defines motivation as a factor for choosing and directing behavior and continuing it until one reaches the goal. Motivation comes from both sources of internal and external motivation, which are both important in sports and are employed by sports psychologists to improve performance (Sadat Emami, Heidarinejad & Shafi Nia, 2013).

Vroom (1964) views internal motivation as an activity for the sake of the activity itself. Intrinsic motivation in sports involves excitement, recreation, interest in practice, and an opportunity to prove one's abilities, improve one's skills and enjoy exercise. External motivation is shaped by the positive and negative reinforcements that a person receives from external sources, and the desire for exercise arises from the internal motivation that is reinforced by external motivation.

Several studies have shown that different motivations (social interaction, pleasure and vitality, prevention and treatment, reduction of psychological stress, weight control, occupational and life relationships, health and physical fitness, etc.) result in tendency towards exercise (Sadat Emami et al., 2013).

Most of the interviewees in this research also expressed motivational factors for participation in extracurricular sports activities in the following way, which we subcategorized into the following sub-themes: University authorities' understanding, fitness, physical health, mental health, identification of talents, vitality and happiness, social interaction and cognition, increased responsibility, development of athletic skills, and sports competition.

### **Barriers to sports participation**

Researchers have mentioned several factors affecting the lack of physical activities and exercises, which can be classified into three categories:

1. Individual variables (such as age, sex, skill and knowledge, time, motivation, physical condition, self-esteem, awareness of the benefits of exercise, personal interest and desire, interest and attention to health, fitness),
2. social variables (such as sport sociability, social support, importance to others, gender stereotypes or social beliefs about the gender nature of sports activities, social class, educational level, leisure time, family economy, social incentives, lifestyle, cultural patterns corresponding to the place of sport in lifestyle, the way of doing sports activities, and male or female identity), and
3. environmental variables (such as the existence and fair distribution of facilities, and the facilities and infrastructure needed for sports activities) (Safania, 2001; Sadat Emami et al., 2013; Nazarian Madavani & Ramazani, 2013; Lopez & Gomez, 2010).

Some other studies have categorized the barriers to sports participation in three areas including:

1. Interpersonal barriers (such as reluctance, lack of awareness, physical and psychological problems, etc.),

2. interpersonal or social barriers (lack of a partner, non-belonging to group or environment, feeling of insecurity, negative experiences, etc.), and
3. structural barriers (lack of time, lack of facilities, financial problems, etc.) (Aghaei & Fatahian, 2012; Asadi, Moradi & Namazizadeh, 2011; Naghavi, 2016).

The students participating in the interviews in this research also mentioned the barriers to their participation in extracurricular sports activities in the following way: Lack of time, lack of facilities, lack of interest, lack of awareness and adequate information, lack of favorite sport, low economic status, physical and psychological problems, lack of access, lack of educational rewards, and inadequate sports awards.

## **DISCUSSION**

At present, Allameh Tabataba'i University in Tehran, with ten faculties, is the largest specialized university in the field of humanities in Iran and the leading university in achieving the growth and development of knowledge in the field of humanities and social sciences of the country.

It annually accepts numerous students from all over the country in different fields of study (the number of students in this university was about 18,000 in the academic year 2016-17) (Allameh Tabataba'i University Website, 2017).

Many of these students are distant from their homes and are exposed to many mental problems and stresses caused by their dwelling in dormitories in addition to academic problems.

Reducing this stress and creating an environment in which students feel comfortable and relaxed requires extracurricular sports activities in the university. By participating in these recreational sports activities, students not only enjoy a physical and mental health, but also ensure active and energetic lives for themselves in the future thanks to their tendency to exercises and physical activities.

The purpose of this research was the qualitative survey of effective factors on students' participation in the extracurricular sports activities. By analyzing student experiences, 3 main themes and 30 sub-themes were extracted. The general context, main themes and sub-themes are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1:** General context, main themes, and sub-themes of effective factors on students' participation in extracurricular sports activities

| General context   | Main themes                                   | Sub-themes                                 |
|---|---|--|
| Effective factors on students' participation in the extracurricular sports activities | Students' enthusiasm for sports activities    | Habit, interest and commitment             |
|   |   | Recreation and entertainment               |
|   |   | Feeling and pleasure                       |
|   |   | Healthy competition                        |
|   |   | Inner satisfaction                         |
|   |   | Promotion of fair play                     |
|   |   | Promotion of sport ethics                  |
|   |   | Manifestation of the championship sports   |
|   |   | Feeling of group ownership and consistence |
|   |   | Tension reduction                          |
|   |   | Establishing communication                 |
|   | Motivational factors for sports participation | University authorities' understanding      |
|   |   | Fitness                                    |
|   |   | Physical health                            |
|   |   | Mental health                              |
|   |   | Identification of talents                  |
|   |   | Vitality and happiness                     |
|   |   | Social interaction and cognition           |
|   |   | Increased responsibility                   |
|   |   | Development of athletic skills             |
|   | Barriers to sports participation              | Sports competition                         |
|   |   | Lack of time                               |
|   |   | Lack of facilities                         |
|   |   | Lack of interest                           |
|   |   | Lack of awareness and adequate information |
|   |   | Lack of favorite sport                     |
|   |   | Low economic status                        |
|   |   | Physical and psychological problems        |
| Lack of access  |   |  |
| Lack of educational rewards and inadequate sports awards.                             |   |  |

The first major theme extracted from student experiences was: Students' enthusiasm for sports activities. The interviewees in the present study expressed the following sub-themes for this subject: Habit, interest

and commitment, recreation and entertainment, feeling and pleasure, healthy competition, inner satisfaction, promotion of fair play, promotion of sport ethics, and manifestation of championship sports, feeling of group ownership and consistence, tension reduction, and establishing communication. These are consistent with the results of Sadat Emami et al. (2013), Jafari Siavashani, Ghadimi, Behaeen, and Same (2010), Pronk et al. (1995), Shahivandi, Masoud, Soltani, and Soltani (2014), Pouladi Reyshahri, Afsharpoor, and Bahramkhani (2011), Stubbe et al. (2007) and Ignatov (2016).

The second finding from the results of interviewing students was: Motivational factors for sports participation, for which the interviewees expressed the following sub-themes: University authorities' understanding, fitness, physical health, mental health, identification of talents, vitality and happiness, social interaction and cognition, increased responsibility, development of athletic skills, and sports competition. Parsamehr (2011), Ghodrathnema and Heidarinejad (2013), Sadat Emami et al. (2013), Heerden (2014), Chen (2014), Gholipour, Anet, Rabieezadeh, & Karimi Dehkordi (2014), Sanaeifar, Abdi, Razavi, Ghamati, and Farzan (2015), Ignatov (2016) and Al-Ansari et al. (2016), in their research regarding sports participation factors, pointed out factors such as social interaction, pleasure and vitality, prevention and treatment, and reduction of the following factors: Psychological stress, weight control, occupational and lifestyle relationships, physical health, body health and body fitness, which in most cases were related to the results of this research considering motivational factors. Jafari Siavashani et al. (2010) also concluded that male and female students did sports activities with similar motives such as maintaining their health, fitness, sports interest and social interaction, consistent with the results obtained in this study.

The third main theme from the student's statements in the interview was: Barriers to sports participation, for which the interviewees in the present study expressed the following sub-themes: Lack of time, facilities, interest, awareness and adequate information, favorite sport, access, and educational or sports award, as well as low economic status, and physical and psychological problems. These are consistent with the results of Hazavehei, Asadi, Hassanzadeh, and Shekarchizadeh (2008), Asadi et al. (2011), Aghaei and Fatahian (2012), Nazarian Madavani and

Ramazani (2013), Naghavi (2016), and Gómez-López, Gallegos and Extremera (2010).

Hazavehei et al. (2008) showed in their research on female students' viewpoints about sports that students who do not participate in sports activities consider preventive factors such as lack of transport, social relationships, lack of awareness, skills, and health to be more effective than other factors. Gómez-López et al. (2010) concluded that the reasons for students' lack of participation in sports in the Almería University in Spain included external barriers such as time and internal barriers such as lack of interest in sport and lack of motivation. Nazarian Madavani and Ramazani (2013) also categorized the barriers negatively affecting the development of students' participation in sports activities in their leisure time, as prioritized by the students, in the following way: Lack of sports equipment, lack of sport space, lack of attention to the physical education course in schools, and lack of awareness about the benefits of doing regular physical activities.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Finally, it can be said that students, as the main source of national capital and the source of social and economic growth and development, are the main audience of universities. They are young people whose physical and spiritual needs need to be recognized and the way should be paved for the growth and realization of their talents. Recreational sports activities are part of the student's daily life plan, and academic sport is a complement to students' social and cultural lives in major universities of the world. Therefore, managers of extracurricular sports activities in universities should try their best to attract more credits in this field and provide sports spaces, facilities and equipment with appropriate planning so that students can take advantage of the physical, mental and social benefits of sports activities based on their interests, needs and motives. This research can have implications for physical education authorities of Allameh Tabataba'i University, as well as those of other universities, and researchers interested in this field, and provide a clear picture of the perceptions of participating students in this study. Based on the results of the research, it is recommended that the authorities and managers of extracurricular sports activities of universities pave the way for the development of such activities for students by removing preventive factors (such as insufficient time, unsuitable facilities, lack of interest,

lack of knowledge and information, low economic status, physical problems, etc.) and improving the motivation and enthusiasm for sports (such as proper planning, increased space, increasing the facilities and equipment for sports, visiting the sports activities of students, holding sports competitions and providing educational and material rewards, holding training courses, promoting sports ethics, providing bus services to and from sports venues, and other incentives).

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