



Original Contribution

ANALYSIS OF THE LEVEL OF HEALTH CULTURE AND THE ROLE OF SPORTS IN THE DAILY LIFE OF STUDENTS PARTICIPATING IN THE ERASMUS+ PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

The Erasmus+ program provides opportunities for both students and educators to study and exchange experiences at various universities abroad, thereby promoting the academic and cultural development of its participants. In September 2023, a study was conducted at the University of Social and Medical Sciences in Lublin, Poland, aiming to examine the level of health culture and the role of sports in the daily lives of students and educators involved in the program. Sports, as part of the educational process, play a crucial role in maintaining a healthy lifestyle. However, in many foreign universities, sports activities are either not included in the curriculum or are allocated minimal time. In the context of studying abroad, students often face challenges related to the lack of structured sports activities and limited time for physical exercise. This study aims to explore how Erasmus+ students perceive physical activity, their habits, and how universities in different countries integrate sports into their academic programs. The findings of the study will provide valuable insights into the significance of sports and offer recommendations for better integrating physical activity into the lives of students participating in the Erasmus+ program.

Keywords: survey, Erasmus+, sports, students, sports habits, social integration

INTRODUCTION

Erasmus+ program provides opportunities for both students and educators to study and exchange experiences at various universities abroad, thereby fostering the academic and cultural development of its participants. Sports, as part of the educational process, play a significant role in maintaining a healthy lifestyle. However, in many European universities, sports activities are either not included in the curriculum or are allotted minimal time (1-3).

A relevant study on the attitudes of newly enrolled students at the University of Mining and Geology “St. Ivan Rilski” towards the subject of Physical Education and Sports offers valuable insights (4). Related research by M.

Nedkova (2014), G. Dyakova (2011), and others examines the current state and challenges of physical education and sports in higher education institutions in Bulgaria (5-8). From a financial and infrastructural perspective, this issue also holds significant importance (9). In summary, it has been observed that only a small proportion (39%) of male students and a slightly larger proportion (66%) of female students engage in sports solely during physical education classes. They generally lack the motivation to participate in sports during their free time, citing various reasons.

METHODOLOGY

Knowledge about the role of a healthy lifestyle, which includes various activities such as sports and accurate self-assessment, is of utmost importance for today’s young generation, which faces increasing levels of physical inactivity and significant daily stress (2, 10, 11). In this context, the Erasmus+ program curriculum for the “Sports” discipline included both lectures

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and practical sessions. The lectures covered topics such as the importance of physical activity and sports for students' health and overall well-being, the need for a daily balanced and healthy diet, and the negative effects of harmful habits that contribute to the development of socially significant diseases. Practical sessions were designed and tailored specifically for the audience, including tests, surveys, and activities aimed at engaging students and promoting an active lifestyle.

The aim of our study is to examine the perspectives of students participating in the Erasmus+ program regarding their health culture and the role of sports in their daily lives.

Main Objectives:

1. Development of a survey questionnaire.
2. Conducting the survey, followed by data processing and analysis of the results.
3. Formulating conclusions and recommendations.

Organization and Methodology:

The study was conducted from September 11 to September 15, 2023, during the 2022/2023 academic year at the University of Social and Medical Sciences in Lublin, Poland. A total of 21 students from various countries and universities participated, with an average age of 25 years.

The students were surveyed using a questionnaire consisting of 16 questions, organized into the following categories: student demographic data, the presence of the discipline "Sports" and sports in general in the academic life of a student.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The initial questions of the survey (**Figures 1–5**) provide information about the students who participated in the Erasmus+ 2023 program. These students come from countries with varying levels of economic development, political objectives, and historical and cultural values (**Figure 1**). The academic disciplines pursued by the participants in their respective universities are primarily in the fields of medicine, social sciences, and finance (**Figures 2–3**). The primary group of participants in the Erasmus+ program consists of students aged 20 to 23 (**Figure 4**), which is typical for university exchange programs. The smaller number of older participants indicates that the program primarily targets young adults but also attracts some more mature students. First-year students and those enrolled in master's programs also take part, albeit in smaller numbers, likely due to differing academic priorities or a lack of readiness to participate in such programs during the initial or final stages of their studies. Erasmus+ predominantly attracts students from their second to fourth year of studies, which is logical since these years are considered the most suitable for academic exchange (**Figure 5**).



Figure 1. Which country are you from?

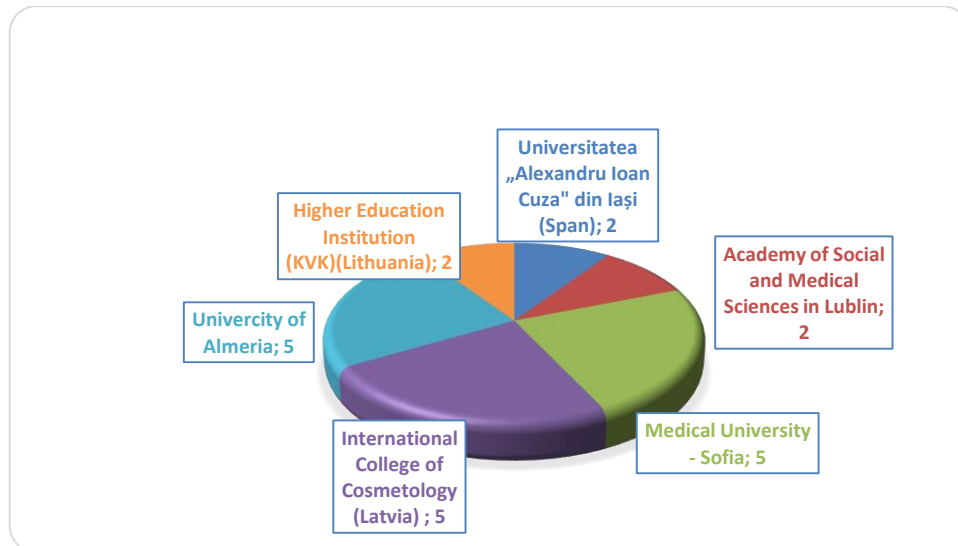


Figure 2. Which university are you from?

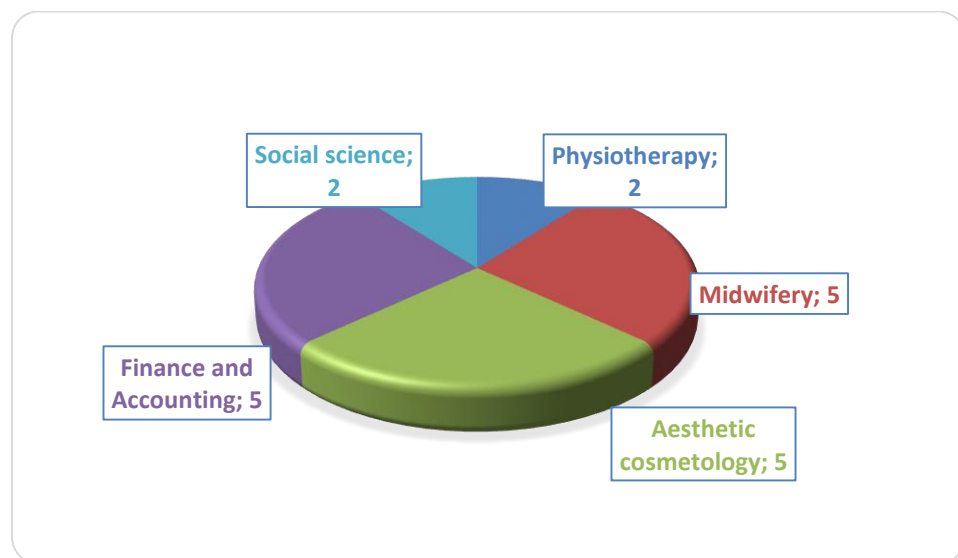


Figure 3. What major are you studying?

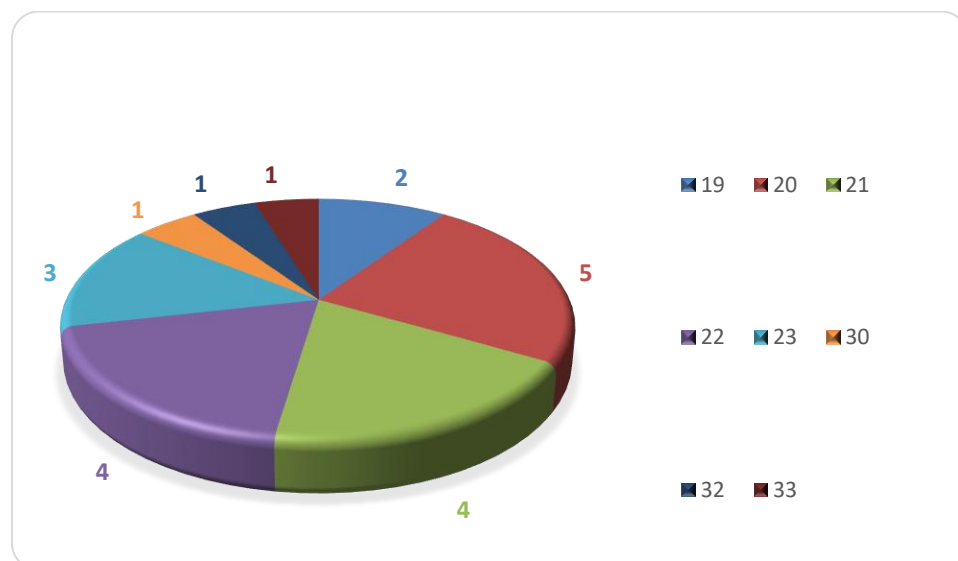


Figure 4. How old are you?

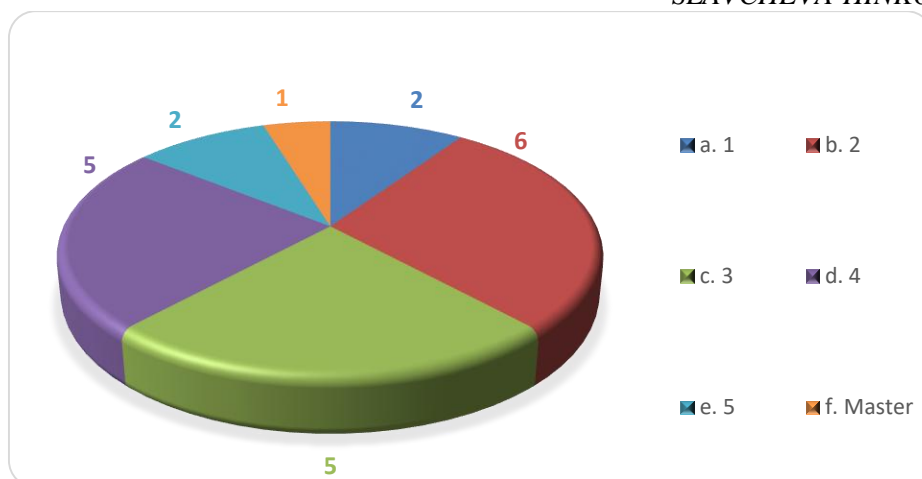


Figure 5. What course are you in at university?

It is particularly alarming that, on a European scale, sports are not included as a university discipline in the academic curricula (**Figure 6**). An exception is observed among students from Bulgarian higher education institutions, where

sports are a mandatory discipline in some universities (6; 28%), an elective course in others (5; 24%), and in a significant percentage (10; 48%), sports are not included in the curricula at all (**Figure 7**).

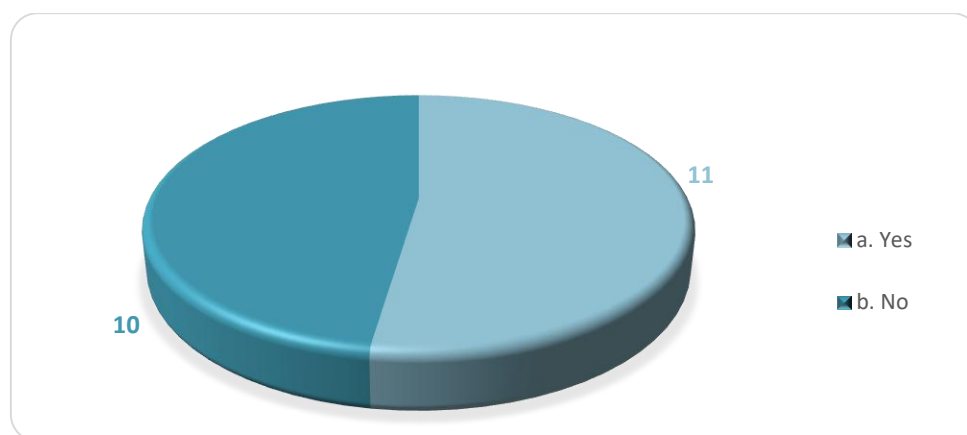


Figure 6. Is the discipline "Sport" included in the curriculum of your major?

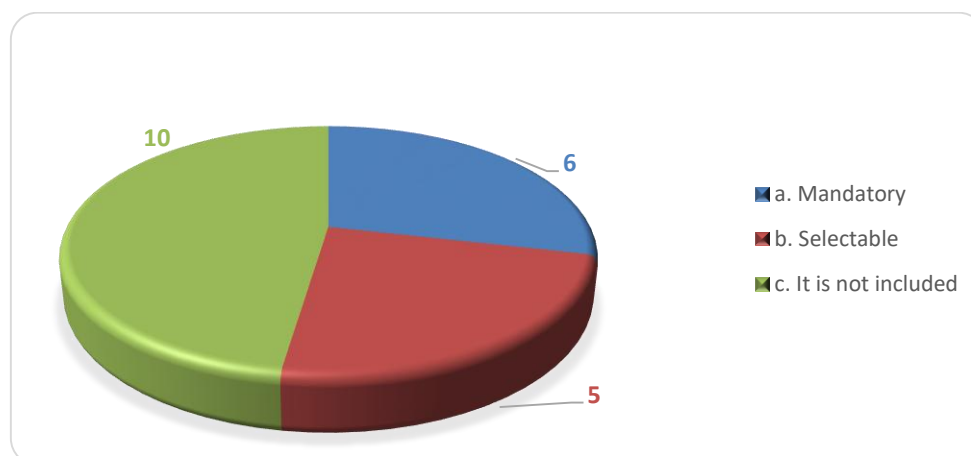


Figure 7. Is the discipline "Sport" a compulsory discipline or optional (optional)?

In universities where the "Sports" discipline is included, it is allocated a negligible number of hours. Only 5% of higher education institutions offer it with more than two sessions per week,

10% include it with two sessions per week, 33% allocate just one session per week, and in 52% of universities, the discipline is entirely absent from students' curricula (**Figure 8**).

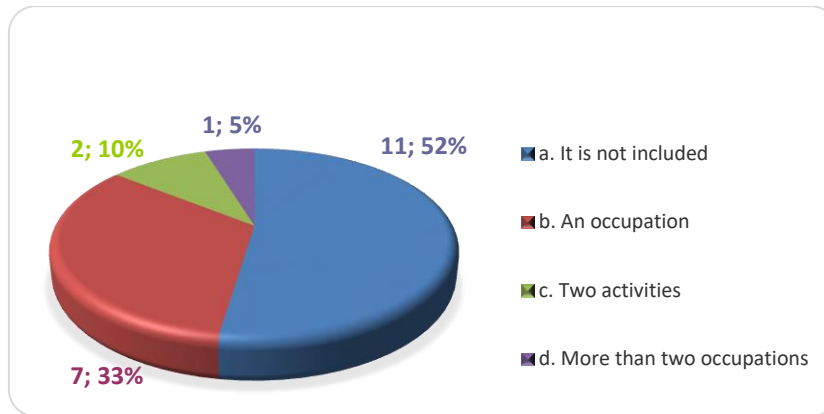


Figure 8. How many study hours a week is the discipline "Sport" included in your curriculum?

Figure 9. Reveals that the majority of students - 52% do not engage in any physical activity. The remaining students, in response to the question "What sport or other activity do you

practice?" indicated that they primarily participate in individual sports, such as fitness (33%), cycling (10%), and conditioning training (5%).

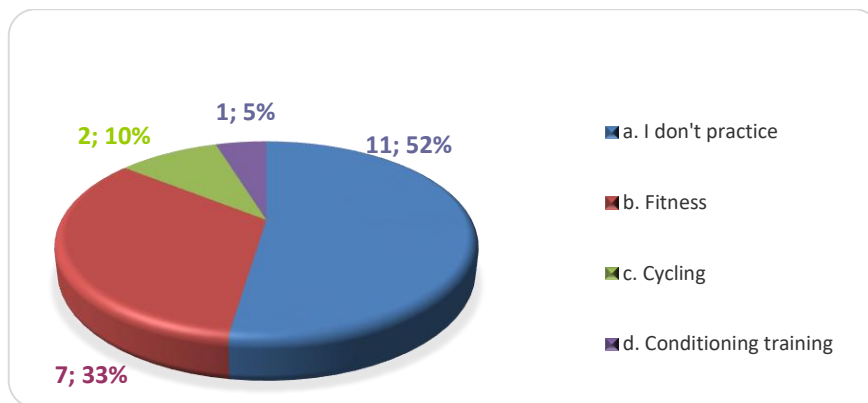


Figure 9. What sport or other activity do you practice?

As sports specialists, it is gratifying to note that 18 students (86%) have a clear understanding of the benefits of physical activity in their daily student life. A smaller proportion either do not

recognize (2; 9%) or are unable to assess (1; 5%) the necessity of incorporating physical activity into their demanding academic schedules (**Figure 10**).

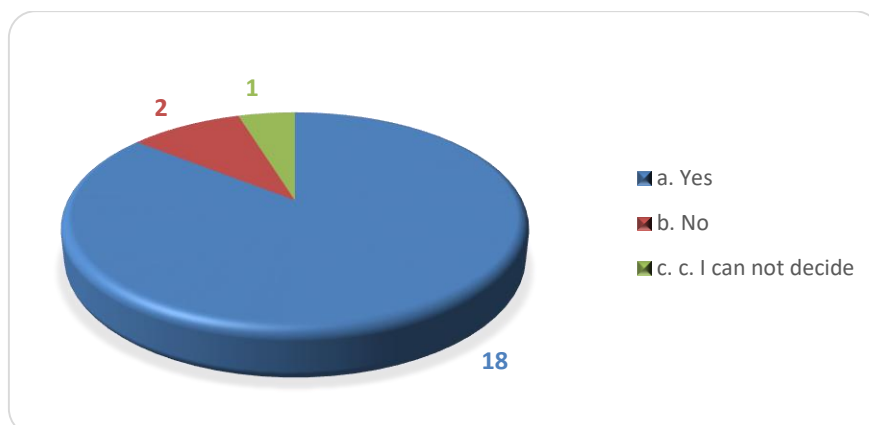


Figure 10. Do you think sports are necessary at university?

In response to the question, "Have you ever participated in a team?", only 10% of respondents answered affirmatively, while 90% selected "No" (**Figure 11**). This is a concerning

finding, as it indicates that the majority of students have not experienced the benefits of organized sports and have not had the opportunity to participate in a team environment.

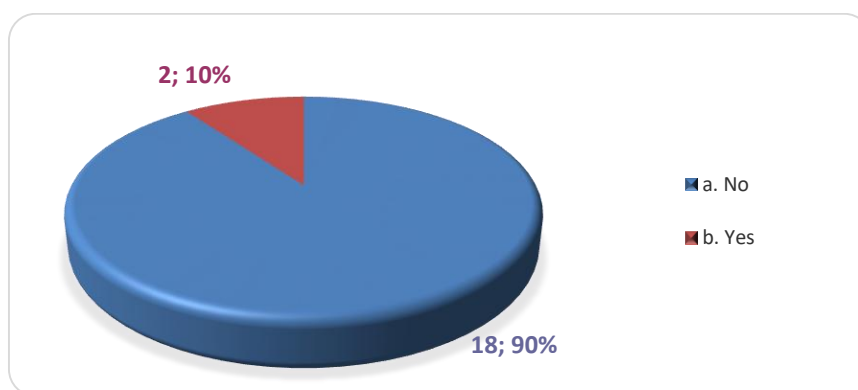


Figure 11. Did you participate in a team?

Figure 12 presents the results of the question, "Do you believe there is a connection between academic success and participation in sports?". The data clearly shows an almost equal distribution, with a slight majority (57%) of students indicating that they believe such a connection exists. The remaining 43% do not

perceive a link, with 29% responding "No" and 14% answering "I can't decide". We believe that this lack of understanding among students regarding the goals and objectives of physical education and sports training, particularly in early school years, is a key factor contributing to these responses.

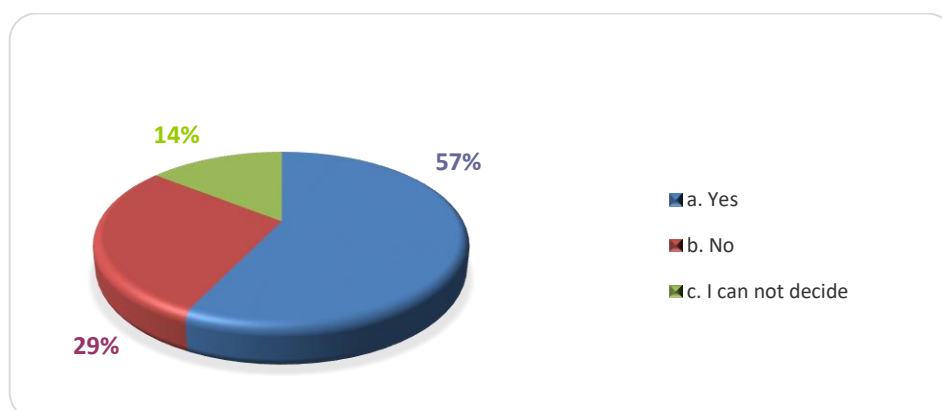


Figure 12. Do you think there is a correlation between sports and success at university?

In response to Question 13, "What are your reasons for engaging in sports?", students provided a variety of answers. The total percentage exceeds 100% because respondents were allowed to select more than one option

(**Figure 13**). Notably, only 3% of the students did not identify any specific reason that would encourage or motivate them to practice a particular sport.

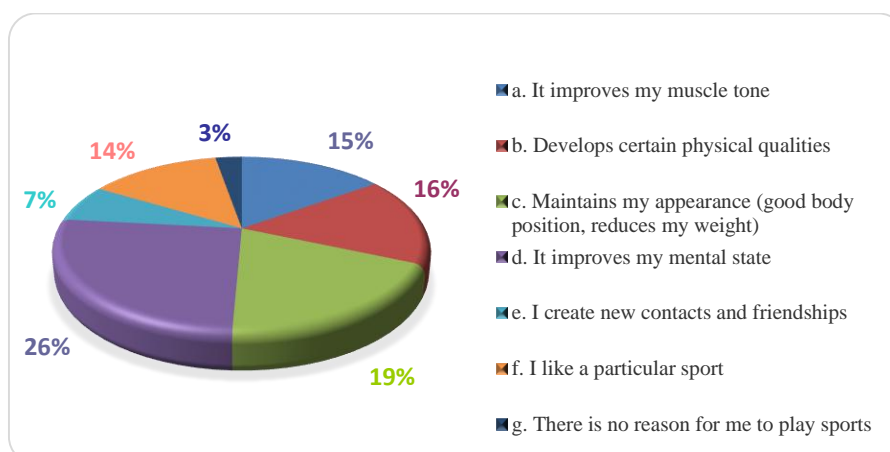


Figure 13. What are your reasons for playing sports? (You can indicate more than one answer)

In the next question, students identified the reasons they do not engage in sports (**Figure 14**). Here, too, they were allowed to select more than one option. Half (50%) of the respondents indicated a lack of time for sports, which is understandable given their demanding academic

schedules. For 27%, health issues prevent them from participating in sports, while 10% stated they have not found a sport that suits them. Additionally, 7% expressed a dislike for sports, and 6% reported a lack of access to facilities, such as nearby sports halls or fields.

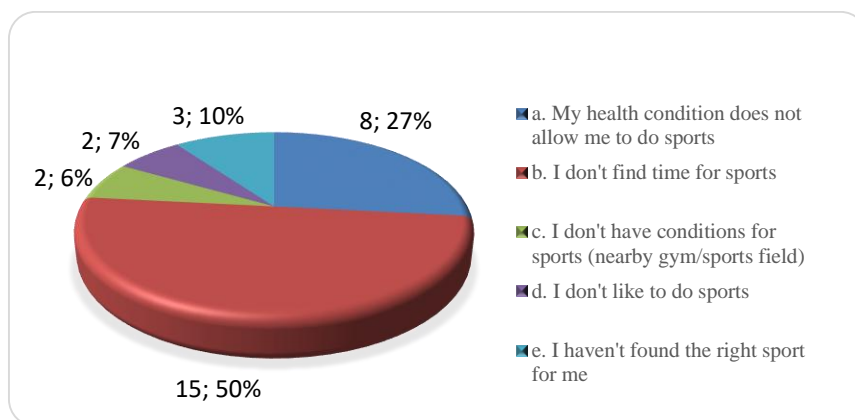


Figure 14. What are your reasons for not playing sports? (You can indicate more than one answer)

Figure 15 illustrates the results regarding students' preferences for different forms of physical activity. The following trend emerges: individual activities are preferred by 14% of students, group activities by 10%, while 38% of

respondents indicated no preference, as they enjoy both forms of exercise. An equal percentage—38%—expressed no preference because they do not engage in sports at all.

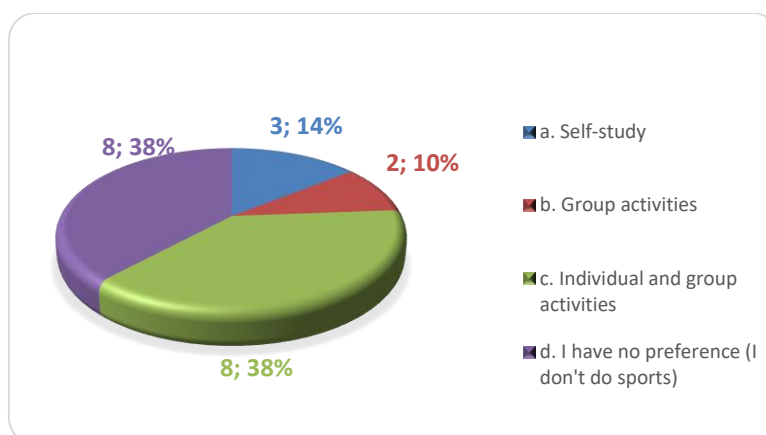


Figure 15. What form of physical activity do you prefer?

We found it particularly interesting to investigate the extent to which the modern “digital generation” uses mobile applications for their sports activities (**Figure 16**). The

results show that the majority of students (a total of 81%) are not yet fully reliant on technology in this context. Only 19% reported using various applications while engaging in sports activities.

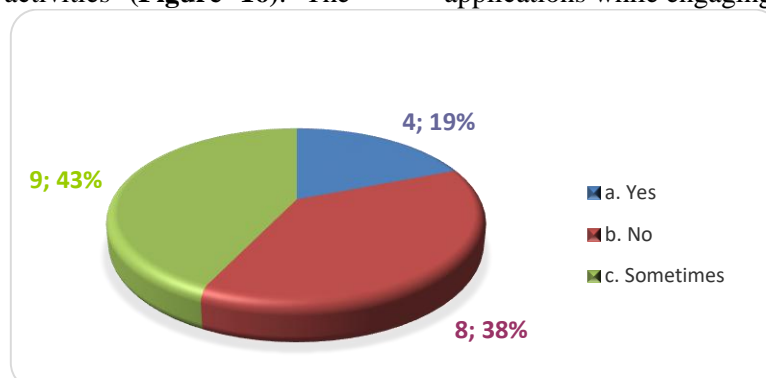


Figure 16. Do you use mobile apps for your sports activities?

DICUSSION

The conducted survey examines critical aspects of the role of sports in the academic lives of students participating in the Erasmus+ program and highlights several challenges they face. One of the main issues identified in the analysis is the lack of sports activities in many of the surveyed universities. This limitation restricts students' ability to maintain an active lifestyle, which is essential for both their physical and mental health. The discussion further underscores the significance of individual sports for students but reveals that the lack of organized sports activities and adequate infrastructure often hampers participation in team sports and hinders social integration through sports (5, 11). Through the involvement of sports professionals, students can gain essential knowledge about sports techniques and methodologies, acquiring valuable skills and habits. This is particularly evident in universities where sports are not a mandatory part of the curriculum. The study also explored the relationship between physical activity and academic performance. While a significant portion of students believe that sports positively impact their academic success, a notable percentage remains unconvinced of this connection. This indicates the need for a deeper understanding of the benefits of sports and their inclusion as an integral component of university education.

The findings emphasize the urgent need for greater awareness and promotion of physical activity among students, as well as the critical importance of institutional support in creating conditions that enable young people to integrate sports into their daily lives. This calls for strategic measures to enhance access to sports facilities and encourage a culture of active engagement in sports as a foundation for academic success and overall well-being.

CONCLUSIONS

1. In many European universities, sports are not integrated as a mandatory part of the academic curriculum, leading to limited physical activity among students.
2. Despite recognizing the benefits of sports, a significant number of students are unable to engage in regular activities due to their academic commitments or lack of suitable conditions.
3. Students tend to prefer individual sports such as fitness and cycling, but the absence of organized opportunities and sports facilities limits their participation.

4. There is a varied understanding of the relationship between physical activity and academic performance, with more than half of the students believing that sports have a positive impact on their academic results.

5. Technologies and mobile applications are not yet widely used by students for physical activity purposes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Universities should integrate more sports activities into the academic curriculum or provide opportunities for elective sports disciplines to promote a healthier lifestyle among students.
2. Better conditions for sports should be created by ensuring access to affordable sports facilities and organizing more sports events, even outside mandatory class hours.
3. Encouraging physical activity through mobile applications and technologies can help motivate students, especially among the younger "digital generation".
4. Students should be informed about the connection between physical activity and academic performance to better integrate it into their demanding daily schedules.
5. Greater efforts should be made to organize sports activities that promote socialization and participation in team sports, as these also have a positive impact on students' overall well-being.

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