



The Role of Universities in Promoting Physical Activities Participation Among Undergraduate Male Students

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Abstract

Engaging in physical activity provides a lot of benefits for the youth. It generally helps to improve fitness. Despite clear evidence that physical activity offers significant health benefits, the majority of youth in Saudi Arabia, do not meet the recommended levels of physical activity as findings show 60 percent of the Saudi Arabian population is physically inactive. This poses a huge problem as sedentary life is a public health issue, lack of policies and funding that will encourage physical activity has been identified as one of the major problems. Therefore, this study examines the role of universities Policy and Funding in promoting physical activities participation among the undergraduates in KSA. Data were collected using questionnaire from 25 universities from the Saudi Kingdom with a total of 643 participants who were selected across all levels. Results show that financial support and policies had high importance in sports participation. Based on these, it can be argued that both university's policies, funding have a positive relationship with physical activities participation.

Keywords: Physical Activities, Role of Universities, Undergraduate, KSA.

INTRODUCTION

Studies have shown the importance of physical activities to both children and adults. As reported by Pate, Flynn and Dowda (2016), physical activity offers range of health benefits to youths. Increase physical activity helps to improve fitness, healthy bone, composition of the body and cardiometabolic risk status in youth. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2008). In their contribution, Bartolomeo and Papa (2019) added that regular physical activity can improve health, cognitive function, and illness prevention. In addition, there is indication of positive "non-health impacts" generated by physical activity or sports involvement.

This is in addition to indication of good "non-health benefits" generated by physical activity or participation in sports. Similarly, in relation to skill development among children, Felfe, Lechner, and Steinmayr (2016) in their study of German children, found that cognitive and noncognitive skills are affected by sports activities with children participating in sports having less difficulties with peers, thereby fostering improved relationship.

This was also the report of Pawlowski, Schuttoff, Downward and Lechner (2018) in their study of Peruvian children when they claimed that being a member of a sports team has a good impact on one's subjective health and prosocial attitudes. As a result, it is acceptable to assume that physical activity is beneficial to mental health, cognition, and academic accomplishment. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2008).

Physical activity guidelines for children and adolescents have been approved by governments around the world, and these suggestions often call for young people to be active for 60 minutes daily, at moderate-to-vigorous intensities. Despite the overwhelming evidence that physical activity has significant health advantages, the majority of children and adolescents around the world, particularly in Saudi Arabia, do not reach the established physical activity guidelines (Sayyd & Nahary, 2020). According to the statistics, 60% of Saudi Arabians are physically inactive, with 90% of them sitting for more than 2 hours every day. (Alahmed & Lobelo, 2018). This has been associated with a number of

factors ranging from lack of facilities, inadequate sport programmes, and culture (Sayyd & Nahary, 2020).

Therefore, in this study, attempts will be made to examine the role of Universities Policy, finance in promoting physical activities participation among the undergraduates in KSA. This is due to the fact that schools are the bedrock of adolescent, youth, and society's evolution and development. (Kalar, Hemmatinezhad & Ramezaninezhad, 2019). The potential of sport in school to solve many social, educational and psychological problems cannot be overemphasized. Hence, this study believes that an investigation of the nexus among policy, finance and physical activities will aid our understanding of how they can be used to enhance physical activities among the students in KSA.

METHOD

Literature Review:

Policy and Physical Activities Participation:

A policy is a written document that has been endorsed and includes declarations and decisions that define goals, priorities, and the primary approaches for achieving these goals. It could also include a plan for implementation. According to Henry and Ko (2014), Without knowing how and why governments, NGOs, and other organizations design and implement sport policy, it is difficult to completely comprehend the role of sport in current global society. A government's image improves in the eyes of its citizens when it promotes athletic activities that people like and appreciate. As a result, many politicians portray themselves as sports fans. They promote sporting events and align themselves with well-known players and teams who have achieved international success.

Ruseski and Maresova (2014) in an analysis cite a country level factor as aggregate economic performance, and the policies which directly or indirectly relate to sport but is to a large extent having influence on sport participation and physical activity. Ruseki and Maresora (2014) were affirming the relevance of government policies in determining individual's decision to be active physically, which ought to be based on established elements and sport-related policies, by making this remark. Downward et al. (2014) showed a positive relationship between government quality and public health expenditure and sport participation when they looked at both government variables like real GDP and expenditure and lifestyle factors. Government spending in sport were found to result in higher levels of involvement and frequency.

Furthermore, research suggests that during the last decade, the topic of sport participation and physical activity has become a global discussion point. Citizens of industrialized countries have become increasingly sedentary as they adapt to innovative technologies and consume a wide range of labor-saving products. Government officials, health promotion agencies, and health care providers are all concerned about the trend toward lower levels of regular physical activity. As a result, international health-based organizations such as the World Health Organization have made physical activity a priority policy issue (WHO).

In order to tackle chronic health problems, WHO is now advocating the development of national physical activity policies with the aim to increase participation. Policy proposals directed primarily at children and adolescents have traditionally been included in national strategic plans for improving physical activity (Pate, Trilk, Wonwoo & Jing, 2011). Many highly industrialised countries have established strategies to enhance physical activity participation for specific demographic segments, particularly children and youth, in response to declining levels of physical activity..

Specifically in Saudi Arabia, current participation in sport and leisure time activity levels most especially among the school students has been observed to be fast decreasing (Al-Refae & Al-Hazzaa, 2001). According to a survey published by Al-Hazzaa et al. (2013), 45 percent of Saudi Arabian boys are physically inactive. In addition, 56 percent of male students were inactive and did not meet the recommended level of physical activity, with females having a higher frequency of sedentary behavior than males (Al-Hazzaa et al., 2014). The lack of or inadequate execution of policies has been blamed for the low level of physical activity.

Among order to promote physical activity in children and youth, Saudi Arabia's physical activity and sport participation policy methods focus on two areas: schools and communities. Physical education, which encompasses physical activity and sport at the school level, has grown in importance in schools all over the world. (Forneris al., 2013). According to Standage et al. (2012), Physical education can aid to build a person's knowledge base and improve academic performance. It has a significant impact on



pupils' motivation and well-being. Physical education also aids in the development and modification of people's values and attitudes. Physical education can provide genuine pleasure and happiness to young individuals. For example, Bernstein, Phillips, and Silverman (2011) discovered that a large number of pupils appreciated physical education sessions and considered them to be places where they could study while also having fun with their peers..

Physical activity programmes are also provided on a regular basis in public and private schools, according to the Saudi Arabia Ministry of Education (2006). The Saudi Arabian Ministry of Education's educational policies, which give guidelines that affect the educational process, are used to determine all of the goals and general objectives of physical education in schools. Furthermore, the educational policies reflect Islam's religion (Ministry of Education, 2006). In 1954, the education policy authorized physical education as a curriculum as a crucial part of preparing young people for responsible citizenship.

Hence, according to the Saudi Department of Education as cited in Karjj (2010), the policy statements seek to achieve the following through physical education.

- a. Promotion of a fit and healthy body;
- b. Students' motor skills are being improved.;
- c. In schools and beyond, the development of an understanding of the value of physical activity;
- d. The building of values; and
- e. Participating in physical activities and sports to make good use of students' free time..

In addition, the most recent programme directives, as stated by the Ministry of Education (2006), need physical education studies in schools all over Saudi Arabia to accomplish the following goals:

- a. Teaching physical activity-related Islamic behaviors to students.;
- b. Boost all fitness factors that are linked to physical health.;
- c. Develop understanding of the health and physiology of physical activity of the students.

Furthermore, as previously said, physical education in schools is one component of the Saudi Arabian national government's physical activity and sport policy development plan according to Saudi Vision 2030. The other arm comprises community participation programmes. This is predicated on the premise that there are numerous compelling reasons to increase community involvement in physical activity and sport. One of the most important reasons, according to Richardson et al. (2014), relates to improved public health.

As a result, Saudi government policy has taken care to specifically address the youth sector in order to improve their interest and, as a result, the number of young people participating in sports and other forms of physical exercise. In 1974, for example, the government established the General Presidency of Youth Welfare as part of its commitment to promote physical activity and sport. (Alshamri, 2001). This organization has established a number of objectives that guide its tactics and policies in order to enhance community participation. In summary, the current government policy, in Saudi Arabia, aims to:

- a. Contribute to Islamic educational development through promoting youth sports and physical activities in all Saudi cities, especially by establishing training facilities and expanding recreational activities, as well as by providing special programmes for those with disabilities.
- b. In order to accomplish the organization's goals and activities, private sector engagement is encouraged and supported by the construction of sport facilities and recreational spaces, as well as the funding of sport club operations.
- c. Provide community groups with customized recreational and sporting activities. build sport administration and coaching programmes
- d. Encourage the development of sports facilities.
- e. Introduce sports initiatives on behalf of the Saudi Arabian Olympic Committee.

Finance and Physical Activities Participation:

Government intervention in sport is generally accepted to have increased in recent years in many countries (Oakley & Green, 2001). This initiative took the form of increased financing, equipment,

policies, and programmes aimed at increasing participation in physical activities, particularly organized sport, and improving elite athletes' performance standards. While the government's influence over the sports policy community is growing, Oakley and Green (2001) imply that the government's uneven intervention is bad to non-profit sports organizations. Public institutions with direct mandate for sport, such as those in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom, drive national sport policies.

These organizations may have minimal political clout when it comes to education and health, both of which have a direct impact on how sport-related activities are included in school curricula and how sport is used to promote healthy living. According to Oakley and Green (2001), supporting top athletes and high-performance programmes, for example, has become a cornerstone of national sport policy and a focus for government intervention. Physical activities, physical education, and sports have received funding as a result, and the government has increased its expectations of these organizations' boards to provide enhanced elite level performances.

Sport, as accurately noted, takes an essential part of government financial intervention, as indicated by the growing number of countries that have articulated a distinct "sport policy" with accompanying financing and support for elite and community sport development efforts. For example, for three reasons, according to Bergsgard, Houlihan, Mangset, N_dland and Rommetvedt (2009), national governments believe sport to be an important aspect of economic and social activity. First, sport has a high cultural relevance in most industrialized countries, as evidenced by the amount of coverage given to national team success in the media and public funding for the development of big stadiums and other athletic facilities.

Second, sport is viewed as a means for attaining non-sport objectives such as demonstrating political power, combating social exclusion, reducing childhood obesity, promoting economic development, and supporting urban regeneration. Third, sport is multi-faceted in that it is not just a public service but also a vital component of social welfare and a source of revenue. As a result, it can aid in the achievement of government goals of sport policy, such as improving elite athlete performance and increasing participation in sports and physical activities. (Bergsgard, Houlihan, Mangset, N_dland & Rommetvedt, 2009).

Second, sport is used to achieve non-sporting goals such as exhibiting political authority, combatting social exclusion, lowering childhood obesity, promoting economic development, and helping modernization. Third, sport is multi-faceted in that it is both a public service and a source of economic activity. As a result, it can assist in a variety of ways in achieving government objectives that aren't related to sport policy, such as improving elite athlete performance and increasing participation in sports and physical activities.

Governments, it is argued, are willing to acknowledge that a minimum level of literacy and good health, for example, do not need an instrumental justification for the investment of public money and are seen as being 'good in themselves'. Similarly, arguments that involvement in school sports will lead to higher academic achievement, improved behavior, and a reduction in absenteeism are used to justify investment in school sports. (Green, 2004). Consequently, what might at first appear to be the exploitation by governments of sport for non-sporting purposes might be a necessary condition for leveraging public funds into what is a set of minority interests.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Twenty-five (25) public universities from the Saudi Kingdom were used in the study with a total of six hundred and forty-three (643) participants who were selected across all levels. Data were therefore collected using questionnaire and analysed using SmartPLS. The results of the analysis are presented in table 1.

Table 1: Constructs Categorization Based on their Importance

Independent Constructs	Importance to sports participation	Performance	Path coefficient (significant level)
Policy	0.092	49.177	Significant
Sport Finance	0.198	57.634	Significant



The results, as shown in table 1, indicate that the financial support, and policies had high importance in sports participation. As can be seen, financial support performed at a high level, with the average latent variable score of (performance=57.634, impotatnce=0.198). similarly, the total effect of policies was (0.092), and the performance was (49.177). Based on these results, it can be argued that both policy and financing have positive relationship with physical activities participation.

Similarly, the results obtained from bootstrapping indicate that the two factors significantly affect sports participation. As shown in table 2 below, it was revealed that sport policies can positively encourage students to participate in sports and physical activities ($\beta = 0.086$, t-value = 1.282). More importantly, the sports financing showed a higher positive and significant effect on students' participation ($\beta = 0.147$, t-value = 3.763). In sum, the empirical evidence from the bootstrapping test showed that both policies and financing were significant and positive predictors for students' sports and physical activities participation.

Table 1. Path Coefficient Results

Factor	Path	Original Sample (O)	T-value	P-values	Path coefficient (significant level)
1-	Policy -> Sport Participation	0.086	1.282	0.1	*
2-	Finance-> Sport Participation	0.147	3.763	0.00	***

Therefore, the results as presented in the tables above revealed that financial support has a positive effect on students' participation in sports and physical activities. This finding is consistent with previous studies (Steenhuis *et al.*, 2009; ALwahhabi, 2015; Alerwi, 2017). For many countries, financial support could be a major barrier to participating in sports activities for individuals (Steenhuis *et al.*, 2009). In the context of this study, students emphasized that they would prefer to participate in free sports activities or activities that are sponsored by the university, and they also highlighted those financial rewards in activities participation are an essential factor in their participation.

This is similar to Alerwi (2017), who found that a well-prepared budget by the university plays a crucial role in helping students who are less fortunate to be able to buy sports-related items of clothing, which in return increases their participation rate in sports activities on the university campus. ALwahhabi, (2015) found that distributing financial rewards to winning students after each activity has a significant positive impact on students' participation behaviour. This result implies that university management should consider financial support as one of the major strategies for attracting students to take part in sports activities on the university campus.

Financial support in the forms of rewards or incentives will be an external motivation resulting in participation in sports activities (Varghese, Antony & Tomar, 2015). Moreover, the university may consider providing financial support for athletic students who have higher achievements in university sports activities and encourage them to participate in nationwide activities. This will create a sense of competition among students and build a sports-oriented environment for students to show their skills and increase the level of participation.

In addition, it was shown that policies have a positive effect on students' sports and physical activities participation. This is in line with findings in previous studies (Alahmad, 2016; Alsahli, 2016). For instance, Weed *et al.* (2012) conducted a systematic review and concluded that policy-led sports activities play a significant role in communities, especially if these activities are well promoted among individuals.

CONCLUSION

Physical activities are important for both children and adults, it provides a wide range of health benefits to children and adolescents. As the expanding number of countries that have formulated a unique "sport strategy" with accompanying finance and support for elite and community sport development activities demonstrate, sport has become a crucial aspect of government financial involvement.

Furthermore, the desire to increasingly use sport to achieve a variety of objectives in a variety of policy sectors is not unrelated to the financial intervention by governments around the world. As a consequence of the findings of this paper, financial aid has a favorable impact on students' engagement in sports and physical activities. This discovery is in line with earlier research (Steenhuis et al., 2009; ALwahhabi, 2015; Alerwi, 2017)

In the context of this study, students stated that they would like to participate in free sports activities or activities sponsored by the institution, and they also stated that financial incentives are an important role in their participation. In the same manner Alsahli (2016) emphasized the important role of sports activity policies and called for universities policy changes that may suit the gender differences taking into consideration the Saudi cultural background. Moreover, previous studies have focused on policies in the schools' context (Alsubaie and Omer, 2015).

However, the findings from this study urge the universities' top management and policymakers to adopt more encouraging policies for students to participate more in university sports activities. Furthermore, this is also in line with the Saudi government's Vision of 2030, which encourages more flexible and adaptable policies in terms of sports activities in the Saudi community.

The findings also suggest that policymakers should consider other aspects to incorporate in universities policy, such as psychological and built-environmental resources (Alahmad, 2016), university offered programmes (Alerwi, 2017), and cultural and religious considerations. Together, these would shape the appropriate policies to encourage more participation among male students on the university campus.

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