

SOFIA UNIVERSITY' STUDENTS' PHYSICAL ACTIVITY LEVELS AND THEIR OPINION ABOUT THE USE OF SMART DEVICES IN SPORT CLASSES

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Abstract: The imperative for taking action to increase physical activity is clear. No European Union country has a prevalence of overweight and obesity below 50%, and childhood obesity is a major concern throughout the continent. The European Union has long increasingly emphasized the sociological, physiological and psychological benefits of sport. The integration of sports into the universities educational curriculum in most European pedagogical systems has resulted in high levels of sport practice among the youth. However, as young people enter higher education many member-states face a problem with withdrawal in participation. At the same time in many recent researches, scientists warn that the fitness level of young generation is far from good. There are many reasons behind the low motivation of young people to participate in sport classes. The universities policy makers and sport departments can play an important role by finding new motivational engines which will make sport classes more attractive to students. "Te(a)chIn Sport" project was developed and granted by the European Commission in 2017. The project general objective is to raise awareness of the importance of health-enhancing physical activity (HEPA) of young people through increased participation in sports by using innovative technologies in university sport classes. In the high-tech era, we live in today, the wearable technology market is booming. Now people are able to find all kind of information at their fingertips via smart phones, fitness activity tracers and many other devices. Especially young people find a lot of excitement in using all kind of applications for which they spend the most of their free time. The represented research is a part of "Te(a)chIn Sport" project, granted by the Erasmus + Sport Program of the European Commission, in which "St. Kliment Ohridski" University of Sofia is the leading partner. The article shows the results of a feasibility study on Sofia University' students' physical activity levels, their preferences and opinion about the sport classes and sport services offered at the University and the local area as well as their interest in using smart devices in sport classes. Participants were 200 Sofia University' students (of which 122 female and 78 male in the age of 18 to 25 years) in different years of their bachelor studies in a variety of subjects. All of them enlisted in different sport classes for 2017-2018 school year. For the purposes of the study has been used the Descriptive - explicative method. For analyzing the received data, the Frequencies (f) and Percent's (%) analyses have been applied. The results show that students do not exercise on regular bases and that the use of smart devices in sport classes will make them more attractive to young people.

Keywords: university students, fitness level, smart devices, sport classes

INTRODUCTION

The imperative for taking action to increase physical activity is clear. No European Union country has a prevalence of overweight and obesity below 50%, and childhood obesity is a major concern throughout the continent. A strong mandate to take action on non - communicable diseases - NCD (such as heart disease, stroke, cancer, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes now considered as the leading cause of mortality in the world) as well as on physical activity and nutrition, exists at both global and regional levels, through the Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control on NCD and, for Europe, through the Vienna Declaration on Nutrition and Non communicable Diseases in the Context of Health 2020. This combination of strong mandates from both World Health Organization and European Union creates a really powerful push for action (<http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/disease-prevention/physical-activity/activities/hepa-europe>).

The European Union has long increasingly emphasized the sociological, physiological and psychological benefits of sport. Sport provision and participation trends have been measured throughout the European member-states and the gaps between Western and Eastern countries are widely acknowledged (https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus/actions/sport/not-for-profit-european-sport-events_en). These gaps are especially noticeable when comparing young-adults in those countries. However, the University sport is not a well investigated issue by the European Commission. The integration of sports into the universities educational curriculum in most European pedagogical systems has resulted in high levels of sport practice among the youth. However, as young people enter higher education many member-states face a problem with withdrawal in participation. In many recent researches, scientists warn that the fitness level of young generation is far from good. In her study Hristova (2017, 2) found that for the most physical tests students have poor or average level.

There are many reasons behind the low motivation of young people to participate in sport classes at university. Hristova (2017, 1) found that the most demotivating factors are the bad sport facilities' condition, the remoteness of the sports halls and the inconvenience when students compare their own physical abilities with

those of others in the group. The universities policy makers and sport departments can play an important role by finding new motivational engines which will make sport classes more attractive to students.

In the high-tech era, we live in today, the wearable technology market is booming. Now people are able to find all kind of information at their fingertips via smart phones, fitness activity tracers and many other devices. Especially young people find a lot of excitement in using all kind of applications for which they spend the most of their free time.

In the light of the mentioned above “Te(a)chIn Sport” project was developed and granted by the European Commission in 2017. The project general objective is to raise awareness of the importance of health-enhancing physical activity of young people through increased participation in sports by using innovative technologies in university sport classes. The project target groups are the university students and the young people in general, teachers, coaches and academic stuff. (<http://teachinsport.eu>). Te(a)chIn Sport Project is a consortium of the following organizations: Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, University of Vienna, University of West Hungary, Youth in Science and Business in Tallinn, Stip University “Goce Delchev” and Krefjandi Iceland.

Introducing smart devices into the physical education curricula at Universities is the main innovative aspect of the project, thus creating:

- ✓ university students’ motivation and inspiration for sports based on their interest in new technologies and innovations;
- ✓ better understanding of the importance of physical activity for students’ health;
- ✓ awareness of the importance of sports for the students’ career development;
- ✓ improved educators’ sports culture and interest;
- ✓ enhanced sports educators’ professional skills

In order to achieve the main project’s outcome - elaboration of a new model for students’ sport curriculum - and extended grassroots sport calendar that will be recommended to all young people in the European Union, a new methodology will be developed based on the preferences of the target groups. For that purpose, all project partners together designed questioner of 20 closed questions, which they applied in each country.

AIM OF THE STUDY

Thus the aim of the present research was to analyze the physical activity levels of Sofia University’ students, to identify their preferences and motivation driving forces as well as their opinion about the sport classes and services offered by Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” and the local area.

METHODS AND INSTRUMENTS

For the purposes of our study, we used the Descriptive - explicative method. For some of the questions, students could give more than one answer.

PARTICIPANTS were a total of 200 Sofia University’ students (of which 122 female and 78 male in the age of 18 to 25 years) in different years of their bachelor studies in a variety of subjects. All of them enlisted in different sport classes for 2017-2018 school year.

STATISTICAL METHODS:

For analyzing the received data, the Frequencies (f) and Percent’s (%) analyses have been applied.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Noticeably quite a big number (38 %) exercise 3-4 times, 11 % - 5-6 times and 2 % even more times a week (Fig. 1). However, at the same time almost half of the students asked (46 %) exercise only 1 or 2 times a week, which is far from enough to maintain good physical condition of the body. Figure 2 shows that the majority of students exercise for 1 to 2 hours, which is within the recommended duration.

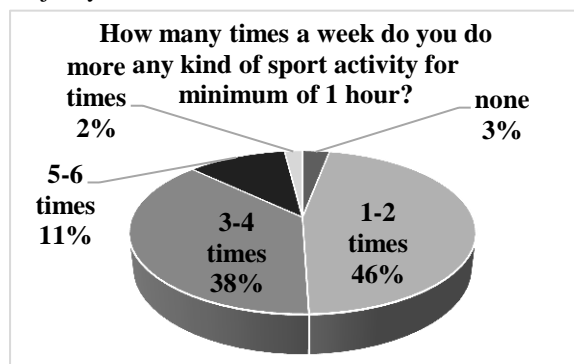


Fig. 1. Students’ physical activity

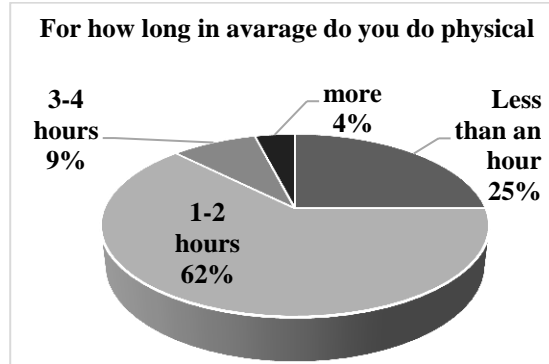


Fig. 2. Physical activity’s duration

As shown in Figure 3, the majority of the students (64%) like equally indoor and outdoor sports, 26% prefer to practice outside and only 10% enjoy exercising inside. More than half of the young people (57%) are confident and need supervision by an expert only occasionally or not at all (13%) and only 30% declare that they need coaching (Fig.4).

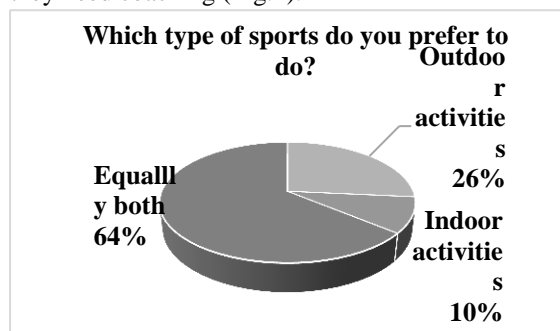


Fig. 3. Sport preferences

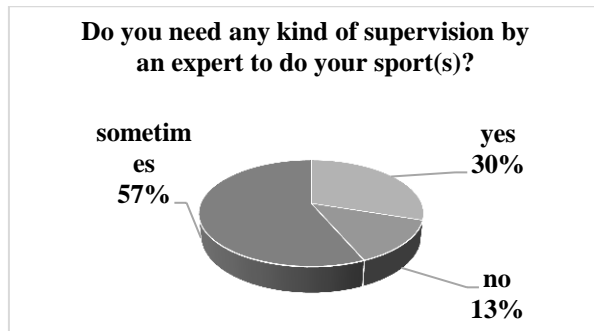


Fig. 4. Need of supervision

As well known, getting to work/university by walk is a great way to get/stay active but as Figures 4 and 5 show even though 72% of the students live only 15-20 minutes away by walk from the University, they still use public transportation to get there. At the same time, almost half of them (46%) are aware that they are not in a good shape (Fig. 7).

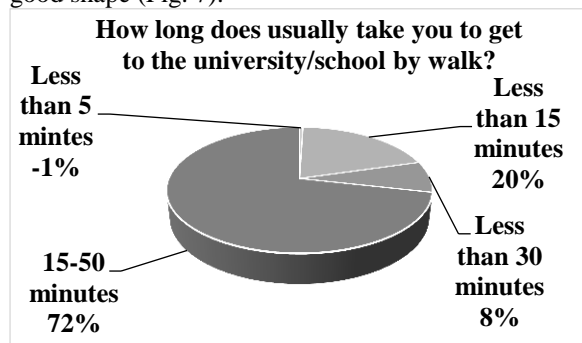


Fig. 5. Time to University by walk

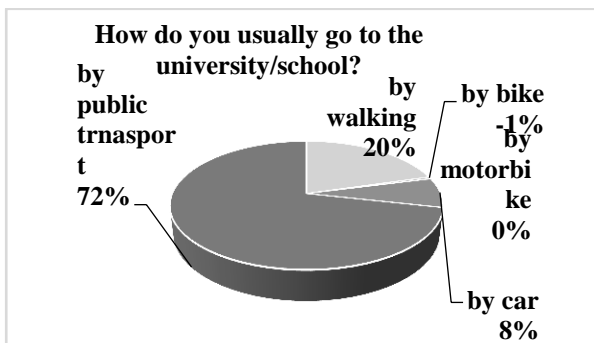


Fig. 6. Means of transportation

More than the half of the young people prefer organized sport activities but still a big number (44%) like to exercise on their own (Fig. 8) This could be one of the reasons for the withdrawal in participation in sport classes during university years and should be considered when planning sport classes curriculum.

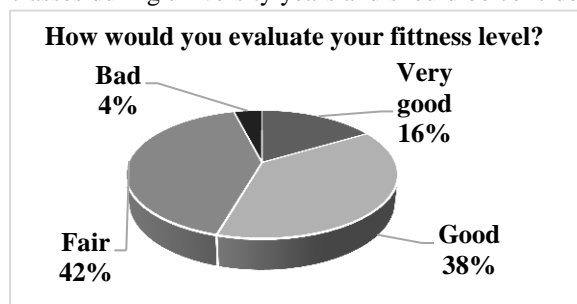


Fig. 7. Fitness level's self - evaluation

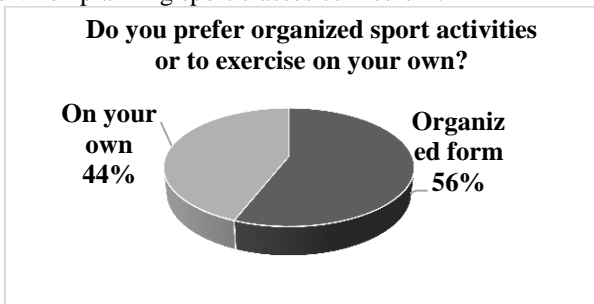


Fig. 8. Exercise's preferences

Many of the 200 students asked are satisfied (41%) and very satisfied (13%) with the sport infrastructure in Sofia University and even more are satisfied with the sport services offered (Fig. 9 and 10). However, also a big number is not. The next two questions clarify the reasons behind these results.

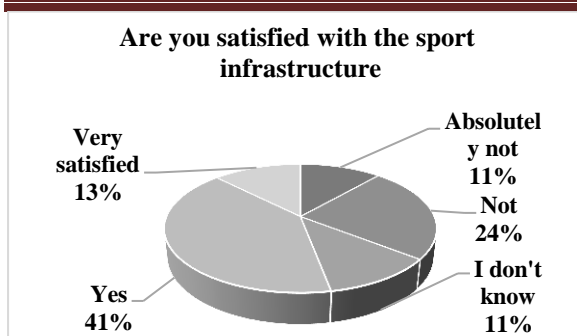


Fig. 9. University' sport infrastructure

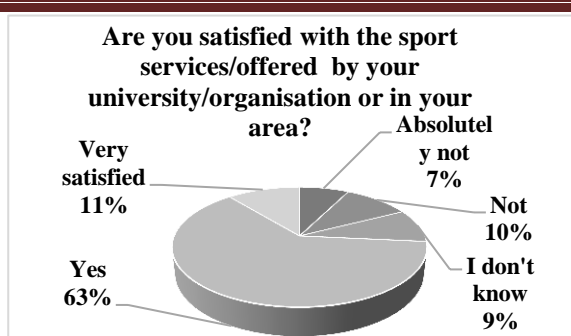


Fig. 10. Sport services

As shown (Fig. 11) young people are satisfied the most by the variety of sports offered at Sofia University, the free access to sport classes and the high professional skills of the teachers.

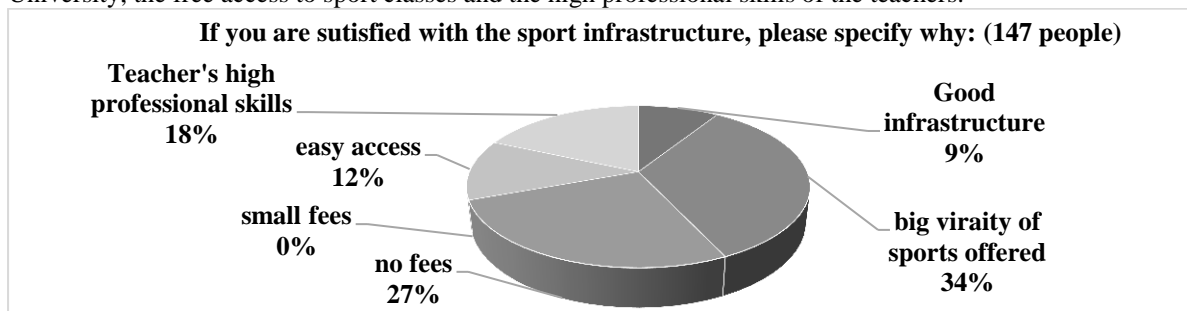


Fig. 11. Reasons for satisfaction

What disappoints students the most is the bad condition of the sport facilities, the kind of sports offered and the remoteness of the sport halls (Fig. 12). Which confirms the results Hristova found earlier in her study (2017, 1).

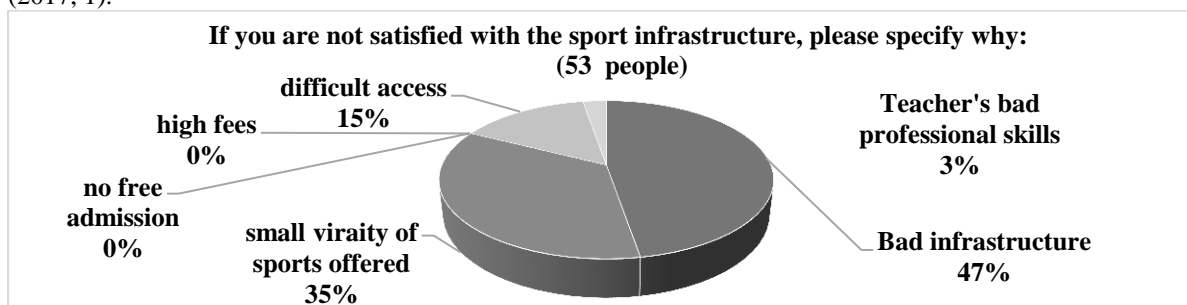


Fig. 12. Reasons for lack of satisfaction

It is in human nature for one to compare himself with others about almost everything. When talking about physical activities, according to many researchers comparing your own physical abilities to the ones of others very often prevent many people from participation. The results from our study confirm that. As shown (Fig. 13), 42% of the students compare themselves with others, another 32 % also do it but for different reason such as to figure out whether they are doing their best.

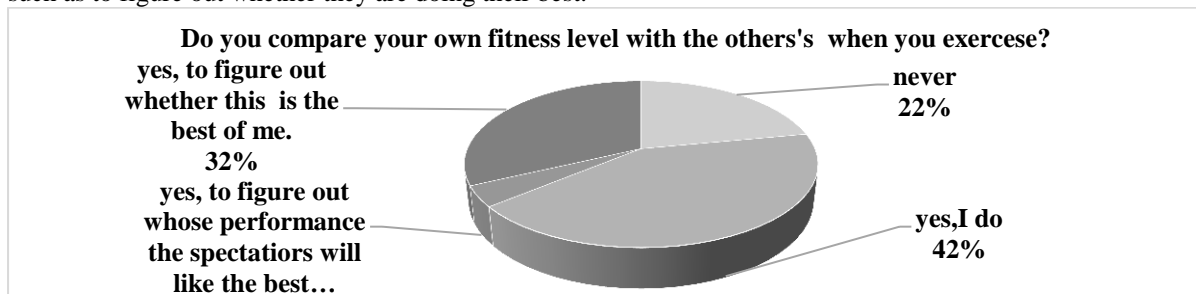


Fig. 13. Self - fitness level compering with others

Introducing innovative smart devices into the Physical Education curricula is the main innovative aspect of our "Te(a)chIn Sport" project in accordance with young people great interest in smart technologies. The results from the next questions (Fig. 14 and 15) also prove that. The majority (85%) of the students are interested to know more about their fitness level and 55% already use such devices.

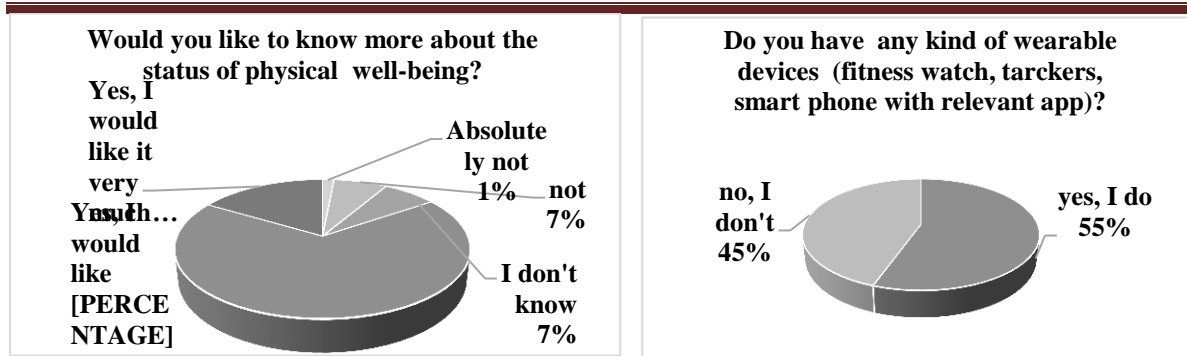


Fig. 14. Interest to know own fitness level

Fig. 15. Fitness smart devices possession

At present, the subject sport is part of the Universities educational curriculum in Bulgaria. The sport Department of “St. Kliment Ohridski” University of Sofia gives the students the opportunity to practice their favorite sport during the academic year. They can choose between more than twenty kinds of sports. The results from the query show that the most popular sports among Sofia University’ students are volleyball, tennis, football and dances but they like variety of others also (Fig. 16).

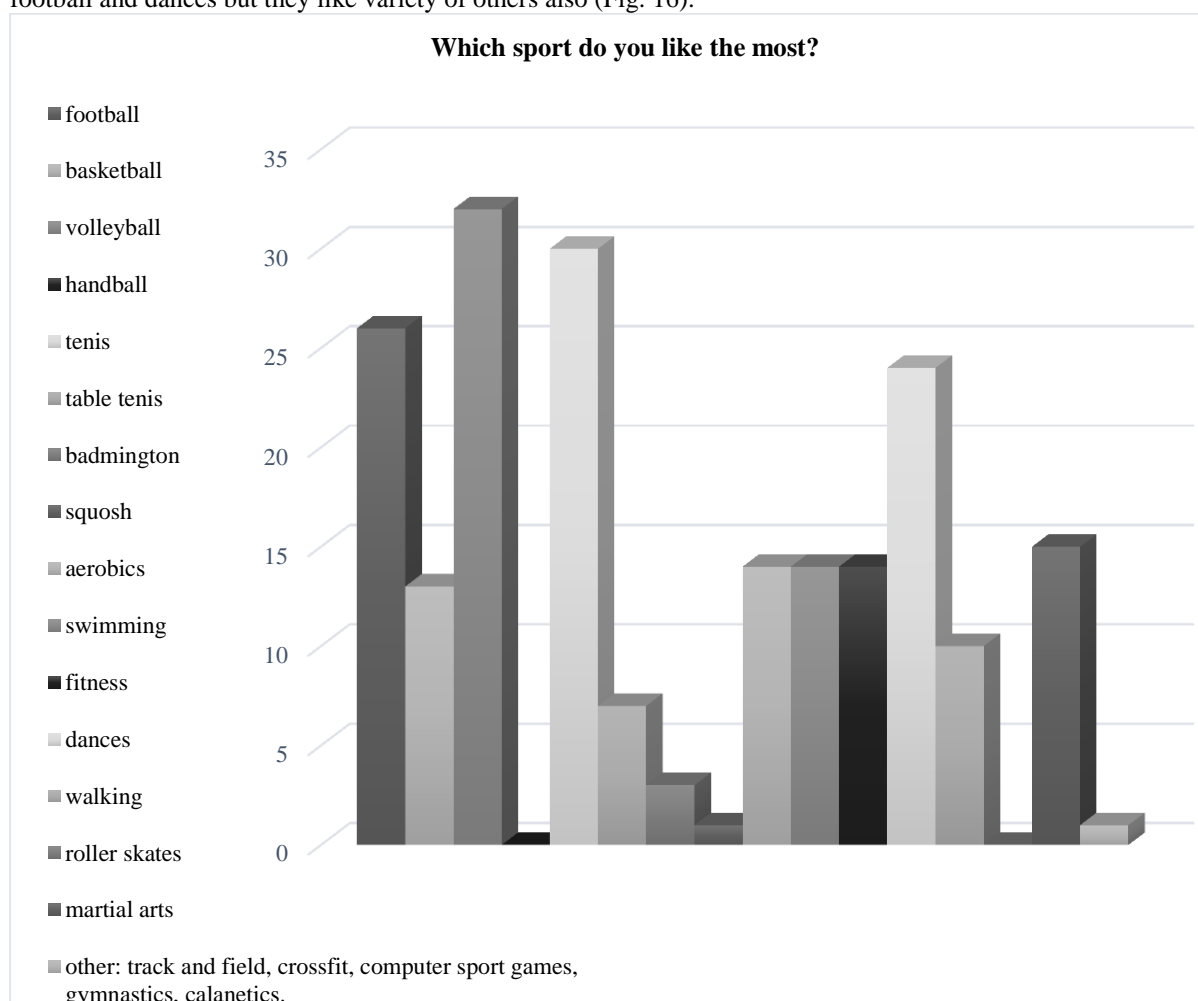


Fig. 16. Favorite sport

CONCLUSIONS

University student age is the time of building and shaping of the personality. At this stage, the young person reorganizes his value system, forms his point of view and builds up his self-esteem and self-consciousness. This is the last stage of the educational system when sport educators can teach the students how important for a person is to be in a good health and the ways to maintain it.

The results from our study show that the majority of Sofia University’ students do not exercise on a regular basis. They prefer to go to University by public transportation instead of walking or cycling. Sport

classes are not very attractive to them due to different reasons. Young people like to know about their fitness levels and have a great interest in using smart devices in sport classes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In today's high tech era and knowing the great interest of students in smart devices, it is imperative to implement innovative technologies in university sport classes in order to make them more attractive. Thus, through increased participation of young people, sport teachers will be able to develop awareness of the importance of health-enhancing physical activity.

LITERATURE

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