



DOI:10.29013/EJHSS-25-6-54-57



## LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE EFFECTS OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION ON UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' UNDERSTANDING OF THE IMPORTANCE OF SPORTS

**Vitiola Pelari<sup>1</sup>, Edlira Peza<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Department of Physical Education, University of Tirana

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**Cite:** Vitiola Pelari, Edlira Peza. (2025). *Literature Review on the Effects of Physical Education on University Students' Understanding of the Importance of Sports*. European Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences 2025, No 6. <https://doi.org/10.29013/EJHSS-25-6-54-57>

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### Abstract

This literature review examines how university-level physical education (PE) influences students' understanding of the importance of sport. Research shows that PE enhances psychological well-being, intrinsic motivation, and social support, all of which contribute to positive attitudes toward physical activity. Effective pedagogical models such as blended learning and the Sport Education Model further strengthen engagement and skill development. Studies also indicate that structured PE improves physical fitness and health literacy, reinforcing students' appreciation of sport's long-term benefits. Overall, the evidence suggests that well designed PE programs play a crucial role in shaping students' lifelong perceptions of sport and healthy behavior.

**Keywords:** Physical education, sport, participation, Albania, universities

### Introduction

Physical education (PE) at the university level plays an essential role in developing students' health behaviors, attitudes toward sport, and long-term lifestyle habits. While school level PE emphasizes motor development and basic health knowledge, university PE intersects with a critical developmental phase: young adulthood. During this period, students adopt independent habits, face new academic pressures, and often experience a sharp decline in regular physical activity.

Understanding how PE influences perceptions of sport helps guide curriculum design, health promotion, and university policy. This literature review synthesizes global research

on the psychological, social, motivational, cognitive, and physical mechanisms through which PE shapes university students' understanding of the importance of sport.

### Growth of University Sport in Albania

We see a growth in university sport participation in Albania, this according to the **International University Sports Federation (FISU)**, showing that participation in university sport has expanded significantly, with more universities involved and more than 6,000 students taking part in competitive or recreational activities (FISU, 2019).

The **Albanian University Sports Federation** which was founded in 2017,

represents increasing institutional support for university sport (FISU, 2019) highlights initiatives to strengthen physical education, promote ethics in sport, and expand physical education in schools (Council of Europe, 2021).

At the pre-university level, the **Albanian School Sport Federation** reports that PE time increased to three hours per week following national legislative reform has showed a significant positive effect in Student life and PE engaging. (International School Sport Federation, 2020).

### **Physical Activity Levels and Fitness among University Students**

Baseline levels of physical activity among university students vary widely across countries. Kljajević et al. (2022) found that while many students demonstrate a satisfactory fitness levels, substantial disparities exist by region and institutional context. A major barrier to regular physical activity is lack of free time due to academic demands, indicating the need for PE programs that fit students schedules.

PE also has well-documented mental health benefits. Chen et al. (2025) found that PE participation improves psychological well-being through two mediators: increased social support and increased exercise behavior. Their large-scale survey of 1,437 students showed strong paths between PE satisfaction, social support, and mental health. These findings highlight PE's social dimension: promoting connection, belonging, and positive behavioral routines

Motivation strongly predicts whether students internalize the value of sport. A study by García-Moya et al. (2021) demonstrated that intrinsic motivation is significantly associated with higher levels of physical activity among Spanish university students. Students who enjoy physical activity or find personal meaning in it are more likely to engage in sport voluntarily.

Pedagogical design influences motivation. Vasconcelos et al. (2022) tested the Sport Education Model, which organizes PE like a competitive sport season. Students assume roles such as coach, referee, or captain. The model yielded improvements in social

skills, self-determination, lifestyle habits, and life satisfaction.

Similarly, Li et al. (2024) found that blended learning PE (online + in-person) improved exercise attitudes and basketball skills more effectively than traditional PE. These findings suggest that innovative, flexible PE models may be especially effective in the university environment, where autonomy and time pressures are major factors. Students' beliefs about PE influence their participation habits. Litoi (2016) found that Romanian non-sport university students considered PE important but rarely engaged in sport outside class. Reported barriers included a lack of time, low motivation, limited infrastructures, and financial constraints. This gap between recognizing sport's value and practicing it highlights the need for universities to create supportive sport environments beyond mandatory classes.

### **Physical Health Outcomes of University PE**

Physical health improvements reinforce students' appreciation for the importance of sport.

Degefa and Kumar (2024) found that structured PE courses significantly increased muscular strength among university students over one semester. Similarly, Kosturanova et al. (2024) showed that organized physical activity improved strength, agility, coordination, and overall fitness in a large student sample. As students become fitter and more confident, they are more likely to value sports as part of a healthy lifestyle. However, excessive physical activity can be harmful. Assegaf (2023) reviewed the consequences of overtraining among university students and found associations with fatigue, injuries, sleep disturbance, and decreased immunity. Universities should therefore promote balanced PE that encourages activity without excessive pressure.

PE environments foster social connection, emotional regulation, and mental well-being. Chen et al. (2025) demonstrated that PE enhances mental health by increasing social support and promoting consistent exercise behavior. The Sport Education Model has also been shown to improve teamwork,

leadership, and social interaction (Vasconcelos et al., 2022).

For students navigating the social and academic challenges of university life, PE provides a setting for identity formation, relationship building, and stress management – strengthening their understanding of sport's broader value. University PE supports health literacy, teaching students concepts related to fitness, nutrition, training, stress physiology, and disease prevention. However, as Litoi (2016) notes, knowledge alone is not enough to ensure participation. PE must link learning to direct physical experience and individualized meaning.

## Conclusion

The reviewed literature indicates that university PE plays a significant role in shaping how students understand the importance of sport. Effective PE programs promote intrinsic motivation, social support, psychological well-being, physical fitness, and health literacy. Teaching methods such as the Sport Education Model and blended learning enhance students' engagement and positive attitudes.

To maximize PE's long-term impact, universities should adopt inclusive, flexible, and motivationally supportive approaches that address participation barriers. Continued research – especially longitudinal studies – is needed to explore the sustainability of PE's influence on sport appreciation.

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submitted 14.11.2025;  
accepted for publication 28.11.2025;  
published 29.12.2025  
© Vitiola Pelari, Edlira Peza  
Contact: keidaush@yahoo.com