Greek students’ motives for participation in physical education

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1. Introduction

Physical education in school has the potential to increase children’s physical activity levels and therefore, to have a significant impact on public health (Haywood, 1991). Consequently, it is important to examine students’ motivation for participation in physical education. Identifying students’ preferences and motives for participation may prove useful in improving physical education and making it more attractive. Unfortunately, relatively little research has examined psychological aspects of participation in this setting.

Research in participation motivation in sport and exercise contexts has focused on potential motives of individuals participating in some form of exercise. The basic tenet of this line of research is that individuals are motivated by contemplating the possible consequences and results of their actions. Rodgers and Brawley (1991) proposed that outcome expectancies are formed by the interaction of two factors: a) outcome likelihood which refers to the probability that a certain action will lead to a certain outcome, and b) outcome value which refers to the value the individual assigns to the possible outcome of the action. This formulation follows what is called “expectancy -
value approach” (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000) where individuals are thought to be motivated both by the anticipated consequences or outcomes of their actions and the utility or significance they attach to these outcomes. This form of conceptualisation may have considerable value in examining student motivation in physical education. Goudas, Dermitzaki and Bagiatis (2000) showed that outcome expectancies was a strong predictor of students’ intrinsic motivation in physical education.

Intrinsic motivation is a construct that has attracted considerable attention in the study of motivation in education (Ryan, Connell, & Deci, 1985). According to Deci and Ryan (1985) intrinsically motivated behaviours are engaged for their own sake - for the pleasure and satisfaction derived from their performance. On the other hand, extrinsically motivated behaviours are performed because they are believed to lead in certain consequences.

Within the recent movement of health related physical education, it is considered of prime importance to convince students about the value of physical activity for promoting their health. Thus, it is worth examining physical education students’ outcome expectancies in relation to their intrinsic motivation.

Therefore, the aim of the present study was to examine which outcomes students consider as important when participating in physical education. In addition, the relation between students’ intrinsic motivation and outcome expectancies in the physical education was examined.
2. Method

2.1. Participants and procedure

Participants of the study were 1055 (497 boys and 558 girls) secondary school students (grades 7 -12) from schools located in north and north-central Greece. The students were from a middle socio-economic status. Permission for the study was obtained by the physical education advisor as well as by the school head teachers. Data collection took place during physical education classes by two trained research assistants. Students responded to the questionnaires anonymously and were assured about the confidentiality of their answers.

2.1 Measurement

Outcome Expectancy. Following the recommendations offered by Rodgers and Brawley (1991), twenty-five students answered an open–ended question that asked them to list their reasons for participating in physical education. Responses were used to construct the outcome likelihood and outcome value scales. To measure Outcome Likelihood, students rated on seven-point scales ranging from 1 (very unlikely) to 7 (very likely) the likelihood of occurrence of ten different possible outcomes of physical education (see Table 1). To measure Outcome Value, students rated on seven point scales ranging from 1 (very unimportant) to 7 (very important) each of the outcomes in terms of its value for them. To obtain a composite score for Outcome Expectancy each outcome likelihood score was multiplied by the respective outcome evaluation score.

Intrinsic Motivation. A Greek version (Papacharisis & Goudas, 2003) of the Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (IMI, Ryan, 1982) was used. IMI comprises four subscales:
Enjoyment/Interest (4 items, e.g., ‘what we do in physical education is very interesting’), Effort/Importance (4 items, e.g., ‘I put a lot of effort in physical education classes’), Competence (2 items asking students to rate their competence in physical education compared to their classmates), and Pressure/Tension (4 items, e.g., ‘sometimes I worry about making mistakes in physical education’). Students rated their answers on a 5-point scale with anchors of 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree). A composite score for Intrinsic Motivation was obtained by adding all the items and dividing by 14, with those of the Pressure/Tension subscale reverse coded. The Cronbach’s alpha for the composite score was .91.

3. Results

Descriptive statistics for each item of the measures of outcome likelihood, outcome value and outcome expectancy are presented on Table 1. The highest ratings for outcome likelihood are for “Learn various sports” and “Relax from other lessons”, while for both outcome evaluation and outcome expectancy the highest ratings are for “Develop physical condition” and “Learn how to exercise to improve health”.

Table 1.
Descriptive statistics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Outcome Likelihood</th>
<th>Outcome Evaluation</th>
<th>Outcome Expectancy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Learn how to exercise after finishing school</td>
<td>4.96</td>
<td>5.47</td>
<td>27.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Develop a nice body</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>5.94</td>
<td>27.40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Develop physical condition  5.33  6.39  34.31
4. Learn how to exercise to improve health  5.14  6.18  32.14
5. Relax from other lessons  5.51  5.48  31.28
6. Learn to cooperate  5.43  5.74  31.91
7. Learn various sports  5.68  5.15  29.89
8. Learn motor skills  5.32  5.14  28.05
9. Learn to comply with rules  5.16  5.67  30.11
10. Learn to compete and win  5.17  5.57  29.85

Correlations between outcome Likelihood, outcome evaluation and outcome expectancy for each outcome with Intrinsic Motivation are presented on Table 2. Overall, it appears that for each of the ten specific outcomes, Outcome Expectancy yields different correlations with Intrinsic Motivation, the highest one being with “Learn to exercise after finishing school” and the lowest with “Relax from other lessons”.

Table 2.
Correlations between the variables of the study (N = 1055).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Intrinsic Motivation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>OL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Learn how to exercise after finishing school</td>
<td>.24**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Develop a nice body</td>
<td>.17**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Develop physical condition</td>
<td>.14**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Motive Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Learn how to exercise to improve health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Relax from other lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Learn to cooperate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Learn various sports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Learn motor skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Learn to comply with rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Learn to compete and win</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

OL: Outcome Likelihood, OV: Outcome Value, OE: Outcome Expectancy.

**p < .001, *p < .05

4. Conclusion

The first purpose of this study was to examine students’ motives for participation in physical education. Based on relevant theory, we distinguished between students’ estimations about the possible outcomes of their participation and their evaluations of these outcomes. Students viewed learning of various sports as the most liable outcome, while the second most possible outcome was to relax from other lessons. It is reasonable to assume that students form these estimations based on their experience, thus these outcomes reflect current practice in Greek physical education. Indeed, learning sport skills is the prime aim of the current Greek National Curriculum for secondary physical education. Further, there are many instances that physical education is an organized recess time for students with sports used as a means for relaxing from other school subjects.
On the contrary, when we examine students’ evaluations of possible outcomes, development of physical conditioning and learning to exercise to improve one’s health are considered the most valuable ones, while the less valuable outcomes are to learn motor skills and sports. These results bear out that there is a substantial discrepancy between the outcomes they value and the outcomes that they consider as likely to happen when they participate in physical education.

The second purpose of the study was to examine the relation between students’ intrinsic motivation and outcome expectancies in physical education since it has been shown that outcome expectancy correlates higher with intrinsic motivation than the two indices of outcome value and outcome likelihood (Goudas & Dermitzaki, 2004). As Table 2 shows, the outcome expectancy for learning to exercise after finishing school had the highest correlation with intrinsic motivation. On the contrary, the outcome expectancy for relaxing from other lessons had the lower correlation with intrinsic motivation. Thus, students do not endorse the common belief that physical education can be used as a recess time. In fact, as the descriptive and correlational results show, they would prefer a more meaningful approach in physical education focusing on health-related exercise. These findings corroborate with recent results from studies evaluating health-related fitness programs, which showed that students participating in these programs reported higher levels of intrinsic motivation coupled with intentions to exercise in the future (Papacharisis & Goudas, 2003; Papacharisis, Simou, & Goudas, 2003).

To summarize, the above results indicate that Greek secondary school students may have different views about physical education as currently practiced favoring an
approach related to the development of physical conditioning and health – related exercise.

5. References


