

Evidence into Practise to increase children's physical activity through schools settings

An exploration of pupils' experiences of participating in a school based running programme: Marathon Kids

Anna E. Chalkley^{1*}, Ash C. Routen¹, Jo P. Harris¹, Lorraine A. Cale¹, Trish Gorely² and Lauren B. Sherar¹

*Presenting author

1. National Centre for Sport and Exercise Medicine, School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences, Loughborough University, UK
2. Department of Nursing, University of the Highlands and Islands

Introduction

There is a growing interest in school-based interventions providing additional physical activity outside of physical education. Subsequently, many school based running programmes are being implemented across the UK in a grass roots style movement. However, research on the implementation of these programmes is relatively underdeveloped. Therefore, the aim of this study was to qualitatively explore pupils' experiences of participating and identify barriers and facilitations to their participation.

Methods

A purposeful sample of 55 pupils (27 girls and 28 boys) aged between five and ten years, were recruited from five schools in England who had implemented the programme for a minimum of one academic year. Nine semi-structured focus groups were conducted with groups of between five to eight pupils at a time. Transcripts were analysed using an inductive thematic approach.

Results

Pupils identified a range of organisational, interpersonal and intrapersonal barriers and facilitators to participation. Perceived facilitators included enjoyment, motivation to achieve a 'personal best' and peer support and acceptance. Other important facilitators included the use of rewards and incentives, time spent outdoors, and having a structured/formal opportunity to participate in activity during lunchtime. Cheating, inclement weather and the school's weather policy, and lack of playground space were all identified as barriers.

Conclusions

Pupils' needs and preferences for participating in a physical activity programme should be taken into consideration prior to its implementation in school. Furthermore, schools should evaluate the delivery of the programme, and what impact it is having on pupils, to allow adaptation and tailoring.

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