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## Importance and Impact of Online Teaching of Sports during Covid-19 Pandemic

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**Abstract:** Sports have a significant impact on the human health, including their physical, mental, and social aspects of well-being. Amidst the challenges posed by the pandemic lockdown, recognizing the constructive influence of sports on people's lives, we conducted a survey among students at Tirana University who participated in online sports classes. Out of the 82 students who completed the questionnaire, 84.1% identified as female, while 15.9% identified as male. In terms of where they practiced sports, 52.4% of the students exercised indoors at home, 29.3% in their garden, and 18.3% in natural settings. Regarding frequency, 16.3% reported engaging in physical activity once a week, 28.7% twice a week, 30% three times a week, 18.8% more than three times a week based on circumstances, and 6.2% every day. Concerning the influence of sports on their ability to cope with the adverse effects of the pandemic, 61.7% of respondents expressed that sports played a significant role in aiding them, while 34.6% acknowledged a moderate impact. Regarding the impact of sports on their emotional well-being, 63.4% of respondents reported experiencing a significantly positive effect, while 36.6% noted a moderate impact following physical activity. When considering the influence of sports on their academic performance, findings revealed various perspectives: 20.7% of students credited the inclusion of sports in their curriculum for aiding in better organization and planning of study time; 22% of them attributed improved concentration during learning to their engagement in sports; a notable 30.5% acknowledged a moderate positive influence and 26.5% reported no apparent impact on their academic performance. In conclusion, despite the challenges encountered by students in adapting to online sports education, it's evident that through the promotion of regular physical activity and cultivation of healthy habits, sports make a substantial contribution to both overall well-being and academic achievement.

**Keywords:** Sports education, Online teaching, Health education

### Introduction

Online teaching of sports during the COVID-19 pandemic has emerged as a crucial area of research and discussion, highlighting its ongoing significance and impact on education. During the COVID-19 pandemic, online teaching of sports emerged as a vital solution to maintain physical education and promote fitness among students. Educators quickly adapted to digital platforms, such as Zoom, Google Classroom, Meet, Microsoft Teams, Skype and delivering engaging content through live classes, recorded sessions, and interactive challenges. Despite challenges such as limited space and resources at home, teachers focused on fostering student motivation and well-being, emphasizing the importance of physical activity for mental health. A few notable benefits of online and distance learning include the ability to reach new and previously underserved student populations, the ability to adapt and change to meet individual needs, and the capacity to innovative remotely within the classroom (Dhawan, 2020). This shift not only highlighted the resilience of educators and students but also paved the way for innovative teaching methods that may shape the future of physical education.

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Regarding the situation in Albania, the number of COVID-19 cases surged rapidly in early 2020, prompting the Albanian government to implement a lockdown starting in mid-March 2020. This period saw strict measures aimed at curbing the spread of the virus, which remained in effect until May 2020. There were undertaken strict restrictions on movement, closure of non-essential businesses, and a shift to remote work and online education. Under these circumstances, people's movement and physical activity were severely limited, creating a concerning global situation. Individuals were compelled to stay home, work remotely, and limit physical activities outside (Schottl et al., 2022; Pecanha et al., 2020; Violant-Holz et al., 2020). According to the WHO guidelines, adults (18–64 years) should do at least 150-300 min of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity per week, or at least 75–150 min of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity per week, or an equivalent combination of both for substantial health benefits (WHO, 2020 & Schottl et al., 2022). Taking into consideration the guidelines from WHO, physical inactivity and an increase in sitting time in general became a global public health issue during pandemic (WHO, 2020; Whiting et al., 2021; Moreno-Llamas et al., 2021).

Online sports teaching has proven to be a catalyst for increased physical activity among students and their family members. By providing accessible virtual classes and resources, students are encouraged to participate in regular exercise, often involving their families in the process. This collaborative approach not only enhances student engagement but also fosters a supportive environment that promotes collective health and well-being. Families can join in workouts, challenges, and fitness activities, creating opportunities for bonding while developing healthy habits together. As students take part in online sports education, they inspire their family members to stay active, leading to a positive ripple effect on overall family fitness and lifestyle choices (Patterson et al., 2016; Kowalski et al., 2020; Hutchinson & Gallagher, 2008; Biddle et al., 2010; Baker et al., 2021).

## **Method**

A retrospective online survey was conducted from Jun 2022 until December 2023 in a group of students from Tirana University; in order to investigate changes in physical activity and lifestyle behaviors due to COVID-19 restrictions during the country lockdown period. All the students participating in this study engaged in online sports education with the same instructor. This approach was intentionally chosen to minimize the impact of external factors, such as variations in teaching styles or the timing of questionnaire completion, on the students' perceptions. In total, 82 students, aged from 18-21, were included in this study. The questionnaire was distributed online, using Teams platform, which was used for the online teaching process as well.

The questionnaire was designed to gather a comprehensive range of demographic and personal information from participants. It included several key components, such as gender, with options for male and female. Participants were asked to provide their age, allowing for an understanding of the age distribution within the sample. The survey also explored employment status, asking participants whether they were currently employed, unemployed, or engaged in other forms of work. The survey inquired about private access to outdoor spaces, specifically gardens, terraces, or balconies, as well as regional affiliation, which helps to understand the geographical distribution of participants in the study. Overall, the questionnaire aimed to collect a rich array of information to facilitate a thorough analysis of the data.

Additionally, participants were informed about the specific inclusion criteria that needed to be met in order for them to participate in the study. This ensured that all respondents understood whether they were eligible to take part in the survey. The duration of the questionnaire was also communicated to the participants, giving them an estimate of how much time they would need to allocate to complete it. This information was crucial for setting expectations and encouraging thoughtful, honest responses. Furthermore, participants were assured about their privacy and the protection of their data. Detailed explanations about how their personal information would be safeguarded were provided, reinforcing the importance of confidentiality and ethical considerations in research. They agreed to take part in this questionnaire on their own and without any pressure. Their choice shows they are genuinely interested in helping with the research.

## **Results and Discussion**

All students who were included in this study completed the questionnaire that was distributed online. Among the total number of participants, a notable majority were women, with 69 individuals representing 84.1% of the respondents. In contrast, there were 13 male participants, accounting for 15.9% of the total. This distribution highlights the significant predominance of female respondents in the study compared to their male counterparts.

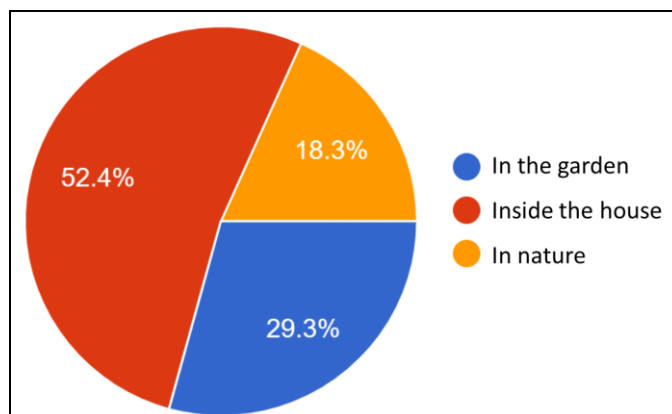


Figure 1. Physical activity practice site during pandemic

When the students were asked to identify the location where they engaged in physical activity, the majority indicated that they practiced their exercises indoors within their homes, and this group represents 52.4% of the total respondents. A significant portion of the participants, 29.3%, reported that they utilized their gardens as a space for physical activity, while, 18.3% of the students chose to practice sports in natural outdoor settings during the pandemic season. This distribution of responses highlights the varying environments in which students pursued physical fitness during that time.

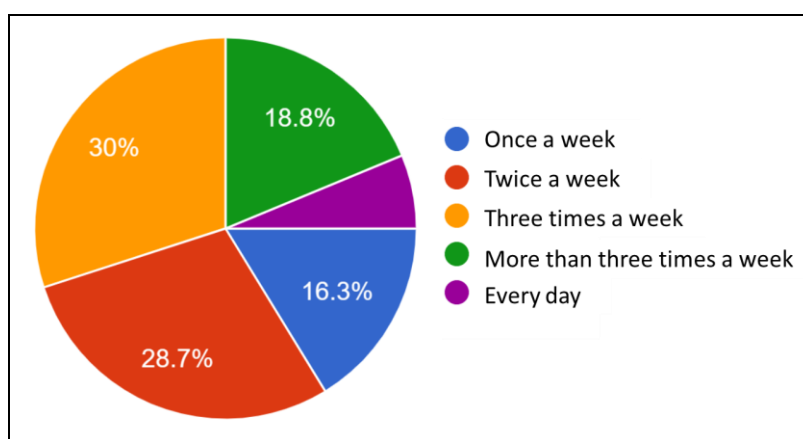


Figure 2. Intensity of physical activity while staying at home

The data regarding the frequency of sports practice among students during the lockdown reveals important insights into their engagement with physical activity while staying at home. Among the students surveyed, the distribution of sports practice intensity was as follows: 30% of students reported engaging in sports three times a week; 28.7% practiced sports twice a week; 18.8% participated in physical activity more than three times a week; 16.3% exercised only once a week and 6.2% engaged in sports every day. The data shows that a substantial proportion of students, 30% practiced sports three times a week, indicating a moderate level of engagement. This frequency suggests that many students maintained a routine that balanced physical activity with other home-based responsibilities during the lockdown. Engaging in sports at this frequency is beneficial for maintaining physical health and can contribute to mental well-being by providing structure to their days. With nearly 29% of students practicing sports twice a week, the results indicate a diverse range of engagement levels. While a significant number of students were actively involved in sports, a combined total of 22.5% (16.3% once a week and 6.2% daily) indicates that some students struggled to maintain regular physical activity. This variability suggests that factors such as motivation, access to resources, and personal circumstances played a role in students' ability to engage consistently in sports. The relatively low percentage of students practicing sports every day (6.2%) highlights an opportunity for educators and policymakers to encourage more consistent physical activity. Initiatives such as virtual fitness challenges, daily exercise routines, and engaging online sports classes could be implemented to motivate students to increase their frequency of practice.

The study of students' exercise during lockdown shows a mixed picture. Some students kept up a good amount of activity, but many others exercised less often. This shows we need focused efforts to encourage daily exercise

and help students build healthy habits for life. By understanding these trends, teachers can better support students' health and well-being during tough times.

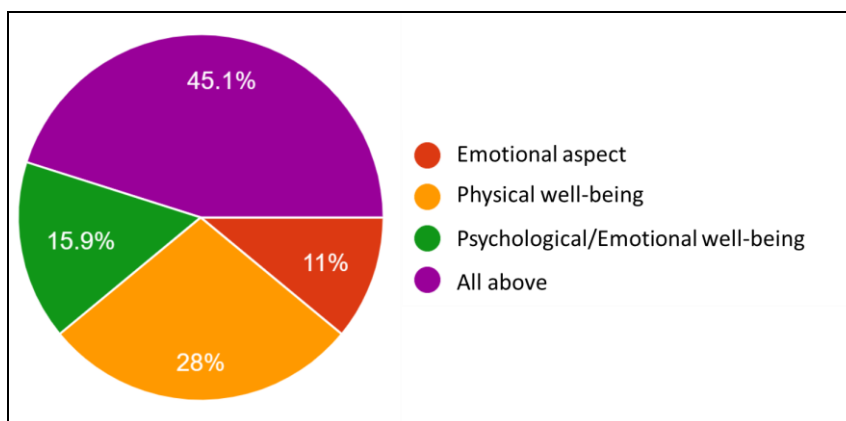


Figure 3. Impact of sports on student well-being during online teaching

The results regarding students' perceptions of the impact of sports on their overall well-being provide valuable insights into how physical activity influences various aspects of their lives. The responses can be categorized into four key areas: emotional impact, psychological well-being, physical health, and the holistic benefits of sports. The findings from the survey indicate the following perceptions among students: 11% of students felt that sports helped them in their emotional aspect; 15.9% believed that sports positively affected their psychological and emotional well-being; 28% reported that sports improved their physical well-being and the majority of 45.1% stated that sports and physical activity enhanced all the aforementioned aspects.

The relatively low percentage (11%) of students who reported that sports helped with their emotional well-being suggests that while some students recognize the emotional benefits of physical activity, a significant number may not fully realize or experience this impact. This highlights an opportunity for educators and sports programs to emphasize the emotional benefits of sports, such as stress relief, mood enhancement, and social interaction, especially during challenging times like the pandemic. The 15.9% of students who identified sports as beneficial for their psychological and emotional well-being indicates a growing awareness of the mental health benefits associated with physical activity. This perception is crucial, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, where many students experienced increased stress and anxiety. It suggests that there is potential for greater engagement through targeted programs that focus on mental health benefits, potentially increasing participation rates among those who may be unaware of these advantages. A more substantial percentage (28%) acknowledged that sports improved their physical well-being. This aligns with the general understanding of the health benefits of regular physical activity, including improved fitness levels, weight management, and enhanced immune function. However, the fact that nearly three-quarters of students did not specifically attribute their physical well-being to sports indicates that there may be other factors influencing their health perceptions, such as lifestyle choices, nutrition, and overall activity levels. The most striking finding is that 45.1% of students believed that sports and physical activity positively influenced all aspects of wellbeing emotional, psychological, and physical. This indicates a recognition of the interconnectedness of these elements, suggesting that students may understand the value of a comprehensive approach to health. This perception can be leveraged to promote a more integrated view of sports, encouraging students to engage in physical activity not only for fitness but also for emotional and psychological support.

The results highlight the need for sports programs in educational settings to focus on holistic well-being. Initiatives could include workshops that educate students on the emotional and psychological benefits of sports, alongside regular physical training. By fostering a greater awareness of how physical activity contributes to overall well-being, schools can motivate students to participate more actively. Further research could explore the barriers that prevent students from recognizing the emotional and psychological benefits of sports. Understanding these barriers could inform strategies to better communicate these advantages and enhance participation rates among those who may be less engaged. The analysis of students' perceptions regarding the impact of sports on their well-being reveals a nuanced understanding of its benefits. While there is a recognition of the positive effects on physical health, emotional and psychological impacts are less acknowledged. By emphasizing the holistic benefits of sports and integrating mental health support into physical education, educators can encourage greater participation and foster a healthier, more active student population. This approach not only enhances students' physical fitness but also supports their emotional and psychological well-being, particularly in challenging times.

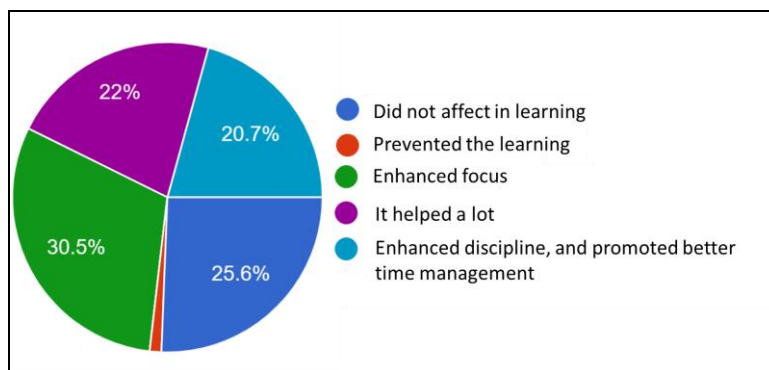


Figure 4. Influence of sports on learning other subjects

The results regarding students' perceptions of the impact of sports on their learning process during the pandemic highlight an intriguing relationship between physical activity and academic performance. Understanding these dynamics can inform educators and policymakers about the broader benefits of incorporating sports into educational frameworks, especially in challenging times like the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey responses concerning the impact of sports on learning were as follows: 30.5% of students felt that sports enhanced their focus; 25.6% reported that sports did not affect their learning; 22% stated that sports helped a lot in learning; 20.7% indicated that sports improved their discipline and promoted better time management; 1.2% expressed that sports prevented learning.

The largest group of respondents (30.5%) believed that sports enhanced their focus. This finding suggests that physical activity can stimulate cognitive functions, leading to improved concentration during academic tasks. The physiological effects of exercise, such as increased blood flow to the brain and the release of endorphins, likely contribute to this enhanced focus. Educators could leverage this insight by integrating physical activity into learning environments, possibly through short exercise breaks or movement-based learning activities. A significant portion of students (25.6%) indicated that sports did not affect their learning. This neutrality suggests that, for some, the connection between physical activity and academic performance may not be as pronounced. Factors influencing this perception could include individual learning styles, personal interest in sports, or varying degrees of physical activity engagement. Understanding these factors could help tailor programs to better connect sports with academic outcomes. The 22% of students who reported that sports helped a lot in learning reinforces the idea that physical activity can serve as a valuable educational tool. This finding underscores the potential for sports to create a more conducive learning environment, as active students may experience improved mood and cognitive function, leading to enhanced academic performance. Additionally, 20.7% of students recognized that sports improved their discipline and promoted better time management. This insight highlights the life skills gained through participation in sports, such as setting goals, adhering to schedules, and developing perseverance. These skills are transferable to academic contexts, suggesting that sports can play a vital role in shaping not only physical fitness but also personal responsibility and organizational skills. The fact that only 1.2% of students stated that sports prevented learning is noteworthy. This indicates a strong consensus among the majority that the benefits of sports outweigh any potential drawbacks. It also suggests that concerns about sports being a distraction from academics are largely unfounded, reinforcing the idea that physical activity can coexist with educational pursuits. Several studies have shown positive impact of integrating assessment for learning in physical education lessons (Crouch et al., 1997; Holt et al., 2012; Johnson & Ward, 2001; Ward et al., 1998). Incorporating formative assessments into lessons often leads to students being more focused and exhibiting a higher level of engagement (Chng & Lund, 2018).

The results suggest a compelling case for integrating sports into educational curricula, particularly during times of disruption such as the pandemic. Schools could consider adopting more holistic approaches that blend physical activity with academic instruction, recognizing the multifaceted benefits of sports on student engagement and learning outcomes. Further research could explore the specific mechanisms by which sports enhance focus and learning. Investigating the types of sports or physical activities that yield the best results could provide actionable insights for educators looking to optimize the benefits of physical activity in learning environments. The analysis of students' perceptions regarding the impact of sports on their learning during the pandemic reveals a generally positive outlook on the relationship between physical activity and academic success. With a substantial number of students recognizing the benefits of sports in enhancing focus, discipline, and overall learning, educators are encouraged to foster environments that integrate physical activity into daily

routines. By doing so, they can not only promote physical health but also enhance cognitive performance and academic achievement.

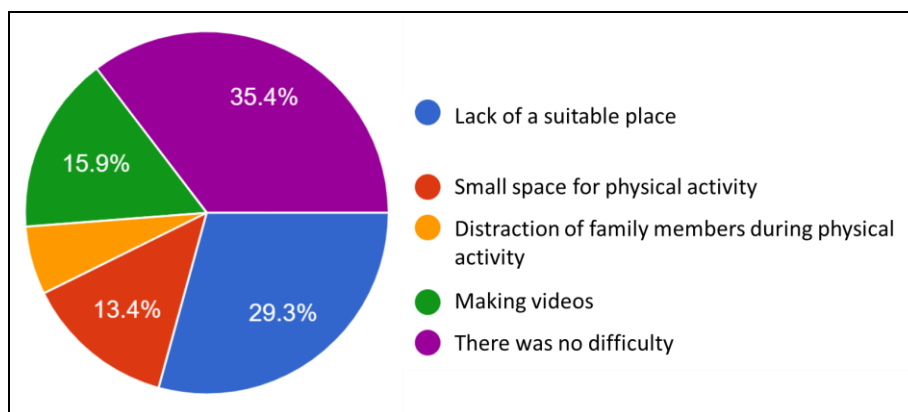


Figure 5. Difficulties encountered during the implementation of the lesson

The findings regarding students' difficulties in implementing sports lessons at home during the pandemic provide valuable insights into the challenges they faced in maintaining physical activity in a non-traditional learning environment. Understanding these challenges can help educators and program designers develop more effective strategies to support students' physical education needs in similar situations.

The survey responses concerning difficulties encountered during home sports lessons were as follows: 35.4% of students reported that they faced no difficulties; 29.3% indicated that they lacked a suitable place for implementing sports; 15.9% experienced challenges with creating videos for their activities; 13.4% noted that they had small spaces unsuitable for physical activity and 6% stated that implementing sports at home was difficult due to distractions caused to family members.

The largest percentage of students (35.4%) reported experiencing no difficulties in implementing sports lessons at home. This indicates that a significant portion of students were able to adapt to the home environment and effectively engage in physical activity. Factors contributing to this success could include prior experience with at home workouts, availability of space or equipment, and strong motivation to stay active. A substantial 29.3% of students expressed that they lacked a suitable place for sports activities. This highlights a critical barrier to physical activity at home. The importance of an adequate environment cannot be overstated; without sufficient space, students may find it challenging to perform exercises safely and effectively. The 15.9% of students who faced difficulties in making videos suggests that technological challenges may hinder their participation in sports lessons. Creating videos can be difficult, especially for those who may not be familiar with video editing tools or comfortable in front of a camera. Providing guidance, resources, or simpler methods for students to share their activities could enhance engagement and confidence in their abilities. An additional 13.4% of students reported having small spaces that were unsuitable for physical activity. This finding aligns with the previous point regarding suitable environments and emphasizes the need for tailored activities that can be performed in confined spaces. Educators could develop and share exercise routines specifically designed for small areas, which could help students maintain their fitness levels regardless of their living conditions. The 6% of students who mentioned distractions to family members during physical activity highlight the social dynamics at play in home environments. For some students, the presence of family members can both motivate and disrupt. This suggests the importance of fostering understanding within households about the value of physical activity, as well as encouraging designated times for exercise that respect the family's shared space. The insights gained from these difficulties indicate that future sports education programs, especially in remote or hybrid learning environments, should be designed with flexibility in mind. Educators could consider offering a variety of formats, such as live virtual classes, recorded sessions, and guided home workouts that require minimal space and equipment. Involving families in these activities could promote a supportive environment that fosters physical activity. Future research could explore the specific types of activities that students found most manageable in small or unsuitable spaces. Understanding these preferences could inform the development of targeted programs that accommodate a wider range of living situations.

The analysis of the difficulties faced by students in implementing sports lessons at home reveals a mixed landscape of challenges and successes. While a significant number of students managed to engage in physical activity without difficulties, others encountered barriers related to space, technology, and family dynamics. Addressing these challenges through innovative programming and supportive resources can enhance students'

ability to participate in sports education, ultimately contributing to their physical and mental well-being during periods of remote learning. By recognizing and adapting to the diverse needs of students, educators can foster a more inclusive and effective approach to physical education in the home environment.

## **Conclusion**

The transition to online sports education during the COVID-19 pandemic showcased the adaptability and resilience of both educators and students, fostering a culture of innovation in teaching methods. Online platforms enhanced student engagement through interactive tools and resources, keeping learners interested in a virtual environment. This shift expanded access to sports education, particularly for those facing barriers in traditional settings, promoting inclusivity and diverse perspectives.

The pandemic also emphasized the importance of mental well-being, allowing educators to incorporate wellness strategies that helped students manage stress and stay motivated. The experiences gained during this time will shape the future of sports education, as ongoing research will be crucial for optimizing hybrid models that effectively blend online and in-person instruction. Furthermore, the shift to online learning enhanced digital literacy and self-directed skills among students while fostering new community connections that encouraged collaboration across geographical boundaries. Overall, this period not only addressed immediate challenges but also paved the way for growth and innovation in educational practices.

## **Recommendations**

To effectively address the importance and impact of online teaching of sports during the COVID-19 pandemic, educational institutions should adopt flexible hybrid teaching models that combine online and in-person elements, while investing in technology training for educators to enhance their effectiveness. Engaging students through interactive methods, promoting mental health support, and ensuring accessibility for all learners are crucial. Fostering community building through virtual connections and regularly gathering feedback will help improve the learning experience. Focusing on skill development, both physical and digital and sharing best practices across networks will further enhance online sports education. Institutions, also should prepare comprehensive contingency plans to ensure readiness for any future disruptions.

## **Scientific Ethics Declaration**

The authors declare that the scientific ethical and legal responsibility of this article published in EPESS journal belongs to the authors.

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