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## Physical education in general education schools in Ukraine (selected aspects)

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### Wychowanie fizyczne uczniów szkół ogólnokształcących na Ukrainie (wybrane aspekty)

#### Streszczenie

W procesie organizacji wychowania fizycznego w szkołach Ukrainy w latach 90. XX w. i początku XXI wieku występowało wiele różnych problemów: niedocenywanie przez kierownictwo poszczególnych szkół wagi wychowania fizycznego w procesie dydaktyczno-wychowawczym; niedostateczne uwzględnianie zainteresowań uczniów wybranymi formami ćwiczeń; brak indywidualizowania pracy z uczniem, które by uwzględniało jego realny poziom sprawności ruchowej oraz gotowości do wykonania poszczególnych ćwiczeń; niski poziom inwestowania przez władze oświatowe i samorządowe w rozbudowę infrastruktury sportowej, tj. tworzenie boisk sportowych, basenów oraz zaopatrzenie szkół w sprzęt sportowy; brak koordynacji we współpracy szkół z rodzicami uczniów, z instytucjami państwowymi i samorządowymi w zakresie popularyzacji wychowania fizycznego i zdrowego stylu życia. Sytuacja zdrowotna dzieci i młodzieży na Ukrainie na początku XXI wieku była niezadowolająca. Analiza literatury pedagogicznej i specjalistycznej, dotyczącej działań naprawczych w systemie edukacji przedszkolnej i szkolnej w zakresie wychowania fizycznego na Ukrainie, pokazuje, iż najczęściej głównym kierunkiem zmian jest doskonalenie metod i form prowadzenia lekcji wychowania fizycznego oraz działań w zakresie popularyzacji rekre-

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acji sportowej w czasie wolnym od zajęć oraz dostosowanie tych rozwiązań do współczesnych wymagań programów nauczania tego przedmiotu w szkole.

**Słowa kluczowe:** wychowanie fizyczne, szkoła, uczniowie, program nauczania, oświata.

## Abstract

There were many different problems in the organisational process of physical education in schools of Ukraine in the 1990s and at the beginning of the 21st century, such as: underestimation of the importance of physical education in the didactic and educational process by managers of individual schools, insufficient consideration of students' interests in selected forms of exercise; lack of individualisation of work with a student, taking into account their real level of mobility and readiness to perform particular exercises; low level of investment in the development of sports facilities by educational and local authorities, i.e. creating sports fields, swimming pools and supplying schools with sports equipment; lack of coordination in the cooperation of schools with students' parents or with state and local government institutions in the field of popularising physical education and a healthy lifestyle. The Ukrainian children and young people's health situation at the beginning of the 21st century was unsatisfactory. The analysis of pedagogical and specialist literature regarding remedial actions in the pre-school and school education system in physical education in Ukraine shows that most often the main direction of changes is the improvement of methods and forms of conducting physical education lessons as well as activities in the field of popularising sport recreation in the free time and adapting these solutions to contemporary curriculum requirements of this subject at school.

**Keywords:** physical education, school, students, curriculum, education.

## Introduction

The problems of modern physical education of schoolchildren and young people in Ukraine were discussed in the works of many Ukrainian scientists, including E.S. Vilchkovskoho, A.V. Tsosia, B. M. Shyiana, O.D. Dubohai, L.V. Volkova, T.Y. Krutsevych, O.S. Kutsa, N.V. Moskalenko and many others [19]. Ukrainian theoretical thought in the field of physical education and sports recreation of children and adolescents has a rich tradition and is based on both theoretical and empirical literature. Modern scientists continue the research process in this field, and the level of their work is not inferior to the best European and world models in this field. At the same time it is worth noting that in the Ukrainian educational reality there was often a discrepancy between the developed theoretical assumptions based on large-scale research and their implementation in real conditions of school functioning, which was influenced by both objective and subjective factors.

The purpose of this article is based on a review of the literature to conduct an analysis and assessment of the current state of physical education in general secondary schools of Ukraine.

The research was carried out using such methods as: comparative analysis, document analysis and internal analysis of the text.

## **Results and discussion**

In the process of organizing physical education in Ukrainian schools in the 1990s and at the beginning of the 21st century, there were many difficulties, namely: underestimation of the importance of physical education in the didactic and educational process by the management of individual schools; insufficient consideration of students' interests in certain forms of exercise; lack of an individual approach to students that would take into account the real level of their mobility and their readiness to perform particular exercises; low level of funding from the education and local authorities to create sports fields, swimming pools and supply schools with sports equipment (only 0.4% of the schools had their own swimming pools, and 26% of the schools, mostly rural, did not have their own gyms at all); lack of coordination in the cooperation of schools with parents of their students, state and local government institutions in popularising physical education and a healthy lifestyle [20].

The facilities to conduct physical education classes at school were in a critical condition, especially in rural schools. For 53 rural schools there was only one stadium, for 25 – one gym. A large proportion of sports facilities and school fields required immediate renovation. According to Y. Kostiuk, V. Kudelko, only 7.3% of all sport coaches worked in rural schools nationwide. Only 5.4% of the total number of students from rural schools participated in sports training in their free time [13]. School management did not always take into account that in the organisation of physical education and sports recreation in the countryside, aspects such as the role of the family and of the distance from large agglomerations as well as regional traditions and the involvement of rural children and young people in helping parents run a farm played an important role [14].

The state of health of school children in Ukraine at the beginning of the 21st century was not at an adequate level. Among young schoolchildren, the rates of morbidity and post-morbid complications increased, which often led to serious damage to their health. Due to a great deal of negligence in health policy issues, 43% of all students suffered from various chronic diseases, and 63% had posture defects; 33% of high school graduates struggled with serious health problems [20]. Morbidity among schoolchildren increased by 26.8% compared to the end of the 1980s. Such highly disturbing data demonstrated some unfavourable conditions for organising the process of teaching physical education at school [10]. Within ten years (1990–2000) the number of children and young people attending sports clubs and extra sports classes decreased by 620,000 people [6].

The results of research carried out in Ukrainian general schools showed that students were overloaded not so much by too much content in the core curricula, but rather by the lack of physical activity. This caused the formation of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome: pupils' eyesight deteriorated, their ability to learn clearly decreased [21]. Information overload and stressful situations required a significant

effort from the students' body, and this, together with other factors (low level of physical activity, bad eating habits) led first to adverse functional changes of the body, and later, to the formation of pathological conditions. At the same time, the tendency of various injuries among students intensified in schools, especially during breaks between lessons, during physical education classes and extra sports classes [2].

According to V.I. Yezersko, in the physical education at school during that period, there were a number of contradictions: between the real state of physical education at school and social requirements; between the needs and aspirations of students and the style of conducting classes by teachers; between the aspirations of students and teachers of physical education and the stereotypes functioning among the headmasters of some schools about physical education and sport recreation [11]. Despite the efforts and attempts made to remedy the situation related to physical education in Ukraine, many problems still remain.

In the first decade of the 21st century, excessive "sport promoting" took place in physical education lessons (especially in grades 5–9), which often prevented less physically able students from participating actively in classes. One of the basic motivations of participation in physical education classes for most students of grades 5–7 was the achievement of high fitness and sports results, hence the lessons during the teaching period were dominated by methods promoting sports competition in the first place. It was rarely taken into account that in the next years of schooling, interest in sport competition among students decreased significantly in favour of methods promoting pro-health and recreational attitudes in physical education [2].

During the first decade of the twentieth century, despite attempts to introduce significant changes, physical education curricula duplicated the curriculum content of the 1990s. The differences were only in the criteria for assessing students and in increasing the hours of football teaching at all stages of school education (a visible growth in this case, especially in the curriculum of 2004). According to I.V. Bakiko, in most school curricula, too little space was devoted to the health-promoting activities of teachers [1].

The role and importance of Olympic education and the correlation of these contents with the objectives and tasks of physical education at school were not fully recognized. Physical education curricula included the content of the Olympic education (as an educational "path"), but to a very limited extent. As V.P. Yukhymuk points out, 58.9% of the PE teachers believed that the Olympic education could significantly contribute to increasing motivation among students to get engaged in physical activity, and 41.1% of the teachers were of the opinion that these activities could be effectively implemented provided that teachers were supplied with appropriate methodological literature, the teaching hours were increased and the entire Olympic Education module was introduced to the curricula. V. P. Yukhymuk notes that most teachers informed their students about the Olympics irregularly and occasionally [12].

Another, not fully used area in physical education of children was swimming. This was not due to a lack of recognition of the role and importance of this discipline for improving the health of schoolchildren, but for objective reasons. Swimming lessons for most students of Ukrainian schools are often not possible due to the lack of swimming pools, not only in the school itself, but also in a given region or city. As a result, children not only are unable to swim, but also they are unable to keep properly afloat. According to research by O.V. Solohub, the rate of older students who are unable to swim is 20–30%, while of younger students over 50%. During the school period, only a small proportion of students master basic swimming techniques. As O.V. Solohub points out, the low level of swimming lessons at school results not only from the lack of adequate facilities, but also often due to the low level of physical fitness of the students themselves and their state of readiness to master swimming lessons [16].

Among physical education teachers, competences are crucial to properly assess the level of mobility and health of students and conduct pedagogical diagnosis (educational achievements, learning progress, behaviour, relationships with other teachers and students). According to the data obtained by H.O. Hatsa, among physical education teachers 93.6% of them confirmed having competence in both diagnosing the mobility level of students and their health, while only 36.8% of respondents had a competence in the field of pedagogical diagnosis, which indicates some disregard by some of the PE teachers of significance of this type of assessment determining the educational progress of students [10].

A positive solution applied in the physical education curriculum at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, compared to the 1990s, was to increase the number of hours during which the teacher teaches team gaming techniques. Team games have been enjoyed and still are by a great deal of students in Ukraine, and, actually, students of all ages. In 2005–2006, the average time spent on teaching team games in general secondary school curricula was 23.1 hours, or 22% of curriculum content (at the end of the 1990s, this rate was just over 9%). The test results by I.V. Bakiko regarding the organisation and conduct of physical education classes conducted in the Volyn Oblast among physical education teachers, students and parents show their attitude to the then physical education at school. According to most teachers, the main goal of physical education at school is to improve the health of school children and adolescents. According to teachers, the core curriculum in this subject should be: football, basketball, volleyball, athletics, gymnastics, swimming, mobility games and activities, cross-country running, tourism, chess. Over 85% of teachers were supporters of original teaching curricula. According to 93.94% of parents, PE should be compulsory; 60% of them were convinced of the need to conduct three physical education lessons per week, and 20% – every day. The greatest interest in physical education classes was observed among students of schools with extensive sports facilities and having access to the pool. The obtained results suggest a very positive perception of the

role of physical education in school, but it is closely related to the proper organisation of classes, school sports facilities, properly developed curricula taking into account regional sports traditions [11].

The important role of physical education and sport recreation of school children and young people in Ukraine is indicated by the legal acts in force there, namely: the State National Program “Education – Ukraine in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century [8], Secondary Education State Standard [9], Resolution “On physical culture and sport” [17], and others, in which it was noted that physical education is an important factor in a healthy lifestyle, diseases prevention, organising leisure time and individual comprehensive development. In Ukraine, the State Program “Health – 2020” and the concept “New School of Ukraine” (2016) are also being implemented, which confirms that the educational authorities have perceived and still perceive the problems in the area of broadly understood physical education and sports recreation in the country.

Despite significant socio-economic difficulties, the state runs a number of projects and campaigns aimed at improving the situation in physical education at school, as well as the state of health of students, including: Summer Youth Sports Games of Ukraine; School Spartakiads; Youth Sports Competition “Starts of Hope”; “Future Olympian” School Children and Youth Competition; School Spartakiads “Believe in Yourself” for children with disabilities; School Competition “Olympic Stork”, “Olympic Week”. They are organised by the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Youth and Sport of Ukraine, as well as local authorities, often in cooperation with the Olympic Committee of Ukraine [19].

A social project for the promotion of physical education and sport of school children entitled: “Open football lessons” initiated by the Football Association of Ukraine is believed to be very promising. It provides for a whole series of projects: organisation of school events, tournaments and sporting competitions for students of all ages – from elementary classes to high school seniors. For teachers, on the other hand, there will be organised cyclical competitions in the “Teacher of the Year” category and for the best innovative lesson in physical education.

One of the pillars of school physical education is football. As early as in 2001, the then Ministry of Education of Ukraine concluded an agreement with the Football Federation of Ukraine to introduce one hour of football in schools as part of three hours of physical education classes, i.e. from the 105 hours of physical education teaching then in force, 34 hours were devoted to lessons with elements of football, and this concerned all stages of school education (previously, a number of 8 lessons with elements of football were conducted in grades 5–9 only). Physical education classes with elements of football were to take place in the most optimal conditions, i.e. early autumn and spring. However, the implementation of this solution encountered difficulties: many schools lacked adequate facilities to conduct football classes. The assumptions of the Ministry of Education, which were in fact very interesting, were in many cases hindered by the improper or-

ganisation of classes or financial problems. Despite this, impressive successes were also achieved: in popular in Ukraine football school competitions organised as part of the “Leather Ball” project for 11–13 year-olds, over 600,000 students took part in 2005 [3].

Current physical education teaching agenda in general schools provide for 3 hours per week in grades 5–9; 2 hours in grades 10–11 and 5 hours in sport- or military-and-sport-oriented grades 10–11. When developing curricula, each school should take into account the climate conditions of a given region, the physical education and sports recreation infrastructure and facilities of the school as well as the level of sports qualifications of physical education teachers. The new curricula also propose to take into account the cultural specificity of the region and the conditions of local didactic and educational activities at school. Contemporary Ukrainian scientific and methodical literature, however, lacks a uniform position regarding the development of new curricula in physical education. There are ongoing discussions on the content of the curriculum in the context of the criteria for assessment and determining annual grades and methods for checking students’ achievement.

In 2017, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine adopted a new curriculum in physical education for students of general school grades 5–9. Teaching modules create a new curriculum. In addition to the modules in force, teachers can create their own – optional (by sport discipline). Not fewer than 18 hours are allocated to the implementation of each optional module. The criteria for launching this module are: school sports facilities, regional sports traditions, the level of specialist qualifications or trainer and instructor qualifications of physical education teachers as well as the interest of students themselves. The new curriculum is intended to offer more attractive classes for students, and raise the level of physical education teaching at schools [15].

In upper secondary education in general schools (equivalent to a Polish high school), students also have the option to choose the main subjects, including physical education (sport-oriented). In 2017, only 3.5% of all students chose this subject. One of the reasons for this is that few schools are able to offer this type of teaching profile due to the lack of compliance with the requirements for conducting classes of this type, such as, lack of proper sports facilities. Other reasons were: lack of suitably qualified teachers and trainers in individual sports; low level of physical fitness of some older students, and, as a consequence, low level of adolescents motivation to practice professions related to physical education and sport in the future. The most popular among the students were team games (such as: football, basketball, volleyball and handball) – 53.6%; swimming (5.6%), athletics (4.2%) [7].

On average, two physical education teachers are employed in Ukrainian schools, of which 85% are usually graduates of physical education academies, faculties of physical education at universities, including pedagogical universities,

and 15% of teachers have the right to conduct lessons in physical education at school obtained at post-graduate studies and also teach another school subject [5]. These proportions positively demonstrate the level of teachers' qualifications in the perspective of modernising lessons in physical education in Ukraine and adapting it to the best European solutions in this educational area. We should also emphasise that contemporary general schools are financed from the state budget (40–45%) and from the budget of local self-government authorities (55–60%), which definitely favours a more flexible school education management system at the regional and local level.

The analysis of pedagogical and specialist literature on corrective actions in the pre-school and school physical education system in Ukraine shows that most often the main direction of changes is the improvement of methods and forms of conducting physical education lessons as well as activities in the field of popularising sport recreation in the free time, as well as adapting these solutions to contemporary curriculum requirements of this subject at school. Important elements of raising the level of physical education classes at school are also improving the student assessment system and promoting a healthy lifestyle.

Numerous studies conducted in Ukraine (E.S. Vilchkovskyj, N.F. Denisenko, V.R. Pasichnyk, A.V. Tsos) show a noticeable reduction in the level of physical activity of children after starting school. Physical education lessons alone, according to the researchers, are not able to compensate for the motor deficit of students. The solution to this problem is to increase the physical activity of school children and adolescents during extracurricular activities. Sports clubs at schools, especially sports games (basketball, volleyball, football) play an important role. Of many sports, team games are the most popular among students. It is no coincidence that in most countries of the world these disciplines have been included in school curricula of physical education. Modern curricula should also include effective mechanisms enabling the practical implementation of curriculum tasks based on the individualisation of the teaching process, taking into account the criteria of student age, health, physical preparation and interests. At the same time, lessons should remain the primary form of physical education for students and they should not be replaced by other forms of physical education organisation [19].

According to E.S. Vilchkovskoho, O.S. Kutsa, and O.P. Shvets, outdoor classes should play an important role in developing students' mobility. According to these scientists, if the schools were able to organise daily outdoor exercise during long breaks for students, the health effect would be higher than in case of 2–3 hours of compulsory physical education classes per week. In addition, these exercises would be spontaneous, and so could better meet the interest of students in physical activity. In this case, the duration of such an "active break" would be 45 minutes, which would require reorganisation of the school teaching process, but the achieved health effect would level out other difficulties in implementing school curricula, because students' health is paramount [20]. At the same time, it



is important to precisely plan the schedule of these activities (for example, for younger students, “periods of physical activity” could be after the second lesson, for older students – after the end of the third lesson). However, according to L. Volkova, N. Zakhoshy, O. Malimona the right conditions for students to participate in extracurricular sport trainings (minimum 2–3 hours a week) need to be maintained [18].

## Conclusions

The physical education system in school education in Ukraine has been struggling with many problems for years. Educational authorities have repeatedly taken and are taking action to improve the situation. The documents prepared by the educational authorities are of strategic nature and are adapted to the European standards in this field. The disadvantage is that the attempts to change the situation usually remain only in the theoretical sphere. The obstacles are budget problems, lack of coordination of cooperation between individual departments and educational institutions and socio-economic instability, which significantly complicates the development of the educational system in this country and contributes to instability in the functioning of families, including in the field of physical education and sports recreation for school children and young people. At the same time, it should be noted that the undoubtedly high level of theoretical thought in the field of physical education and the desire of educational authorities to adapt to the European and world standards in this field show the consequences of implementing measures contributing to the modernisation of physical education in Ukrainian schools.

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