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Integrating Life Skills in Physical Activity Programs for Elementary School Students

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the best program to improve elementary school student life skills through physical activity programs in physical education subject. In this study, sixty elementary school students in Gorontalo participating in basketball extracurricular were divided into two groups. Thirty students were included in the experimental group and other thirty students were put into the control group. The sampling technique used was the cluster random sampling technique. The Life Skills Scale for Sport (LSSS), consisting of eight elements of social skills namely leadership, problem solving, decision making, emotional skills, communication, teamwork, and goal setting, was used in this quasi-experimental study. The findings showed that elementary school student life skills improved better after receiving the physical activity program combined with life skills than the physical activity program without integrating life skills.

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INTRODUCTION

Sports are well-known for helping people acquire skills that allow them to succeed and contribute to society. Since people are expected to work independently and support each other in problem-solving and decision -making, this fact is not surprising given the nature of sports, which requires perseverance in learning new abilities as well as social and cognitive skills (Cope et al., 2017). Those who participate in sports gain benefits by developing their life skills and psychological attributes (L. Cronin, 2015). Sports have the potential to enhance cognitive, emotional, and social skills. Sports can also teach children how to work with others (Hayden et al., 2015).

Sports are considered a good technique to support the development of young people (Jones & Lavallee, 2009). Even the knowledge gained through the learning process in sports is viewed as new life skills. Sports can help people learn life skills, but participation alone is not enough; it requires deliberate practice. Sports that are intentionally designed to foster life skills are more effective in promoting PYD (Positive Youth Development) than those that are not (Bean & Forneris, 2016a). Despite arguments that people do not need to learn life skills through sports, this only applies if players or coaches are seen to have a positive influence on the skill development of players (S. J. Danish & Nellen, 2012). Many young people today attempt to enter the workforce without further education, believing that continuing education will not significantly help them secure jobs (Sziraczki & Reerink, 2004). It takes a lot of effort from sports psychology experts to truly understand how sports can be managed to enhance PYD. Since sports are the most popular activity among young people outside of school, it is determined that this setting is beneficial for fostering PYD (D. Gould & Carson, 2008a; Guèvremont & Findlay, 2002). The positive psychology framework called PYD offers young people an alternative to the reactive and deductive ways of thinking they typically use in school and community settings (Coakley, 2016).

Sports can be used as a PYD approach due to its popularity among young people as an after-school activity. Sports can also be characterized as a supportive setting for promoting PYD (D. Gould & Carson, 2008a; Guèvremont & Findlay, 2002). Sports are a popular social activity among young people, making it an ideal approach to capture their interest. Although it has long been believed that sports provide the best setting for the development of life skills, much research has focused on how closely structured approaches resemble PYD (Le Menestrel et al., 2002).

Individuals who participate in sports can develop their psychological abilities and life skills (L. Cronin, 2015; Muslihin, 2018)). Sports can enhance social, emotional, and academic skills (Hayden et al., 2015). It is important to note that life skills must be transferable across all life domains (e.g., schoolwork, home life, and relationships) to be truly considered life skills (Scott. Pierce & Camiré, 2017). Educational and government organizations have highlighted the importance of transferable life skills for adolescents' health, well-being, and educational and occupational success (Artess et al., 2016). Settings intended to develop youth life skills include extracurricular activities such as music, drama, and sports (Coakley, 2016). There are several reasons why sports can promote students' life skills. The popularity, appeal, and motivational aspects of sports are key features for promoting youth development (Bailey, 2018). In addition, a study found that Dutch physical education teachers believed that the collaborative and interactive aspects of lessons promote students' social and moral development (F. Jacobs et al., 2013).

Several studies have noted the value of a deliberate approach to PYD development, and sports have been identified as a conducive environment for developing life skills. The concept of intentional structure refers to the implementation of planned activities in sports settings to learn life skills and apply them to real-life situations. Research suggests that youth training models can help children develop life skills by promoting better behavioral development models and teaching them how to manage their time in situations other than sports, such as homework and classwork (Hardcastle et al., 2015).

Currently, in physical activity programs, the components of life skills are rarely structured and integrated (Anira et al., 2021; Pierce et al., 2020). Consequently, the benefits gained from sports are limited to the sport itself, and the broader significance of sports activities to achieve the development of life quality of the wider society in Indonesia has not yet been achieved (Suardika et al., 2022). Therefore, this research aims to optimize sports involvement through the integration of

life skills in physical activities for elementary school children.

METHODS

This study employed a quasi-experimental methodology (Fraenkel et al., 2012), utilizing a posttest control group design. In this design, participants were divided into two groups: the experimental group (A) and the control group (B). Only the experimental group received treatment, although both groups were given pretests and posttests. For comparative and experimental research, a minimum of 20 participants per group is recommended as the sample size (Fraenkel et al., 2012). Sixty elementary school students participating in extracurricular basketball took part in this study. The sample was divided into two groups: n = 30 for the experimental group and n = 30 for the control group. In this study, the researcher's role was as teacher and program designer. The Life Skills Scale for Sport (LSSS) questionnaire was used to measure life skills. The sample consisted of individuals aged between 10 and 12 (L.D. Cronin & Allen, 2017). Further, each participant voluntarily signed a consent form agreeing to be part of the study. In this study, the random cluster sampling method was used. Cluster random sampling involves the random selection of groups of people, commonly used in schools. Cluster random sampling is considered more effective for gathering large class or group samples, whereas individual sampling is effective for collecting large individual samples.

The Life Skills Scale for Sport (LSSS) (L.D. Cronin & Allen, 2017) was adapted for this study to suit its objectives. The LSSS includes eight life skills—social skills, leadership, problem-solving, decision-making, intrapersonal communication, teamwork, and time management—across 47 statements. With reliability scores of 0.91 for teamwork, 0.88 for goal setting, 0.89 for time management, 0.80 for emotional skills, 0.85 for interpersonal communication, 0.88 for social skills, 0.82 for leadership, and 0.80 for problem-solving and decision-making, the LSSS has high reliability that meets research instrument standards. The tool's validity and reliability were tested before use. SPSS 24's Reliability Scale was used to confirm its validity, with Corrected Item-Total Correlation values compared to the 0.2 standard to determine if each item was valid.

Procedure

As part of the applied research design, the procedure began with formulating the research problem, followed by determining the type of research methodology. A control group was created with pretests and posttests, but only the experimental group received treatment. The experimental group participated in physical activities combined with a life skills program, while the control group did not receive the life skills program. Aside from pretest and posttest data collection, the research was conducted over eight sessions. To implement the integration of the life skills program, four steps were followed: (1) introducing one life skill per lesson, (a) introducing the life skill at the beginning of the lesson, (b) implementing a teaching approach throughout the lesson to reinforce the life skill, and (d) providing feedback on the life skill after the lesson (Kendellen at al, 2016). This structure served as the foundation for the research. Pretest data was collected one week before the treatment, and posttests were conducted in both groups in the final week using the same instrument, LSSS. Data collection occurred in two stages: gathering and then processing and analyzing the data. Data was analyzed using SPSS version 24, with a paired sample t-test. The final step involved drawing conclusions based on the data processing and analysis results.

Table 1. Program Scenario

Stage	Experimental Training with Life Skill integration	Control Training without Life Skill integration
Opening	• Prayer • Warm Up • Relating training program to life skill integration: Life Skill of the Day	• Prayer • Warm Up
Core	• Introducing Life Skill of the Day • Technical practice using life skill integration: Skills • Drills • Games • Reinforcing life skill application: Reminder of Life Skill of the Day	• Technical practice • Games
Closing	• Discussion on life skill application in sports and non-sports settings: Debrief life skill • Cool down	• Cool down

Data Analysis

In this study, a Paired Samples t-test analysis was conducted using SPSS version 22 on the data collected from the participant, because the t-test is used in paired sample testing to determine whether the means in paired sample groups differ from each other (Jaedun, 2011). The purpose of this study was to determine whether physical exercise combined with a life skills program had a more significant impact than physical exercise alone in a particular experimental group.

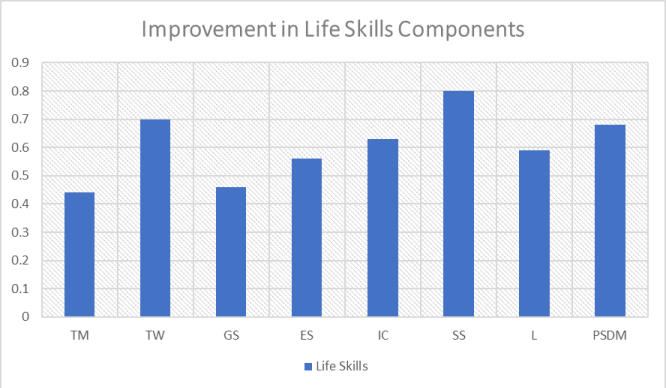

Figure 1. The integration of life skills component

RESULT

The descriptive data results of this study are outlined in Table 2 and Table 3: At a significance level of 0.095 for the experimental group pretest, 0.885 for the experimental group posttest, 0.185 for the control group pretest, and 0.087 for the control group posttest, all normality tests show normal distribution. Additionally, the Levene's test results for homogeneity show homogeneous data in the pretest (0.256) and posttest (0.143).

Table 2. Descriptive Data of Research Findings

Research Group	Experimental	Control
Pretest	2.676	2.670
Posttest	3.402	2.956
Gain	0.726	0.286

Table 3. Paired Sample T-test Results

Group	T	Sig (2-tailed)
Experimental (pretest-posttest)	-17.987	0.000
Control (pretest-posttest)	-14.855	0.000

Table 3 demonstrates that both the experimental and control groups had a significant effect on students' life skills (sig. 0.000 < 0.05). However, as shown by the gain scores in Table 2, the experimental group achieved a gain of 0.726, compared to the control group's 0.286. This indicates that the experimental group had a more substantial impact than the control group.

These findings suggest that the influence of physical activity on elementary students' life skills is enhanced when combined with a life skills program compared to physical activity alone. Figure 1 shows that the integration of life skills component experienced the greatest increase in life skills. The results of the first hypothesis test indicate that, in terms of improving students' life skills, physical activity combined with a life skills program has a greater impact than physical activity alone. Clearly, there is a significant difference between the experimental and control groups in terms of life skills. This aligns with research findings by Anira et al. (2021), which show that students who exercise regularly have significantly different life skills than those who do not. This indicates that physical activity can help students develop their life skills; however, the benefits of life skills will be greater if the exercise is combined with a thoughtfully designed life skills program. This is due to the fact that the group that received the life skills integration program learned life skills before, during, and after physical activity, while the control group did not receive this instruction.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are consistent with research by Bean & Forneris (2016) and Kendellen et al. (2016), which emphasize that structured and deliberate sports programs are more effective for life skills development than unstructured approaches. According to social learning theory, students acquire life skills through three stages. First, through direct instruction from the researcher during physical activities. Second, through observation: students observe their peers' behaviors and then imitate them. This occurs because behaviors in physical activities often reflect life skills. Lastly, through social interaction during physical activities. The second hypothesis suggests that social skills experienced the most improvement. This is because the experimental group received substantial social skills components integrated into physical activities. Each

session involved structured social interactions, including communicating with others, engaging in social exchanges, maintaining positive relationships with peers, participating in group activities, helping others, and more. Consequently, students' initially low social skills improved after implementing this program.

This study has some limitations, primarily in its duration, which was only carried out for eight sessions. Future research could expand on this by implementing a longer duration and including more varied life skills components relevant to societal and contemporary needs to optimize the outcomes.

CONCLUSION

Elementary students' life skills are more improved through physical activities integrated with a life skills program than through physical activity alone. The physical exercise group showed improvement across all life skills components, including leadership, problem-solving, teamwork, goal setting, time management, emotional intelligence, social skills, and decision-making, compared to the group without the life skills program. Social skill is the most significantly developed area of life skills. Furthermore, the results of the study indicate that physical activity is an ideal way to enhance life skills by incorporating a well-organized and systematic life skills program. As a result, students are able to comprehend and apply specific life skills through physical activity. It is anticipated that these acquired skills can be transferred to non-athletic, daily tasks. Therefore, physical exercise can improve not only an individual's life skills but also their overall health and fitness.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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