

RECONCEPTUALISATION OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION DISCIPLINE IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract: *This article presents a new approach to the discipline "physical education" and aims to include all students in higher education institutions in motor activities based on interests (individually or at academic group level), to meet the needs of movement and the orientation towards the systematic practice of a sport during the whole life. The reconceptualization of university physical education consisted in the redesign of disciplinary curriculum, taking into account modern approaches to curriculum development, where the priority role is intended for educational purposes expressed in terms of skills, but also for diversifying the forms of practicing physical education activities. The forms of organizing physical education activities proposed to students are the following: lessons - sports tests on a circle or modules/sports tests, physical education sections and motor activities/sports practised outside the educational institution. These forms of activities will intensify the focus on learner, valorizing on the principles of individualization, differentiation and personalization of the learning process.*

Key Words: *Physical Education, Students, Sport, Discipline Curriculum, Specific Competences, Sports Sections, Motor Activities.*

INTRODUCTION

Physical education is a component of society's education, which continues throughout life and has the purpose of transforming a person into a member of society, which essentially contributes to its development. The role of "physical education" discipline in higher education institutions is to train students in motor, physical, intellectual and aesthetic skills, which contribute to the development of future specialist's personality.

The changes and adaptations of education to the demands of modern society require from the specialists in physical education field a new approach to the content and the

teaching-learning process of university discipline, in the foreground being the increase in quality of teaching, in order to be able to respond to the challenges of educational system. In recent years, researchers who have studied different aspects of physical education in higher education institutions, support the need for changes to adapt the discipline to modern educational requirements. The researcher C. Ciorbă [1, p.6], proposes, in order to combat the hypodynamism of students with a pedagogical profile, to involve them in extracurricular sports activities, organized according to sports interests, to replace the participation in physical education lesson as a basic and mandatory form. Researcher G. Cozmei [2, p.11], analyzing the physical education and sports activities of medical students, is of the opinion that the application of the "binary methodology" (the combination of knowledge and motor actions specific to professional activity) will lead to the optimization of health condition, intellectual and work capacity of future doctors.

In the Republic of Moldova, the discipline "physical education" in higher education institutions is mandatory and is regulated by the Law on physical culture and sport, "mandatory discipline in the first 4 semesters of the study process, included in the education plans within the limit of 4-6 transferable study credits" [3] and the University Curriculum Reference Framework, "Physical Education course for I/II year students, which is not quantified with credits, but whose evaluation is graded "admitted". This is a prerequisite for admission to the Licentiate (Bachelor studies)", designed in the education plan as a "component of training general skills and competences (code G) and aims to train the skills to learn, research, analyze, present, effectively communicate orally and in written form, including through information technologies, in the field of professional training and in various cultural contexts" [4, p.47].

The aim of research consists in the reconceptualization of "physical education" university discipline through the curriculum design and the diversification of educational offers, which, in addition to the training of general motor skills and abilities necessary in daily and professional activity, will ensure the increase of motivation for the systematic practice of motor activities, increasing the attractiveness and prestige of the discipline, amplifying the impact of physical education and sports on the formation of student's personality.

The concept of curriculum for the Physical Education discipline in higher education institutions. The design of Curriculum for physical education discipline must be determined as a result of the evaluation process of the previous curriculum, of the opinions of specialists in the field based on the paradigm given by the Reference Framework of the University Curriculum [4], carried out taking into account the following:

- the postmodern approaches and trends in curriculum development on a national and international level;
- the need to adapt the disciplinary curriculum to society's expectations, students' needs, but also to the traditions of higher education institutions in the country;
- the valences of discipline in the formation of transversal, general/transdisciplinary and specific competences;
- the need to ensure continuity and interconnection between education levels and cycles.

The curriculum for "physical education" discipline at the Moldova State University (USM) was conceptualized following the analysis of curricular programs within higher education institutions, the authors' works dealing with university physical education and a study on satisfying the students' need for exercise [5].

The central function of the curriculum in the "physical education" discipline is to guide the design of concrete training activities within the physical education activities of students, but at the same time, the curriculum also denotes other functions such as [6, p.199]:

- regulating and ensuring coherence between the physical education discipline and specialized disciplines;
- regulating and ensuring coherence between teaching, learning and evaluation in the context of training/competences development;
- ensuring the coherence between the curricular products specific to the discipline at the level of education plan, disciplinary curriculum, implementation guides, didactic materials;

- designing the educational/contextual approach, leading to the progressive and gradual formation of the discipline’s competences at the level of academic group/individual student;
- evaluating the learning outcomes specific to the form of motor activity chosen by the student.

The novelty of designed curriculum is *the intensification of focus on the student through the diversification of educational offer*, which implies the following (Table 1):

- at the level of academic group, the choice of form of the physical education lesson – on sports tests on circle (a number of sports tests practiced during a semester) and sports module/test (for a semester);
- individually, physical education sections with in-depth sports test, outside the basic schedule;
- practicing motor activities independently, or sports tests in other specialized institutions/associations.

Table 1. Administration of Physical Education Discipline Within USM

| Name of Discipline | | | Physical Education | | | | | |
|---|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|---|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Study Year | | | I – II | Semester | | I – IV | Type of Final Evaluation | C |
| Training Regime of Discipline: G – general, F – fundamental, S – specialized | | | | | G | Number of Credits | - | |
| Regime of Discipline’s Compulsoriness: O – compulsory, A – optional, F – facultative, FC (LA) – freely chosen | | | | | O | | | |
| Total Hours From Education Plan | | | | | 120 | Direct Contact Hours | 60 | |
| | | | | | | Individual Work | 60 | |
| Lesson: Physical Education | | | Section: Physical Education | | | Independent Motor Activities or Sports in Specialized Institutions/Associations | | |
| Total Hours per Semester | Direct Contact Hours | Individual Work Hours | Total Hours per Semester | Direct Contact Hours | Individual Work Hours | Total Hours per Semester | Direct Contact Hours | Individual Work Hours |
| 30 | 15 | 15 | 30 | 30 | - | 30 | - | 30 |

Along with the diversification of educational offer, in addition to choosing the form of physical education practice, the Curriculum gives a student the right to choose from the educational offer as follows:

- what sports tests will be practiced in the physical education lesson with sports tests on circle, proposed in the Curriculum;

- which modules/sports tests he/she will select for each semester among those proposed in the Curriculum;
- which is the method of assessment, depending on the form of activity practised.

In order to promote confidence in the teaching staff by increasing the freedoms and responsibilities in designing the student's training course, the Curriculum entrusts the teacher with the right to decide, in agreement with other actors of the educational process (institutional managers, etc.), depending on the material resources, the following moments:

- what sports tests he/she will propose for practicing in physical education lessons and sports sections;
- depending on the group level, on which contents the teaching-learning-evaluation process will focus;
- to what extent it will develop the proposed learning contents;
- how the didactic strategies will enhance the learning activities;
- diversification of evaluation methods, depending on the type of activity practiced.

An important feature of the Curriculum for discipline within the USM, through the diversification of educational offer, is the promotion of integrated education, which refers to the inclusion of students with special requirements in the educational process (young people with sensory, physical, cultural, intellectual or language deficiencies, social-economically and culturally disadvantaged, young people with mild psycho-emotional and behavioral disorders), in order to provide them with a favorable climate for harmonious and balanced development. At the same time, through the freedom of teaching staff in the design of student's training course and the valorization of principles of individualization, differentiation, personalization in the learning process, the curriculum involves the inclusion in activities of exempted or temporarily exempted students from effort in the basic groups.

Competences of the university discipline of physical education. As a concept, the Curriculum has the priority role of the outcomes, expressed in terms of competences, which also become criteria for the selection and organization of contents, the choice of training and evaluation strategies. Thus, the competencies of "physical education" discipline are generic - common to all university specialties, and their development takes

place in an integrated and cyclical way throughout the entire study program and is structured on three levels:

- key/transversal/transdisciplinary competences,
- general competences of "physical education" discipline,
- specific competences of physical education activities.

The general competences of the discipline consist of:

1. Identifying the benefits of active lifestyle for professional activity, showing interest and openness to the systematic and independent practice of motor activities.
2. Exploring motor potential in educational and daily activities, demonstrating knowledge of the rules of a healthy lifestyle.
3. Practising individual and collective motor activities to satisfy movement needs, showing self-control in order to maintain physical condition and harmonious development.
4. Adaptation of varied motor experiences in competitive and recreational activities, demonstrating moral integrity, fairness, dignity, honesty.

The specific competences of Physical Education activity - sports tests on circle consist of:

1. Valorizing on the effects of motor activities on the human body, showing critical and positive thinking in different contexts of learning, activity and human values.
2. Exploring motor potential in educational and everyday activities, showing self-appreciation, self-control and self-regulation in order to develop harmonious physicality.
3. Managing the motor skills formed during the practice of different sports, demonstrating resilience and adaptation.

The specific competences of Physical Education activity on sports modules/tests consist of:

1. Knowledge of the basic notions of physical education and sports within related learning activities, demonstrating attitude and interest in new ways of learning, taking into account safety rules and hygiene norms.

2. Reproduction of motor actions in basic and complex structures specific to the sports event, showing an effort for fast and efficient learning in order to ensure harmonious physical development.
3. Application of motor skills and abilities in daily activities and in competition conditions, supporting behavioral relationships based on fair play, respecting the values of mass sport.

The specific competences of the activity of Physical Education section in the in-depth sports test will take into account:

1. Valorizing on the sporting and recreational benefits of the practiced sport, showing an attitude for a healthy lifestyle.
2. Promoting safety rules and hygiene norms within the training process and related activities, demonstrating care for participants.
3. Exploration of the specific means of practised sport in order to ensure physical and harmonious development, showing self-control and self-regulation.
4. Application of skills and motor skills in competitive and recreational activities, showing initiative and involvement.
5. Promoting the values of physical education and sport in sports and everyday activities, showing training and affirmation of the personality.

The forms of organizing physical education activities in higher education institutions.

The educational plans of students of the first cycle, Licentiate (Bachelor Studies), for all specialties within the USM, physical education are designed 1 hour per week with direct contact, an activity carried out once every 2 weeks. The number of hours planned for the "physical education" discipline, according to the theories of influence of motor actions on the systems of human body, is insufficient to reach the level of development of the student's motor capacities according to age-appropriate standards. In this sense, the physical education lesson, through the forms proposed in the disciplinary curriculum, aims to propose new sports tests, other than those studied in high school, as well as the formation of basic skills and the motivation of their independent and systematic practice for recreational purposes and compensatory throughout life.

In the curriculum of physical education discipline, according to the technical and material availability of the institution (USM), the following sports tests are designed and

proposed to the student: aerobics, athletics, badminton, basketball, football, strength fitness, handball, swimming, chess, tourism, volleyball. These can be practiced in different forms, according to Table 1, and are described below.

Lessons - sports tests on circle. This provides for the practice of a sports test during a lesson, respectively several sports tests during a semester (7 lessons – 7 tests practised). According to the typology of lessons, they are carried out from the perspective of competences training: lesson for training the abilities to apply knowledge.

This form of lesson is mandatory for academic groups from year I, semester I, for adapting to the new requirements of the university discipline, discovering the sports base of the university and orienting students for practicing the sports modules/tests in the following semesters at group or individual level.

The sports module/test is practiced during one semester, chosen by simple majority at the level of the academic group, from the offer of sports tests designed in the disciplinary curriculum (3 modules will be designed, corresponding to the 3 semesters, for students of year I - semester II, and year II – semesters III and IV).

The design of sports tests in modules conceptually respects the theory of modular training, through which the contents present integrated functional units, which provide learning experiences (theoretical and practical) as a means to achieve educational outcomes, expressed in terms of competences.

The Physical Education section with the in-depth sports test. This form of activity is designed for students who opt for a greater number of practical activities than those provided in the curriculum. In this sense, the student's individual working hours are realized by transferring them into direct contact hours, so one activity per week will be carried out. Physical education sections, as an individual student option, can be practiced during 4 semesters. The deepening of the sports test requires the accumulation by the student of general and specific knowledge, skills and abilities necessary for the independent practice of motor activities, but also methodical-organizational and competitive skills.

Independent motor activities or sports activities in specialized institutions/associations. This form of activity designed and provided for in the disciplinary curriculum is an option for students who continue their sports training in sports institutions/associations,

outside the institution, but also an option for other categories of students, such as those employed in the field of work, for students involved in the academic mobility program, for students with different disabilities. The activity is carried out during the semester through individual work hours, guided by the specialist teaching staff, and the assessment at the end of the semester will be carried out by presenting the activity portfolio (alternative assessment method), which reflects to what extent and at what level the general competences in the given discipline have been trained/developed.

Applying the curriculum to "physical education" the discipline. The discipline curriculum designed, approved within the physical education department, approved by the faculty council and the faculty quality council, was applied starting with the 2022-2023 academic year in all academic groups of the Moldova State University. In order to choose the forms of practicing the physical education activities provided by the curriculum, the 1st and 2nd year students filled out a form at the beginning of the semester that provides the following options:

- *At academic group level:*
 - The physical education lesson in the system - sport tests on circle (1 activity in 2 weeks, at each lesson a sport test will be practiced during a semester);
 - Education lesson on modules/sports tests (1 activity in 2 weeks, in each semester where a sports test will be practiced, respectively 3 semesters - 3 sports tests).
- *Individual, extended or in-depth sports test:*
 - Physical education Section (practicing a sports test - 1 activity per week during the semester, within the educational institution);
 - Independent motor activities or sports training (outside the educational institution, sports institutions/schools/associations).

Following the processing of forms filled in by the students of all the faculties of university, regarding the forms of practicing physical education within the university discipline, (figure 1 and 2), we find that for the students of the first year (63.6%) and second year (60%) the physical education lesson is the most preferred for practising motor activities. From the same form, we notice that more students (39.5% first-year

students and 36.6% second-year students) opt for the modular form of organizing the physical education lesson.

A little over 1/3 of the students chose to practice the physical education section, therefore, they recognize the fact that the motor activity only within the physical education lessons is not sufficient for training the competences specific for the discipline, nor for satisfying the need for movement for recreational-compensatory purposes.

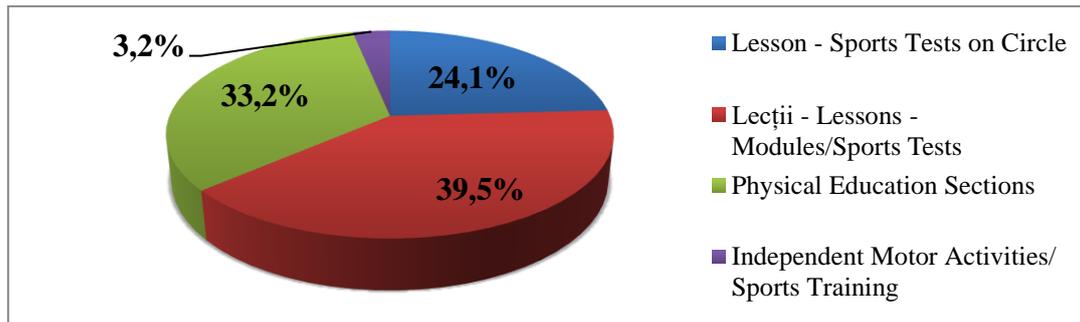


Figure 1. Options of I Year Students for Forms of Practising Physical Education Activities Provided by Discipline's Curriculum

3.2% of first-year students and 5.1% of second-year students chose to practice independent motor activities or sports activities in specialized institutions/associations. We find that second-year students, for personal reasons (health, interests in other sports), or professional reasons (employment, academic mobility, etc.), choose the option of independent practice of motor activities for training general/discipline-specific competences, where we can conclude that this form of organization of physical education activities is current and meets the needs of modern physical education.

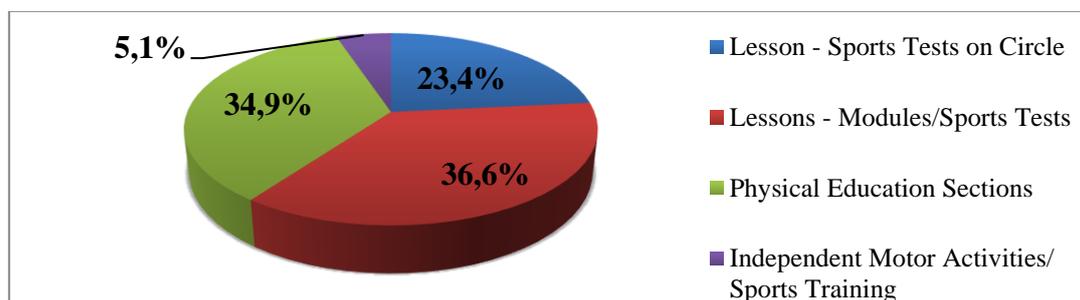


Figure 2. Options of II Year Students for Forms of Practicing Physical Education Activities Provided by Discipline's Curriculum

Another finding, which is of interest, resulting from the reorganization/reconceptualization of the "physical education" university discipline, are the students' preferences regarding sports tests for practice within the activities organized by the specialized department of the higher education institution. From figure 3 we can see that

for the physical education lesson the volleyball game is the most requested, followed by the table tennis, strength fitness and badminton. Another trend is observed for the physical education section with in-depth sports test, where the volleyball game has the most demands again, but the activity in the strength gym, table tennis and the swimming pool are more preferred by students.

In this context, the Department of Physical Education of the Moldova State University, by reconceptualizing the process of university physical education, in which it diversifies the forms of practising motor activities and offers students educational offers to form general/discipline-specific competences, must ensure a effective teaching-learning-assessment process in the given discipline. This can be achieved by developing the potential of teaching staff of the department (personal and professional), developing the sports infrastructure of USM, providing with sufficient equipment/inventory and corresponding to the educational process, which will directly influence the organizational culture of the higher education institution.

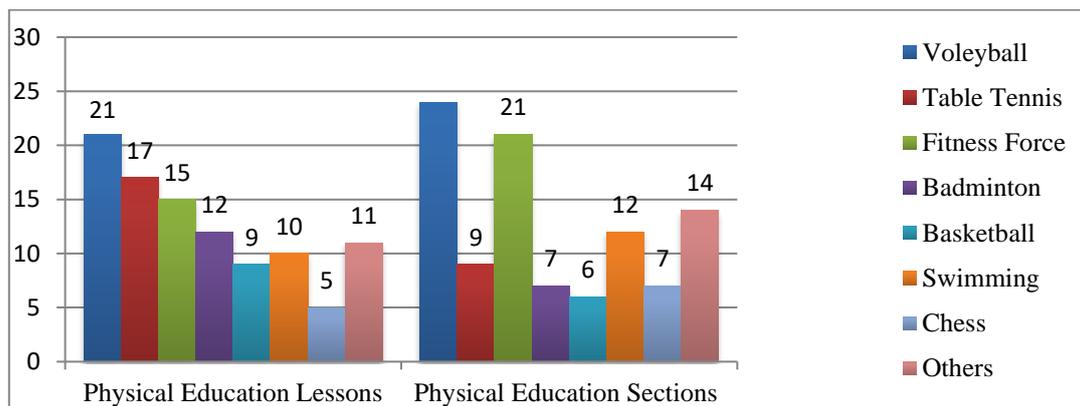


Figure 3. Sports Tests Requested by USM Students in Physical Education Lessons and Sections

CONCLUSIONS

The transformations in educational system at the level of higher education institutions condition the reorganization of "physical education" discipline as a university discipline at the organizational level, but also the diversification of the forms of motor activities aimed at satisfying the need for movement from the perspective of the student's professional training.

Diversification of the forms of practising motor activities, organized in the educational institution and outside it, must ensure the inclusion of all students in the practice of

physical education and sports activities with the basic aim of training general/discipline-specific competences.

Through the existence of possibility to choose the form of practising physical education and sports activities within the "physical education" university discipline is ensured the following: the constructivist and interactive conception (centering on the learner); valorizing the principles of individualization, differentiation and personalization in the learning process, ensuring an effective learning environment.

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