



Research Article

Healthy Lifestyle Through Physical Education: A Pathway to Holistic Health and Well-Being

Mahesh S Akkivalli

Physical Director, Shri Kumareshwar College of Education, Hangal, Karnataka, India

Corresponding Author: *Mahesh S Akkivalli

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Abstract

The increasing prevalence of sedentary lifestyles, physical inactivity, and lifestyle-related diseases has emerged as a significant public health concern worldwide. Rapid technological advancement, urbanization, and changing patterns of daily living have contributed to declining levels of physical activity among children, adolescents, and adults. In this context, physical education has gained recognition as a critical educational intervention for promoting healthy lifestyles and fostering holistic well-being. This paper examines the role of physical education in developing health-enhancing behaviours, improving physical fitness, strengthening mental and emotional well-being, and encouraging lifelong engagement in physical activity. Drawing upon contemporary public health and educational perspectives, the study highlights how quality physical education contributes to the prevention of non-communicable diseases, enhances social competencies, and supports the development of healthy behavioural patterns. International organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNESCO emphasize the integration of regular physical activity within educational settings as a strategic approach to improving population health and reducing health-related risks associated with sedentary behaviour (Bull *et al.*, 2020; UNESCO, 2015) [3, 9]. Furthermore, physical education serves as a platform for cultivating physical literacy, self-discipline, teamwork, and resilience, all of which are essential components of a healthy lifestyle. The paper argues that strengthening quality physical education programmes within educational institutions can significantly contribute to sustainable health outcomes and the creation of healthier and more active societies.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Health has increasingly become a central concern of contemporary societies as rapid technological advancements, urbanization, and changing patterns of living continue to influence human behaviour and well-being. While modernization has enhanced convenience and productivity, it has simultaneously contributed to a decline in physical activity and an increase in sedentary lifestyles. The growing dependence on digital technologies, reduced participation in outdoor activities, unhealthy dietary practices, and heightened levels of psychological stress have collectively contributed to the rising prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disorders, and mental health problems (World Health Organization [WHO], 2022) ^[15]. These emerging health challenges have intensified the need for effective educational and behavioural interventions aimed at promoting healthier lifestyles across all age groups.

A healthy lifestyle is widely recognized as a multidimensional construct that encompasses regular physical activity, balanced nutrition, adequate rest, emotional stability, social well-being, and the avoidance of health-risk behaviours. Contemporary public health research consistently demonstrates that lifestyle-related factors account for a substantial proportion of preventable diseases and premature mortality worldwide (Lee *et al.*, 2012) ^[5]. Consequently, the promotion of healthy behavioural practices has become a strategic priority for governments, educational institutions, and health organizations seeking to improve individual and community well-being.

Within this context, physical education has emerged as a powerful educational medium for fostering health-enhancing behaviours and active living. Modern perspectives view physical education not merely as participation in sports or exercise but as a structured educational process that develops physical competence, health literacy, movement skills, and positive attitudes toward lifelong physical activity (UNESCO, 2015) ^[9]. Through carefully designed learning experiences, physical education equips learners with the knowledge, skills, and motivation required to make informed health-related decisions and maintain active lifestyles throughout their lives.

Furthermore, physical education contributes significantly to holistic development by enhancing physical fitness, psychological well-being, emotional resilience, and social competence. Participation in physical activities has been associated with improved academic performance, greater self-esteem, reduced stress levels, and stronger interpersonal relationships (Bailey, 2006) ^[1]. As educational systems increasingly emphasize the development of well-rounded individuals, physical education assumes a crucial role in addressing contemporary health concerns and cultivating sustainable lifestyle practices.

Against this backdrop, the present paper examines the contribution of physical education to the promotion of healthy lifestyles. It explores the conceptual foundations of healthy living, analyses the multifaceted benefits of physical education, and highlights its significance in preventing lifestyle-related diseases and promoting lifelong well-being.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Physical Activity and Health Outcomes

The relationship between physical activity and health has been extensively documented in contemporary health research. Physical inactivity has been identified as one of the leading risk factors for global mortality and is associated with an increased prevalence of cardiovascular diseases, obesity, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and several forms of cancer. In a landmark study, Lee *et al.* (2012) ^[5] estimated that physical inactivity contributes substantially to the global burden of non-communicable diseases and premature mortality. Similarly, the World Health Organization (2020) ^[14] emphasized that regular participation in moderate to vigorous physical activity improves cardiovascular fitness, metabolic functioning, muscular strength, and overall quality of life. Warburton and Bredin (2017) ^[10], through a systematic review of existing evidence, concluded that regular physical activity produces significant physiological and psychological benefits while reducing the risk of chronic diseases across different age groups. These findings collectively highlight the importance of promoting active lifestyles as a key strategy for public health improvement.

2.2 Physical Education and Holistic Development

Research has increasingly recognized physical education as a multidimensional educational process that contributes to holistic development beyond physical fitness. Bailey (2006) ^[1] reviewed the educational outcomes associated with physical education and reported positive effects on physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development. Expanding upon these findings, Bailey *et al.* (2009) ^[2] argued that quality physical education enhances self-esteem, teamwork, leadership, communication skills, and social inclusion. The authors emphasized that physical education provides meaningful learning experiences that foster personal growth and lifelong engagement in health-promoting behaviours. These studies suggest that physical education serves as an important vehicle for achieving broader educational and developmental objectives.

2.3 Physical Education, Mental Health, and Well-being

A growing body of literature has explored the relationship between physical activity, physical education, and mental health. Evidence indicates that regular participation in physical activity contributes to reduced levels of stress, anxiety, and depression while enhancing self-confidence, emotional stability, and psychological well-being. Biddle and Asare (2011) found that physical activity is positively associated with mental health outcomes among children and adolescents, particularly in relation to self-esteem and emotional resilience. Furthermore, the World Health Organization (2022) ^[15] recognizes physical activity as an essential component of mental health promotion and disease prevention. These findings reinforce the significance of physical education in supporting both physical and psychological dimensions of health.

2.4 Physical Literacy and Lifelong Active Living

The concept of physical literacy has emerged as a significant theoretical framework for understanding lifelong participation in physical activity. Whitehead (2010) ^[11] defined physical literacy as the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge, and understanding necessary to engage in physical activities throughout life. This perspective shifts the focus of physical education from short-term performance outcomes to the development of sustainable active lifestyles. UNESCO (2015) ^[9] further emphasized that quality physical education should cultivate physical literacy and empower learners to make informed decisions regarding their health and well-being. Research suggests that individuals who develop physical literacy during their formative years are more likely to remain physically active and health-conscious in adulthood.

3. RESEARCH GAP

The reviewed literature demonstrates that physical activity and physical education contribute significantly to physical health, psychological well-being, social development, and disease prevention. However, most existing studies examine these outcomes independently, focusing on specific dimensions of health or educational development. Limited scholarly attention has been directed toward understanding physical education as a comprehensive pathway for fostering a healthy lifestyle that integrates physical, mental, social, and preventive health dimensions within a single conceptual framework. Therefore, the present paper seeks to synthesize these interconnected dimensions and examine how physical education can serve as a holistic strategy for promoting lifelong health and well-being.

4. Theoretical Understanding of Healthy Lifestyle

The concept of a healthy lifestyle has emerged as a significant area of inquiry within public health, education, and behavioural sciences due to its profound influence on individual and societal well-being. Contemporary health theories conceptualize health not merely as the absence of disease but as a dynamic state of physical, mental, and social well-being that enables individuals to lead productive and meaningful lives (World Health Organization [WHO], 1948) ^[12]. Within this broader perspective, a healthy lifestyle refers to a pattern of behaviours, habits, and choices that contribute to the maintenance and enhancement of overall health throughout the lifespan.

The theoretical foundation of a healthy lifestyle is closely associated with behavioural health models, particularly the Social Ecological Model and the Health Promotion Model. These frameworks suggest that health-related behaviours are influenced not only by individual choices but also by social, environmental, educational, and cultural factors. Consequently, healthy living is viewed as the outcome of continuous interactions between personal responsibility and supportive environments that facilitate positive behavioural change (McLeroy *et al.*, 1988) ^[6].

A healthy lifestyle encompasses multiple dimensions, including regular physical activity, balanced nutrition, adequate sleep, emotional regulation, stress management, social connectedness, and avoidance of harmful behaviours such as smoking, substance abuse, and prolonged sedentary practices. Evidence

indicates that these behavioural factors significantly reduce the risk of non-communicable diseases while improving physical functioning, psychological well-being, and quality of life (WHO, 2020) ^[14]. In contrast, unhealthy lifestyle patterns have been identified as major contributors to the global burden of disease and premature mortality.

Among the various determinants of healthy living, physical activity occupies a central position because of its widespread influence on physiological, psychological, and social health outcomes. Contemporary research highlights that sustainable engagement in physical activity contributes not only to disease prevention but also to the development of resilience, self-efficacy, and overall well-being (Warburton & Bredin, 2017) ^[10]. Therefore, the healthy lifestyle paradigm represents a holistic and preventive approach to human development, providing a conceptual foundation for understanding the role of physical education in fostering lifelong health and well-being.

5. Physical Education as a Health-Promoting Educational Process

Physical education is increasingly recognized as a fundamental component of contemporary education that contributes significantly to health promotion and lifelong well-being. Traditionally perceived as a subject primarily concerned with sports and physical fitness, physical education has evolved into a comprehensive educational process aimed at developing physical competence, health literacy, positive attitudes, and lifelong engagement in physical activity. Modern educational frameworks emphasize that physical education serves not only recreational and developmental purposes but also functions as an essential strategy for addressing public health challenges associated with physical inactivity and unhealthy lifestyles (UNESCO, 2015) ^[9].

As a health-promoting educational process, physical education provides learners with structured opportunities to acquire knowledge, skills, and values necessary for making informed health-related decisions. Through participation in diverse physical activities, students develop an understanding of the importance of regular exercise, balanced living, injury prevention, and personal health management. This educational dimension distinguishes physical education from mere physical activity, as it intentionally integrates cognitive, affective, and psychomotor learning outcomes that contribute to holistic development (SHAPE America, 2014) ^[8].

The concept of physical literacy further strengthens the role of physical education in health promotion. Physical literacy refers to the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge, and understanding required to value and engage in physical activities throughout life (Whitehead, 2010) ^[11]. Quality physical education programmes foster these attributes by creating inclusive and supportive learning environments where students experience enjoyment, achievement, and personal growth through movement. Such experiences encourage the adoption of active lifestyles that extend beyond the school years.

Furthermore, physical education contributes to the development of self-discipline, teamwork, leadership, cooperation, and resilience, all of which are closely associated with positive

health behaviours and social well-being. Research indicates that individuals who participate regularly in quality physical education are more likely to maintain physically active lifestyles and demonstrate greater awareness of health-promoting practices in adulthood (Bailey *et al.*, 2009) ^[2]. In this regard, physical education serves as a preventive and developmental intervention that empowers learners to take responsibility for their health.

Therefore, physical education should be viewed as a vital educational mechanism for fostering healthy lifestyles, enhancing quality of life, and promoting sustainable health outcomes across the lifespan.

6. Physical Education and Physical Well-being

Physical well-being constitutes a fundamental dimension of overall health and is closely associated with an individual's capacity to perform daily activities efficiently, maintain physiological functioning, and prevent disease. In recent decades, declining levels of physical activity have emerged as a major public health concern, contributing significantly to the global burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). According to the World Health Organization (2022) ^[15], physical inactivity is among the leading risk factors for mortality worldwide and is strongly linked to cardiovascular diseases, obesity, type 2 diabetes, and certain forms of cancer. Within this context, physical education plays a crucial role in promoting physical well-being by encouraging regular participation in health-enhancing physical activities.

Quality physical education programmes provide structured opportunities for learners to engage in activities that improve cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength, flexibility, coordination, and body composition. Through systematic participation in sports, games, exercise, and fitness-oriented activities, students develop the physical competencies necessary for maintaining an active and healthy lifestyle. Research has consistently demonstrated that regular physical activity contributes to improved cardiovascular health by enhancing heart function, regulating blood pressure, and improving blood circulation (Warburton & Bredin, 2017) ^[10].

Physical education also plays a significant role in addressing the growing prevalence of childhood and adolescent obesity. Sedentary lifestyles characterized by excessive screen time and limited physical movement have increased the risk of obesity among young people across the world. School-based physical education interventions have been found to be effective in increasing energy expenditure, improving body composition, and fostering positive attitudes toward physical activity (Janssen & LeBlanc, 2010) ^[4]. These outcomes are particularly important because health behaviours established during childhood often persist into adulthood.

Furthermore, regular participation in physical education contributes to the development of functional fitness and physical literacy, enabling individuals to engage confidently in a wide range of physical activities throughout life. It strengthens the musculoskeletal system, enhances motor skills, improves balance and coordination, and supports healthy growth and development. Emerging evidence also suggests that physically active individuals demonstrate stronger immune

functioning and greater resistance to various health conditions compared to their inactive counterparts (Pedersen & Saltin, 2015) ^[7].

Therefore, physical education serves as a vital mechanism for enhancing physical well-being by promoting fitness, preventing disease, and encouraging lifelong participation in physical activity. Its contribution extends beyond immediate physical benefits and forms the foundation for sustainable health and improved quality of life across the lifespan.

7. Physical Education for Social Competence and Life Skills

Physical education plays a pivotal role in fostering social competence and developing essential life skills that contribute to holistic human development. Beyond its contribution to physical fitness and health, physical education provides a dynamic social environment where learners interact, collaborate, compete, and communicate with others. These experiences facilitate the acquisition of interpersonal competencies that are necessary for effective participation in contemporary society. As educational systems increasingly emphasize the development of twenty-first-century skills, physical education has gained recognition as an important platform for nurturing socially responsible and emotionally intelligent individuals.

Participation in sports, games, and group-based physical activities requires individuals to work cooperatively toward shared goals. Through such experiences, learners develop communication skills, teamwork, mutual respect, and an appreciation of diversity. Physical education settings expose students to situations that demand cooperation, conflict resolution, negotiation, and collective decision-making, thereby strengthening their social adaptability and interpersonal effectiveness (Bailey *et al.*, 2009) ^[2]. These competencies are transferable to academic, professional, and community contexts, making physical education an important contributor to lifelong personal development.

Another significant contribution of physical education is the development of leadership and responsibility. Students frequently assume various roles, including team leaders, captains, organizers, and peer supporters, which enable them to cultivate decision-making abilities, accountability, and self-confidence. Such opportunities encourage learners to take initiative and develop a sense of ownership over their actions and behaviours. Moreover, participation in competitive and cooperative activities helps individuals learn to manage success and failure constructively, thereby fostering emotional maturity and resilience.

Physical education also serves as an effective medium for the development of life skills such as discipline, perseverance, goal-setting, time management, and self-regulation. These skills are essential for personal effectiveness and long-term well-being. The World Health Organization recognizes life skills as critical psychosocial competencies that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life (WHO, 1999) ^[13]. Through structured physical activity experiences, learners practice these competencies in real-world situations, enhancing their applicability beyond educational settings.

Therefore, physical education contributes substantially to social competence and life skill development by creating meaningful opportunities for interaction, cooperation, leadership, and personal growth. Its educational value extends far beyond physical performance, preparing individuals to become responsible, resilient, and socially engaged members of society.

8. Physical Education in the Prevention of Lifestyle Diseases

Lifestyle diseases, also referred to as non-communicable diseases (NCDs), have emerged as a major global health challenge in the twenty-first century. Conditions such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases, and certain forms of cancer are increasingly associated with physical inactivity, unhealthy dietary habits, prolonged sedentary behaviour, and chronic stress. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2022) ^[15], NCDs account for a substantial proportion of global mortality, highlighting the urgent need for preventive strategies that promote healthy behavioural patterns from an early age. In this regard, physical education serves as an effective educational intervention for reducing health risks and preventing the onset of lifestyle-related diseases.

One of the primary contributions of physical education is its role in increasing regular physical activity among children, adolescents, and young adults. Structured participation in sports, exercise, and movement-based activities helps individuals maintain healthy body weight, improve metabolic functioning, and reduce the accumulation of excess body fat. Research has demonstrated that regular engagement in moderate to vigorous physical activity significantly lowers the risk of obesity and related metabolic disorders (Janssen & LeBlanc, 2010) ^[4]. Since obesity is a major precursor to several chronic diseases, physical education plays a preventive role by encouraging active living and healthy behavioural habits.

Physical education also contributes to cardiovascular health by improving blood circulation, enhancing cardiac efficiency, regulating blood pressure, and improving lipid profiles. Individuals who engage consistently in physical activity are less likely to develop hypertension and coronary heart disease compared to physically inactive populations (Warburton & Bredin, 2017) ^[10]. Furthermore, regular exercise improves insulin sensitivity and glucose metabolism, thereby reducing the likelihood of developing type 2 diabetes.

Beyond physiological benefits, physical education promotes health literacy and awareness regarding disease prevention. Learners acquire knowledge about fitness, nutrition, personal health management, and healthy lifestyle choices, enabling them to make informed decisions regarding their well-being. Such educational experiences foster lifelong habits that contribute to disease prevention and health maintenance.

Therefore, physical education should be regarded as a preventive public health strategy that addresses the behavioural risk factors underlying lifestyle diseases. By encouraging regular physical activity and health-conscious decision-making, it contributes significantly to reducing the burden of non-communicable diseases and promoting long-term health and well-being across populations.

9. Contemporary Challenges and Future Directions

Despite the well-documented benefits of physical education in promoting healthy lifestyles, several contemporary challenges continue to hinder its effectiveness in educational institutions and communities. One of the most significant concerns is the growing prevalence of sedentary behaviour resulting from increased dependence on digital technologies, social media, online entertainment, and screen-based learning environments. The widespread use of smartphones, computers, and gaming platforms has substantially reduced opportunities for physical activity, particularly among children and adolescents. Consequently, educational institutions face increasing difficulty in encouraging active participation in physical education programmes.

Another major challenge is the marginalization of physical education within school curricula. In many educational systems, greater emphasis is placed on academic achievement and standardized testing, often resulting in reduced instructional time allocated to physical education. Limited sports infrastructure, inadequate funding, overcrowded classrooms, and shortages of qualified physical education teachers further restrict the quality and effectiveness of programme implementation. These constraints are particularly evident in developing regions where educational resources are unevenly distributed.

Socio-economic and cultural factors also influence participation in physical activity. Gender stereotypes, safety concerns, lack of parental awareness, and restricted access to recreational facilities may discourage regular involvement in physical education and sports. Furthermore, the increasing incidence of mental health challenges among young people necessitates a more comprehensive approach that integrates physical, emotional, and social dimensions of well-being within physical education programmes.

Looking toward the future, educational policies should prioritize quality physical education as an essential component of holistic development and public health promotion. Schools and universities need to adopt learner-centred and inclusive approaches that encourage participation regardless of gender, ability, or socio-economic background. The integration of technology-enhanced learning tools, fitness monitoring applications, and digital health platforms may further increase student engagement while supporting active lifestyles. Additionally, stronger collaboration among educational institutions, families, healthcare professionals, and community organizations is required to create supportive environments for lifelong physical activity.

Future physical education programmes should emphasize physical literacy, health education, and behavioural change strategies that extend beyond school settings. Such an approach can strengthen the capacity of individuals to make informed health decisions and sustain healthy lifestyle practices throughout their lives. Consequently, addressing contemporary challenges through innovative and inclusive strategies will be critical for maximizing the contribution of physical education to long-term health and well-being.

10. CONCLUSION

The promotion of a healthy lifestyle has become an urgent priority in response to the growing prevalence of physical inactivity, sedentary behaviour, and lifestyle-related diseases across the world. As a multidimensional educational process, physical education offers an effective means of addressing these challenges by fostering physical fitness, mental well-being, social competence, and health-conscious behaviours. The findings discussed in this paper demonstrate that physical education extends beyond the development of physical skills and serves as a powerful mechanism for promoting lifelong health and overall quality of life.

Through structured participation in physical activities, learners acquire essential knowledge, values, and competencies that encourage active living and responsible health-related decision-making. Physical education contributes significantly to the prevention of non-communicable diseases by improving cardiovascular fitness, maintaining healthy body composition, and reducing behavioural risk factors associated with chronic illnesses. Moreover, its positive influence on emotional resilience, social interaction, teamwork, leadership, and life skills highlights its importance in holistic human development. Despite its recognized benefits, challenges such as sedentary lifestyles, inadequate infrastructure, limited institutional support, and socio-cultural barriers continue to restrict the full potential of physical education. Addressing these issues requires coordinated efforts from policymakers, educators, families, and community stakeholders. Strengthening quality physical education programmes and promoting physical literacy across educational settings can play a transformative role in developing healthier and more active societies. Therefore, physical education should be viewed not merely as a curricular subject but as a strategic investment in public health, sustainable development, and lifelong well-being.

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About the Author



Mahesh S. Akkivalli is the Physical Director at Shri Kumareshwar College of Education, Hangal, Karnataka, India. He is dedicated to promoting physical education, sports, and student wellness. His academic interests include sports science, health education, and educational development, with a commitment to fostering holistic growth through teaching, research, and professional engagement.