

Examining associations among actual motor competence, perceived motor competence, physical education enjoyment, and physical activity in early childhood

Unjong Lee, University of South Carolina

Ali Brian, University of South Carolina

An De Meester, University of South Carolina

Physical activity (PA) in early childhood offers numerous health benefits (e.g., physical & mental health), but PA levels in this age group are often insufficient to promote health. According to Stodden and Colleagues as well as Menescardi and Colleagues, actual & perceived motor competence (AMC & PMC) with physical education (PE) enjoyment can influence PA in early childhood. However, few studies have examined the relationship among PE enjoyment and other variables (e.g., AMC, PMC, PA) in preschool settings which is the purpose of this study. A convenience sample of young children (N=64, 55% boys, Mage = 59.8 months) and their two PE teachers (N=2, Women=100%) participated in this study. Participants completed the Test of Gross Motor Development-3 (AMC), a the Pictorial Scale of Perceived Movement Skill Competence (PMC), and a modified enjoyment scale. Nonparametric correlation tests and regression analysis were used in a descriptive-correlational design. A positive Spearman's correlation was found between AMC and PA ($\rho=0.45$, $p<.001$) and AMC and PMC ($\rho=0.26$, $p=.04$). However, other correlations (e.g., between AMC and PE enjoyment, PMC and PE enjoyment, PMC and PA, PE enjoyment and PA) were not statistically significant. Regression analysis ($R^2= .21$, $F(2, 48) = 6.65$, $p<.001$) showed that while AMC significantly predicted PA ($\beta=.47$, $p<.001$), neither PMC nor PE enjoyment served as significant mediators. Higher levels of AMC associated with PA in early childhood. However, neither PMC nor PE enjoyment were found to be significant mediators between AMC and PA. This study is the first to examine associations among AMC, PMC, and PE enjoyment in promoting PA in early childhood in the US. Future studies need to examine the mediating roles of PMC and PE enjoyment while comparing results across different school levels with a larger participant pool.