

HOW DO UNIVERSITY'S POLICIES FACILITATE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND SPORTS FOR THEIR STUDENTS?: LESSON LEARNED FROM UNIVERSITAS NEGERI MALANG

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Abstract. University life is a critical period regarding unhealthy behavior changes among students, such as decreasing physical activity and possibly increasing a risk of non-communicable diseases. This study sought to describe policies related to physical activity and sport in Universitas Negeri Malang to support the successful implementation of health promoting university. This was a qualitative study with semi-structured interviews among ten purposely selected participants. Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, and coded manually. Inductively thematic analysis was used for data analysis. The findings of this study led to the identification of three categories of policies. Policies related to administrative support and leadership commitment through creating a task force and developing a plan of action for physical activity and sports in the university environment. Policies in the provision of facilities to ensure the availability of adequate places and equipment for physical activity and sports. Policies for implementing physical activity and sports that offer more activities for students to increase opportunities for exercise. These results can inform the role of university policies in strengthening physical activity and sports among students. The findings from this study can provide the most up-to-date evidence for the university's contribution to preventing non-communicable diseases in the youth generation. Future research could explore monitoring and evaluation of physical activity and sports among university students.

Keywords: physical activity, sports, university students, health promoting university, healthy lifestyle policies

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INTRODUCTION

Non-communicable diseases constitute a significant public health problem that requires attention and action from society and government. They are the leading global cause of mortality and are responsible for 74% of deaths worldwide, mostly in low- and middle-income countries (WHO, 2022a). They pose a significant financial burden on healthcare budgets and nations' welfare, likely to increase over time (Muka *et al*, 2015). An international report has noted that chronic diseases affect the younger generation instead of only being limited to adults (Almutairi *et al*, 2018). The Indonesian Ministry of Health also reported that non-communicable diseases start in children aged 10-14 years old (Indonesian Ministry of Health, 2021)

Incorporating of daily physical activity and exercise into one's lifestyle will reduce the risk of many non-communicable diseases (Anderson and Durstine, 2019). World Health Organization (WHO) also stated that regular physical activity is a well-established protective factor for preventing and controlling the leading non-communicable diseases (WHO, 2013). Physical activity is defined as any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles and the amount of energy expended when physical activity is a fundamental part of energy balance and weight control (WHO, 2022b). Encouraging people to play sports for physical activity is the most influential factor that can easily affect the prevention of non-communicable diseases (Budreviciute *et al*, 2020).

University students have a high risk for non-communicable diseases due to poor lifestyle (Saqib *et al*, 2020). Students usually face challenges when entering campus life, including staying away from family, developing

new social networks, adapting to new learning schedules, and having more behavioral autonomy (Monteiro *et al*, 2023). University students typically have just entered adulthood from adolescence and are often still relatively young and healthy, making it more likely for them to ignore their health (Almutairi *et al*, 2018). Therefore, several studies have shown that university students are more prone to behaviors that endanger their health, such as lack of physical activity, unhealthy eating habits, alcohol consumption, and smoking (Chao, 2023).

The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion claims that health is built where people live, play, and love (WHO, 1986). One of these places is the university environment, where students spend a significant part of their lives. Universities offer profound opportunities to impact young people's healthy development positively (Sanci *et al*, 2022). In the mid-1990s, the health promoting university concept was initiated as part of health promotion approaches adapted to the university context (Suárez-Reyes and Van den Broucke, 2016). Health promoting universities must incorporate health into the university culture, processes, and policies and promote an organizational culture and learning environment that enhances health, wellbeing, and the sustainability of its community (Suárez-Reyes *et al*, 2019).

In Indonesia, health promoting university have been developed by the Ministry of Health since 2019. This program consists of several themes, such as a physical activity that aims to create a learning environment and organizational culture that improve the university community's health status and quality of life (Indonesian Ministry of Health, 2019). Until 2021, 23 public and private universities have participated, including Universitas Negeri Malang (Indonesian Ministry of Health, 2021). After two years of joining, the limited study still examines this program at Universitas Negeri Malang. Therefore, this study was conducted to describe specifically policies related to physical activity and sport in Universitas Negeri Malang to support the successful implementation of health promoting university.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study design and setting

A qualitative methodology was employed to explore the participants' experience interacting with the implemented policies. The study was held in Universitas Negeri Malang during February and March of 2023. Universitas Negeri Malang, located in East Java of Indonesia, is a publicly-owned university established in 1954 and has eight faculties: Education, Letters, Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Economics and Business, Engineering, Sport Sciences, Social Sciences, and Psychology. It is a large university with a student population of 33,755 from various regions of Indonesia.

Study participants

Participants included students, the person in charge of physical activity, and the head of the task force in health promoting university. The student participants were recruited across the eight faculties using word-of-mouth and voluntary approach. Possible participants were approached face-to-face and by WhatsApp to book appointments and fix schedules for each interview. The sociodemographic characteristics of participants were collected via a face-to-face interview.

Study tools and data collection

Data was collected using a semi-structured interview guide that was generated based on a thorough literature search. Open-ended questions were used when interviewing participants to explore the issues in-depth. Each interview lasted between 40-60 minutes during work hours at the workplace of the participants and was organized at a time suitable for the participants. The interviews were audio recorded after obtaining the consent of participants.

Data management and analysis

The collected interview records were transcribed verbatim and the transcripts were checked to ensure the accuracy of data and minimize bias. Data from the interviews were analyzed inductively following the thematic analysis approach. Data were manually coded then analyzed to conclude the findings. All authors discussed the final codes to reach a consensus.

Ethical statement

Before the interview, an explanation about the aim of the study was given and informed consent (in which participants' anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed) was signed by each participant. This study was awarded ethical approval by the Health Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Dentistry, Universitas Airlangga, Surabaya, Indonesia, in February 2023 (reference no. 158/HRECC.FODM/II/2023).

RESULTS

Table 1 describes gender and age of research participants while the main findings of the study are presented below under themes that mirror the study's purpose.

Policies related to administrative support and leadership commitment

Participants stated that the university had legitimized the task force for health promoting university and has a responsibility to manage the implementation of these programs in the campus environment. Structurally, the task force team assigned takes a position in the Center for Gender and Health, one of the parts in research and community empowerment institutions. Every unit in all the centers also composed

Table 1
Characteristics of participants ($n = 10$)

Type of participant	Gender		Total	Age in years (mean \pm SD)
	Male	Female		
Student representative	5	3	8	22.5 \pm 5.04
Physical activity officer	1		1	31*
Health promoting university official		1	1	33*

*There was only one participant, therefore, SD is not available.

SD: standard deviation

an annual activity plan as communicated by the participants:

"From 2020, we have initiated a health promoting university. Meanwhile, its task force was formed by the University in 2021 through letters of decision from the head of research and community empowerment institutions." (Health Promoting University Official)

"Team for health promoting is under the control of the Center for Gender and Health. As other centers, we usually discuss our activity plan every year, including physical activity division." (Physical Activity Officer)

Policies in the provision of facilities

Participants explained that the majority of faculty had provided facilities with adequate equipment to support students in physical activity and sports. It also consists of indoor and outdoor sports facilities that can be made available free to students on campus. The views from some of the study's participants are quoted below:

"There are lots of sports facilities that can be accessed by all students, and the first one is the fitness center or performance laboratory. Other facilities are such as a swimming pool, tennis, and basketball court." (Student from Faculty of Sports Sciences)

"The hall at our faculty on the 7th floor is used as a semi-permanent court for badminton and for table tennis." (Student from the Faculty of Social Sciences)

"The joint lecture building in our faculty is usually utilized for sports events. There is also exercise equipment such as nets, balls for basketballs and volleyballs, and ball pumps." (Student from the Faculty of Education)

"There is a tennis table facility in the literature building. In addition, there is also an area for walking barefoot on stones in front of the D15 building" (Student from the Faculty of Letters)

"As far as I know, there is a hall that can be used for seminars and also sports on the fourth floor of building B11." (Student from the Faculty of Engineering)

Policies for implementing physical activity and sports

Participants mentioned various activities that were applied by the university to promote physical activity and sports for all communities of campus, including students, such as restrictions on elevator access to increase stair use, car-free day events, students sport competitions, and aerobic exercise. These activities were designed to encourage students to combat sedentary behavior as a risk of non-communicable disease. Reflections are seen in the following testimonies:

"The use of elevators for ascent and descent from/to the ground floor in the faculty of social sciences was limited. All students are required to climb the stairs if going to the second floor because the elevator can only

be accessed from the third floor to the seventh floor.” (Student from the Faculty of Social Sciences)

“University stipulates once a week a car-free day on campus. This policy applies every Friday so all students entail walking and cycling to their destinations.” (Health Promoting University Official)

“Sports activities for new students are held every year through sports and art events. Students from different faculties competed in various sports in the competition.” (Student from the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences)

“Our faculty organizes student sports competitions every year such as badminton, volleyball, basketball, and futsal to compete for the Dean’s Cup.” (Student from Faculty of Psychology)

“I think physical activity in my faculty is aerobic exercise. I have seen it every Friday, which is attended by academic staff, students, and lecturers.” (Student from the Faculty of Economics and Business)

DISCUSSION

According to the result of the study, creating a team and developing a plan of action for physical activity and sports shows the strong commitment from the university to realizing a health promoting university. Commitment from university leaders has a strategic role as a central driver of whole systems in higher education (Dooris *et al*, 2021). Previous study which have evaluated the implementation of non-communicable disease-controlling programs in Indonesian universities have found university leaders’ commitment is the main factor that can encourage all university communities to participate actively in the program (Siswati *et al*, 2022).

This study presents that the university has prepared sufficient facilities to support the university students in applying physical activities and sports. The provision of convenient and accessible facilities for exercise was one

of the significant environmental resources that may encourage university students to engage in physical activity and sports (Ndupu *et al*, 2023). The preferred place for university students to exercise is the free sporting facilities on campus (Cho and Price, 2018). The exercise facilities are fully equipped, and the sports centers are sufficient as the embodiment of measuring the physical exercise culture in colleges and universities (Pan *et al*, 2022).

Additionally, this study also revealed that the university has sought to provide more activity for all communities, including students doing physical activity and sports. Other studies have shown that stair climbing intervention could be suggested to address low physical activity among university students (Muttaqien *et al*, 2023). By reducing and eliminating motor vehicles through car-free day events, people can come together as a community to improve their physical exercise (Glazener *et al*, 2022). Participating in sports competition activities can produce higher levels of enjoyment that positively affects students' sports motivation (Doyle *et al*, 2019). Aerobics helps guide students to actively participate in physical exercise, stimulate their interest in exercise, cultivate their sports hobbies, and cultivate their awareness of lifelong sports (Zhang, 2022).

This study gives essential findings to show the intention and effort of the university to promote health, but it still has several limitations. Firstly, this study included a small sample size, which limits generalizability. Future studies should consider involving more respondents through large-scale surveys to get comprehensive results. Secondly, researchers do not evaluate the implementation of universities' physical activity and sports policies to identify challenges or obstacles, and further research is needed.

In conclusion, this study may indicate exploratory insights about the policies related to physical activity and sports in universities to tackle risk factors of non-communicable diseases among students. This study expressed three policies: administrative support and leadership commitment, the provision of facilities, and the implementation of physical

activity and sports. This university's policies are strongly associated with better physical activity and sports for students.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST DISCLOSURE

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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