ASSESSMENT OF HEALTH-RELATED FITNESS STATUS OF 6-9 YEAR OLD PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS IN MUKONO AND WAKISO DISTRICTS, CENTRAL UGANDA

BY
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DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other University.

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This work is dedicated to my children Michael Martin Kalemba, Marion May Nanditta and Mildred Jemimah Nanteza and my beloved father Hannington Kagimu.

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ABSTRACT

Despite a world-wide increase in health-related diseases and conditions among children, little information is known about the children's health-related fitness status in Uganda. Assessment of the fitness status of pupils aged between 6 and 9 years in Mukono and Wakiso districts in central Uganda was conducted using physical fitness testing. The study also determined their level of engagement in physical activities. A cross-sectional survey research design was used to assess four health-related fitness components. These were cardiovascular endurance using a 9-minute run test, body composition using BMI method, low back flexibility using the sit and reach test and abdominal muscular strength/ endurance using the sit up test. The target population comprised of 25,500 school children drawn from public and private schools. Four thousand pupils formed the sample for the study. The actual sample consisted of 1929 pupils with 922 day scholars and 1,007 in boarding schools. Data was analysed using frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviation and one way analysis of variance at 0.05 level of significance. The AAHPERD (1980) percentiles and the WHO (2007) CDC-BMI for sex- age-growth charts percentiles to determine the fitness status of the pupils. The results showed that out of the 922 day scholars 250 (27.1%) had weak cardiovascular endurance, 27 (2.9%) were underweight, while 58 (6.3%) were overweight, 29 (3.1%) were obese; 707 (76.7%) had poor flexibility and 798 (86.5%) had weak abdominal muscles. On the other hand, out of the 1007 pupils in boarding schools 307 (30.5%) had weak cardiovascular endurance, 50 (5%) were underweight, while 79 (7.8%) were overweight, 50 (5%) were obese, 824 (81.8%) had poor flexibility and 814 (80.9%) had weak abdominal muscles. The results revealed significant differences in cardiovascular endurance, body composition and abdominal muscular strength/endurance between day and boarding pupils ($p>0.05$) with day scholars having higher mean distance run scores, lower mean BMI scores and lower mean sit up scores. There were no significant differences in the mean sit and reach scores between day and boarding pupils. However, majority of pupils achieved the recommended standard for the cardiovascular endurance and normal body composition. There were also significant gender differences in all the health-related fitness components. The boys had higher mean distance run scores, lower mean BMI scores, lower mean sit and reach scores and higher mean sit up scores. This implies that more boys had better cardiovascular endurance, normal weight and better muscular strength/endurance than girls. On the other hand, more girls were flexible than boys. The study revealed that the pupils demonstrated poor health-related fitness status especially in abdominal muscular endurance and low back flexibility. The study also revealed that most pupils met the recommended 60 minutes of daily physical activity although the activities they engaged in were not appropriate enough to develop most of the health-related fitness components. It is recommended that more physical activities that develop the health-related fitness should be integrated in the school curriculum and children need to engage in more active behaviours.