



Facilitators and Barriers of Engaging in Physical Exercises by Tertiary Students at one Campus of the University of Eswatini

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Abstract:

Background: Lack of physical exercise has significant influence on the rise of cases of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) among university students globally. University students' engagement in physical exercises tend to decline when compared to previous school years. The decline is also observed in Eswatini's university students. This study, therefore, described the facilitators and barriers of engaging in physical exercises by tertiary students of one Campus of the University of Eswatini.

Methods: A descriptive qualitative research design was employed to describe the facilitators and barriers of physical exercise of ten purposively sampled students. Data was collected through audio-recorded face-to-face interviews utilising a pretested researcher developed interview guide. Data were analysed using thematic analysis of Colaizzi's descriptive method of data analysis.

Result: Four themes emerged from the study findings; 1) Students understanding of physical exercise, 2) Facilitators of physical exercise, 3) Barriers of physical exercise, 4) Strategies to improve physical exercise engagement.

Conclusion: Students' physical exercise participation is characterised by facilitators and barriers. Therefore, students need practical support from the university in terms of provision of enough variety of training facilities and equipment within the campus, and time allocated for physical activities within the course of their learning.

Keywords: Barrier, Eswatini, Facilitator, Physical Exercise, University Student

1. INTRODUCTION

Physical exercise is defined as any bodily movement produced by the musculoskeletal system that require energy expenditure (World Health Organisation, 2024). Physical exercise improves state of wellbeing and overall state of health while the opposite is true with physical inactivity. Despite the health benefits associated with physical health, Alkhateeb et al. (2019) observed a significant decrease in the performance of physical exercises by students during the course of their university life when compared to previous school years. Students tend to be less active or take part in any physical exercises once at tertiary; and such had been observed in Eswatini's tertiary students. Such disruption has detrimental effects to their wellbeing and health; such as obesity and

overweight (Dube et al., 2019).

The physical inactivity among adults, including students, account about one third of the 1.8 billion of adult population, and it is projected to rise to 35% by 2030 if there no actions that are taken (World Health Organisation, 2024). Physical inactivity was ranked among the top 10 risk factors for disease burden in Sub-Saharan Africa whereby the prevalence was 20% and projected to increase in the next decades (Onagbiye & Bester, 2022). In Eswatini, only 38% of students exercised daily, with 24% engaging in professional sports. In addition, 30% of students engaged in smoking behaviours, 75% consume fast foods and takeaway foods (Tafireyi & Grace, 2022). The poor engagement to physical exercises, despite the consumption of fast foods by Eswatini's tertiary students, suggests a need to explore the reasons to/not to engage in physical exercises by students.

Sedentary lifestyle comes with dire implications related to health, and financial costs. With the current trajectory, the cost of physical inactivity on the public healthcare systems between the year 2020 and 2030 is estimated to be about US\$ 300 billion which is about US\$ 27 billion annually (Onagbiye & Bester, 2022), and the global prevalence of obesity and overweight was 40.4% in 2022 (Tafireyi & Grace 2022). However, such financial costs and health implications can be reversed through establishing

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and/or enforcing physical exercises/activities among adults especially university students. To achieve maximum participation of students to physical exercises, their insights regarding the facilitators and barriers, and suggestions on how to improve such an activity become vital. This is because students' insights and suggestions will ensure the "nothing about us without us" adage.

The extent of engagement of university students in physical exercises depends on various factors. Some factors promote students' engagement to physical exercise whereas some impede them (Garcia et al., 2022). Students engage in physical exercises in order to reap the benefits that come with it, such as perceived enhancement of physical appearance as they become fit and maintain shape, source of enjoyment that assist with stress reduction and academic pressure management (Alkhaldeh et al., 2024; Brown et al., 2024; Makuzo et al., 2025; Radebe et al., 2025; Vieira et al., 2023). Other students participate in physical activities due to self-discipline embedded on the intrinsic motivation to finish whatever they have started, external reinforcement in a form of incentive, positive feedback and/or perceived encouragement from peers and family, as well as affordable costs of gym membership and availability of training facilities and equipments (Brown et al., 2024; Ndupu et al., 2023; Recker et al., 2020).

Emphasizing the importance of external reinforcement, Johannes et al. (2024) alluded to social support from family and friends, motivations from social media and gaining recognition from others as facilitators of physical exercise. Radebe et al. (2025) also noted that students are motivated to engage in physical activity to escape the lurking danger of NCDs and the desire to meet new people, form alliances and acquaintances. Regarding the prevention of NCDs, Makuzo et al. (2025) posited that students view physical activity as a vital ingredient that improve the overall body functioning and mental alertness. Makuzo et al. (2025)'s findings corroborated Chaabna et al. (2022)'s observations that students are merely motivated by the importance of physical exercise which include improving body function and resisting NCDs. This highlights the importance of knowing the benefits of physical exercise by students. Therefore, Shava et al. (2024) and Othman et al. (2022) noted that students' engagement in physical activities is influence and motivated by their more knowledge on the benefits such as life enhancement through a toned body shape and weight, and positive psychological impacts.

Despite the aforementioned health related benefits of physical exercises, some university students do not engage in them. There is a wider array of reasons that make students not to engage in physical exercises. In 2022, Chaabna et al. noted that students lack time to engage in physical exercises. The lack of time was in double folds; poor time management from students side (Brown et al., 2024), and long fitness classes that are scheduled at inconvenient times (Alkhaldeh et al., 2024; Blake et al., 2017). However, some students viewed physical exercise as an activity that is time-competing with their academic commitments (Johannes et al., 2024; Shava et al., 2024). As such, students chose their academic work over physical exercises. However, students highlighted that academic or study commitment vary according to the levels of study with higher level being the most engaging and time consuming due to high workload (Ndupu et al., 2023; Radebe et al., 2025). Not only academic commitment consume time, but also the commuting from campus or residences to training facilities, and waiting in long cues in their cafeteria (Othman et al., 2022).

Although the time factor is widely cited as a barrier to physical exercises, other students mentioned different barriers. Ndupu et al. (2023) observed that students were shy to engage in physical exercises. Those students lacked confidence in their abilities thus viewing physical exercise as an activity for the 'chosen ones.' Such students ended having no motivation to try physical exercises (Odunaiya et al., 2021). However, other students had the motivation and confidence to participate in sporting activities during their university lives, but their energies were halted by external factors. There was lack of sufficient, functional facilities and equipment (Othman et al., 2022), lack of personalised physical exercise to cater for individual needs (Brown et al., 2024), and financial limitation in paying for the gym (Johannes et al., 2024). Despite the cited challenges by students, it still remains that nothing can substitute physical exercise.

To address the challenges, students had suggested on interventions that may improve their participation. Students opined that physical activity courses must be incorporated into curriculum so as to raise awareness of physical exercise and its associated benefits (Dube et al., 2022; Johannes et al., 2024; Makuzo et al., 2025; Verma, Singh & Patwardhan, 2022). There must be deliberate scheduled times for recreational activities accompanied by affordable, accessible and sufficient training infrastructure and personnel (Ndupu et al., 2023; Tafireyi & Grace,



2022). Some students lamented for the reduction of academic workload so that time will avail for sporting activities (Odunaiya et al., 2021). To improve students' participation to physical exercises, therefore, it entails the gathering of their insights regarding contextual facilitators, barriers and suggestions. As such, this study described the facilitators and barriers of engaging in physical exercises by tertiary students of one Campus of the University of Eswatini following an observed decline in physical exercises.

2. MATERIAL AND METHOD

2.1 Study Design

A descriptive qualitative design was used in the current study. Because there is dearth of information on the facilitators and barriers of students' participation to physical exercises, the descriptive approach assisted in the depiction of facilitators and barriers in the selected context.

2.2 Study Setting

The study was conducted among students of the University of Eswatini between July and October 2025. The University has three campuses namely Mbabane, Kwaluseni and Luyengo. The exact site of the study was Mbabane Campus, which is the Faculty of Health Sciences. The campus trains students in health related programmes; Nursing and Environmental Health Science from undergraduate to postgraduate studies. The faculty and campus had ongoing sporting activities like volleyball, aerobics, soccer and netball, and some students were seen engaging in those activities.

2.3 Sampling and Sample Size

Ten undergraduate students (7males, and 3 females) were purposively sampled for the study. Generally, qualitative research require small size of homogenous participants so that an in-depth understanding of the subject can be achieved (Creswell, 2014; Kaae & Traulsen, 2020). The purposive sampling technique ensured that information-rich students were engaged so as to glean the insights into the facilitators and barriers of physical exercises. All included students were: (1) full-time registered undergraduate students at the faculty, (2) study either Nursing or Environmental Health Science programme, (3) above age 18 years at the commencement of the study, and (4) willing to participate in the study.

2.4 Study Instrument

The study used an interview guide that was developed by the researchers and pretested. It

consisted of two sections; **Section A** comprising participants' socio-demographics and **Section B** having a grand tour question. The grand tour question was open-ended and was used to open the interview so that each participant would be able to share his or her insights in a relaxed way. The grand tour question was followed by probes generated from the participant's initial response and the probes were in line with the main research question.

2.4 Data Collection

The interviews were face-to-face and were conducted in a private space in one of the designated room in the campus. Interviews lasted between 20-35 minutes and they were all recorded with the consent from the participants. All the interviews were conducted in SiSwati and field notes were captured and included during the analysis of the data. Every interview commenced with the grand tour question that made participants to feel at ease while sharing their insights. Probes were then used to gain indepth of the participants' responses. At time intervals during the interview, summary of the participant's insights were shared to verify if such was understood correctly. Following three consecutive interviews yielding no new insights, data collection was discontinued.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

The study was approved by Eswatini Health and Human Research Review Board (FWA00026661/IRB00011253/SHR073/2025) and the University of Eswatini Management. Through out the study, the researchers protected participants' human rights, including confidentiality, and the right to withdraw from the study without any consequence. Before each interview, participant consented to be interviewed and recorded.

2.6 Data Analysis

The biographic data of participants were analysed using simple descriptive statistics and expressed in percentages. Insights or responses from the main research question were analysed following Colaizzi's thematic analysis approach (Valle & King, 1978). The researchers read each transcript line by line, multiple times, to get a sense of what it contained. Thereafter, the two researchers independently assigned codes to statements that were of direct relevance to the research questions. Any different opinions on assigned codes that arose were discussed, and a consensus was reached among the researchers. Thereafter, insights and meanings that were related to the "facilitators and barriers" to physical exercises were identified. Related meanings were clustered to form themes through

uncovering threads related to the main research question and probes.

2.7 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was ensured throughout using Lincoln and Guba (1985), whereby participants` vernacular language was used in the interviews. Futhermore, trustworthiness was ensured through having two researchers validating data coding, validating participants` responses with them at intervals during the interviews, and cross-checking the transcripts against the audio recordings.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Result

3.1.1 Sociodemographic Charactristics of Participants

The study comprised of ten (10) participants; seven males and three females. Their ages ranged from 17 to 31 years. The below *table 1* shows the participants` sociodemographic characteristics.

Table 1. Participants` Sociodemographic Characteristics

Variable	Frequency(%)	
Gender	Males	7 (70%)
	Females	3 (30%)
Nationality	LiSwati	10 (100%)
	Other	0 (0%)
Age range in years	17-20	1 (10%)
	21-24	6 (60%)
	25-28	2 (20%)
	29-31	1 (10%)
Level of study	Level 1	1 (10%)
	Level 2	3 (30%)
	Level 3	1 (10%)
	Level 4	5 (50%)
Programme	Nursing	5 (50%)
	Enviromental Health	5 (50%)
Residence	On-Campus	9 (90%)
	Off-Campus	1 (10%)
Sport	Aerobics	1 (10%)
	Soccer	5 (50%)
	Kyokushin	1 (10%)
	Valleyball	1 (10%)
	None	2 (20%)

3.1.2 Main Findings

Four (4) themes emerged from the participants insights. Although the themes are presented independantly, the overarching theme hinges on the facilitators and barriers of physical exercise by students. The below *table 2* is showing the themes and subthemes.

Table 2. Themes and Subthemes

Theme 1. Students` understanding of physical exercise

Subthemes:

- Self-percieved definition of physical exercise
- Modes of physical exercise

Theme 2. Facilitators of physical exercise

Subthemes:

- Health benefits of physical exercise
- Source of enjoyment and socialising
- Talent enhancement

Theme 3. Barriers to physical exercise

Subthemes:

- Time constraints
- Limited variety of training facilities, sporting activities and equipment
- Lack of intrinsic motivation
- Intermitent student strikes

Theme 4. Strategies to improve physical exercise engagement

Subthemes:

- Designated campus sport day
- Increase in variety and number of sporting codes
- Increase in variety or number of facilities and equipment

Theme 1: Students` Understanding of Physical Exercise

The theme describes the various views that students shared regarding their understanding of physical exercise. The concept of physical exercise was perceived differently by students. While some adopt an instrumental view of physical exercise that





requires specialized equipment or instruments, others linked it to any modality that is available as long as it yields the envisaged health related benefits. However, all students appreciated that physical exercise requires a sacrifice in their time.

Subtheme 1: Self-perceived Definition of Physical Exercise

Students defined physical exercise differently. Some define physical exercise as keeping the body active, for others it's a strenuous activity resulting in muscle strengthening using instruments, whereas for others any movement is an exercise. Participant MPMb defined physical exercise as *"Moving the body in a way that you end up sweating and exerting yourself to the point of feeling exhausted and tired using certain instruments. This exertion should be such that, perhaps after showering, you'll notice a physical difference before you even start exercising."* Participant MPMh shared his definition as *"when you talk about physical exercise, we are talking about strenuous activity that will actually make you sweat, and also the purpose will be to strengthen the muscles of the body, which to me may be jogging, engaging in sporting activity such as football."*

Subtheme 2: Modes of Physical Exercise

In as much as the goal may be one, the way to arrive to it is not always the same so goes for physical exercise. Students highlighted different modalities, like jogging, that one may use to engage in physical exercise and such was used even prior to enrolling at the university. Participant MPMd shared *"... Any way you can use to exercise the body, which includes, roadworks, or those who play soccer, those who play Volleyball... There are many ways of exercising the body."* In support, participant MPMg emphasized *"Or else if there is no time but I feel that I need the gym today, my spirit is low I just do a simple physical exercise which is jogging."*

Theme 2: Facilitators of Physical Exercise

There are different reasons/facilitators that makes students to engage in physical exercise. The facilitators then become the driving forces behind the consistency of students in physical exercises.

Subtheme 1: Perceived Benefits of Physical Exercise

As students engage in physical exercises, they reap certain fruits physically, emotionally and mentally. The benefits keep the students motivated to engage in physical exercises. Physically, their bodies remained toned as they lose weight and get protected

from some diseases. The physical benefits are of a result that some students desire to stay fit as such is a requirement in their sporting activity like soccer. Physical exercise also improve their sleep pattern. Participant MPMc stated that *"Okay, first, it keeps the body active, so I don't become fat. I don't like being fat, and I become healthy...Another thing I think is that when you go to practice, you come back tired and then get proper sleep; you are able to rest your body and sleep soundly."* Participant MPMi also stated that *"It is good because, firstly, I can say it helps us who have bodies, you know, to lose weight and have six-packs so that girls can see us well when we walk around. Another thing, as you mentioned, it can reduce chances of non-communicable diseases, which means it keeps us healthy."*

Physical exercises also have emotional benefits. Students not only felt good after exercise, but they were better able to regulate their emotions. Participant MPMa mentioned that *"You see, when I'm angry, I go to aerobics. Like I said in aerobics we do punches; when I do those punches, I imagine I am facing the enemy. Then when I am at the Matrix (gym), maybe something has hurt me, I tend to convert that pain, the pain of the heart, to... I don't know how to explain it to you, but I convert the pain I feel to the pain of the muscles. I prefer the pain of muscles. I am able to convert it, how I don't know, but I am able to."* Participant MPMb stated that *"I believe so, yes, I don't know about others, but for me, it boosts my mood."*

Mentally, students benefited especially when they were stressed. Basically, physical exercise was sometimes viewed as a coping strategy from academic workload and other stresses of life. Participant MPMa stated that *"Yes, the improvement is great. In the beginning, when I had stress, I felt like I would go crazy, but now I can go to aerobics. Even if something has angered me or is stressing me, or even if I'm just feeling down, I feel like I am relieving stress. The difference is big; they help me."* Participant MPMb stated that *"Yes, I was drawn by the music, but when I started aerobics, I was going through a lot, so I thought let me go try to refresh with it, and then I used it as a coping mechanism for stresses."*

Additionally, some participants appreciated the contribution of physical exercise in the growth of their self-esteem and confidence.

Participant MPMf mentioned that *"And also, soccer is the one available, and it works for us, we are able*

to train, be in shape, and build our confidence and self-esteem.”

Subtheme 2: Source of Enjoyment and Socialising

Physical exercises availed an opportunity of enjoyment and socialising for some students. They tended to enjoy both their exercises and companies especially in aerobics and soccer. This also became a social platform where friendships were created. Participant MPMa stated that *“I think it is the music. Is so enjoyable. Yes, I was drawn by the music, but when I started aerobics, I was going through a lot, so I thought let me go try to refresh with it.”* Participant MPMf also alluded that *“I feel that soccer works, first of all, because socializing in soccer is a lot.... so when you go to the gym, there is also the joy that, Oh, I'm going to see my guys, and, I'm going to socialize, it's fun and the jokes are endless.”*

Subtheme 3: Enhancement of Talent

Driven by the love of the sport, some students engaged in physical exercises just as a way of developing and maintaining competency in the sport; not only in performing but also showcasing their talent. Participant MPMb stated that *“Fewer people are there, maybe talent-wise they have the skills I have, but with volleyball, ...So, I decided that I would stick just to soccer, just as a hobby, so I can see if I can improve and compete better with others, and then I can give others an opportunity in volleyball.”*

Theme 3: Barriers to Physical Exercise

This theme highlights a number of reasons that made students not to engage and/or be consistent in physical exercises.

Subtheme 1: Time Constraints

For most students, time is a major factor to engaging in physical exercise; as it requires dedication and effort. When priorities were weighed, the students mentioned that their academia becomes a priority in the available time. As such, physical exercises were perceived as a “waste of time” when compared to the main reason of enrolling to the university. Participant MPMc stated that *“Yes, it happens, a major one is academic stress or academic pressure because we need to study and we cannot always play soccer, our books need our attention, we find ourselves dedicating a lot of time towards our academic work and neglect soccer. It comes secondary.”* Participant MPMh also added that *“It has decreased a lot because, oh, in Year 1 it was easy, it was easy, we had time. In Year 2, maybe it started... I won't say the courses increased, they decreased, but the work*

required by those courses needs you to spend more time studying. Then, in Year 3, there is just no time.”

Subtheme 2: Limited Variety of Training Facilities, Sporting Activities and Equipment

Students mentioned that they have a problem with the available facilities and equipment, with some stating that the variety of sports provided do not match their needs or rather what they desire. In turn, such prevented them from participating to physical exercises. Participant MPMc mentioned that *“I can give an example that here at school we lack a training facility. That is a major problem because we don't have a place to practice, so we have to go somewhere else...as I mentioned, you have to go all the way to Msunduza, which is 30 minutes away.”* Participant MPMj said *“Okay, at school, we don't have a volleyball court, we don't have a volleyball net, we don't have volleyball balls. They don't attend to it properly like sports such as soccer and netball. Besides that, I wouldn't even count it as one (a barrier), I feel like at school, they don't prioritize sports; it's like they feel it wastes time for books, yet it's something where we should be de-stressing and refreshing when the books are choking us in class.”* Participant MPMb shared *“Then when I arrived there, I realized that there were not many options, and the only sports available were volleyball and football, so I had to choose between the two. I decided to play soccer because I was needed there more than I was in volleyball.”*

Subtheme 3: Lack of Intrinsic Motivation

Some students lacked intrinsic motivation for physical exercise. They were not appreciating the importance and benefits of physical exercises. Participant MPMd explained that *“As I grew older, I lost interest since this is just an activity where you chase air, you are always running. Not that athletics is a bad thing but I lost interest in it, I loved it when I was young. That is the reason why I said I have matured, because I used to love it was not a problem, I used to win.”* Participant MPMi said *“I had not yet thought about it since I spend most time on social media, also the fact that I do not fancy physical exercise I do not think about it either, maybe now I would just consider it with time.”*

Subtheme 4: Intermitent Students' Strikes

The students explained that in as much as some of the barriers exist some of them were worsened by students' strikes which tend to have negative consequences on issues of time. They explained that strikes led to a lot of academic pressures that immensely affected time for physical exercises. Participant MPMb said that *“At most when we open*



you find that everything is flowing well, even if the test is set, but then maybe if there are strikes here and then when we come back, I will not even lie we do not even go to the ground to exercise. When we come back, we would be writing tests, the whole week at most, you will find that we do not get time to go to the ground. So, the pressure becomes a lot when classes were suspended and when we come back, we have to push the content and we have about 3 to 4 weeks left to write the exam and the work becomes a lot.”

Theme 4: Strategies to Improve Engagement in Physical Exercise

The students expressed their perceived strategies for improvement of physical exercise engagement among the students community. Each suggestion presented the perceived support needs of the students.

Subtheme 1: Designated Campus Sport Day

Students expressed their desire for a campus sport day in which all students can engage in physical exercises of their choice, hence, improving their engagement. Participant MPMc stated that *“Okay, that is an administrative issue. It would require, like in high schools, or just in schools, they have Wednesdays, I think, where today is a sports day. So, they stop learning around 1300hr, then after lunch, they go and exercise. Like, it's compulsory for every student to practice, and then they go home.”* Participant MPMi also added that *“Another thing I can add is that the school can help us by having a sport day where we will have a variety of games so that students can choose where they feel comfortable.”*

Subtheme 2: Increase in Variety and Number of Sporting Codes

Some students expressed a concern on the diversity of sporting codes, which limits some students from engaging in physical exercise yet some were interested. Therefore, they suggested an increase in the number and variety of sporting codes so as to diversify the choice for students. Participant MPMb said *“I feel like we need to know what the people are interested in doing exactly, because we are just different, some love soccer, some love aerobics, some do not love anything...so, you see that a whole lot of other sports can make people join, some like rugby but they can-not play it so I think this is one thing that can make us all engaged.”* Participant MPMd added that *“The problem is that our university is in a bad setting, but if an attempt could be made to add more sports that are interesting, those we see in elite*

places, since we are used to what we see here and hence we have no motivation. Maybe if they could try maybe swimming, some would be happy to join, do you understand? The problem is here is the lack of diversity that could spark interest in us.”

Subtheme 3: Increase in the Number/Variety of Facilities and Equipment

Without the right facilities and equipment, engaging in physical exercises for most students was a challenge. Consequently, students suggested addition of facilities and equipment for the various sporting codes. Such entails even the maintenance of the current available facilities. Participant MPMe expressed that *“Among students, okay, the availability of facilities at the school would be a change, it would be a game-changer in my view, those facilities would be a game-changer, those lifts, those weights, I do not know what, and I am so confident that for the guys, the boys, it would bring a big change.”* Participant MPMf mentioned that *“The school could buy land, there are many grounds in Mbabane. In that way, we will also be able to train, be competitive, and win trophies and cups. In that way, the money will also come back to the university. Another thing is to add more sports”.* Participant MPMj added that *“The school should at least try a way to have a sports emporium for students, for example. If they can mind those things and provide us with equipments it would be better than finding ourselves with no equipment.”*

3.2 Discussion

Students` Understanding of Physical Exercise

The current study revealed that the understanding of physical exercise differs among the students. Despite the difference, students understood that physical exercise entails bodily movement of the muskuloskeletal using various means like jogging, running and playing soccer. Notably, every type of physical exercise demanded energy expenditure, and time comitment from the students. The overall understanding of physical exercise is mirrored in [World Health Organisation \(2024\)](#)`s definition whereby physical exercise comprises any muskuloskeletal movement that exhaust energy. This finding, therefore, highlights the need to broadened the understanding of physical exercise among the student community; as physical exercise is not confined to sporting activities but to all activities that exhaust energy.

Facilitators of Physical Exercise

For one to continuously engage in physical exercises, he or she needs some certain level of motivation.

The current study showed that the health benefits that come with physical exercise kept most students pushing. Consequently, the students benefitted physically, emotionally and mentally. Previous studies (Alkhaldeh et al., 2024; Radebe et al., 2025; Shava et al., 2024; Vieira et al., 2023) conducted in Northern Jordan, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Brazil, respectively, highlighted the desire from students to attain the benefits that comes with physical exercise such as physical fitness that lessen chances of NCD, relieve of stress, and the overall ‘feel good’ that comes after exercise.

Findings of the current study also revealed that physical exercises created an enjoyable platform whereby opportunities of socialising and networking availed. Such an experience created an intrinsic motivation among students towards physical exercise. Similar to previous studies, students had cited the sense of enjoyment that comes with engaging to physical exercises (Chaabna et al., 2022; Brown et al., 2024), and the opportunity it creates for networking and socialising with their peers (Odunaiya et al., 2021; Othman et al., 2022) as motivators that sustained the physical exercise engagement. Furthermore, students constantly engage in physical exercise in order to enhance their talent and stay competent; they do so to keep up with the game. Till and Baker (2020) corroborated that the modern-day landscape of sport is arguably more competitive than ever and it requires one to stay on top of his/her game through training and mentorship. The findings on facilitators of physical exercise underscore the areas that key players, like the University of Eswatini management, needs to capitalise on so as to reinforce students’ engagement in physical exercise.

Barriers to Physical Exercise

Due to academic pressure, that increases with level of study, students tended to have limited time for physical exercise which was compounded by no time allocated for physical activities by the university. The limited time that they were having was utilized in their academic work so that they do not end up failing; jeopardising the major reason for enrolling in the institution. These findings were corroborated by previous studies whereby students cited time constraints as a major barrier for students to engage in physical exercises. Students had to impossibly balance academic work and physical exercises (Ndupu et al., 2023; Chaabna et al., 2022; Radebe et al., 2025; Brown et al., 2024; Alkhaldeh et al., 2024). Therefore, physical exercises were perceived to be time consuming by some students; which they

felt the time could be better invested in their academic work, (Alkhaldeh et al., 2024; Blake et al., 2017; Shava et al., 2024). Contrary, Odunaiya et al. (2021) noted that physical exercise did not take much time from students’ academic work, hence, that made them to engage even more consistently. These current findings imply that there is a need for a balance in time allocation for physical exercise and academic work in tertiary institutions during the course of students learning.

Limited variety of training facilities and equipment in the campus acted as barrier for physical exercise participation among students. There were no soccer fields, and tennis courts, and equipment to use while training. To compensate, students had to leave campus and train at outside facilities that were far and costly. These findings were supported by studies in which students also reported that the lack of physical exercise infrastructure was a major barrier to their engagement. The students cited cases of training facilities that are outside of their campuses, situated in far places (Odunaiya et al., 2025; Tafireyi & Grace, 2022; Shava et al., 2024), and lack of equipment to perform physical exercises which eventually make students to lose interest in physical exercises (Alkhaldeh et al., 2024). In some instances, the equipment were either too old and defective or they were not what the students anticipated they needed (Othman et al., 2022). However, in some settings where infrastructure and equipments for physical exercises were present, students complained that those facilities were expensive for them (Brown et al., 2024). This finding underscores a need for provision of easily accessible, affordable and well equipped training facilities within the campus.

Strategies to Improve Physical Exercise Engagement

The overarching opinion lied in addressing the barriers to physical exercise. Therefore, students suggested that a provision must be made for them in which they would have time allocated just for physical exercises on specific days; balancing their academic load and physical exercise. In the same vein, Odunaiya et al., (2021) and Ndupu et al. (2023) posited that the provision of time for physical exercise or recreational activities would help students to be able to engage in physical exercise while not jeopardising their academic endeavours. However, Brown et al., (2024) argued that students need to be capacitated on time management skills so that they are better positioned to allocate time for physical exercise in their busy schedules. In that regard, the provision of time for physical exercises



must be complemented by students' capacitation on time management skills.

Students lamented for an increase in the number and variety of training facilities and equipment for physical exercises in the campus. The availability of a variety of facilities meant that students would be able to choose what they preferred more, hence, more students would engage in physical exercises. This suggestion emphasized on findings of local studies by Dube et al. (2019), and Tafireyi and Grace (2022) whereby suggestions for accessible and affordable training facilities that have equipment must be availed within the campus. Therefore, students need support by making facilities, equipments and diverse sports activities available within campus.

3.2.1 Implications

1. The highlighted facilitators of physical exercise undercore the areas that key players, like the University of Eswatini management, needs to capitalise on so as to reinforce students' engagement in physical exercises.
2. The discussed barriers to physical exercise highlight and create an opportunity for the University Management to (a) Balance time allocation for physical exercise and academic work during the course of students' learning, and (b) provide easily accessible and affordable well equipped training facilities in the campus. Such was emphasized by the students' suggestions on improving students' participation in physical exercises.

3.2.2 Research Contribution

There is dearth of local and contextual empirical evidence on the facilitators and barriers of students' participation to physical exercises. Therefore, the current study had unearth the contextual facilitators and barriers and further suggested possible solutions on improving students participation in physical exercises. The findings further form a base for further studies on physical exercise such as the students' pattern in physical exercises over the years of their teartiry training and its correlates.

3.2.3 Limitation

The findings must be intepreted in light of limitations. The current findings are not generalizable to the entire population of students in other campuses of the University of Eswatini due to their nature of subjectivity, and small sample size. The study was male dominated (n=7) thus most insights were likely to be from males than females..

4. CONCLUSION

The study findings revealed that students' engagement to physical exercises entailed some facilitators such as percieved health benefits and opportunities to socialise with peers. However, their participation was impeded by limited sporting facilities, variety and equipment. Therefore, students need practical support from the university in terms of provision of enough variety of training facilities and equipment within the campus, and time allocated for physical activities within the course of their learning.

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6. AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Author S.C. designed the study, formulated the concept, enrolled the participants, collected data, analysed the data, revised the manuscript and read and approved the final manuscript. Author T.R. supervised the entire research project; assiting author S.C. in conceptualising the project, collecting and analysing the data. T.R. further wrote the manuscript, reviewed the manuscript, read and approved the final manuscript.

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