

Recreational activities and their influence on the healthy lifestyle of teachers at the Technical University of Babahoyo: an integrative health approach



Actividades lúdicas y su influencia en el estilo de vida saludable de los docentes de la universidad técnica de babahoyo: un enfoque saludico integrador

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Abstract

This study addresses a specific educational issue: the healthy lifestyle of teachers in their professional practice. One of the main theoretical contributions of the research is the introduction of the concept of health-ludic (salúdica), understood as the interaction between playfulness and health, which allows for a better understanding of how recreational activities contribute to the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of teachers. The main findings highlight a strong correlation between the analyzed variables: playful activities significantly influence the improvement of teachers' healthy lifestyles. It is concluded that it is necessary to create educational environments conducive to collaborative learning and to propose academic alternatives that promote the implementation of playful activities within teaching practice. In this context, it is recommended to encourage practices such as active

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breaks, framed within a health-ludic approach, to strengthen the comprehensive well-being of teaching staff.

Keywords: playful activities, healthy lifestyle, active breaks, teaching practice, health-ludic.

Resumen

El análisis parte de una problemática educativa concreta: el nivel de vida saludable que presentan los docentes en su ejercicio profesional. Uno de los aportes teóricos relevantes del estudio es la incorporación del concepto saludica, entendido como la interacción entre lo lúdico y la salud, lo cual permite comprender cómo las actividades recreativas contribuyen al bienestar físico, mental y emocional de los docentes. Entre los principales hallazgos se destaca la existencia de una correlación fuerte entre las variables analizadas: las actividades lúdicas influyen significativamente en la mejora del estilo de vida saludable de los docentes. Se concluye que es necesario generar ambientes educativos adecuados para el interaprendizaje y proponer alternativas académicas que promuevan la implementación de actividades lúdicas dentro del ejercicio docente. En este contexto, se recomienda fomentar prácticas como las pausas activas, enmarcadas en una visión saludica, para fortalecer el bienestar integral del personal docente.

Palabras clave: actividades lúdicas, estilo de vida saludable, pausas activas, ejercicio docente, saludica.

Introduction

The quality of higher education depends largely on the performance and overall health of teachers, characterized by high academic demands, constant research, administrative responsibilities, and social engagement processes. Teachers face a set of risk factors that directly impact their physical, emotional, and social well-being. Increased stress, long working hours, lack of physical activity, and a sedentary lifestyle are variables that progressively deteriorate the quality of life of teachers, affecting not only their health but also institutional dynamics and educational quality. Various international reports, such as those issued by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020), have warned of the need to promote healthy lifestyles in work and academic spaces, pointing out that health cannot be understood solely as the absence of disease, but as a comprehensive state of physical, mental, and social well-being. From this

perspective, teacher well-being becomes a strategic factor in strengthening educational processes and consolidating healthy, inclusive, and sustainable universities. In this context, recreational activities emerge as a pedagogical, cultural, and social strategy with high potential to promote the health and well-being of teachers. Recreation has been defined and analyzed by multiple authors over time. Huizinga (1938), in his work *Homo Ludens*, recognizes play as a cultural phenomenon that accompanies the evolution of society, while Vygotsky (1979) highlights its socializing function and its role in collaborative learning in higher education, where it can serve not only as a teaching resource but also as a tool for promoting health and reducing teacher burnout. Recent research confirms these approaches. García (2019) points out that recreational dynamics among university teachers contribute to reducing stress levels and promoting resilience. For his part, Torres (2021) highlights playfulness as a motivating factor in higher education, capable of enhancing academic commitment and strengthening interpersonal relationships within the university community. This evidence reinforces the relevance of analyzing play from a perspective that transcends pedagogy, incorporating its influence on the overall health of teachers. The study also introduces an innovative conceptual proposal: *salúdica*, understood as the integration of health and play in a model that articulates well-being, prevention, and motivation. This concept not only enriches the theoretical debate on pedagogy and health, but also offers a practical tool for the design of institutional programs aimed at strengthening teacher well-being in higher education.

Recreational activities and their impact on university education

Recreational activities have been defined as pedagogical strategies that promote learning through play, creativity, and exploration (Gallardo, 2018). Although traditionally associated with early childhood education, several studies have demonstrated their effectiveness in the university setting, especially in promoting the health and well-being of teachers (González & Ramírez, 2020).

According to Salazar (2022), university teachers often face a heavy workload that affects their physical and emotional health. Implementing recreational activities in their daily routine can be an effective strategy for promoting healthy habits, improving communication between teachers, and strengthening the sense of community within higher education institutions.

Healthy lifestyle and its relationship with recreational activities

A healthy lifestyle is defined as the set of habits and behaviors that promote an individual's physical, mental, and social well-being (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021). Within this framework, recreational activity is recognized as a key factor in health promotion, as it contributes to stress reduction, improved physical condition, and strengthened emotional health (Fernández & Castro, 2020).

Studies conducted by Hernández and Suárez (2018) have shown that the lack of recreational spaces in the university environment can have negative effects on the quality of life of teachers, increasing levels of exhaustion and affecting their professional performance. In this sense, incorporating recreational activities into their daily routine not only benefits their personal health, but also has a positive impact on the teaching-learning process.

Recreational strategies

Recreational strategies in university education are tools that make the teaching and learning process more dynamic, promoting motivation and well-being. These strategies include activities such as group dynamics, simulation games, challenge-based learning, gamification, etc. They foster a more collaborative and participatory work environment, reducing stress and strengthening creativity. Furthermore, their application not only improves educational quality but also contributes to the personal and professional development of teachers, promoting a more balanced and healthy lifestyle.

Playful activities are game-centered strategies, conceived not only as a means of entertainment but also as pedagogical tools that contribute to the integral development of the human being. According to Huizinga (2022), play is a central element of human culture, with a structuring function in learning, socialization, and creativity. From an educational perspective, Ortega and Sastre (2021) highlight that playful activities generate spaces for active participation, intrinsic motivation, and enjoyment, which are essential elements for meaningful learning.

From the perspective of cognitive and social development, Piaget (2013) argues that play allows for the assimilation and accommodation of mental schemas, facilitating learning through direct experience. Vygotsky (2018), for his part, argues that symbolic play is a fundamental tool for the development of language, imagination, and social interaction.

Healthy recreational activities

Healthy recreational activities represent a crucial dimension in promoting people's overall well-being. Herrera argues that: "Recreation is more of an attitude, a predisposition of the self towards everyday life, it is a way of being in life, of relating to it." Therefore, playfulness is an attitude toward life, characterized by enjoyment and happiness in activities such as games, creativity, and humor. It is related to a positive and relaxed predisposition toward everyday life, where imagination and artistic expression are encouraged.

Healthy competencies

These competencies represent fundamental skills and knowledge for self-care and informed decision-making in health matters. PAHO. It maintains that "Essential competencies are the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for the practice of public health, that is, to solve community health problems effectively and efficiently." Therefore, integrating the development of healthy competencies into health education provides individuals with the tools they need to take control of their well-being and make decisions that promote their physical, mental, and emotional health throughout their lives.

Cognitive play activities

The aim is not only to strengthen these cognitive skills, but also to promote critical thinking and learning ability. Cognition includes mental processes related to knowledge and learning, which can be grouped into basic and higher cognitive processes. In playful contexts, these processes are significantly stimulated. Navarro, Pérez, and Lazo (2020) point out that cognitive games activate areas of the brain related to problem solving and decision making. This dimension is related to information processing theory, in which the brain acts as an active system that organizes, encodes, and stores information through stimuli such as those provided in games.

Attitudinal recreational activities

Attitudinal recreational activities are those designed to promote and develop positive attitudes, values, and social-emotional skills in participants. Sánchez states, "Attitudinal recreational activities allow teachers to accompany students in the research processes they undertake to find answers and generate more questions about knowledge."

Therefore, these activities go beyond the acquisition of knowledge and focus on the integral development of the person, including aspects such as self-esteem, empathy, cooperation, respect, tolerance, and conflict resolution.

Cooperation is the attitude that involves working together with other people to achieve common goals, sharing responsibilities, and promoting group synergy (González, 2019). It is based on the theory of cooperative learning.

Empathy is the ability to put oneself in another's place, understanding their emotions and reactions. Playful dynamics promote empathic development through active role-playing and symbolic play (Jiménez, 2020).

Motivation is the internal drive that directs and maintains behavior toward specific goals. Playful activities strengthen intrinsic motivation by providing rewarding experiences (Ruiz & Morales, 2022). Based on self-determination theory, which values autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Social-affective values

Within the context of playful activities, the indicator of social-affective values plays a fundamental role in the comprehensive development of individuals. Mena argues that: "Social-affective and ethical education is considered an essential part of the educational efforts of today's schools, which are adaptable and creative, and can think critically when making decisions." In this sense, recreational activities become a powerful vehicle for the transmission and consolidation of social-affective values, thus promoting personal and social development in a fun and participatory environment.

Healthy lifestyle in health education

Health education plays a fundamental role in the prevention and management of various conditions and diseases. In accordance with Ecuador's Organic Law on Higher Education (LOES), health promotion in the university setting is closely linked to the principles of comprehensiveness and Good Living (Article 6), which recognize the importance of the physical, emotional, and social well-being of all actors in the education system, including teachers.

The Health Approach: Foundation of the Health-Recreational Pedagogical Model

In the context of this research, the term "salúdica" is proposed as an original conceptual construct, resulting from the fusion of

comprehensive health and the recreational dimension. This integration seeks to promote a healthy lifestyle among university teachers through meaningful recreational activities and enjoyable dynamics that foster physical, emotional, and social well-being.

Salúdica not only refers to a set of healthy practices, but also proposes a new way of understanding teacher well-being, based on a pedagogy of play, movement, self-care, and positive interaction. This approach arises in response to the challenges faced by teachers in institutional contexts marked by work stress, chronic fatigue, and the dehumanization of educational work (Muñoz & Caro, 2021).

Materials and methods

The research processes to be applied at the Technical University of Babahoyo will be defined in order to determine the influence of recreational activities on the healthy lifestyle of teachers. In this sense, the research approach is quantitative, the design is non-experimental, cross-sectional, and descriptive and correlational in nature.

This work aims to describe the relationships between the study variables of recreational activities and the healthy lifestyle of UTB teachers. To this end, Hernández-Sampieri et al. (2014) share that: “These designs describe relationships between two or more categories, concepts, or variables at a given moment” (p. 157). Therefore, although it refers to correlation and causality, it focuses on the relationship between the indicated variables.

Results

PREGUNTAS	PORCENTALES MAS ALTOS	DESCRIPCION
1 ¿Cuál es su género?	50.50	Masculino
2 ¿Cuál es su estado civil?	54.80	Casados
3 ¿En qué rango de edad se encuentra?	34.60	41 a 50 años
4 ¿Cuál es la Facultad o Unidad Académica donde trabaja en la Universidad Técnica de Babahoyo?	27.40	Facultad de Ciencias de la Salud
5 ¿En qué rango de años laborables se encuentra como docente de la Universidad Técnica de Babahoyo?	55.80	0 a 8 años de experiencia docente

6) ¿Cuál es su relación de dependencia como docente en la Universidad Técnica de Babahoyo?	38.50	Titular Auxiliar
7) ¿Cuál es la dedicación de su distribución laboral?	85.60	Tiempo Completo
8) ¿Cuáles son sus jornadas de mayor dedicación laboral?	49.50	Matutino / Vespertino
9) ¿Cuáles son sus actividades curriculares vinculadas a la docencia que más realiza?	58.20	Varias actividades académicas
10) ¿Con qué área del conocimiento del campo amplio está relacionado su título de tercer nivel?	39.40	Ciencias de la Educación
11) ¿Con qué área del conocimiento del campo amplio está relacionado su título de cuarto nivel?	51.90	Ciencias de la Educación

The information in questions 1 to 11, which considers the highest percentages of the data provided by the 222 teachers surveyed at the UTB. This reveals the current situation of the teaching staff in terms of their third and fourth level academic training; years of teaching experience, employment status, academic unit where they teach, working hours, as well as the fact that most teachers are between 40 and 50 years old. This data provides us with an overview of the teaching staff at the Technical University of Babahoyo.

The respondents expressed the following: 3.2% said never, 4.1% said almost never, 22.5% said occasionally, 44.6% said frequently, and 25.7% said very frequently. In conclusion, although the majority of respondents show a positive predisposition towards the use of recreational activities for the purpose of developing healthy skills, the presence of those who do not do so and the variability in the responses underscore the importance of addressing this issue in a comprehensive manner. 2.3% never, 3.6% almost never, 28.8% occasionally, while 44.1% frequently and 25.2% indicated very frequently. In conclusion, most respondents show a reasonably high level of activity in basic and instrumental activities of daily living based on their level of physical mobility. However, there is variability, with a significant group performing these activities only occasionally.

5.9% never, 15.3% almost never, 44.6% occasionally, 27.0% frequently, and 7.2% very frequently. In conclusion, the results suggest that musculoskeletal ailments are a common experience for

most respondents, with a range of frequencies varying from occasional to frequent.

Respondents expressed the following: 0.5% never, 1.8% almost never, 17.1% occasionally, 47.7% frequently, and 32.9% very frequently. In conclusion, most respondents have a positive perception of the contribution of recreational activities to the development of motor skills, with a significant percentage indicating a high frequency in this relationship. However, there is also a segment that has more moderate or negative opinions on this subject.

3.6% never, 8.1% almost never, 32.9% occasionally, 37.8% frequently, and 17.6% very frequently. In conclusion, most respondents regularly participate in recreational games to strengthen attitudes toward a healthy lifestyle, although there is variability in frequency. Negative responses are minimal, underscoring the general acceptance of recreational games as effective tools for promoting a healthy lifestyle: 3.2% never, 7.2% almost never, 25.7% occasionally, 40.1% frequently, and 23.9% very frequently. The results reveal that most respondents regularly engage in recreational activities to contribute to strengthening mental health, especially in reducing stress, anxiety, and depression.

Discussion

For this thesis, an online survey was administered to a sample of 222 teachers at the Technical University of Babahoyo (UTB). The statistical procedure was detailed in the previous section. In this section, the results obtained are compared with the theoretical background presented in the theoretical framework.

Regarding the independent variable, in question 12, more than 50% of respondents stated that they frequently prioritize health; in question 13, more than 30% acknowledged having knowledge about health; in question 14, 40% indicated a predisposition to engage in recreational activities; in question 15, 40% stated that they regularly practice a healthy lifestyle; and in question 16, more than 30% had a positive attitude toward the prevention of chronic noncommunicable diseases, although they also stated that they only “occasionally” practice preventive measures against these diseases.

These findings coincide with those of Oyague (2023), who argues that an unhealthy lifestyle can have negative effects on nutrition, stress, and overall health, underscoring the importance of promoting

healthy lifestyles among UTB teachers to foster proper educational development.

Regarding questions 17 to 22, more than 40% of respondents believe that recreational activities contribute to the development of healthy skills and motor skills. These include the integration of play into tasks related to coordination, balance, strength, motor skills, daily life, and perception of physical ailments.

These responses are consistent with the findings of Arévalo (2016), who concluded that play and recreational activities promote learning, especially at the primary and secondary levels of education. Although his study did not focus on higher education, it is feasible to project his conclusions to this level, promoting appropriate environments to improve educational outcomes.

In questions 23 to 29, between 42% and 48% of the teachers surveyed stated that playful activities often promote motor skills, motivation, cognitive development, perception, attention, memory, and thinking.

These results are consistent with those reported by Chango (2020), who found improvements in the logical-mathematical thinking of children subjected to innovative playful strategies. Therefore, it is necessary to encourage critical and logical thinking, especially in exact sciences such as mathematics, using teaching strategies based on technology and play.

In question 30, 32.45% report experiencing occasional age-related cognitive decline. In questions 31 to 37, more than 40% say they frequently use playful activities to strengthen healthy skills, stimulate positive attitudes, encourage motivation, adapt the curriculum, promote teamwork, and strengthen social inclusion.

These findings coincide with the study by Ripalda (2019), who points out that the lack of recreational activities limits the development of skills and abilities, negatively affecting academic performance. Therefore, the need to integrate play into teaching and learning processes is reaffirmed.

In relation to the dependent variable, in questions 38 to 42, between 40% and 48% of teachers believe that recreational activities and healthy habits contribute to mental health, stress reduction, and the prevention of diseases such as diabetes, obesity, and hypertension.

This approach coincides with Aguilar (2017), who recommends an adequate diet that does not exceed the recommended sugar levels,

highlighting the need for teachers to maintain eating habits that do not compromise their health.

In questions 43 to 50, the results indicate that between 37% and 48% of teachers recognize the importance of maintaining healthy levels of cholesterol, blood pressure, and blood sugar, and of adopting healthy habits, although in several cases they only perform checks occasionally.

In this regard, the CDC (2022) highlights the importance of monitoring Body Mass Index (BMI), suggesting that teachers should undergo periodic assessments of their overall health.

In questions 51 to 59, respondents report varying levels of healthy practices: 73% never smoke cigarettes; between 37% and 47% indicate that they frequently engage in physical, academic, and social activities to strengthen their overall well-being, interpersonal relationships, and collaborative work.

These practices are related to Tapia's (2020) findings on the benefits of physical activity, both emotionally and mentally, which promotes better teaching performance.

Finally, in questions 60 to 63, between 39% and 44% of respondents say they often feel motivated to engage in activities that strengthen socio-emotional well-being, culture, and social inclusion. This is consistent with Lara (2022), who points out that an inadequate lifestyle can jeopardize both the health and the family and educational environment of teachers. Therefore, it is crucial that UTB teachers adopt regular controls to improve their personal and professional well-being.

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