

Digital health education as a topic for PE: Relevance, practical implications and teachers' perspectives

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Purpose

- This paper aims to discuss the relevance of digital health education as a topic for PE both from a theoretical and an empirical perspective.

Background

- Digital health technologies and networks are widely used in the context of physical activity, exercise routines and fitness training.
- Adolescents obtain health-related knowledge and beliefs from such technologies and social media.
- Digital health technologies and applications often promote a one-dimensional understanding of health and the human body.
- Students should be supported to develop their own critical viewpoints and attitudes towards the use of digital health technologies to pursue individual sports- and health-related goals.

Methods

- 32 semi-structured oral interviews with Austrian PE teachers were analyzed applying reflexive thematic analysis to extract their views on digital health education.

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Results

Themes	Exemplary quote
Digital technology as a tool for functional health promotion	"If I take in more calories than I burn, I will probably not lose weight."
An awareness for normative body representations in social networks	"Not everyone needs to look like a model [...] jumping around in these videos."
PE as a counterpart to an increasingly digitalized world	"There are so many options to move and motivate kids without digital aids."

Discussion

- PE teachers seem to be aware that digital technology is relevant for adolescents' understanding of health and their approach to physical activity.
- However, PE teachers also tend to reduce health to bodily functions and physical performance or believe PE should be kept screen-free.
- The digital culture of health and fitness needs to be experienced and discussed from different perspectives. In doing so, students can be enabled to use digital health technologies in an informed, responsible and self-determined way.