

Walking the Talk: Knowledge-Driven Advocacy for Open Spaces and Campus Fitness

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Abstract: Incorporating regular physical activity is crucial in a time when sedentary lifestyles are becoming more prevalent. Walking, an easy yet often overlooked form of exercise, offers several health benefits, including improved mental and cardiovascular health. The University of the Philippines Los Baños encourages students to incorporate walking into their fitness regimens through its Walking for Fitness programs. The program promotes a wellness and health-conscious culture on campus through planned activities and introspective practices. Although the participants have reported favorable experiences, obstacles like uneven walkways, dimly lit pathways, and stray dogs make it difficult for them to feel motivated and satisfied overall. The dedication of participants and a positive walking environment are both essential to the program's success. To improve accessibility, safety, and efficacy, this study examines these issues, evaluates their effects on participant involvement, and explores knowledge management techniques. The lack of designated open spaces is a major limitation on the program's potential. Institutional support, such as better infrastructure and policies that prioritize physical exercise, is necessary to address these problems. The report emphasizes the importance of the institution investing in accessible, safe walking spaces. Improving these areas will not only address current issues but also promote sustained involvement, enhancing the overall well-being of both staff and kids. The university may reaffirm its dedication to health and wellness and ensure that physical activity remains a vital aspect of campus life by promoting improved walking environments.

Keywords: physical activity (PA), physical fitness, policy, wellbeing

1. Introduction

Movement has always been an essential part of the human experience. Movement today seeks to boost personal growth, foster social interaction, and elevate human well-being beyond mere physical fitness. Loneliness among college students during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic was a serious mental health issue that continues to have repercussions in society today (Wenig et al. 2023). It is essential to promote the importance of movement and well-being via a knowledge-sharing platform that encourages societal change. This approach will establish a supportive atmosphere that encourages children to engage in physical activity and develop strong social bonds.

The quality of walking has been the most often overlooked, but it is one of the most vital in the daily lives of any individual. Walking through forests and parks significantly improves an individual's focus and directed attention by calming the mind, promoting stress relief, and rejuvenating mental health (Puhakka 2021). Additionally, Asim et al. (2024) stated, "nature-rich environments provide a restorative effect that helps reduce mental fatigue and increase cognitive performance. In elaborating on how walking is a significant strategy to combat life's challenges (Ozdemir et al. 2024) displayed the reflections of their study's participants on how outdoor nature walks provided high oxygen intake and promoted tranquility, how the sound of water and the blueness of the sea can cause happiness, and the way one of the participants' extensive 3-4 hours walking regimen contributed positively to their mental health. Even indoor walks, using active workstations, lead to significant reductions in depression and anxiety (Baldek 2021).

The success of a walking program depends not just on participants' commitment, but also on the environment in which the activity takes place. Studies highlight that having access to safe, well-maintained open spaces significantly boosts participation and enjoyment in walking programs. Creating such conducive environments, whether in community parks or structured urban areas, can enhance both the frequency and the duration of physical activity, leading to better health outcomes (Giles et al. 2021). By identifying and applying precise, data-driven recommendations, knowledge management can support targeted interventions that make physical activity more accessible and practical for diverse populations. This current paper would identify the specific challenges faced by participants due to the lack of designated open spaces within the university, assess the impact of environmental factors on participant satisfaction, and explore the potential benefits of university-provided open spaces in enhancing the program's accessibility, safety, and overall effectiveness.

2. Methodology

As open spaces can be perceived in various ways, participants were asked to identify the challenges they encountered during the walk. A random selection of participants from the walking classes was made, and they were informed about the study's purpose, their rights, and their ability to withdraw at any time. Written consent was obtained before their participation. Demographic information, including gender and age (Table 1), was collected, ensuring anonymity in data handling. A combination of quantitative and qualitative data was used in the analysis of the study. Content analysis was conducted to categorize responses based on key

themes and patterns.

Table 1. Sociodemographic status of the respondents.

Gender	Male	Female	Prefer not to say	Total	
	38	71	2	<i>f</i> 111	% 100
Age					
19-21	18	34	0	52	47
22-24	20	34	2	56	50
25-27	0	3	0	3	3

3. Results and discussion

3.1 Challenges along the pathway

Walking programs have been increasingly popular because they are easily accessible, reasonably priced, and encourage physical activity that benefits people of all ages. However, several contextual elements have a significant impact on the performance of these programs, particularly in terms of participant satisfaction and ongoing participation. The walking experience is shaped in large part by factors like lighting, road conditions, and general safety. These factors ultimately influence how much people enjoy walking and how long they continue to participate in such projects.

The condition along the road: *“I was scared because there are many dogs, but thankfully they didn’t pay attention to me, and also since I started when the sun was setting, I was really scared because the route is so dark, but at least I wasn’t feeling uncomfortable due to the heat.”* Several shared narratives were collected, which showed one prominent problem encountered: stray dogs and the absence of proper roadside lamps during nighttime were highlighted. A delightful and less taxing walking experience is enhanced by smooth, comfortable, and hazard-free paths that are provided by well-maintained roads. In addition, the walking environment’s lighting is essential, especially for activities that take place in the early morning or late evening. While dimly lit locations might cause pain, confusion, or accidents, well-lighted paths improve visibility and foster a sense of security.

One other highlight of the narratives said, *“I felt a bit uneasy when I reached the forestry area because it was getting darker, and the sky looked ominous after the recent rain when I decided to take my walk.”* This uneasy feeling was reinforced with the quotes from other participants, *“The road was kind of muddy and there were a lot of insects since it recently rained that day, therefore adding difficulty to our walking route.”* As Rod et al. (2023) showed that safety concerns are generally measured through risk perceptions. The findings suggest that policymakers and practitioners should consider real safety and perceived safety to promote sustainable mobility. Other authorities would also conclude that young people from the city had associated nature to physical effort and endurance, as well as dread and danger and perhaps discomfort (Lekies et al. 2015). On the other hand, these young people, though not familiar with the topography of the UPLB may have looked at nature as fun and a place to be

respected.

3.2 The Impact of Environmental Factors and Planning on Satisfaction

A survey was also conducted to assess their satisfaction with the walking program they were involved in. A 10-point scale was used because it provides more options for determining the difference between slight and strong preferences for questions that require a comprehensive understanding of intensity or frequency, such as satisfaction. Data on Figure 1 showed that 49.55% of the respondents were extremely satisfied and gave a rating of 10. While 32 (28.83%) respondents rated a 9 which may possibly say that the walking program was nearly perfect but perhaps wished for slightly better road conditions or noticed minor issues, like a small safety concern. Fifteen individuals gave a rating of 8 (13.51%) were still happy, but they might have encountered more noticeable issues, like intermittent poor lighting or feeling a little less secure in certain areas, which impacted their overall satisfaction.

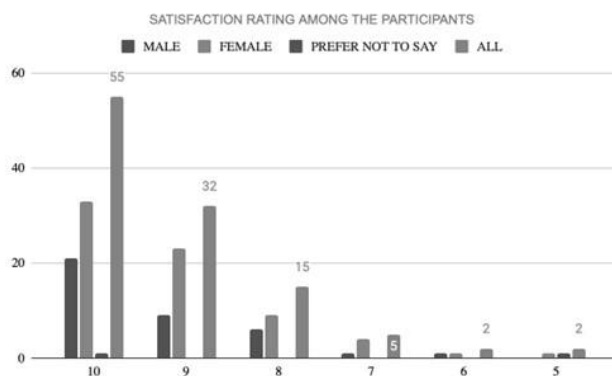


Figure 1. Satisfaction rating among the respondents regarding the walking program.

The success of such a program is not solely dependent on the participants' commitment but also on the quality of the environment in which they walk. While attitude towards reaching the goal played a part in feeling satisfied, the respondents revealed their own emotions (Table 2.) Beliefs in one's own efficacy are among the most fundamental and universal of the processes of human agency as declared by Bandura (2002). A big portion of the respondents (57.66%) belonged.

Table 2. How participants feel about not reaching the target for the week.

EMOTION	Male		Female		Prefer not to say		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Acceptance and promise to be better	26	23	38	34	0	0	64	57.7
Disappointed	6	5.4	23	20.7	0	0	29	26
Sad	6	5.4	10	9	2	1	18	16.2

To the group whose acceptance was easier than the rest, and promised to do it better the second time around. This idea aligns with Bandura's (2002) work. Indeed, young people who experience disappointment when they don't reach walking program goals are probably motivated by achievement and have a goal-oriented perspective. These students frequently establish goals for themselves and get satisfaction from achieving them.

The current program is designed to allow for asynchronous participation. Allowing students to track their walks asynchronously or online via wearable technology or a different walking app further enhances flexibility by allowing them to walk whenever it suits them, but within the target dates. Majority of the respondents (92/111) agree in doing the walking program asynchronously though 19 of them were neutral (Fig. 2). As the program adjusts to their lifestyle, giving students the option to choose when they walk may increase the likelihood that they will develop long-lasting habits (Ajzen 1991; Rebar et al 2023). This may ultimately lead to improved long-term fitness outcomes, which the program aims to promote.

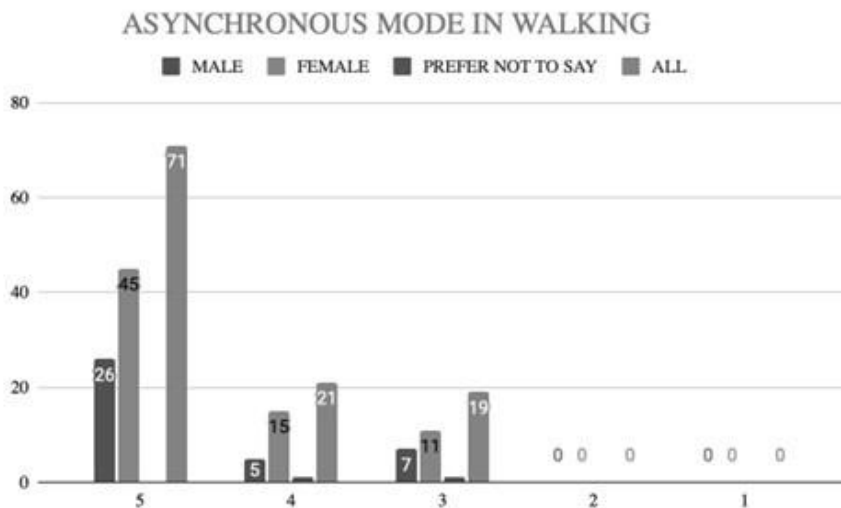


Figure 2. Agreement of respondents to participate in a flexible schedule for the walk.

Different times of the day may see improved performance from some students. We always accommodate individuals who prefer to work out in the morning, afternoon, or evening by providing a flexible schedule, which makes the experience more enjoyable and customized. A flexible walking exercise program is likely to boost engagement, lower anxiety, and support students in achieving their health objectives without interfering with their academic obligations. This idea was summed up with: *“After a week of regular walking, I saw an improvement in my heart rate, hitting the target levels. However, the main problem was the heat, a frequent difficulty for everyone, despite my efforts to walk between 7 and 8 in the morning. To stay away from the heat, I’m thinking of moving my walks to the evening hours of 6 to 7 the following week.”*

3.3 Knowledge Management Solutions for the Promotion of the ‘Walking for Fitness’ Advocacy and Overall Effectiveness of the Program

Knowledge management (KM) offers various solutions that support a safe and accessible ‘Walking for Fitness’ experience that will improve the overall effectiveness of the program for the students and the UPLB community. These KM solutions were explored through methodical gathering and utilization of pertinent information, including best practices, safety guidelines, participant feedback, and flexible scheduling, derived from their shared narratives about their walking experiences.

A shared narrative by a participant state: *“The walk is exhausting, but it is also rewarding because I can stay on track and achieve my objectives. This routine not only keeps me active, but it also allows me to end the day on a positive note.”* All participants were required to submit a weekly journal detailing the distance walked and the duration of the walk. They were allowed to use any walking application as long as the proof of their walk was documented. Strava offers free usage, thus students opted to use it, although students can choose any walking app (Fig. 3).



Figure 3. Sample map of the walk recorded via an app.

By using a weekly journal or a walking application (i.e. Strava), the participants are already establishing a knowledge repository where they are encouraged to reflect on their walking exercise as well as take note of their observations of their walking routes concerning their accessibility and safety. According to Milton and Lambe (2016), incorporating some KM approaches can connect people through communities or networks, facilitate learning from experience and the sharing of best practices, and innovate ways of doing things, among other benefits. Upon integrating the weekly journal and a walking application through simple movement, a connection is established, learning from experience is facilitated, best practices are

shared, and innovation is encouraged.

Through learning from experience, participants reflected that walking with a buddy can make the exercise more fun and less monotonous (Fig. 4). The shared experience of exploring new walking routes, enjoying nature, or simply catching up in conversation makes the routine more engaging and rewarding. But sometimes, walking alone cannot be avoided, just like this quote: *“This week, my walking buddy and I do not have similar schedules, so I walked alone.”* Another participant, Micah, expressed it well: *Walking is an excellent and relaxing activity. I had energy carrying out this task while doing it with Alaina, my walking buddy.* In summary, having a buddy during walking exercises is beneficial for the student, as it improves motivation, safety, and enjoyment.

It also offers the emotional and social advantages that can help participants find walking to be a more rewarding and long-lasting activity. Checking their progress through their submitted walking journals was very helpful for the faculty-in-charge to determine whether targets were being met and to identify other personal issues.



Figure 4. Walking with a buddy while doing one of the targets (Alainah and Micah).

Given its vital role in fostering the general growth, health, and well-being of its faculty, staff, and students, a university must provide safe, open spaces for walking and other necessary physical activities. Academic success is more likely for a student when their mind and body are in good health, while staff and professors in excellent physical condition are more productive. The data showed that the majority strongly agreed or agreed that indeed a public space for walking was needed (Fig. 5).

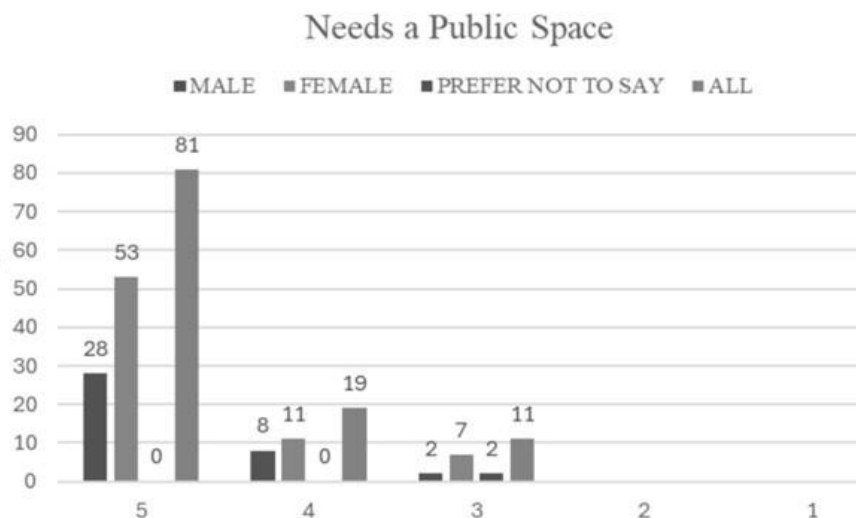


Figure 5. Agreement among respondents that the university has to provide open space for all.

It is well recognized that walking in open areas lowers stress, elevates mood, and lessens depressive and anxious symptoms (Audrey et al., 2014). As educational institutions, universities also need to prioritize mental health, and taking a walk in open area is a healthy way to decompress from the pressures of the classroom and enhance mental clarity. It is an easy yet powerful technique to improve the mental health among staff and students. The two most significant desires of the participants were: a designated lane for walking and a less bumpy road. Figure 6 indicated that students participating in the walking program competed with other elements on the road, while Figure 7 depicted the desired open space for this type of workout.



Figure 6. A sidewalk for the walking class.



Figure 7. A designated lane in an open space.

It is the university's responsibility to provide areas where people can walk for health, as this improves social interaction, mental and physical well-being, and campus safety. It also develops long-term, good habits while cultivating a culture of fitness and health through movement that benefits the community.

4. Summary and conclusion

Findings of the paper include challenges along the pathway that may be disruptive to the walking experience, such as stray dogs, uneven roads, and poorly lit areas at night. Despite these difficulties, the participants described the experience as fulfilling and enjoyable. They also observed a positive change in their heart rate, reaching their target more easily with less fatigue.

Another set of findings regarding the impact of environmental factors and planning based on satisfaction was uncovered. Asynchronous mode encourages continuous enhancement, allowing the program to adapt to changing conditions and to optimize participation and engagement, thus establishing a sustainable culture of wellness and fitness within the community.

Given these challenges and environmental factors, knowledge management (KM) solutions were explored to support a safer and accessible 'Walking for Fitness' experience for the program and the community. It was found that integrating KM approaches, such as the weekly journal and walking application, into the program encourages students to reflect on their walking experience through learning by doing and connect with people in the walking community.

Universities play a vital role in encouraging a lifestyle of health and wellness that incorporates physical activity with academic duties by making walking places easily accessible. Students, instructors, and staff who frequently engage in physical activity tend to be more focused, perform better academically or professionally, and experience fewer health-related disruptions.

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