

Dimensions and Categories for a Physical Activity Label for Schools in Europe: a Pilot Study in Luxembourg

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ABSTRACT

In the frame of the European Physical Activity Label for Schools (Eu-PALS, 2020a) project diverse indicators of physical activity, physical education and sport in different European schools have been analysed. As a starting point, this paper is presenting the chosen indicators and comparing them to an already existing physical activity label for schools in Luxembourg. The choice of the quality criteria in the Eu-PALS project, which may lead to the awarding of the label, are further discussed by demonstrating the results of a pilot study at four schools in Luxembourg. This national pilot study shows not only to the participating schools in which areas they might need to improve their activities, but allows also more generally to evaluate the indicators and possibly to improve the choice. Finally, with regard to the topic of the CEREPS Conference 2019 in Prague – “Quality criteria and outcome standards for Physical Education and School Sport” – in the frame of which this study has been presented, it is also discussed whether the project contributes to make criteria and outcome standards of physical education and school sport in Europe visible and comparable.

KEYWORDS

active school; physical education; school sport; Luxembourg

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INTRODUCTION

Cross-nationally no doubt exists that health and fitness enhancing physical activities should take place in schools. As kids spend regularly and increasingly time in school settings, it constitutes an important area to practice physical activities (Stanton Ward & Ford, 2012). Uncertainties circulate however when it comes to the concrete implementation, especially in primary schools where the person giving physical education classes has not necessarily the educational background of a physical education teacher. Therefore, teachers and school principals, but also parents and pupils, might ask themselves whether their school can be considered as highly active in terms of physical activity related programs and practices? Also, they might like to know how physically active their school is in comparison to others in their own country and/or in other European countries?

To diminish those uncertainties, indicators for a physical activity label for schools in Europe are in the centre of an ERASMUS+-funded project called “European Physical Activity Label for Schools (Eu-PALS)”¹ (Eu-PALS, 2020a). In the frame of this project, indicators of physical activity, physical education and school sport in different European schools are chosen and analysed. The aim is to develop a comprehensive, ready to use tool for schools to evaluate and promote the three pillars, and possibly to build up an international network of active schools. The establishment of the label shall thus allow the schools to fully utilize possibilities to provide space, time and opportunities for pupils to be physically active and to have the chance to compare and evaluate their physical activity related programs and practices to schools in other European countries. With the help of an objective comparison and evaluation tool the map of physical activity in European schools will be drawn up. Creating and developing a European network under one label allows engaging schools and children around the continent to be more active. Schools that are seeking for recognition and reward will be motivated to be awarded during the evaluation in the label system, which shall result in better and more sport and physical activity programs. The objective of the project will be reached therefore through the contribution to increased participation of pupils in physical activity programs in European Union member states. The European physical activity label focuses on three different dimensions and involves indicators from three neighbouring fields (hereinafter also referred to as “dimensions”) (Eu-PALS, 2020b):

1. quality physical education as a compulsory school subject (seen as an educational course and part of the curriculum, from the quality PE perspective) → *Physical Education (PE)*
2. health-enhancing physical activity opportunities (beyond physical education, extracurricular, organised in or by the schools or pupils themselves) → *Physical Activity (PA)*

¹ Project partners are the Hungarian School Sport Federation (Hungary), the University of Ljubljana (Slovenia), the Estonian School Sport Federation (Estonia), the Youth Sports Trust (UK), the University of Luxembourg (Luxembourg), the European Physical Education Association (EUPEA; Switzerland), and the International Sport and Culture Association (ISCA; Denmark).

3. school sport dimension as an extracurricular and competitive (or non-competitive) opportunity of sport activities and events in or between schools → *School Sport (ScS)*

Table 1 Overview of the Eu-PALS dimensions and categories

1. Physical Education (PE)	2. Physical Activity (PA)	3. School Sport (ScS)
Curriculum	School development – Physically Active School concept	Extracurricular organized sport activities (competitive or non-competitive school sport)
Teacher education and workforce	Active recess (and active homework)	Sport events (sport days, physical activity project days, sport festivals)
Facilities, equipment and resources	Active transport	
Inclusion and diversity	Curricular activities (active classroom, cross-disciplinary classes, outdoor classes)	
Community partnerships	Human resources Facilities, equipment and resources Inclusion and diversity Community partnerships	

Among those three dimensions, again different categories exist in order to comprehensively include diverse possible criteria that schools could fulfil or work on in the future. Those categories are based on the categories used in the Erasmus+ funded project European Physical Education Observatory (EuPEO) (EuPEO, 2020).

During the project, an online self-assessment tool will be developed to be able to measure the above indicators and to guide schools to comply with the label criteria (Moving Schools Award, 2020). In line with the above, the programme aims to raise awareness towards the values and qualities of sport-minded schools.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY LABELS IN LUXEMBOURG

The existing label “Clever Move”

In Luxembourg a label called “Clever Move” has already been established by the SCRIPT (Service de Coordination de la Recherche et de l’Innovation pédagogiques et technologiques), a department in the Ministry of Education (SCRIPT, 2020a). The main goal of this campaign is to provide additional daily physical activity time of 15-20 minutes for pupils during instruction time, by implementing one or more of the following activities during classroom lessons in other subjects than physical education: active learning, time for relaxation and loosening, dynamic sitting, active areas in the classroom, active breaks, active home work.

To receive the label, a school must adhere to the following (SCRIPT, 2020b):

- 3/4 of the teachers commit to daily 20 minutes of exercise in the classroom;
- The school guarantees each child his/her right to PA time, esp. the PE lessons foreseen in the national curriculum;

- Once a trimester, a teacher concertation meeting is dedicated to the topic of a “physically active school”.

The assessment is provided by a self-evaluation questionnaire of the school. The network of participating schools is open for all primary and secondary schools in Luxembourg. However, until now only one secondary school has participated. Also, the sustainability of the program is questioned, as there is no strong follow-up assured by the Ministry of Education.

The European Physical Activity Label – what is new for Luxembourgish schools?

The European Physical Activity Label for Schools shall ensure that ...

- the Physical Activity Label is awarded on the base of a broader sum of criteria and thereby gives schools more ideas how to improve the situation;
- secondary schools are likewise included in the project;
- a follow-up shall be provided by the project partners.

The fact that in Luxembourg a quality mark system exists means that some schools are already experienced in implementing a physical activity quality label. By applying for the more comprehensive Eu-PALS, those schools can reach out for a next, higher level when it comes to the promotion of physical activity in the frame of school development.

RESULTS OF THE PILOT SURVEY AT SCHOOLS IN LUXEMBOURG

The Eu-PALS-Project embraces two different stages: Phase 1 outlines all the essential readiness factors in each of the dimensions that are necessary for a school to have in place in order to be able to progress to phase 2 and make a full application. This stage is implemented in the form of an online self-assessment. Phase 2 is the full application process for schools to join the label. This stage is based on a larger list of indicators and evaluated by the project partners. Both phases were evaluated in a pilot survey that was conducted among different schools in Europe in May and June 2019. The aim was to collect a broad feedback before the online application opens.

In the pilot study in Luxembourg four schools, two secondary and two primary schools², participated. It was implemented in the form of a written questionnaire and should encourage the schools to provide feedback to the questionnaire, to identify possible intervention areas to enhance their approach to the three dimensions, and to reflect on the practices and attitudes of the schools towards PA, PE and School Sport. Figure 1 summarizes the answers of the four participating schools to the questions of phase 1.

First, it has to be stated that currently none of the schools fulfils all necessary criteria to pass phase 1. The secondary school ALR shows overall the best result: it fulfils the criteria in two dimensions but still needs to improve its results in the dimension “physical activity”. Also, the LESC reaches 100% in the dimension of “physical education”, so that both secondary schools pass phase 1 in this category. Among the primary

² Primary schools: École Primaire Albert Wingert, Schifflange (EF Albert Wingert); École Primaire Cecile Ries, Mersch (EF MERSch); Secondary schools: Atert Lycée, Rédange (ALR); Lycée Edward Steichen, Clervaux (LESC).

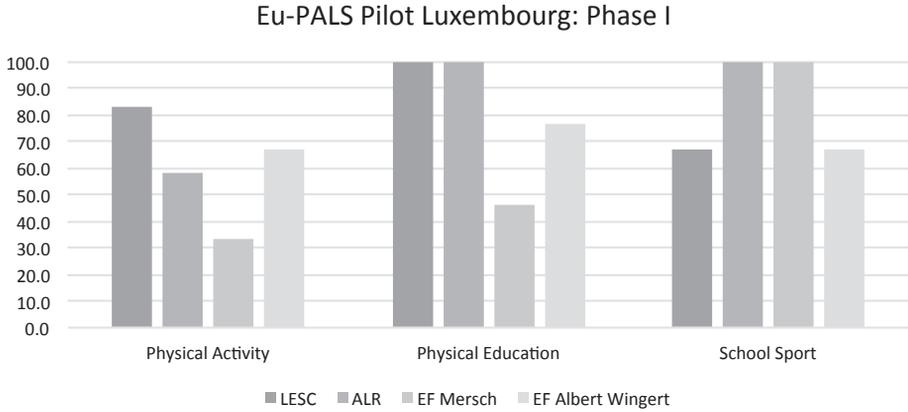


Figure 1 Results of the pilot study in Luxembourg: Dimensions Phase I

schools only EF Mersch fulfils the criteria in one field, in the dimension of “school sport”. Figure 1 demonstrates that among the three dimensions the initiatives concerning “school sport” are the ones that are in average implemented most frequently, closely followed by those in the field of “physical education”.

However, when having a look at all different schools it becomes obvious that the two primary schools have comparatively met less criteria within the dimension “physical education” than the secondary schools. The dimension “school sport” is in contrast equally important in the chosen primary and secondary schools. Especially in the primary school EF Mersch “school sport” is a strong dimension in contrast to physical activity and physical education. The two latter come out with the lowest results in EF Mersch or the highest possibility for improvement among the four participating schools.

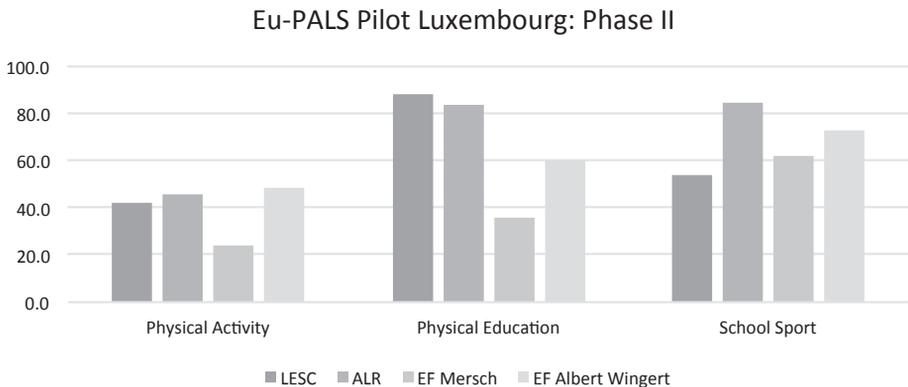


Figure 2 Results of the pilot study in Luxembourg: Dimensions Phase II

Figure 2 summarizes the responses of the four participating schools to the questions of phase 2. First of all, parallels to phase 1 can be figured out: as phase 1 constitutes the basis for reaching phase 2, it is not surprising that also here in all schools there is still room for improvement (none of them reaches 100%). The figure shows that among the three dimensions also here the initiatives concerning “school sport” are the ones that are in average implemented most frequently, again closely followed by “physical education”. In accordance with phase 1, and therefore not surprisingly, the primary school of EF Mersch demonstrates the lowest results in all categories except “school sport”, and therefore offers the highest demand for improvement in “physical education” and “physical activity”.

When comparing the results between secondary and primary schools, the dominance of the activities of the secondary schools in the field of “physical education” is once more underlined. In the dimension “physical activity” all schools have still room to improve their profile, meaning their basis to receive the label. This concerns for instance items like the “school development concept”, or the offer of “active recess” or “active transport”.

In the frame of the questionnaire the teachers were additionally asked to value the relevance addressed to the indicators in the respective dimensions and categories. In the following, the focus will be on the results concerning phase 2, as they are based on a more comprehensive spectrum of indicators and thereby allow especially relevant feedback to the composition of items. When evaluating the indicators, the respondents could choose between the three options “essential, desirable, and irrelevant” (cp. Figures 3, 4, 5).

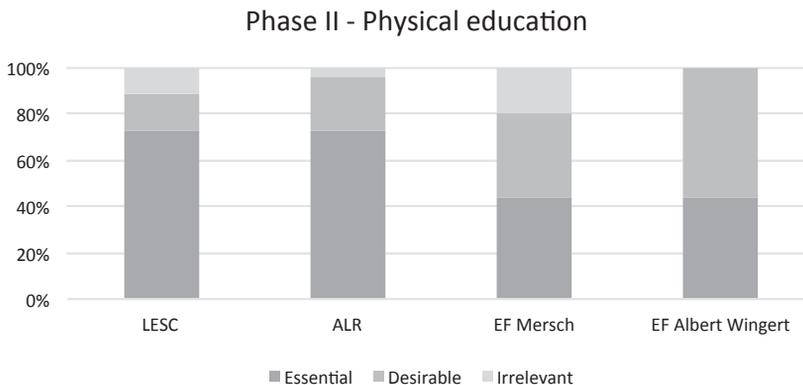


Figure 3 Results of the pilot study in Luxembourg: Relevance of the indicators in Phase II – Physical Education

Concerning the dimension “physical education” (cp. Figure 3), none of the four schools considers all chosen items as “essential”. Whereas the two secondary schools categorize around 70% of the items as “essential”, the primary schools only deem less than half of them as “essential”. The primary school EF Albert Wingert states that a majority of the criteria is after all “desirable” for the dimension; the three other schools also valued some items as “irrelevant”. This is of course an important informa-

tion for the project partners in order to further develop the final catalogue of questions to assess the indicators.

Among the items that are considered as “irrelevant” by several schools are most of all those who address the cooperation with other people or institutions, so for instance with professional associations, corporate partners and also parents.

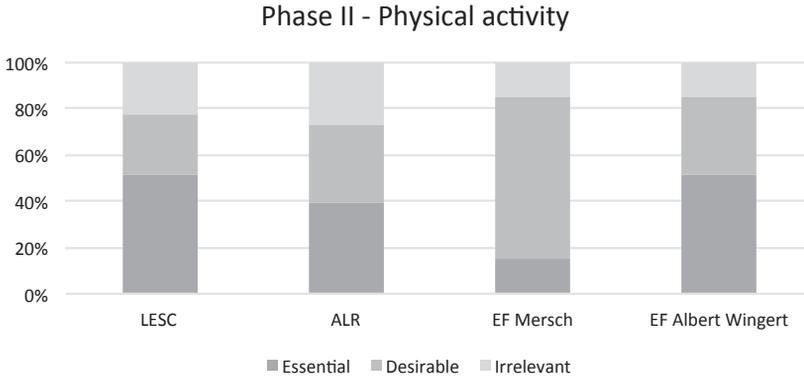


Figure 4 Results of the pilot study in Luxembourg: Relevance of the indicators in Phase II – Physical Activity

With regard to the dimension “physical activity” (cp. Figure 4), all four schools deem one part of the criteria as “irrelevant”. The ALR moreover considers only one third of the items as “essential” to mirror the physical activity status of a school. The primary school EF Mersch evaluates even only around 15% of the items as “essential”.

As for the dimension of “physical activity”, the two secondary schools value for instance the question whether teachers give active homework on a regular base (at least once a week) as “irrelevant”. The same schools also consider the implementation of regular active cross-curricular classes as “irrelevant”, arguing for instance that the national curricula do not give enough room for that (LESC). The LESC and EF

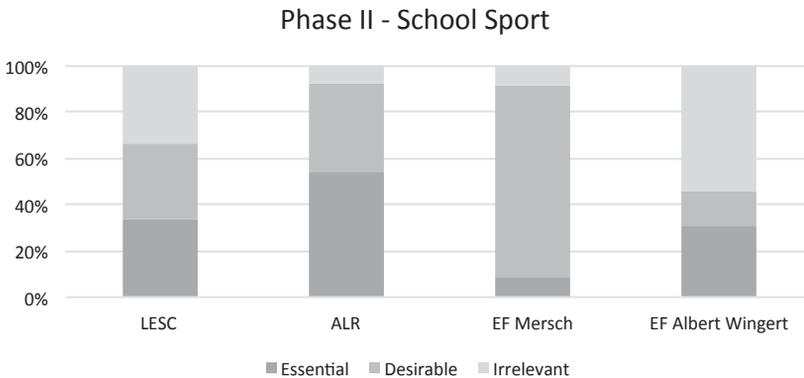


Figure 5 Results of the pilot study in Luxembourg: Relevance of the indicators in Phase II – School Sport

Mersch furthermore doubt the importance to implement regular active outdoor classes (learning spaces, forest) as a criterion for “physical activity”. Again, the cooperation with professional associations, with corporate partners and even with other schools (EF Mersch) or with higher education and research institutes (EF Albert Wingert) are partly valued as “irrelevant” for the dimension “physical activity”.

Finally, figure 5 demonstrates the relevance dedicated to the items for the dimension “school sport”. For the first time, one school, the primary school EF Albert Wingert, categorizes more than half of the items as “irrelevant”; the LESC comes to the same conclusion for one third of the items. Only the ALR ranks still around half of the items as “essential”. Among those items considered as “irrelevant” is for instance the question whether student volunteers are involved in the sport days or physical activity project days or festivals or the question whether teachers are supporting the volunteers involved in those events (both LESC and EF Albert Wingert). One school (EF Albert Wingert) mentions that this situation has so far not yet happened and that this is the reason why they do not see the relevance of this item.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the pilot study in Luxembourg show that the four selected schools still need to improve in order to be able to pass the necessary criteria of phase 1 of the label. Thus, none of them currently fulfils the essential readiness factors in all three dimensions (“physical education”, “physical activity”, “school sport”) that are necessary for a school to have in place in order to be able to progress to phase 2 and make a full application. With regard to the secondary schools, the dimension “physical education” shows comparatively the best results; in primary schools, the initiatives concerning “school sport” are the ones that are implemented most frequently. However, only one primary school reaches the required 100% in this dimension.

This trend is followed in phase 2, the actual application of the label, as none of the participating schools reaches 100% in any dimension. When comparing the results between secondary and primary schools, the dominance of the initiatives of the secondary schools in the field of “physical education” is once more underlined. In contrast, all participating schools have still room to improve in the dimension “physical activity”: this could for instance embrace a “school development concept”, or the offer of “active recess” or “active transport” which seems to have been neglected so far.

Concerning the value addressed to the indicators in the respective dimensions and categories, the results of the pilot study give diverse hints to further develop the final catalogue of indicators. Most critical are the comments with regard to the categories mentioned within the dimensions “school sport” and “physical activity”. It will be important to compare the results in detail to those of further pilot studies in other participating countries in Europe.

Finally, coming back to the topic of the CEREPS Conference 2019 in Prague – “Quality criteria and outcome standards for Physical Education and School Sport” –, the “European Physical Activity Label for Schools” project indeed contributes to make criteria and outcome standards of physical education and school sport in Europe visible and comparable. It also further motivates the schools to improve their curricular and extracurricular activities and school development policies. The presented results

from Luxembourg therefore constitute an important part to ensure the quality of the chosen essential categories and items and therefore for the further development of the European Physical Activity Label for Schools.

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