

3 - REVIEW PAPER: Fitness professionals' pedagogical intervention [Susana Franco & Vera Simões]

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Abstract: It is recognised the importance of fitness professionals' intervention for fitness centres' quality and participants' satisfaction and retention. The objective of this article is to present several studies that show some particular aspects of pedagogical intervention which must be taken into account for participants' satisfaction and retention, namely encouragement, instruction and pay attention to participants. Some implications for the practice of fitness professionals' pedagogical intervention are presented.

Key-words: Pedagogical intervention; Fitness professionals; Quality; Satisfaction

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Background

Although known the innumerable benefits of exercise [1,2], according to Sport and Physical Activity Eurobarometer [3], there is still a large number (42%) of European Union citizens that never exercised or played sport. One of the concerns of fitness centres managers is to present a quality service, which, according to several authors, may provide clients' satisfaction and consequently clients' retention [4-12]. Several authors refer the importance of human resources, particularly fitness professionals, in a quality service of fitness centres and participants' satisfaction and retention [12-22]. The adherence to physical activity in unsupervised program setting is very low [23], which reinforce the importance of the intervention of fitness professionals. Fitness professionals can be one of the participant's drop out motives from fitness centres [24], or can be a motive to choose a fitness centre [25].

Discussion

Considering the importance of fitness professionals' quality for participants' satisfaction and retention, Campos, Simões and Franco [26] develop a study to identify the quality indicators of group fitness instructors. After interviewed 100 fitness stakeholders (gym owners/general managers, technical directors, trainers, instructor and fitness participants) and have done a content analysis, they found 4 dimensions of group fitness instructors' quality: professional, relational, technical and pedagogical. The quality indicators of each dimension can be observed in table 3.

Table 3 - Quality indicators of each dimension of group fitness instructors' quality [26]

Dimensions	Indicators
Professional	Assiduity, Dedication, Ethics, Experience, Image, Punctuality
Relational	Good mood, Communication, Cordiality, Availability, Empathy, Honesty, Humility, Sympathy
Technical	Fitness level, Knowledge, Musical skills, Technical performance, Technical education, Innovation, Planning
Pedagogical	Adaptability, Dynamism, Instruction, Motivate

The most cited quality indicators, in Campos et al. study [26], were empathy (from relational dimension), motivate and instruction (from pedagogical dimension). This study, like others studies [6,12,27-30], reveal the importance of fitness professionals' pedagogical intervention in fitness centres' quality and participants' satisfaction and retention.

In fact, there is a positive relation between the participants' satisfaction and the fitness professionals' pedagogical behaviour [31]. Franco et al. [31] studied this relation, in group fitness classes, and found a significant positive relation between participants' satisfaction and the following fitness instructors' pedagogical behaviours: encouragement, instruction (information, correction, positive evaluation, negative evaluation and questioning) and monitoring (observe and pay attention to what participants do and say). Therefore, behaviours for encouraging, instruct and for pay attention to participants can contribute to increasing participants' satisfaction. Authors also found a significant negative relation between participants' satisfaction and the behaviour independent exercise of fitness instructors, which means that if during a group fitness classes the fitness instructor performs the exercise with participants but don't pay attention to them, participants will be less satisfied.

According to the multidimensional model of sports leadership from Chelladurai [32], the satisfaction level of participants results from the level of congruence between required, actual and preferred behaviour. This model also shows that situational characteristics (e.g., group dimension, activity, objectives, tasks, etc.) and member characteristics (e.g., age, gender, participant experience, personality, etc.) are related to required and preferred behaviour. Based on this model, Franco, Cordeiro and Cabeceiras [33] study participants' preferences about group fitness instructors characteristics in different activities, namely: resistance training, hip hop, aqua-fitness and fitness-combat. They found some similarities in the participants' preferences about group fitness instructors' characteristics in different fitness activities, such as being dynamic and motivator, that are two of the most preferred characteristics by participants about group fitness instructors. However, authors

found significant differences between groups in 8 of the 23 characteristics. Authors also study participants' preferences of different group ages, about fitness instructors' characteristics, and they verify similarities in different group ages about the most preferred characteristics in group fitness instructors, namely being dynamic, motivator and imaginative. Nonetheless, they found significant differences between groups in 14 of the 23 characteristics. Considering these results, it's important that fitness professionals adapt their intervention to participants' characteristics, such as participants' age, and to situational characteristics, such as the activity.

Considering the importance, for participants' satisfaction, of congruence between required, actual and preferred behaviour about fitness professionals, it's important to know what participants prefer for fitness professionals act according to their preferences. Participants' preferences about fitness instructors' pedagogical behaviour were studied, in different group fitness activities, namely resistance training [31], indoor cycling [34] and Zumba® [35]. Results are summarized in table 4.

Table 4 - Participants' preferences about fitness instructors' pedagogical behaviour, in resistance training [31], indoor cycling [34] and Zumba® [35]: most preferred and less preferred behaviours.

	Most preferred behaviours	Less preferred behaviours
Resistance training	Encouragement (E, WE), Demonstration with information, Information (E, WE), Participative exercise (with clients as a participant), Correction (E, WE), Positive evaluation (E), Questioning (E)	Conversations with others (clients or staff out of the class; E, WE), Attention to interventions of others (clients or staff out of the class; E, WE), Negative affectivity (E, WE), Other behaviours (e.g., drink water or clean the face with a towel without pay attention to participants), Independent exercise (do exercise without pay attention to participants), Demonstration without information
Indoor cycling	Encouragement (E, WE), Questioning (WE), Participative exercise, Positive evaluation (E), Positive affectivity (E, WE), Correction (WE), Information (E)	Negative affectivity (E, WE), Conversations with others (E, WE), Attention to interventions of others (E, WE), Independent exercise, Other behaviours
Zumba®	Demonstration with information, Information (E, WE), Encouragement (E)	Conversations with others (E, WE), Attention to interventions of others (E, WE), Independent exercise, Negative affectivity (E, WE), Other behaviours, Demonstration without information

E: fitness instructor behaviour doing exercise simultaneously; WE: fitness instructor behaviour without doing exercise simultaneously.

There are some common participants' preferred fitness professionals' behaviours in different activities, such as encourage participants and give information to explain exercise while performing the exercise with participants (table 4). However, there is some behaviours specificity that participants prefer in each group fitness activity. For example, considering that indoor cycling requires fewer changes in the exercises and consequently less instruction than the others activities, so, probably for "breaking the ice" during practice, participants like that the instructor interacts with them to create a good climate. In activities that require more technical skills, like resistance training or Zumba[®], participants prefer that, besides just show (demonstrate) the model, also explain, with verbal and/or non-verbal instruction, how to perform the exercises. Franco et al. [35] also found significant differences between participants' preference about the following instructional behaviour, which means that participants don't want just a model to see during "the Zumba[®] party", but also an explanation of the exercises: give information explaining the exercise, verbally or non-verbally, while doing exercise; give information explaining the exercise, verbally or non-verbally; show the model, before participants perform the exercise, and give information explaining the exercise, verbally or non-verbally; just show the model before participants perform the exercise (significantly less preferred, compared with others).

There are also some common less participants' preferred fitness professionals' behaviours in different activities, which are related to bad mood or don't pay attention to participants, namely: negative affectivity creating a bad class climate; conversations with people outside of the class (other clients or staff); pay attention to interventions of people out of the class (other clients or staff); other behaviours, such as fix the clothes, drink water, clean the sweat; do exercise without pay attention to participants.

Considering that for a participant have a higher level of satisfaction the perception and the preferences should be congruent [32], some studies were done to check this congruence in fitness. Franco and Simões [36] compared participants' perception and preferences, about pedagogical feedback of Body Pump[®] instructors, and found significant differences in 19 of the 24 types of feedback.

These results probably mean that participants are not satisfied with feedback of Body Pump® instructors, which may be due to, in closed pre-choreographed program, the obligation to follow the choreography, and perform pedagogical functions for that, may limit the availability of fitness professional to observe and correct participants.

In another study [31] group fitness instructors' observed behaviour, participants' perception and preferences, about pedagogical intervention, were related. Although there was no congruence between the observed behaviour of the instructors and the preference of the participants in various categories (26 of 33), there was always congruence between perception and preference, which, perhaps, may contribute to the participants satisfaction with the instructor, considering that satisfaction results from the level of congruence between preference and perception. But when authors relate observed behaviour with participants' perception they only found 15 significant positive relations in the 33 tested behaviours. Participants' perception is influenced by their preference and affective reactions, so the participants' perception may not reflect reality [37].

Sometimes it is not just the participants who have no sense of reality, but also fitness professionals. A study [38] that relates self-perception with the observed behaviour of group fitness instructors, verified that fitness instructors had no idea about one-third of the behaviours they performed. Considering these results, it is important that fitness professionals do a self-analysis of their own intervention to have a better sense of the reality [38].

A systematic process of supervision and self-analysis, through observation, using for example videos, observation systems or checklists, should be done to collect information about fitness professionals' intervention, and give feedback for they improve their professional performance. There are some observation systems about fitness professional intervention, validated for fitness context, namely about general pedagogic intervention [31,39], pedagogic feedback [40], class climate [41], instruction [42], non-verbal kinetic communication [43], non-verbal proxemics communication [44].

There are also instruments to know participants opinion about fitness professionals' intervention, validated for this context, namely about fitness professional quality [45], general pedagogic intervention [31,46] and pedagogic feedback [47].

Implications for practice

For participants' retention and satisfaction, fitness professionals should focus their pedagogical intervention especially in [31,34,35]:

- Encouragement for practice;
- Instruction situations: demonstrating and explaining verbally and non-verbally the exercises, question participants about their physical state and exercises' understanding, correct participants' performance and praise them;
- Pay attention to participants, observing and hear them.

Fitness professionals should adapt their intervention to participants' characteristics (e.g., age, gender, participant experience, personality) and to situational characteristics (e.g., group dimension, activity, objectives, tasks).

For a continuous professional development fitness professionals should often do:

- Continuous education [48];
- Systematic self-analysis [49,50];
- Be supervised by other professionals or coordinators [49,50];

For systematic self-analysis and supervision, observation systems, specific for fitness context [31,39-44], can be used for this process. Surveys about participants' opinion [31,45-47] should sometimes be applied, to know their opinion and adapt the intervention to preferences of class in general and to each individual in specific, which can contribute to participants' satisfaction and retention.

A triangulation of these different perspectives (observed behaviour, participants' perception and preferences, instructors' self-perception) can be used for a better comprehension of the fitness professionals' intervention, adjusting and improving it [31,38,51].

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