

Evaluating the Perceived Health-Related Effectiveness of 'The Daily Mile' in Irish Primary School Settings



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Introduction

Physical Activity (PA) has been shown to have a positive impact on markers of children's health and wellbeing (1). However, a high percentage (83%) of Irish primary school children do not meet the current recommendations for PA of 60 minutes daily, moderate-vigorous, physical activity (2). The purpose of this research was to evaluate the implementation process and perceived health-related effectiveness of 'The Daily Mile' (TDM) in Irish primary school settings.

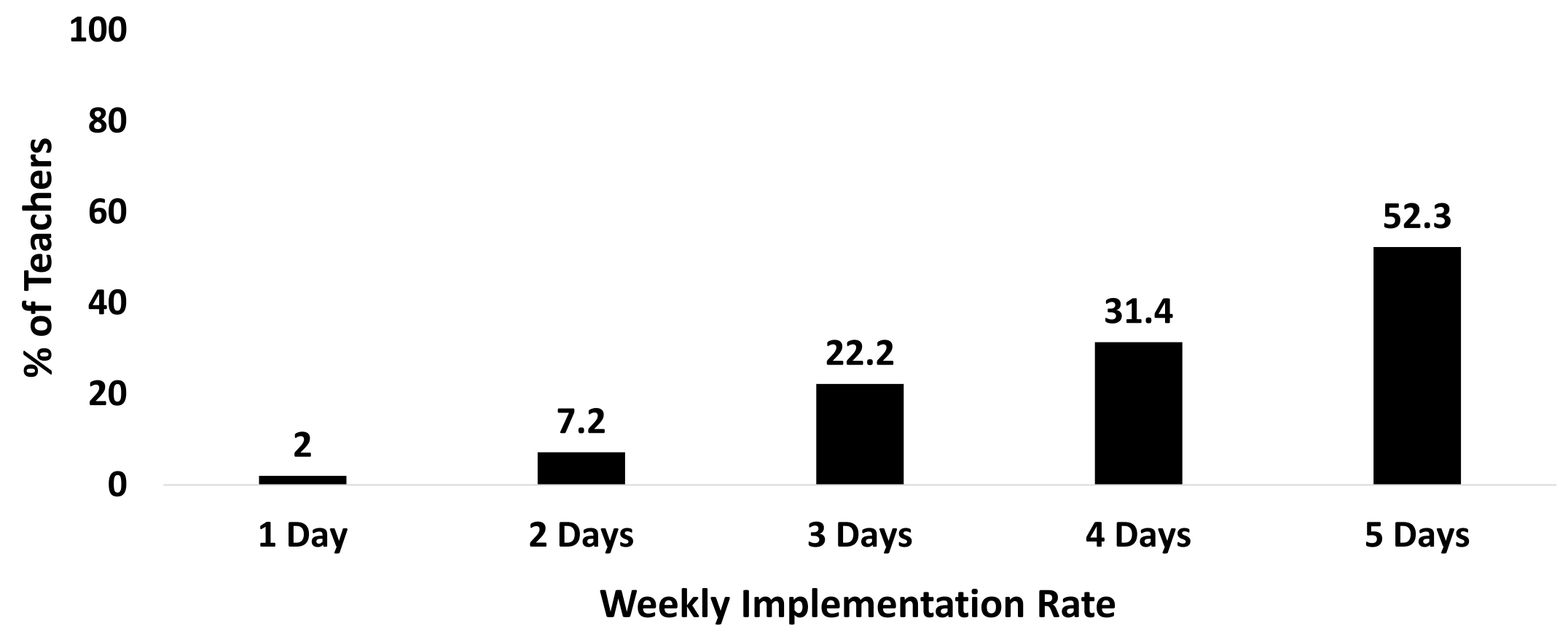


Fig. 1: Mean number of days TDM is implemented by teachers each week.

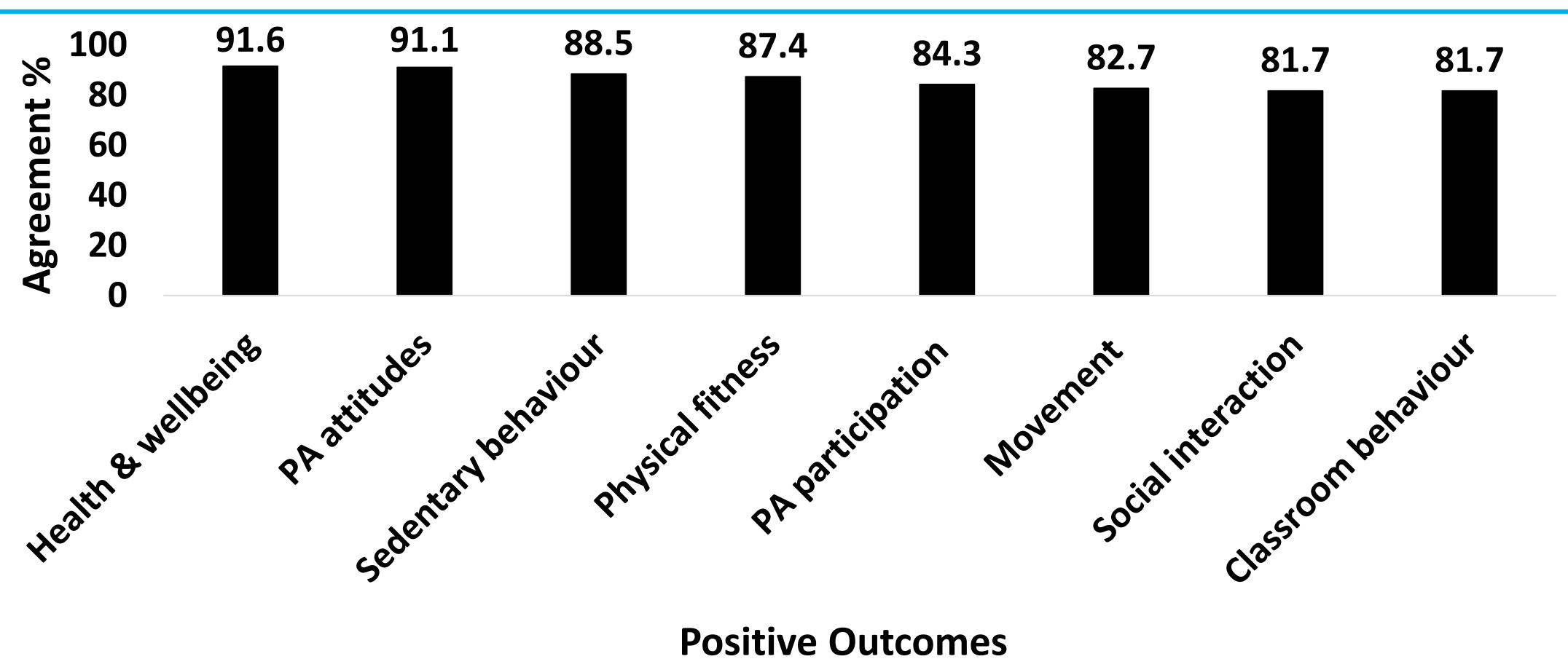


Fig. 2: Percentage of questionnaire participants who 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that TDM positively impacted the suggested benefits.

Methods

This mixed-methods study adopted a holistic approach, whereby the RE-AIM (3) framework was used to bridge the gap in evidence available that analyses the perceptions teachers, principals and children have of TDM within an Irish primary school context. Phase 1 involved staff members (n=191) from TDM registered schools participating in an online survey questionnaire. Phase 2 involved focus group interviews being conducted with principals (n=2), teachers (n=4) and pupils (n=14) from TDM registered schools.

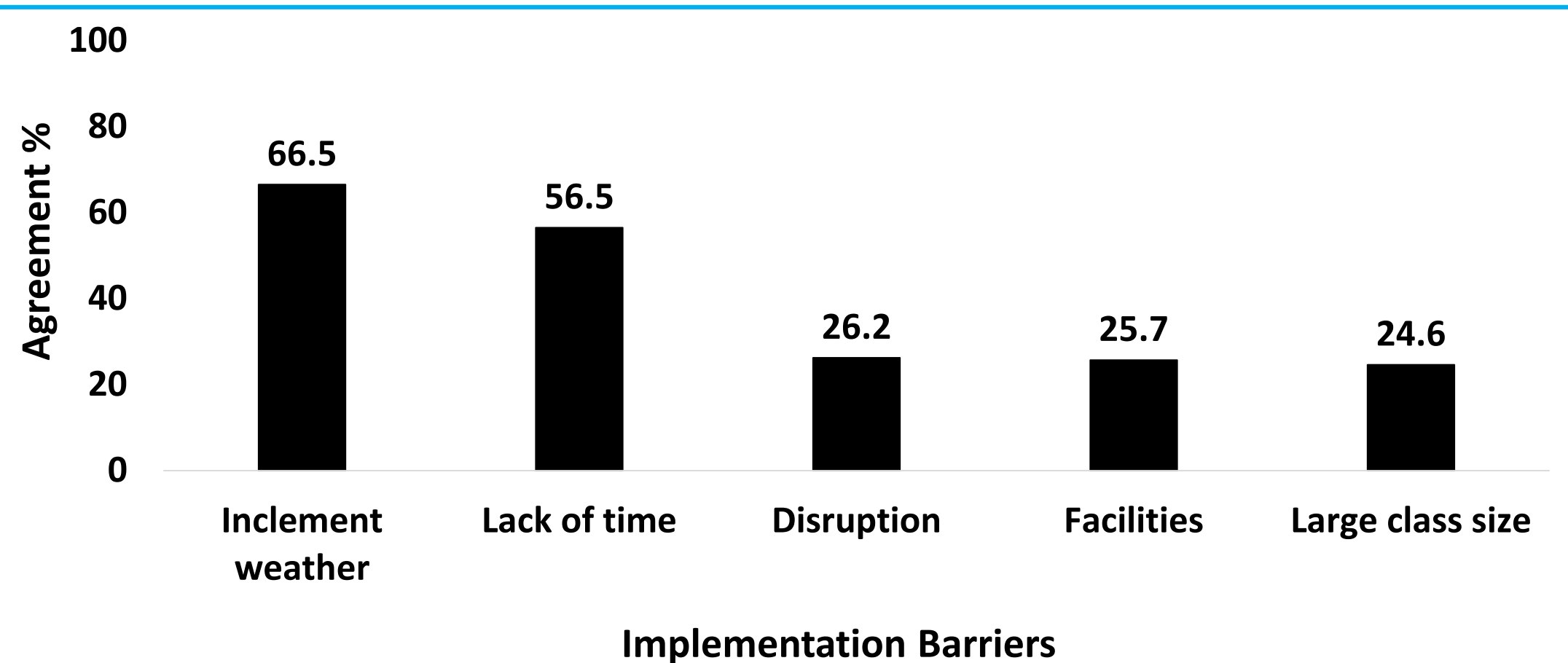


Fig. 3: Percentage of questionnaire participants who 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that the suggested barriers impacted implementation of TDM.

Results

A high percentage (90.5%) of teachers reported that they implement TDM. It was found that 90.8% delivered the initiative \geq three days every week (Fig. 1). A Chi-Square test revealed teachers from rural schools were significantly more likely to implement TDM than teachers located in urban schools (95.6% vs 84.4%; $p = .002$).

Approximately 1 in 6 implementors of TDM (16.3%) reported that children in their class used various PA methods, other than walking or running, when participating in a TDM session. Data collected from the focus group interviews suggested that the repetitive nature of TDM often leaves children feeling disinterested when participating. As discussed by one child:

"It's sort of a repetitive thing to do the same four laps every day of the same pitch"

TDM was found to have a positive impact on a range of potential benefits associated with children's health by questionnaire participants who rated their level of agreement with each outcome on a 5-Point Likert Scale (strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree or disagree, agree, strongly agree) (Fig. 2).

'Inclement weather' (66.5%) and 'a lack of time' during a school day (56.5%) were identified in a 5-Point Likert Scale (strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree or disagree, agree, strongly agree) by questionnaire participants as the most common barriers associated with implementing TDM (Fig. 3).

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings are in agreement with previous studies that determined TDM had a positive effect on children's health and wellbeing (4). However, strict adherence to principles of TDM can negatively impact children's enjoyment and motivation to participate. In support, a systematic review evaluating the sustainability of school-based initiatives (n=18) found that the original formats of each initiative were not sustained in their entirety (5).

TDM appears to positively effect a range of benefits relating to children's health and wellbeing. However, developing the principles of TDM has the potential to increase the health-related effect and limit the impact of common implementation barriers.

References

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