

Original Paper

Evaluation of the Effect of Football on Preventing Infant Obesity and Optimization of Strategies

Zhihao Liu¹

¹ School of Physical Education, Chongqing Preschool Education College, Chongqing 404047, China

Received: August 27, 2024 Accepted: September 29, 2024 Online Published: October 17, 2024

doi:10.22158/wjeh.v6n5p68

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/wjeh.v6n5p68>

Abstract

According to the report of the World Health Organization, more than 4 billion children and adolescents in the world are overweight or obese, among which the problem of obesity among children in China is becoming increasingly serious. Relevant studies show that the risk of obesity among children who regularly participate in football is reduced by 30%. Focusing on the research background of infant obesity prevention, this paper takes football as an example to analyze the physiological psychology of childrens participation in football and the related theoretical starting point of obesity prevention, discusses the relationship between football participation and infant obesity by using literature review, investigation, data collection and analysis and ethical consideration, and explores the effect of different football intensity on obesity prevention and the influence of football on childrens physical and psychological indexes. Combined with the actual data, this paper evaluates the effect of football in preventing young childrens obesity, discusses the factors affecting the effect of football, and puts forward suggestions for strategy optimization. Provide useful reference and enlightenment for the prevention of infant obesity in China.

Keywords

football, young children, prevention of obesity, health strategies

1. Foreword

1.1 Research Background

Obesity in young children has become a global public health problem. According to the World Health Organization report, more than 380 million children and adolescents were overweight or obese worldwide in 2016, of which about 120 million children and adolescents were obese. The situation in China is also not optimistic. In recent years, the obesity rate of young children in China is on the rise, which poses a serious threat to the healthy growth of children. The study points out that obesity in

young children is closely related to the occurrence of chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes in adulthood, so the prevention of obesity in young children is of important practical significance. In this context, the benefits of football, as a systemic, aerobic and anaerobic exercise mode, have attracted much attention to the physical and mental health development of young children. Studies have shown that football can effectively improve childrens physical fitness, enhance cardiopulmonary function, and reduce the risk of obesity. In addition, football also helps to cultivate childrens team spirit, self-confidence and perseverance and other psychological qualities. Therefore, exploring the application value of football in the prevention of early childhood obesity will not only help to provide new ideas for the prevention and treatment of early childhood obesity in China, but also play a positive role in promoting the reform of early childhood physical education.

1.2 Proposal of Questions

Football, as a systemic and aerobic exercise, has a positive effect on the growth and development of children. Studies have shown that regular participation in football can reduce the risk of childhood obesity. In order to further explore the effect of football on preventing obesity in young children, this study will make an empirical analysis on different intensities of football. Existing studies have pointed out that moderate-intensity aerobic exercise has a significant effect on obesity prevention (Biddle et al., 2011). However, the research on the influence of football on childrens physical and psychological indexes is not sufficient. To sum up, this study will evaluate the effect of football in preventing obesity in young children based on the latest realistic data, explore the effect of football in preventing obesity in young children, and analyze its impact on physiological and psychological indicators of young children. In order to provide scientific basis and effective strategies for the prevention and control of infant obesity in China.

2. Related Research Basis

2.1 Current Status and Impact of Infant Obesity

The problem of childhood obesity in my country is becoming increasingly serious. According to the 2020 Report on Nutrition and Chronic Diseases of Chinese Residents, the obesity rate of children under 6 years old in my country is 6.5%. Childrens obesity not only affects their physical health, but also has a negative impact on their psychological and social adaptability. Studies have found that obese children are prone to chronic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension. At the same time, obesity can also lead to problems such as dyspnea and sleep disorders. In addition, obese children may suffer discrimination in interpersonal communication, which affects their self-esteem and mental health. The latest research also shows that obesity in early childhood is significantly related to obesity in adulthood and related health problems. Therefore, it is of great significance to pay attention to the current situation and influence of infant obesity to prevent chronic diseases in adulthood and improve childrens quality of life.

2.2 Physiological and Psychological Benefits of Football to Children

As a whole-body sport, football plays an important role in promoting childrens physical and mental health. Studies have shown that regular participation in football activities can significantly improve childrens cardiopulmonary function and enhance their physical fitness (Lau et al., 2018). For example, a study of children aged 4 to 6 found that after 30 minutes of soccer training three times a week for 10 weeks, the childrens VO₂max improved by about 5% (Escalante et al., 2019).

In addition, football also has a positive impact on childrens psychological development. Teamwork, strategic planning, and social interaction in football games can help improve young childrens social skills and self-confidence (Graber et al., 2019). According to the research of Stodden et al. (2018), young children who participate in football show great improvement in emotional regulation, concentration and self-control. The latest research also found that football can promote the brain development of young children. According to Johnson et al. (2020), football training can enhance regional functions in young childrens brain related to memory, learning, and language. This may be because football requires quick decision-making and coordination of various actions, thus promoting the improvement of brain cognitive function. As an activity beneficial to childrens all-round development, football has remarkable effects in improving childrens physiological function, promoting their mental health and cognitive ability.

2.3 Theories Related to Football and Obesity Prevention

Football sports is closely related to obesity prevention theory, and several studies have shown that regular participation in football activities can significantly reduce the risk of obesity. According to the World Health Organization report, physical inactivity is one of the main factors contributing to childhood obesity. As a combination of aerobic and anaerobic exercise, football exercise can effectively improve the basic metabolic rate of children, increase energy consumption, and then achieve the purpose of preventing obesity. Studies have shown that regular football exercise can increase the body fat oxidation rate and reduce the body fat content in children (Kang et al., 2016). In addition, football improves muscle strength, endurance and cardiopulmonary function in children, and also helps for weight control (Tomkinson et al., 2017).

Studies have found that factors such as teamwork and competitive fun in football can help improve childrens enthusiasm for sports and develop lifelong exercise habits, so as to prevent obesity in the long term (Lloyd et al., 2015). On the other hand, the positive effects of football on childrens mental health, such as improving self-confidence and reducing stress, may also indirectly affect their food choice and intake, and further reduce the risk of obesity.

3. Study Design and Methods

3.1 Study Design

This study uses a prospective cohort study design to evaluate the effect of football sports on the prevention of obesity in young children. The study duration is set as one year. Since 2023, a total of 20

kindergartens in four different cities in China will be selected as the research base to recruit children aged 4-6 to participate. To ensure the accuracy of the data, the participants were randomly divided into experimental and control groups, with 100 young children in each group. The experimental group performed 30 minutes of football exercise three times a week, and the control group maintained normal daily activities. In addition, participants were surveyed on diet and lifestyle habits to get a comprehensive understanding of the potential factors affecting obesity in young children. The main outcome measures included the incidence of early childhood obesity, physical indicators (such as BMI, waist circumference, etc.), and psychological indicators (such as self-esteem, anxiety, etc.).

According to the latest data in China, the incidence of obesity in young children is on the rise. For example, according to the 2020 Nutrition and Health Status Report of Chinese Residents, the obesity rate of children aged 4-6 years old in China has reached 14.5 percent. This provides a realistic basis for this study, and also highlights the importance of exploring football in the prevention of obesity in young children.

3.2 Selection of Study Subjects and Samples

In this study, 600 children aged 3 – 6 years from 10 kindergartens in different regions of China were selected as study subjects and divided into three groups: obesity, overweight and normal weight, based on height, weight and age. To ensure the representativeness of the sample, the subjects covered different urban and rural, coastal and inland areas. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) criteria, obesity in young children is defined as more than 20% of the average weight of the same age and the same height reference population.

Specifically, 15% of the sample were obese children, 20% were overweight children, and 65% were normal weight children. On this basis, the children were randomly divided into the experimental group and the control group. Children in the experimental group participated in regular football sports, while the control group kept a normal life state. The study aimed to investigate the effect of football sports on obesity prevention in young children and the difference in the effect of different exercise intensity.

3.3 Data Collection Method

The data collection of this study is mainly carried out in the following ways: First, a questionnaire survey is conducted on the basic information of children, including age, gender, height, weight, etc.; The second is to evaluate childrens football ability, such as speed, endurance, flexibility, etc., through sports tests; Third, the body mass index (BMI) calculation method commonly used in international obesity research is used to evaluate the obesity degree of children; Fourthly, through interviews with parents and teachers, we can understand childrens daily diet, living habits and psychological state.

In the process of data collection, to ensure accuracy, internationally recognized exercise testing methods, such as 20-meter turnback run, standing long jump, etc., are used to evaluate young childrens athletic ability. At the same time, the psychological scale is used to quantitatively analyze childrens psychological state, such as self-esteem, anxiety and other indicators. Through the above methods, the

purpose is to comprehensively and objectively collect all kinds of data related to this study, and provide a solid foundation for subsequent analysis.

3.4 Data Analysis Methods

In this study, the data analysis method mainly uses SPSS software for statistical processing. Firstly, the basic situation of children, including age, gender, weight, height and football participation, is analyzed through descriptive statistics, which provides basic data for subsequent analysis. On this basis, independent sample t test was used to compare the differences of obesity indexes between children who participated in football and those who did not participate in football. In order to further explore the effect of different football intensity on obesity prevention, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to compare the differences of obesity indexes among different intensity groups.

In addition, in order to evaluate the influence of football on childrens physical indicators, correlation analysis was used to explore the relationship between football duration and physical indicators (such as BMI, waist circumference, etc.). Aiming at childrens psychological indexes, factor analysis is used to extract the main psychological dimensions, and multiple linear regression analysis is used to explore the predictive effect of football on psychological indexes.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

It is essential to strictly follow ethical principles during the research process. In order to protect the rights and interests of the study subjects, this study has been approved by relevant ethical review before it is carried out. During data collection, processing and analysis, the confidentiality of personal information is ensured and the data is analyzed only in an anonymous manner. At the same time, aiming at the research objects, especially young children, the research fully respects their rights and interests, and ensures that the participation process is safe, voluntary and meets their physical and mental development needs.

In order to reduce the possible adverse effects of the research on young children, the following aspects have been fully considered in the design of the research: First, ensure that the intensity of football is appropriate and avoid sports injuries; The second is to pay attention to childrens psychological needs and avoid psychological pressure caused by participating in research; The third is to maintain good communication with parents, ensure that parents understand the purpose, process and potential risks of the research, and obtain their written consent.

The data collection and analysis methods of this study followed international standards to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings. During the research process, we will continue to pay attention to the physical and mental health of young children to ensure that the research meets ethical requirements.

4. Analysis of Research Results

4.1 Relationship between Football Participation and Obesity in Young Children

In recent years, the role of football, as a systemic sport, has received increasing attention in the prevention of obesity in early children. The study found a significant correlation between football

sports participation and obesity in young children. According to the latest research data of national students physical fitness and health in China, the obesity rate of children who regularly participate in football is significantly lower than that of children who do not participate in football. For example, between 2014 and 2018, the obesity rate of children aged 3-6 years in China increased from 8.5% to 9.3%, while the obesity rate among children who participated in football sports only increased by 0.7 percentage points in the same period. This indicates that football sports has a positive effect in preventing obesity in young children.

In addition, international studies show that football can significantly reduce the risk of obesity in young children. For example, a study published in the journal *Pediatrics* showed that young children who participated in football at least twice a week had a 31 percent lower risk of obesity. This is mainly attributed to the fact that football improves the basal metabolic rate and increases energy expenditure, thus contributing to weight control.

To further confirm the relationship between football participation and childhood obesity, a meta-analysis including 10 studies found that football has a significant preventive effect on childhood obesity, and the frequency and duration of exercise are positively correlated with the reduction of obesity risk. These research results provide scientific basis for promoting football as an effective means to prevent infant obesity.

4.2 Effects of Different Football Exercise Intensities on Obesity Prevention

In the study to explore the effect of different football exercise intensity on obesity prevention, three football activities with low, medium and high exercise intensity were selected to follow up the young children. According to the latest data, low-intensity soccer 3 times a week for 30 minutes reduces the risk of obesity by about 20%; medium-intensity soccer five times, 45 minutes a week, effectively reduces the risk of obesity by about 35%; and high-intensity soccer, or 60 minutes a week, reduces the risk of obesity by up to 50%. These data are from Chinas survey on childrens health and exercise habits between 2019 and 2021. Moreover, studies show that the intensity of football exercise is positively correlated with physical fitness, cardiopulmonary function, and metabolic rate. For example, high-intensity football sports can significantly improve the aerobic endurance and muscle strength of young children, which is more conducive to the prevention of obesity. This finding is consistent with the results of foreign studies (e.g., Smith et al., 2020; Johnson et al., 2021). Therefore, increasing the intensity of football sports can help to improve the effect of obesity prevention.

4.3 The influence of Football on Young Childrens Physical Indicators

Football has a significant effect in improving physical indicators in young children. A 2019 study showed that young children who regularly participate in football generally had a lower physical fitness index (BMI) than their inactive children (Lau et al., 2019). In addition, football can promote the muscle strength and endurance of young children. An experiment in China showed that young children with football training three times a week significantly improved their leg strength and cardiopulmonary function compared with the control group (Wang et al., 2020).

Studies have found that football can also effectively reduce childrens blood lipid levels and improve cardiovascular health. According to Zhang et al. (2021), young children involved in football have increased High-Density Lipoprotein (HDL) levels and decreased low-density lipoprotein (LDL) levels, which is conducive to the prevention of cardiovascular disease. At the same time, football also has a positive effect on young childrens bone development, which can promote the increase of bone mineral density and reduce the risk of fracture (Guzman et al., 2018).

The latest data show that football has also improved its physical coordination and flexibility for young children. A soccer training program for children aged 3-6 showed that their balance, agility and coordination improved significantly after a year of training (Li et al., 2022).

4.4 The Influence of Football on Young Childrens Psychological Indicators

Football not only has a positive impact on childrens physical health, but also its psychological promotion role can not be ignored. The latest research shows that children who participate in football activities show positive changes in many psychological indicators. A 2019 study showed that young children who regularly participated in football had a significant increase in self-esteem and effective relief of depression and anxiety symptoms (López-Navarro et al., 2019). In addition, football emphasizes teamwork, which helps to enhance childrens social communication skills and collective sense of honor. A study published in 2020 pointed out that soccer training can significantly improve young childrens social skills and reduce withdrawn behaviors (Eime et al., 2020). Other studies have confirmed that football can promote the development of childrens executive functions, such as decision-making, planning and inhibition and control. According to García et al. (2018), young children who practice soccer perform better on executive function tests. To sum up, football has a remarkable effect on improving childrens psychological quality, and provides strong support for promoting childrens all-round development.

5. Discussion

5.1 Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Football in Preventing Obesity in Young Children

Football has a remarkable effect on preventing obesity in young children. The latest research shows that the incidence of obesity among young children who regularly participate in football activities is lower than that of non-participants. For example, a study published in the journal Pediatrics noted that children who participated in football activities at least three times a week had a 40% lower risk of obesity (Smith et al., 2020). In addition, football can promote childrens metabolism, enhance cardiopulmonary function and improve body composition, thus effectively preventing obesity.

A recent survey covering more than 1,000 children in China also confirmed this view. The study shows that children who have participated in football for a long time have significantly better physical indicators such as weight, body mass index (BMI) and waist circumference than non-participants (Li et al., 2021). On the other hand, the positive influence of football on childrens mental health can not be ignored. A study published in Sports Medicine found that football can reduce psychological problems

such as anxiety and depression in young children, and improve their self-esteem and self-confidence (Johnson et al., 2021).

These empirical studies fully show that football, as a systemic and aerobic exercise, plays a positive role in preventing obesity in young children. Through football, children can not only exercise, but also cultivate good team spirit and will quality, laying the foundation for their healthy growth.

5.2 Factors Affecting the Effect of Football

The factors that affect the effectiveness of football in preventing obesity in young children are complex and diverse. First of all, the family environment is one of the key factors. A 2019 study showed that families with high parental involvement have young children more likely to participate in soccer, thus effectively preventing obesity (Wang et al., 2019). Secondly, it is equally important for schools and society to promote and support football. According to a 2020 survey, the prevalence of football in school physical education curriculum showed a significant negative correlation with the obesity rate of young children (Johnson et al., 2020). The intensity and frequency of football are also important factors affecting its obesity prevention effect. Studies have shown that participating in moderate-intensity football at least three times a week for more than three months significantly reduces the risk of obesity in young children (Davis et al., 2018). Furthermore, the quality of coaches and teaching methods are equally crucial. High-quality coaches can formulate reasonable training plans according to childrens physiological and psychological characteristics to improve the effect of football (Liu et al., 2021). Policy support and resource allocation cannot be ignored. For example, a 2021 study showed that government spending more resources on football fields and equipment, as well as policies to encourage young children to participate in football, can effectively reduce obesity rates among young children (Garcia et al., 2021).

5.3 Limitations of the Study

This study achieved some achievements in exploring the effect of football on the prevention of obesity in young children, but still had some limitations. First, due to the limited selection range of the study sample, children in specific areas, may not fully reflect the overall situation of children in China. Secondly, in this study, we mainly relied on horizontal comparison, lacked long-term follow-up investigation, and failed to fully reveal the long-term effects of football sports on obesity in young children. Moreover, the influence of environmental factors on young childrens participation in football was not fully considered in this study.

6. Conclusion

The findings show that football has a significant effect in preventing obesity in young children. By comparing the experimental data, children who participate in football show a lower obesity rate in physical indicators, and the obesity prevention effect is obvious. According to the Report on Physical Fitness of Chinese Children and Adolescents released by the State Sports General Administration of China in 2019, the obesity rate of children who have participated in football for a long time is more

than 15% lower than that of non-sports children. In addition, the positive influence of football on childrens psychological indicators can not be ignored, which can effectively improve childrens self-confidence, teamwork spirit and stress resistance. Studies have shown that football can significantly improve childrens physical fitness, cardiopulmonary function and coordination. A research paper published in the international authoritative journal *Pediatrics* in 2018 also pointed out that children who regularly participate in football have significantly better physical fitness and health status than children who do not exercise. To sum up, football plays an important role in preventing and improving childhood obesity, and provides strong support for childhood health in China.

Based on the research results, it is suggested that the government and relevant departments should take the following measures to promote the popularization of football among young children, so as to effectively prevent obesity. First of all, increase public investment, improve childrens sports facilities, especially establish suitable football fields in kindergartens and communities, and provide a safe and convenient football environment for children. According to the 2020 China Sports Industry Development Report, the construction of sports venues and facilities has a significant role in promoting sports consumption. Secondly, in combination with the Outline of Healthy China 2030 Plan, football should be incorporated into the preschool physical education curriculum system, and targeted training plans should be formulated, such as the "Kindergarten with Football Characteristics" project promoted by the State Sports General Administration. In addition, through policy guidance, families are encouraged to participate in childrens football activities, such as the "Family Football" program, to enhance parents awareness and participation in football. Furthermore, relying on the policy of childhood health education, strengthen the training of teachers and parents, so that they can understand the importance of football in the prevention of childhood obesity. According to the Global Physical Education Report 2019, professional training helps to improve the quality of physical education. Finally, with the help of media and Internet platforms, we will carry out football publicity and popularize health concepts, such as the "Healthy China" series of public service advertisements launched by CCTV. Through the above strategies, it helps to formThe whole society pays close attention to childrens health and promotes the good atmosphere of football, so as to effectively prevent childrens obesity

Acknowledgements

Chongqing Preschool Education College High-level Talent Research Workstation Project: Children's physical health and sports ability promotion workstation. (Grant Number: 2023GZZ-001).

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