

Open learning spaces do not increase children's physical activity

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Open learning spaces seem to enable more breaks from sedentary time, which may decrease the potential adverse effects of prolonged sitting on the health of children. Credit: University of Jyväskylä

According to a recent study, open learning spaces are not directly

associated with the physical activity of students in grades 3 and 5, even though more breaks from sedentary time were observed in open learning spaces compared to conventional classrooms. The findings are based on the CHIPASE study, carried out at the Faculty of Sport and Health Science of the University of Jyväskylä. The results were published in *Frontiers of Sports and Active Life*.

After the reform of the national core curriculum for [basic education](#) in Finland, issued in 2016, most of the new or renovated comprehensive schools in Finland began to incorporate open and flexible [classroom](#) designs and principles. Combined with student-centered pedagogies, these open learning spaces may increase children's physical activity during lessons. Classroom-based physical activity may also have a [positive impact](#) on academic-related outcomes.

"Surprisingly, students were physically less active in open learning spaces than in conventional classrooms," Says Doctoral Researcher Jani Hartikainen from Faculty of Sport and Health Sciences at the University of Jyväskylä. "In turn, open learning spaces seem to enable more breaks from sedentary time, which may decrease the potential adverse effects of prolonged sitting on the health of children."

The main result of the study was that, on their own, open learning spaces do not increase children's physical activity during lessons. Future studies should seek to investigate and develop teacher practices to capitalize on the potential of open learning spaces to promote classroom-based [physical activity](#).

"In this study, we did not observe teachers' instructions about students' movement, but prior studies have reported difficulties in how teachers adapt to open learning spaces," Hartikainen says. "Especially large student groups may cause teachers to need to restrict students' movement during lessons."

This study was published as part of the CHIPASE study, which is funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland. The study was based on cross-sectional data collected in 2015 and 2016 before and after renovations which replaced conventional classrooms with open learning spaces.

More information: Jani Hartikainen et al, Comparison of Classroom-Based Sedentary Time and Physical Activity in Conventional Classrooms and Open Learning Spaces Among Elementary School Students, *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living* (2021). [DOI: 10.3389/fspor.2021.626282](https://doi.org/10.3389/fspor.2021.626282)

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