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The case study: contribution to research in Physical Culture and Sport

El estudio de caso: contribución a las investigaciones en la Cultura Física y el Deporte

O estudo de caso: uma contribuição para a pesquisa em Cultura Física e Esporte

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, case studies have been increasingly used as part of qualitative paradigm research. It is applied as a method and also as a strategy to respond to clinical, social and educational problems that can hardly be approached from a model more focused on the explanation of the phenomena, and not on the understanding of them. The aim of this article is to evaluate the contribution of the case studies in scientific research, and the potential of their application in the field of Physical Culture and Sport. By means of the bibliographic analysis, the case study is evaluated, inserted in the methodology of educational qualitative research. The researcher uses it according to his particular objectives, case studies are



presented in different spheres of action of physical culture and sport, so that it provides a preliminary approach, it is used as a method and as a technique in the processing of the information collected; also as a research strategy that allows to deepen in particular cases, in which valuable information is analyzed and obtained depending on the objective planned in the research. It is concluded that in the field of Physical Culture and Sport, this type of research allows systematizing particular distinctive and exemplary studies that constitute an enriching source for teaching, research and practices of coaches, psychologists, athletes and other specialists.

Keywords: Physical Culture and Sport, case studies, qualitative methodology, Sport Psychology.

RESUMEN

En los últimos años, se utilizan cada vez con más profusión los estudios de caso como parte de la investigación del paradigma cualitativo. Se aplica como método y también como estrategia para dar respuesta a problemas clínicos, sociales y educativos que difícilmente se pueden abordar desde un modelo más centrado en la explicación de los fenómenos, y no en la comprensión de los mismos. Este artículo tiene como objetivo valorar la contribución de los estudios de caso en la investigación científica, y las potencialidades de su aplicación en el ámbito de la Cultura Física y el Deporte. Mediante el análisis bibliográfico, se valora el estudio de caso, insertado en la metodología de la investigación cualitativa educativa. El investigador lo utiliza según sus objetivos particulares, se exponen estudios de caso en diferentes esferas de actuación de la cultura física y el deporte, de manera que propicia un acercamiento preliminar, se utiliza como método y como técnica en el procesamiento de la información recopilada; también como estrategia investigativa que permite profundizar en casos particulares, en los cuales se analiza y obtiene información valiosa en dependencia del objetivo planificado en la investigación. Se concluye que en el ámbito de la Cultura Física y el Deporte este tipo de investigaciones permite sistematizar estudios particulares distintivos y ejemplarizantes que constituyen una fuente enriquecedora para la docencia, la investigación y las prácticas de entrenadores, psicólogos, deportistas y demás especialistas.



Palabras clave: Cultura Física y el Deporte, estudios de caso, metodología cualitativa
Psicología del Deporte

RESUMO

Nos últimos anos, os estudos de caso têm sido cada vez mais usados como parte da pesquisa do paradigma qualitativo. Ele é aplicado como um método e também como uma estratégia para responder a problemas clínicos, sociais e educacionais que dificilmente podem ser abordados a partir de um modelo mais focado na explicação dos fenômenos, em vez de sua compreensão. O objetivo deste artigo é avaliar a contribuição dos estudos de caso na pesquisa científica e o potencial de sua aplicação no campo da cultura física e do esporte. Por meio de uma análise bibliográfica, avalia-se o estudo de caso, inserido na metodologia da pesquisa educacional qualitativa. O pesquisador o utiliza de acordo com seus objetivos particulares, os estudos de caso são apresentados em diferentes âmbitos de atuação na cultura física e no esporte, de modo que favorece uma abordagem preliminar, é utilizado como método e como técnica no processamento das informações coletadas; também como estratégia de pesquisa que permite um estudo aprofundado de casos particulares, nos quais são analisadas e obtidas informações valiosas, dependendo do objetivo planejado na pesquisa. Conclui-se que, no campo da Cultura Física e do Esporte, esse tipo de pesquisa permite a sistematização de estudos particulares distintos e exemplares que constituem uma fonte enriquecedora para o ensino, a pesquisa e as práticas de treinadores, psicólogos, esportistas e outros especialistas.

Palavras-chave: Cultura Física e Esporte, estudos de caso, metodologia qualitativa,
psicologia do esporte

INTRODUCTION



Research is a process aimed at arriving at reliable solutions to problems, through the planned and systematic collection, analysis and interpretation of data (Munarriz, 2011). This general definition of research encompasses the different realities of study and the different ways of dealing with that reality, whether with a quantitative or qualitative approach.

The difference between the two lies in the process followed to find solutions. In this sense, it should be noted that it is not only a differentiation between methodology, methods and techniques used by one type of research or another, but that the differences are based on the assumptions made when carrying out a qualitative or quantitative study (Munarriz, 2011).

Therefore, the way of perceiving the complexity of the real world for a study, together with the nature of the problems to be investigated, is what leads to carry out one type of research or another. In this way, the paradigms do not compete with each other, since both start from different assumptions and are more suited to one or another study problem.

Thus, the methods and techniques of data collection and analysis can be shared by both types of research. It is often necessary to collect and analyze data from different perspectives, using different methods, in order to analyze and interpret reality as completely and objectively as possible.

The need to understand educational problems from the perspective of the actors, based on the researcher's interrelationship with the subjects of study, in order to capture the meaning of social actions, is what has led to approaching them from a qualitative perspective.

In research in the field of Physical Culture and Sport, qualitative studies are not as abundant as those of the quantitative paradigm, which seems to be given, more than by the inertia of the change from one paradigm to another, by the multidisciplinary nature of this area of knowledge that integrates multiple and varied objects of study, each with its particularities and scope, where there are educational facts and phenomena, but also of other orders, such as biological, biomechanical, physiological, morphological, sociological and others; Therefore, not all research in one area of knowledge can be strictly and solely adjusted to the trends of educational research, where qualitative research has proliferated for years.



Qualitative research uses diverse methods and techniques as a range of strategies that help to gather data to be used for inference and interpretation, explanation and prediction. Studies conducted in education, from the qualitative perspective (Cañizares and Huie, 2022; Cañizares *et al.*, 2022) state that the methods most commonly used in this type of research are the case study and action research. Therefore, the objective of this research is to assess the contribution of case studies in scientific research and the potential of their application in the field of Physical Culture and Sport.

DEVELOPMENT

The case study. Definitions

The case study is defined as a complete or intense examination of one facet of a subject or group in a particular place or circumstance. The case study is referred to as an examination of a case in action. It is considered as a particular way of collecting, organizing and analyzing data. All definitions agree that the case study involves a process of inquiry characterized by a detailed, comprehensive, systematic and in-depth examination of the case of interest.

As a form of research, the case study is defined by interest in the individual case(s) (Stake, 2007). In this sense, the case study is considered as "a method involving the collection and recording of data on a case or cases, and the preparation of a report or presentation of the case".

A case can be a person, an organization, a teaching program, a collection, a particular event or a simple document repository. The only requirement is that it possesses some physical or social boundary that confers it an entity. In the educational environment a student, a teacher, a class, a faculty, a center, a curricular project, a teacher's practice, a certain educational policy, among others.

In other contexts, it can be a family, a group or social institution, a community or nation; in this research an athlete, a physical activity practitioner, a sports team, a patient in rehabilitation or a sports organization can constitute potential cases of study (Cañizares and Huie, 2022; Díaz De Salas *et al.*, 2011; Stake, 2007).



The case study has become an (ideographic) research technique that is highly celebrated in scientific research, as testified by its application in fields as diverse as anthropology, education, law, social work, medicine, psychology and psychiatry, among others.

In the field of pedagogical research, it is beginning to be strongly introduced as a research paradigm, as evidenced by the breadth of studies carried out in recent years. In this sense, the studies that attempt to link this methodological approach with temporal designs are well known (Stake, 2007; Yin, 2009).

The usefulness of this new design, which means or may mean a break with traditional group designs, seems to begin in educational terms, in the fields of diagnosis of learning difficulties, in school guidance, in training-groups and in the whole wide field of experimental research that can serve as a basis for the training of psychologists, sociologists and pedagogues (Yin, 2009).

The case studies at the Physical Culture

The scientific problems that occur in the fields of Physical Culture and Sport demand the deepening of their realities through case studies. Studies have been made of physical activity practitioners, patients rehabilitated with physical exercises, life stories of relevant figures, as well as of distinctive teams and organizations that due to their characteristics exhibit exemplary conditions worthy of taking into account for future contributions, through investigations of unique cases.

These single-case designs are those that focus their analysis on a single case, and their use is justified for several reasons. In the first place, their use is justified to the extent that the single case has a critical character, or, in other words, the case allows confirming, changing, modifying or extending knowledge about the object of study (Yin, 2009). From this perspective, the single case study can have an important contribution to knowledge and to the theoretical construction of science that can be valued from the frameworks of the sciences of Physical Culture and Sport.



Secondly, the unique case design in sport and/or physical activity is justified on the basis of its extreme character or uniqueness. The unique, unrepeatable and peculiar character of each subject that intervenes in a context, in this case sport, justifies by itself this type of design; even more, if the circumstances that make it relevant and distinctive are present.

A third reason that supports and justifies the use of the single case in physical activity resides in its revealing character. This situation manifests itself when a researcher has the opportunity to observe, analyze and evaluate a situation; a physical activity practitioner, team, athlete, sports organization or a fact that is previously inaccessible to scientific research.

This type of design finds a clear example with the use and support of the biographical method, and life histories where the case is revealing of a concrete situation.

Thus, in order to study athletes through a case study, the aim is to select the design that allows learning as much as possible about the object of research, about the phenomenon in question and about the case or cases. Thus, with this vision of having an opportunity to learn, it is taken into account Stake's (2007) statement on the selection of the type of design, which is determined by the following:

- 1) have easy access to it
- 2) there is a high probability that a mix of processes, programs, people, interactions and/or structures related to the research questions will occur
- 3) to be able to establish a good relationship with the informants
- 4) to be able to develop the researcher's role for as long as necessary
- 5) to ensure the quality and credibility of the study.

Case studies of the life history type are particularly important. This method requires in-depth interviews, recordings, analysis of documents on the history of an individual. In the case study of outstanding practitioners and athletes, the analysis of their sports trajectory can be used, focusing on some of their most important traits or of particular interest in the sports community in question; for example, the particular fighting style of the Cuban boxer



Julio César La Cruz, Olympic and world champion; technical-tactical strategies or relevant teamwork styles such as the "morenas de Caribe", the National Boxing team; the winning Cuban baseball teams, among other sports groups and entities that can account for a Cuban school of sports with a relevant trajectory.

In addition, the cases of certain research on personalized treatments in athletes, such as those carried out by Rodriguez et al. (2024), can be evaluated to determine the individual characteristics of a sports performance.

A case study systematizes, over a period of time, one or several experiences or processes, their critical moments, actors and context, in order to explore their causes and understand the reason for the experience/s or process/s under study and their development, how they did it, how they obtained the results and what aspects deserve particular attention in the future. Experiences of longitudinal studies that particularize specific studies of particular subjects/cases are also recorded (Fernandez *et al.*, 2023).

The observation of a multiplicity of factors or variables is important to answer the questions raised in descriptive research, and in this sense, it can also be taken into account in case studies of the physical activity sphere. Precisely, the pluriobjetal and multidisciplinary nature of the area of knowledge of Physical Culture points to the maximum use of the advantages of case studies.

The sciences of Physical Culture and Sport define a specific region within the broad field of science that is integrated by disciplinary sciences that study certain facts and phenomena of reality, with well-defined objects of study and with a set of theories built in interrelation with other fields, such as philosophical, psychological, pedagogical, biological, medical, physical-mathematical and educational sciences, among others; from which are derived disciplinary sciences such as sports psychology, functional sports morphology, biochemistry of physical and sports activities, among others. This gives the sciences of Physical Culture and Sport a transdisciplinary character.



The possibility of approaching problems of different kinds, through studies that allow to approach their phenomena and facts from a credible, interpersonal approach, closer to the scenarios where they occur and to the development situations of their protagonists, should provoke in our areas of study, a human and scientific enrichment more congruent with the needs of these times.

A brief reference to the areas of study of this science, weighted in the Doctoral Program in Physical Culture Sciences (PDCCF, 2021) of Havana, which are not unique; but the most representative ones, allow understanding the usefulness and validity of the type of research we are talking about.

Case Studies in Sport

This sub-area of knowledge groups two large fields that are inseparable due to their interconnection and dependence: sport as a cultural phenomenon and the process through which this is expressed in its material realization; that is, sports training. Sport as a cultural phenomenon reaches dimensions that are related to history, sociology, jurisdiction, philosophy, ethics, aesthetics, politics, praxeology and other humanistic sciences that explain its origin and existence.

Sports training is an area of Physical Culture that seeks to achieve physical-sports performance at different ages and levels. In the Cuban National System of Physical Culture, not only high-performance sport is distinguished, but also sport for all. Its realization occurs as a teaching-educational process, where the regularities, principles and biological, biomechanical, psychological, managerial and other laws determine the pedagogical effectiveness of this process.

In this sense, it is important to highlight the existence of entities that guarantee the development of this activity in its broadest sense, whose particularities require a close study of their functions and needs, in accordance with the social role that corresponds to them within a National System of Physical Culture. Therefore, reference can be made to this



system itself, to the organizational levels that integrate it, as well as to the different social groups that act in it.

Reference can be made, then, to the study of different sports schools, of different management and pedagogical groups, of sports teams at different levels of competition, whose studies as exclusive realities require a holistic, multifactorial approach. In these contexts, the case study, understood as a research strategy and method, seems to be an expeditious way to solve the most global problems.

Likewise, in high performance sports, exclusive cases appear in the world scenario of athletes and teams that obtain the highest results, exclusive of people with a high degree of personality development, with exceptional physical and psychological conditions, world and Olympic champions that become models for the generations that know their sports successes. The study of these unique cases can undeniably be a source of knowledge and educational experiences.

Case studies in Physical Education

It is a sub-area of Physical Culture that, both structurally and epistemologically, has reached a high degree of development in its historical-cultural course. It serves sectors of the population from infancy to the elderly and includes that part of education which, through various forms of physical activity, contributes to the integral formation of the personality.

School Physical Education is part of the National Education System in our country. Its benefits also reach the adult population through various physical-educational activities such as professional, labor and mass physical education, among others. This area of knowledge, approaches a scientific treatment attached to educational research, so that many of its research processes can occur through case studies.

Case studies in physical recreation

It deals with the process of directing physical-recreational activities in the different sectors of the population in order to occupy leisure time creatively and educationally. Recreation,



as a means to satisfy leisure time, is a factor to be taken into account in the socioeconomic development of any society; it is a social need that allows for the permanent physical and spiritual enrichment of man. The correct use of free time is an important condition in the integral formation of the individual, so it is necessary to motivate and guide him/her adequately towards activities that serve as pleasant recreation, but at the same time, creative and formative, such as physical-recreational activities.

These goals are made viable through the individual-community-recreation-environment relationship, under different organizational forms such as recreational programs in the community, popular camping, special mountain plans, tourist-recreational plans and other forms.

Physical recreation can transform social and cultural conditions, which brings as a consequence new scientific problem and requires the necessary preparation to solve them, in a changing society that projects new needs and social demands that bring as a consequence the need for professionals of a qualitatively higher level, to face them and solve them scientifically. Due to their particularities, most of these problems are of a socio-cultural nature, so they can and do use the case study.

Case studies in prophylactic and therapeutic physical culture

Sub-area of knowledge that deals with the organization of physical activities with hygienic objectives, prevention and rehabilitation of different inadequate functional states, derived from pathological or other reasons, where medical, biological and psychological sciences interact in a particular way with their specific processes, mediated by physical activities under a methodological organization.

It covers post-traumatic rehabilitation, convalescence processes, care of specific diseases and includes postural correction and contemplates the specific hygienic norms of any physical activity. This sub-area of knowledge, due to its broad nature and development, implies deep interdisciplinary relationships, whose core is exercise and physical activity.



Given its close connection to physical medicine and physical rehabilitation, it is common in research to use case studies as a research strategy and method; both multiple case and single case.

Case Study Examples: *Sport Psychology*

In Sport Psychology, one of the so-called sciences applied to Physical Culture and Sport, or as (from a more accurate understanding) transdisciplinary science connected to all the facts, phenomena and processes of these areas of knowledge, research using case studies with different approaches and levels of depth can be appreciated.

Some of the most recent case studies carried out in sport psychology, in outstanding figures of our country are that of Ana Fidelia Quiros Moret, Cuban world champion and Olympic champion (Cañizares et al., 2020; Cañizares and Huie, 2022); a case study is carried out based on aspects of her life history, through analytical qualitative research, to analyze her volitional qualities and resilience capacity from the beginning of her sports career, her results and sporting continuation after a traumatic life event.

The methods used are interviews, focused interviews, analysis of official and personal documents and the reconstruction of events through records, formal letters, diplomas, orders, recognitions, videos, personal documents, letters, photographs, personal notes and autobiographies; as well as the triangulation of sources and methods.

In the research developed by Huie (2020), the benefits of the case study are used as a technique that allows to deepen the analysis of the results obtained in athletes of the National Table Tennis Team of the junior and senior category to explore emotional control, due to the contribution of this ability to the performance of athletes during the training and competition process.

The treatment of the data carried out by means of its particular deepening, is an example of the case study as a research technique. Also, resilience and psychological states in the face of Covid-19 and the interruption of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games have been studied in Cuba and abroad (Zamora, et al., 2022), injuries in sporting life, self-efficacy and competitive



performance of high-performance athletes such as Idalys Ortiz Bocourt (Judo), Luis Alberto Orta Sánchez and Oscar Pino Hinds (Cañizares et al., 2022, 2022^a, 2020; Cañizares and Huie, 2022; Pino *et al.*, 2022).

The research conducted by Collado and Sanchez (2017), in Spain, on the process of becoming excellent in sport, with the case study of Pau Gasol is an important example to describe and explain the sport development of athletes; the research focuses on knowing the process of becoming excellent in sport, through a single case study. Using the biographical method, three dimensions were analyzed (sporting, social and personal) that included 5, 4 and 8 categories, respectively.

The biographical source of Pau Gasol was selected because it was the one that best suited the study proposal and the categorical system established, based on other research and the conceptual framework. In addition, the criteria of transferability and credibility were taken into account to provide the research with quality.

Another example is seen in the study conducted in a Brazilian Paralympic athlete with blindness, based on his sports career with a life history approach, it highlights the significance of sport for the development of his autonomy, social recognition, his victories and successes, and his limitation (blindness) was a product and at the same time a producer of the evolutionary change of the athlete (Cardoso, et al., 2019).

Tarqui (2021) conducted a case study on an elite Ecuadorian karate athlete during the Covid-19 crisis and reflects the importance of clinical-sports intervention in the early stages of the competitor's life with projections to high performance for his development as an athlete in mature ages.

Other examples in Physical Culture

In several theses of the Doctoral Program in Physical Culture Sciences of the UCCFD, case studies have been used, in this regard several examples are presented. From the area of



knowledge of sport, a model is the training of Cuban women elite shut put players, because from the problematic situation detected about the innovations made in the training process, the causes that produced their high results were investigated. This process had not been sufficiently grounded, nor did it appear in the specialized bibliography; a situation that manifested the social need that arose from the contradiction between the sports results achieved worldwide by the athletes and the insufficient theoretical-methodological support.

The case study is used to study in depth, based on defined dimensions and variables, the training process carried out in preparation for the 2004 Olympic Games and the World Indoor Championship, by the Cuban shut put athlete Yumileidi Cumba Jay and Misleydis Gonzalez Tamayo, respectively. This process is described and the innovations with respect to the usual practice are explained, in order to conform an ideal model of training at this level and context and in other contexts. For their part, Bennett *et al.* (2022) explains the experiences of Canadian conventional and Paralympic athletes in the face of the interruption of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic cycle due to the Covid 19 pandemic.

From the area of knowledge of Prophylactic and Therapeutic Physical Culture

The research on operational skills as components of the cognitive status of patients with nervous system diseases was developed, where the application of regulations for the design of the physical neurorehabilitation process is demonstrated. It was carried out through the comparison of a treatment applied to a patient with severe cranioencephalic trauma and treatment design posteriori, to this same patient. For this purpose, an experimental design that appears in chapter V of the thesis document Pedagogical strategy for motor rehabilitation of patients with severe head injury (PDCCF, 2021) was applied.

The study reports the case of a patient with severe traumatic brain injury (TCEG) who underwent a motor rehabilitation strategy using physical exercises, which led to partial functional recovery, with sequelae of her trauma.

From the area of knowledge of Physical Education



The physical exercise program to maintain the physical condition of civil aviation technical crew members, in this research the case study was used as a particular technique to collect, organize and analyze data within this research, when after the construction and application of the program proposal, the results obtained in six cases were analyzed, through a process of inquiry that was characterized by the detailed, comprehensive, systematic and in-depth examination of the cases under study.

From the results of the review of case studies in the field of Physical Culture and Sport, it is agreed with Díaz *et al.* (2011); Munarriz (2011); Tarqui (2021) who state that as in educational research, case studies are suitable for obtaining knowledge of potential cases: a student, a group, a class, a community and others.

In this research, the studies refer to athletes, rehabilitation patients, systematic practitioners of physical activities, trainers or rehabilitators, a training or rehabilitation session, but they can also be carried out in physical activity teaching programs or training plans, an educational and sports training institution, a training or rehabilitation learning process, or a sports team. The important thing is to use the method properly and take advantage of its potential and benefits in obtaining significant research results.

CONCLUSIONS

In the field of Physical Culture, case studies can be understood as a methodological tool that adapts to the needs of the researcher as a technique in the processing of the information collected and as a research strategy that allows to deepen in particular cases, as they constitute and contribute to enrich the teaching, research and practices of coaches, psychologists, athletes and other specialists.

Specifically in sport, there are cases that are representative of a social ideal of perfection, that are unrepeatable, unsurpassable, unique, whose transmission of experiences and values to the next generations should not remain in a mark, a time of execution, a medal, so that the knowledge that gave rise to these certain events, the experiences and unique experiences



need to be recorded, analyzed and disseminated, so that they meet the appropriate scientific rigor, provide usefulness and credibility to the results.

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The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest.



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The author is responsible for writing the work and analyzing the documents.



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