



Evaluation of Changes in VO₂max of FTME UPN Students in the First Two Semesters of Study: A Multistage Fitness Test Approach

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to evaluate changes in students' cardiorespiratory capacity at the Faculty of Mineral and Energy Engineering (FTME) UPN "Veteran" Yogyakarta during the first two semesters of the 2024/2025 academic year. Fitness measurements were conducted using the Multistage Fitness Test (MFT) on 154 male students at the beginning of semester 1 and the end of semester 2 to obtain VO₂max estimates. During the two semesters, students took Physical Education courses once a week (± 100 minutes/session), which included fitness exercises, team sports (basketball, soccer, and handball), and basic motor skills training. The training intensity was moderate and did not apply the principle of progressivity. The analysis showed no significant difference between the pre-test VO₂max score (83.05) and the post-test score (83.04; $p = 0.978$). The stability of this value indicates that the physical activity program that lasted for two semesters did not provide sufficient physiological stimulus to increase aerobic capacity. These findings were analyzed using the principles of overload, diminishing returns, and homeostasis, which state that improving fitness requires progressive and intense exercise stimuli. This study recommends applying structured exercise methods, such as HIIT and periodization, to promote more significant physiological adaptations among engineering students.

Keywords: VO₂max, Physical Fitness, Engineering Students, Multistage Fitness Test, Physical Exercise

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INTRODUCTION

Students at the Faculty of Mineral Engineering (FTME) face academic challenges that demand not only intellectual skills, but also optimal physical readiness. Activities such as geological surveys, mine exploration, and topographic mapping are generally carried out in rugged terrain, over long periods, and require high mobility. These activities demand cardiorespiratory endurance, muscle strength, and the ability to adapt to extreme weather and geographical conditions. In this context, physical fitness is not merely a complement but a functional

prerequisite for students to carry out field activities effectively and safely (Kurniawan & Sumarni, 2021).

However, to date, there is no systematic data on the physical fitness profile of FTME students obtained through standardized instruments. In fact, this kind of information is essential for developing physical training programs aligned with the academic characteristics and environment of engineering students. Previous studies have shown that low fitness levels can increase the risk of injury during field activities and reduce the effectiveness of practice-based learning (Muspita et al., 2015; Sunadi et al., 2018). Therefore, comprehensive mapping of students' physical fitness is necessary to determine their level of physical readiness and formulate preventive and curative training policies (Wahyuni et al., 2022).

One valid and reliable instrument for measuring cardiorespiratory fitness is the Multistage Fitness Test (MFT). This test measures VO₂max —the body's maximum capacity to consume oxygen during intense physical activity —and is a key indicator of cardiovascular and respiratory fitness (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2022). The MFT is widely recognized for its efficiency, affordability, and ability to provide an objective assessment of aerobic endurance. Although commonly used in sports training and physical education, its application is still very limited in non-sports student environments, such as engineering students (Nababan & Rizal, 2024).

Given these conditions, this study aims to compile a longitudinal profile of the physical fitness of FTME students for the 2024/2025 academic year using MFT results. The study focuses on mapping changes in fitness levels from the first to the second semester to identify whether fitness has increased, decreased, or remained stable. This longitudinal analysis is essential because significant changes in activity patterns, adaptation to academic loads, and student lifestyle habits often accompany the initial transition period of lectures (Handayani & Prasetyo, 2020; Yusuf & Puspitasari, 2020).

Through this approach, the research results are expected to make a real contribution to the development of more targeted and structured physical training strategies within the FTME environment. These findings also serve as a basis for the faculty in formulating academic policies and health services that support a

balance between the intellectual demands and physical readiness of engineering students.

METHODS

This study used a pre-posttest design with a quantitative longitudinal analytical approach. This design was chosen because it allowed researchers to observe changes over a specific period in the same group of subjects. This study was conducted at two points in time: the beginning of semester 1 (August 2024) and the end of semester 2 (June 2025) of the 2024/2025 academic year. During the first two semesters, students took Physical Education courses scheduled once a week. The course material included physical activities such as fitness exercises, team sports (gymnastics, basketball, soccer, and handball), and basic general fitness training. Each session lasted approximately 100 minutes, at moderate intensity, focusing on introducing fundamental skills, improving movement coordination, and increasing general physical activity. In addition to regular lectures, students also participate in field practicum activities that require high mobility, such as geological surveys and topographic mapping. However, these activities are not organized as structured training programs based on the principle of progressivity, but rather as part of the academic curriculum and basic physical adaptation for engineering students.

The research was conducted at the Faculty of Mineral Engineering (FTME). The subjects in this study were 154 students from the 2024 class of the Faculty of Mineral Engineering. This study used a total sampling technique in data collection. This technique was chosen because the researcher took all male participants listed in the physical fitness score data, without conducting random selection (Creswell & Creswell, 2021). Measurements were taken twice, before and after two semesters of lectures. The aim was to see the changes in physical fitness levels that occurred during that period.

The main instrument in this study was the Multistage Fitness Test (MFT). VO₂max was calculated based on the final level and stage achieved, using the official formula from the Ministry of Education and Culture (2022) guidelines. Validity and Reliability: The MFT has high validity as an estimate of VO₂max, with a correlation of $r > 0.90$ with the treadmill test, the gold standard. The MFT

shows high score consistency ($r > 0.85$) in retesting (test-retest reliability). Therefore, the MFT is recognized as a valid and reliable instrument for measuring cardiorespiratory fitness in both physical education and non-athletic environments. Data was collected directly through the Test. Data analysis used descriptive statistics to examine the mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum values of VO₂max across two periods. Inferential Tests: using a paired t-test to determine significant differences between initial and final VO₂max results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive analysis was performed on VO₂max data from male participants to provide an overview of the level of cardiorespiratory fitness measured by two tests conducted within a specified period. The data used in this analysis included two measurement scores, namely Score 1 and Score 2, which reflected each participant's estimated maximum oxygen consumption (VO₂max).

Table 1. Statistics of Differences between Test 1 and Test 2 VO₂max

Statistics	Score 1	Score 2	Mean
Number of Data	154	154	154
Average	83.05	83.04	83.05
Standard Deviation	9.10	8.74	8.41
Minimum	69	66	68.50
Quartile 1 (Q1)	74.00	74.00	76.00
Median (Q2)	82.00	83.00	82.50
Third Quartile (Q3)	88.00	88.00	88.50
Maximum	100	100	100

Based on descriptive statistical analysis of 154 male participants, the average VO₂max score on the first test was 83.05, with a standard deviation of 9.10. This value indicates that, in general, the participants had fairly good to excellent cardiorespiratory fitness, depending on the standard VO₂max classification based on age and gender. The highest score in the first measurement was 100, while the lowest was 69. This relatively wide range of values indicates moderate to high diversity in fitness levels among all participants.

In the second measurement, the average VO₂max score was 83.04, slightly lower than in the first. The standard deviation also decreased slightly to 8.74, indicating that the variation in scores between participants was more uniform than in the first measurement. The maximum score remained at 100, while the minimum

decreased to 66, indicating that several individuals experienced a sharp decline in performance. In general, despite a slight decrease in the average and distribution of values in the second measurement, these results did not show a statistically significant change, as confirmed by an inferential test that produced a p-value of 0.978. This means that the VO₂max scores between the two measurements were relatively stable, and the observed variations were most likely natural or influenced by technical factors in the measurement process rather than reflecting actual changes in fitness. When viewed in terms of the median, quartiles, and score distributions, both measurements show a relatively symmetrical pattern and are not too deviant. This is indicated by the median, which is quite close to the average, and by the difference between the quartiles not being too extreme. This data also shows that most participants have values around the average, with only a few individuals showing extreme values (either very high or very low).

Thus, based on the descriptive statistics, the cardiorespiratory fitness levels of male participants, as measured by two VO₂max tests, are consistent. The values obtained reflect good aerobic performance, with moderate variability between participants. These results serve as a starting point before conducting inferential analysis to determine whether there are statistically significant differences between the two measurements.

This study used two VO₂max measurements: before (pre-test) and after (post-test) a treatment or exercise was carried out. The purpose of this analysis was to determine whether there were significant changes in male participants' pre-test and post-test results. For this reason, a paired t-test was used because the data came from the same people who were measured twice. The following Table presents the steps for calculating the paired t-test to determine whether there is a significant difference between the pre-test VO₂max score (Score 1) and the post-test score (Score 2) in 154 male participants.

Table 2. Summary of Inferential Tests

Step	Formula	Result
1. Calculate the Score Difference (D)	$D = \text{Score 1} - \text{Score 2}$	Difference for each participant
2. Average Difference (\bar{d})	$\bar{d} = \Sigma D / n$	0.01299
3. Standard Deviation (SD)	$SD = \sqrt{\Sigma(D - \bar{d})^2 / (n - 1)}$	7.417
4. Standard Error (SE)	$SE = SD / \sqrt{n}$	0.269
5. t-value	$t = \bar{d} / SE$	0.027
6. p-value	From the t-distribution df = 153	0.978

Since the p-value is greater than 0.05, there is no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test results. This means that, statistically, the VO₂max values of male participants remained stable and did not experience a significant increase or decrease after the treatment was carried out.

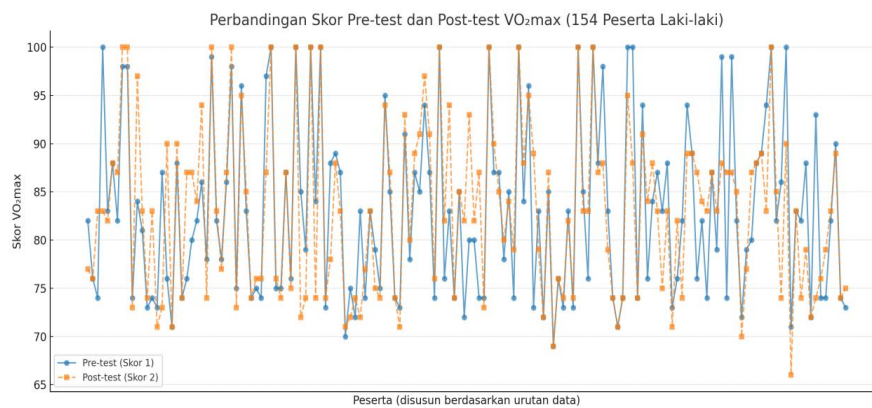


Figure 1. Comparison of Pretest and Posttest

The figure above shows a line graph comparing VO₂max scores between the pre-test (Score 1) and post-test (Score 2) taken from 154 male participants. Each line represents one participant, with two measurement points, namely before and after the treatment or exercise program was carried out. In general, many lines are almost parallel and flat, indicating that most participants had relatively stable VO₂max scores between the two measurements. Only a few participants showed noticeable changes in the form of a drastic increase or decrease in scores. This graph also reinforces the results of the previous inferential analysis, which showed a p-value of 0.978, well above the 0.05 significance threshold. This indicates that there was no statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test results.

Thus, from a visual and statistical perspective, it can be concluded that the program or treatment administered during the inter-test period did not have a significant impact on the increase or decrease in the VO₂max capacity of male participants in the analyzed population.

The results of data analysis of 154 male participants showed that the average VO₂max score at the pre-test was 83.05, and at the post-test was 83.04. The difference in the mean was very small, with a t-value of 0.027 and a p-value of 0.978. Because the p-value was well above the commonly used significance threshold ($\alpha = 0.05$), there was no statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores. The results of the inferential analysis show that there is no significant difference between the pre-test (83.05) and post-test (83.04) VO₂max scores ($p = 0.978$). These findings indicate that students' cardiorespiratory capacity is relatively stable throughout the first two semesters of lectures. This stability can be understood by considering the characteristics of the physical activities undertaken by students, namely routine sports classes such as gymnastics, basketball, soccer, and handball, which are carried out at moderate intensity. Although these activities play a role in maintaining student physical involvement, they do not meet the criteria for physiological stimuli needed to increase VO₂max.

Training principles such as *overload*, *progression*, and *periodization* were not systematically applied in the lectures, so the stimulus provided tended to be within the body's homeostatic zone. As a result, physiological adaptations that increase aerobic capacity did not occur, and the students' VO₂max scores remained stable from the pre-test to the post-test. These results indicate that participants' cardiorespiratory fitness levels remained stable despite the implementation of treatment programs, interventions, or activities during the period between the two measurements. This can be interpreted as: 1) The treatment provided was not sufficient to cause significant physiological adaptation, 2) The duration and intensity of the program did not reach the stimulus threshold required to increase aerobic capacity, 3) Participants were already in relatively high fitness condition from the start, making it difficult to show significant improvement.

According F. Yue (2025), VO₂max is the best measure of the cardiorespiratory system's capacity to deliver oxygen during intense physical

activity. A high VO₂max level indicates good aerobic capacity. In this context, stable average scores suggest that the participants' cardiorespiratory systems continued to function optimally. The stable results showed that participants' fitness levels were relatively strong from the outset and did not improve significantly after the intervention. Based on the FITT (Frequency, Intensity, Time, and Type) theory and the principle of overload, an increase in physical fitness will only occur if a person is given a training load that exceeds their normal activity threshold. Weakley et al. (2023) State that even when using low loads (<50% 1RM), if repetitions are performed to near concentric failure, physiological adaptations similar to those obtained from high loads can still occur. This shows that intensity and effort near the limit are also effective in triggering adaptations.

According Z. Yue et al. (2025) in their book *Physiology of Sport and Exercise*, the human body undergoes biological adjustments when given sufficiently intense exercise stimuli. These adaptations include increased cardiac capacity, oxygen transport efficiency, and muscle capillary formation. However, if the intensity or duration of exercise is too low, there will be no significant adaptation, as the body will remain within its physiological comfort zone. Bompa & Buzzichelli (2019) also, explain that the principle of overload must be accompanied by periodization and progressivity, namely, a systematic and planned increase in exercise load. Without a gradual increase in load, the body will quickly adapt and no longer respond with increased fitness even if the exercise continues.

This aligns with the findings of F. Yue (2025) in a meta-analysis showing that HIIT is significantly more effective at increasing VO₂max than the control group. A narrative review by Ko (2025) reinforces that HIIT at high intensity ($\geq 90\%$ VO₂max), accompanied by adequate frequency and duration, is key to stimulating cardiorespiratory adaptation. A systematic study by Wiesinger (2025) confirms that HIIT provides greater improvements in cardiorespiratory fitness compared to moderate-intensity continuous training (MICT). Furthermore, experimental research by Lasso-Quilindo & others (2025) on paracycling athletes also proves that 8 HIIT sessions over 4 weeks can significantly increase VO₂max and anaerobic capacity.

The principle of diminishing returns in fitness training states that the higher a person's initial fitness level, the smaller the improvement gained from the same training stimulus. This means that at some point, the body will show a decrease in its adaptive response to training that does not lead to progressive improvement. This phenomenon has been explained in the latest edition of *Essentials of Strength Training and Conditioning* (Baechle & Earle, 2015), which describes the biological adaptation curve: individuals new to exercise experience rapid fitness gains in a relatively short period, while trained individuals require greater, more specific, and more complex stimuli to achieve similar gains. Modern findings also support this, with meta-analyses showing that high-intensity interval training (HIIT) is more effective than moderate-intensity continuous training (Ko, 2025; Wiesinger, 2025) in stimulating cardiorespiratory adaptation in trained populations. Thus, exercise programs that lack progression or intensity variation may lead to progressively diminished adaptations as an individual's fitness level increases.

Yang et al. (2025) also emphasize that VO₂max tends to increase rapidly in inactive individuals when they start exercising, but will plateau or stagnate in individuals who have reached a specific fitness capacity, unless the exercise stimulus is deliberately increased (e.g., through periodization or HIIT). In this study, the VO₂max values of male participants were generally high from the pre-test, with an average of 83.05, approaching the "good to very good" category in cardiorespiratory fitness classification. (American College of Sports Medicine, 2021). Therefore, it is not surprising that no significant improvement was observed after treatment, as the participants' bodies may already have been in peak fitness condition, and the physiological adaptive response to the same stimulus became very small.

Recent studies show that HIIT training quality is not solely determined by average intensity but also by the total time spent at $\geq 90\%$ VO₂max. Training on moderate inclines will not have a significant effect on this group. Standard or non-structured training will not have a significant effect on this group. Additionally, a recent study suggests a greater stimulus (Held et al., 2023) Standard or non-structured training will not have a significant effect on this group. Additionally, a recent study reinforces that athletes or fit individuals will experience a plateau or even regression

if the training stimulus is not strategically increased. This proves that routine training alone is not enough, but must be balanced with a training design based on progressive and varied loads. These findings align with the principle of diminishing returns, where participants who already have high fitness levels at the start of measurement tend not to show further increases in VO₂max. The average VO₂max for men aged 18–25 years is in the range of 42–52 ml/kg/minute for the "good" category and >52 ml/kg/minute for the "very good" category. Thus, the average VO₂max value of the study participants (83.05) far exceeds the threshold for the "very good" category. This condition empirically shows that the students already had a high level of aerobic fitness from the outset. According to the principle of *diminishing returns*, individuals with already high fitness levels will experience smaller increases or even stagnation despite continuing to receive exercise stimuli. Therefore, the stability of VO₂max scores between the pre-test and post-test can be explained as a logical consequence of high initial fitness status, where the body no longer provides a large adaptive response to moderate physical activity stimuli.

The theory of homeostasis is a fundamental principle in human physiology which states that the body naturally strives to maintain stable internal conditions despite facing external environmental changes. This concept was first introduced by Claude Bernard and further developed by Walter Cannon in the early 20th century with the term steady state or dynamic equilibrium of the body. Modern understanding has expanded this concept into a more complex physiological control framework, encompassing multi-level mechanisms and interactions between various body tissues in maintaining balance. Stevenson (2024) explains that physiological stability can be understood within a hierarchy that includes homeostasis, rheostasis, and allostasis, each with a different genetic and cellular basis, Travers & others (2022)) emphasize that Bernard's concept of "*milieu intérieur*" remains relevant for explaining how organs such as the brain, lungs, heart, and muscles adapt in an integrated manner to physiological challenges such as physical exercise and environmental stress.

In the context of physical exercise, homeostasis helps regulate cardiovascular, metabolic, and neuromuscular systems to keep the body within its physiological comfort zone. When the body receives a stimulus, such as physical

activity, the physiological system evaluates whether it is significant enough to disrupt internal balance. If the stimulus exceeds the adaptation threshold, the body will respond by making physiological adjustments. Conversely, if the stimulus is considered insufficiently strong, no significant changes will occur, and the body will maintain its original physiological condition.

According Yang et al. (2025) in *Exercise Physiology: Nutrition, Energy, and Human Performance*, a successful exercise response occurs when the intensity, duration, and frequency of exercise are sufficient to push the body out of its temporary homeostasis zone, thereby triggering long-term adaptation. Exercise that is below the adaptive stimulus threshold will not produce significant changes. In this study, the absence of a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test VO₂max scores (p-value = 0.978) can be interpreted as a homeostatic response. This means that the exercise stimulus provided was not strong, regular, or challenging enough, so the participants' bodies did not feel the need to increase their cardiorespiratory capacity.

A study conducted by Booth et al. (2017) Confirms that to achieve an increase in VO₂max capacity, physical exercise stimuli must consistently exceed the anaerobic threshold. Exercise below this threshold generally serves only to maintain existing physical condition, without significantly increasing fitness. In this context, the homeostasis mechanism acts as a regulator that maintains the body's physiological stability in the face of changes considered non-essential. Furthermore, according to the general adaptation syndrome theory proposed by Hans Selye, the body responds adaptively only when it experiences significant physiological stress. Routine activities that are not physiologically challenging do not trigger adaptation, so they have no significant impact on improving the body's functional capacity.

Based on homeostasis theory and findings in exercise physiology literature, the unchanged VO₂max scores in this study are most likely a natural expression of the body's regulatory system, maintaining its physiological stability. Further analysis of the characteristics of the physical activity program undertaken by students supports this interpretation. The Physical Education course was held once a week for approximately 100 minutes, with the curriculum consisting of fitness exercises, team games (basketball, soccer, and handball), and basic motor activities.

The training intensity was moderate, without weekly load progression or the application of periodization principles. From an overload perspective, the frequency and duration did not meet the physiological stimulus threshold for significantly increasing VO₂max. Thus, this data reinforces the conclusion that the lack of VO₂max improvement is more due to the program's design, which was not intended as a progressive exercise intervention but rather as a general physical activity course. Therefore, to create meaningful change, exercise stimulus must be designed with loads exceeding the physiological equilibrium point (overload), so that the body is pushed out of its homeostasis zone and experiences functional improvement.

CONCLUSIONS

This study aims to analyze changes in VO₂max scores of male participants across two measurements, namely pre-test and post-test, to evaluate the effectiveness of physical training programs in improving cardiorespiratory fitness. Based on data from 154 participants, there was no significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores ($t(153) = 0.027$, $p = 0.978$). This indicates that the exercise intervention did not have a significant effect on participants' aerobic capacity. Theoretically, these results are highly relevant to various approaches in physical fitness and exercise physiology. First, based on the principles of overload and progression, fitness improvements will only occur if the training load exceeds the body's adaptive threshold. The exercise program provided in this study appears to have been insufficiently intense or physiologically challenging, thus failing to trigger a meaningful adaptive response. Second, these findings can also be explained by the principle of diminishing returns, which states that individuals with high fitness levels tend to experience more minor improvements even when given the same training stimulus. In this context, the participants had relatively high VO₂max scores from the outset, requiring more specific and progressive training methods to produce significant changes. Third, the theory of homeostasis also explains why the participants' bodies did not show increased capacity. The body naturally strives to maintain the stability of its physiological functions and will only adapt when subjected to sufficient pressure or stressors. Exercise that does not exceed this stress threshold tends only to maintain the body's condition rather than improve it. Fourth, the absence of HIIT (High-Intensity Interval Training) or SIT

(Sprint Interval Training) methods, which have been extensively researched as effective methods for rapidly increasing VO₂max, is also an important factor. [1] As a recommendation, structured training methods can be implemented with program designs that suit the time constraints and physical needs of engineering students. For example, HIIT (High-Intensity Interval Training) with a format of 4 × 4 minutes of high-intensity running at ≥85–90% of maximum heart rate, interspersed with 3 minutes of active recovery (light jogging), carried out twice a week. This pattern is effective at increasing VO₂max, even with a total training duration of <40 minutes per session. Another alternative is simple training periodization by dividing the semester into 3 phases: general adaptation phase (low-to-moderate intensity training, 6–8 weeks), development phase (interval training and medium-to-high intensity resistance training, 6–8 weeks), and maintenance phase (combination of moderate aerobic training and HIIT with lower frequency). This approach allows students to continue receiving sufficient progressive stimulation to improve aerobic capacity while accommodating academic demands and demanding field activities.

These methods are not only more efficient in stimulating cardiorespiratory adaptation but are also suitable for populations with high fitness levels. Finally, the lack of exercise periodization principles and insufficient control over daily rhythms and physical activity consistency can prevent the body from achieving its maximum adaptation. Without progressively structured training based on physiological data (e.g., heart rate), the body's adaptive response will be random or may not occur at all. Considering all these theories, it can be concluded that the lack of VO₂max improvement in this study is not solely due to program failure but rather the failure to apply scientific principles in the design and implementation of the training program. Therefore, this study serves as an important reminder that effective physical training design must consider the principles of overload, progression, periodization, and individual physiological needs and conditions.

More Concrete Recommendations: You recommend implementing structured training methods, such as HIIT and periodization. This is good advice. To make this article more useful, you could provide concrete examples of HIIT or

periodization training programs that are suitable for engineering students, taking into account their academic demands and field activities.

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