


# Stepping into their Shoes: Unpacking Senior High Schools Students' Lived Experiences in Physical Education, Ghana

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## Abstract

Physical education is not only about physical activity but also about building a sense of belonging, teamwork, and motivation. This study explored the lived experiences of students in physical education, focusing on the factors that influence their engagement, sense of belonging, and participation in physical activities. Guided by Self-Determination Theory and Constructivist Theory, the research aimed to identify how social interactions, instructional methods, and challenges impact students' experiences in physical education classes. The study adopted an interpretivist paradigm, using a qualitative research approach and a case study design to guide the investigation. Utilizing semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, data was collected from 20 Senior High School students in Effutu Municipality selected through maximum variation—a type of purposive sampling. Data were analysed using thematic analysis for identifying patterns and themes within the data. The findings indicate that positive peer interactions and teamwork foster a strong sense of belonging and enhance engagement, while negative social dynamics such as exclusion hinder participation. Students reported higher levels of engagement when activities were varied and provided a reasonable challenge, and when they received support from teachers and peers. Instructional strategies that were student-centred and allowed for personal expression were associated with higher motivation, whereas traditional, repetitive methods resulted in disengagement. However, challenges such as physical limitations, social exclusion, and logistical issues like inadequate resources and poorly organized classes were barriers to full participation. The study concludes by highlighting the importance of creating a supportive, inclusive, and dynamic physical education environment that caters to the diverse needs of students. Recommendations for improving physical education practice include adopting more inclusive teaching strategies, addressing resource constraints, and fostering positive social dynamics among students.

**Keywords:** Challenges, Engagement, Factors, Instructional Approaches, Lived Experiences, Physical Education, Social Interaction, Students.

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## INTRODUCTION

Physical Education (PE) is an integral and vital aspect of the school curriculum that plays a foundational role in fostering the holistic development of students. It is widely acknowledged for promoting physical fitness, but its significance extends far beyond physical health, encompassing social, emotional, and psychological well-being. Glynniss (2015) assert that physical education provides students with a platform to engage in physical activities that not only improve their motor skills and physical fitness but also enhance cognitive function, emotional resilience, and social competencies, which are crucial for their overall personal development. This multidimensional impact of physical education contributes to shaping students into well-rounded

individuals capable of navigating the challenges of life with confidence and discipline. Through regular participation in physical activities, PE offers opportunities for students to develop essential life skills that are transferable to various aspects of their daily lives. Teamwork, cooperation, and leadership are cultivated during group activities, while perseverance, discipline, and goal-setting are nurtured in individual sports and fitness routines. These skills, which are foundational to both personal and professional success, help students develop a sense of responsibility, self-control, and the ability to work effectively with others. In addition, PE fosters a positive attitude toward physical activity, encouraging students to view exercise as an enjoyable and important lifelong habit, contributing to their long-term physical health and well-being.

In addition to its role in physical fitness, physical education has been shown to positively influence cognitive functioning. Studies indicate that regular physical activity enhances brain function by improving concentration, memory, and problem-solving abilities, all of which contribute to better academic performance (Bailey *et al.*, 2009). Furthermore, engaging in physical education can support emotional stability and mental health by reducing stress and anxiety, improving mood, and promoting a sense of well-being (Bailey *et al.*, 2009). By integrating physical activity into students' routines, PE helps to cultivate not only their physical health but also their mental and emotional well-being, creating a balanced foundation for personal growth and success in academic and life pursuits. PE's influence extends to fostering social well-being, as it provides a unique space for students to interact with peers in an environment that encourages positive social behaviours such as collaboration, empathy, and communication. Group activities in PE classes promote cooperation and allow students to form social bonds with their peers, which contributes to a sense of community and belonging within the school environment. This social aspect of PE is particularly valuable in helping students develop the interpersonal skills that are essential in both school and later life contexts, such as teamwork, respect, and conflict resolution.

Despite the significant role that physical education (PE) plays in students' development, their experiences within this domain can vary widely. The nature of these experiences is influenced by a complex array of factors, such as teaching methods, peer interactions, the inclusivity of the curriculum, and the physical and psychological environment in which PE is taught (Kaite, 2017). While PE can be an empowering and enjoyable experience for some students, fostering a sense of accomplishment, belonging, and physical competence, for others it may be a source of frustration, alienation, and low self-esteem. These contrasting experiences suggest that student engagement with PE is not solely determined by physical ability but is also shaped by a variety of personal, social, and contextual factors that influence how students perceive and engage with physical activities (Chen *et al.*, 2018; Jabeen *et al.*, 2017). For instance, Knifsend and Graham (2012) state that instructional approaches that emphasize individualized feedback and inclusive practices can promote positive student engagement, whereas traditional, competitive environments may lead to feelings of exclusion for students who struggle with physical tasks or who are not naturally athletically inclined. Peer interactions also play a significant role; students who experience supportive and collaborative peer relationships are more likely to feel motivated and involved in PE, while those who face bullying or exclusion may become disengaged or develop negative attitudes toward physical activity (Kaite, 2017). Furthermore, the physical environment of the PE class,

including the availability of equipment, the space for movement, and the overall atmosphere created by the instructor, can either enhance or hinder students' experiences.

Given these factors, it is clear that the lived experiences of students in PE are highly diverse and multifaceted. A deeper understanding of these experiences is essential for designing PE curricula and instructional strategies that are more inclusive, accessible, and engaging for all students, regardless of their physical ability or social background. By unpacking these experiences, educators can identify the barriers that hinder student engagement and develop more effective teaching methods that foster a positive, supportive, and inclusive environment. Understanding students' lived experiences in physical education is therefore critical to enhancing the quality and impact of PE programmes and ensuring they contribute meaningfully to students' overall development.

### Statement of the Problem

While physical education is widely acknowledged as a critical aspect of students' overall education, research suggests that not all students benefit equally from this part of the curriculum. The diversity in students' experiences ranging from positive engagement and enjoyment to alienation and disengagement highlights a significant gap in understanding the factors that influence their participation in PE (Chen *et al.*, 2018; Pate *et al.*, 2014). Some students report feeling motivated and empowered through physical education, gaining confidence in their abilities and developing strong social bonds with peers, while others experience negative emotions such as frustration, anxiety, and embarrassment due to perceived competence gaps or social exclusion during activities (Hagger *et al.*, 2003; Pelak, 2010). The lack of engagement among certain groups of students can often be linked to instructional practices, lack of inclusivity, and social dynamics that fail to accommodate diverse needs and preferences (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Despite the growing body of research on physical education, limited studies focus on unpacking the lived experiences of students, particularly with respect to how different elements, such as teaching methods, peer relationships, and the overall classroom environment interact to shape students' perceptions of PE. Additionally, there is a need for a deeper understanding of the emotional, social, and psychological factors that contribute to students' engagement or disengagement in physical education. Without this understanding, it becomes challenging to design and implement effective teaching strategies that cater to the diverse needs of students and ensure that all students have equal opportunities to succeed in physical education. This study aimed to fill this gap by examining the lived experiences of students in physical education, specifically focusing on their social interactions, factors influencing engagement, instructional approaches, and the challenges they face.

## Research Objectives

The study sought to:

1. Examine how students' social interactions during physical education affect their sense of belonging and teamwork.
2. Assess the specific factors that contribute to students' engagement in physical education activities.
3. Analyse how instructional approaches affect students' overall experiences in physical education.
4. Investigate the challenges students encounter during physical education activities.

## Research Questions

The following research questions were answered:

1. How do students' social interactions during physical education affect their sense of belonging and teamwork?
2. What specific factors contribute to students' engagement in physical education activities?
3. How do instructional approaches affect students' overall experiences in physical education?
4. What challenges do students encounter during physical education activities?

## Significance of the Study

This study is significant in practice, policy, and theory as it provides valuable insights into the lived experiences of students in physical education, highlighting key areas for improvement in teaching methods and programme design to foster better engagement, inclusivity, and teamwork. For practice, it equips educators with a deeper understanding of how social interactions and instructional approaches influence students' participation and sense of belonging. In terms of policy, the findings can inform the development of inclusive and student-centred physical education programmes that address challenges and promote active engagement. Theoretically, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on experiential learning in physical education, offering a nuanced understanding of the interplay between social, emotional, and instructional factors in shaping students' experiences.

## Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two key theories: Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Constructivist Theory, both of which offer valuable insights into understanding students' lived experiences in physical education. Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan (1985), emphasizes the importance of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness—in fostering intrinsic motivation and active engagement. According to SDT, autonomy refers to the sense of control and choice that students have over their activities, which enhances their connection to the tasks. Competence involves students feeling capable and

confident in their ability to meet challenges, which boosts their motivation. Relatedness highlights the significance of positive social interactions and a sense of belonging, which are crucial for student satisfaction and continued participation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This theory aligns with the study's objectives by offering a lens through which to understand how social interactions, engagement, instructional strategies, and challenges affect students' experiences in physical education. For instance, exploring teamwork and belonging directly addresses the need for relatedness, while examining factors that influence engagement reflects the importance of autonomy and competence. Additionally, investigating instructional approaches highlights how well these psychological needs are supported or hindered in the educational environment. Applying SDT allows the study to identify practices that foster these essential needs, thereby enhancing students' motivation, engagement, and outcomes in physical education.

The Constructivist Theory, which posits that individuals construct knowledge and meaning through their experiences and interactions with the world, provides a complementary framework for this study. Constructivism emphasizes the active, contextual process of learning, where students engage with activities, peers, and instructors to build their own understanding of concepts and skills. In physical education, this theory suggests that students' engagement, sense of belonging, and overall experiences are shaped by their interactions with others, as well as the teaching methods employed. Constructivism supports the notion that learning is inherently social and interactive, making it particularly relevant for exploring students' lived experiences in physical education. For example, examining how social interactions affect teamwork and belonging reflects the constructivist belief that learning occurs within a social context. The framework also guides the investigation of instructional approaches, as constructivism advocates for student-centred, collaborative methods that respond to individual needs. This study aligns with constructivist principles, highlighting how students perceive and respond to their environment by focusing on students' perspectives. The constructivist framework further informs the identification of strategies that enhance engagement, support students' needs, and foster a more inclusive and effective physical education experience.

Together, SDT and Constructivist Theory provide a robust foundation for understanding the diverse factors that shape students' experiences in physical education, offering practical insights for creating a more supportive and engaging learning environment.

## METHODOLOGY

Grounded in an interpretivist research philosophy, the study sought to understand the subjective meanings and experiences of individuals. Interpretivism emphasizes the importance of understanding the context in which social phenomena occur and acknowledges that reality is socially constructed through individuals' experiences, interactions, and interpretations (Creswell, 2014). This philosophy aligned with the study's goal of exploring how students made sense of their experiences in physical education, focusing on the role of their personal and social contexts in shaping their perceptions and behaviours.

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to explore students' lived experiences in physical education. The qualitative research approach was particularly suited for examining the complexity of human experiences, enabling an in-depth understanding of how students perceived and engaged with physical education activities. The study aimed to capture the nuances of students' experiences, focusing on their individual perceptions and interactions within the context of physical education.

A qualitative research approach was chosen to gather rich, detailed data that reflected students' perspectives. This approach was ideal for capturing the complexity of students' experiences and providing deeper insights into the factors influencing their engagement, sense of belonging, and overall experiences in physical education. The study sought to understand not only the "what" of students' experiences but also the "why" behind their perceptions and attitudes toward physical education (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2002).

The research design for this study was a case study research design, which enabled a comprehensive, contextualized examination of students' lived experiences in physical education. Case studies are particularly useful for exploring a phenomenon in-depth within its real-life context (Yin, 2014). In this study, the case referred to the students' experiences in physical education, allowing for a detailed analysis of the social, emotional, instructional, and contextual factors that influenced their perceptions and participation in PE activities.

The study was conducted in a selected secondary school in Effutu Municipality where physical education was part of the curriculum. This school is situated in a Central region of Ghana offering a diverse student population, which provided a broader range of perspectives on students' experiences in physical education. The setting provided valuable insights into how physical education was implemented in practice and how students from varied backgrounds experienced the subject.

The study employed maximum variation otherwise known as heterogeneous sampling, a type of purposive sampling to select participants who could

provide rich and relevant information on the research topic. This approach involves the strategic selection of participants who differ broadly in attributes relevant to the study issue so that the researcher can gain a broad range of opinions and experiences related to physical education. It helps in identifying common patterns among diverse cases as well as describing various realities of the participants. Premised on the foregoing, a total of 20 students were selected from the school, ensuring diversity in terms of gender, academic background, and levels of engagement in physical education. Purposive sampling allowed the researcher to focus on participants with direct experience in physical education who could offer in-depth insights into their lived experiences (Creswell, 2014).

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions. Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to share their personal experiences in detail, while offering flexibility to explore emergent themes. Focus group discussions provided an opportunity to explore group dynamics, including peer interactions and shared experiences in physical education. The interview guide contained open-ended questions designed to explore students' personal experiences, perceptions of PE activities, social interactions, and instructional strategies. The focus group discussion guide focused on collective experiences, such as teamwork, social dynamics, and challenges faced during PE classes.

Before the main data collection, the interview and focus group discussion guides were pre-tested with a small sample of students (5-6) from a different school to ensure clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the questions. This pre-testing allowed the researcher to refine the instruments, adjust the wording of questions, and ensure they captured the intended data effectively. Feedback from the pre-test helped assess the reliability of the instruments.

Data collection occurred over a period of three weeks. The researcher began by conducting semi-structured interviews with individual students, allowing them to speak freely about their experiences. Following the interviews, four focus group discussions constituting five (5) students in each group were held to encourage students to share their group-based experiences and explore the social aspects of their physical education experience. All interviews were audio-recorded (with participants' consent) and transcribed for analysis.

The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis, a common method in qualitative research for identifying patterns and themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher transcribed all interviews, then conducted an in-depth reading of the transcripts to identify recurring themes, patterns, and insights. Thematic analysis allowed the researcher to categorize the data into key themes related to students'



experiences, such as autonomy, competence, relatedness, engagement, and challenges. In this study, saturation was reached when the researcher noted that further interviews did not result in more themes than those already found. This is a signal that the thematic categories were sufficient in representing the range of students' experiences, providing a solid basis for analysis. The application of saturation maintains the rigour and credibility of the findings by demonstrating that the dataset is rich and sufficiently large to portray the study context realistically.

Ethical considerations were crucial in this study. The researcher obtained informed consent from all participants and ensured they understood the purpose of the study, the nature of their involvement, and their right to confidentiality and anonymity. Students were informed that their participation was voluntary, and they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Parental consent was also sought for minors involved in the study. Data were stored securely, and participants' identities were anonymized to protect their privacy. Ethical guidelines regarding respectful and non-invasive interactions with participants were strictly adhered to throughout the research process.

## RESULTS

**Research Question 1:** How do students' social interactions during physical education affect their sense of belonging and teamwork?

**Theme 1:** Positive Peer Interactions Enhance Sense of Belonging: The responses from the students reveal that positive peer interactions significantly impact their sense of belonging in physical education. One student emphasized the importance of teamwork, saying,

*When we work in teams, I feel more connected to my classmates. We help each other out and celebrate when we succeed. It makes me feel part of the group, like I'm not alone [ST7]*

Another student echoed this sentiment, explaining,

*"Working together in PE activities really helps me feel like I'm part of something bigger than just me. I enjoy playing in teams because it makes me feel accepted [ST3]"*

Another student highlighted the role of social support, noting,

*When my friends cheer me on during PE, it makes me feel good and want to participate more. I think it's important to have positive relationships with my classmates because it makes everything feel more enjoyable [ST14].*

Similarly, a third student shared,

*The support from my teammates helps me push through when I'm tired. I feel like we all depend on each other, and that's a good feeling [ST20].*

These responses underscore how crucial peer encouragement and camaraderie are to students' sense of belonging and motivation during physical education.

**Theme 2:** Negative Social Interactions Impact Engagement and Sense of Belonging, however, not all social interactions are positive. A student reflected on the negative effects of exclusion, stating;

*Sometimes, when people get picked last for teams or are made fun of for not being good at sports, it makes them not want to try anymore. I've seen this happen, and it doesn't feel good. [ST6]."*

Another echoed this concern, saying,

*If I'm not on the same team with my friends, I feel awkward and left out, especially if the others don't really talk to me [ST19].*

These responses highlight the impact of exclusion and the feelings of isolation that can arise when students are not included in social activities.

Additionally, a student spoke about the challenges posed by social conflict and rivalry in PE, saying,

*In some games, if people start fighting or arguing, it makes me feel uncomfortable. I'd rather just have fun with everyone instead of dealing with drama [ST10].*

Another student added,

*Sometimes when there is too much competition, I feel stressed and less motivated. It's hard to work as a team when others are just trying to show off [ST1].*

These comments suggest that when PE activities are marred by competition and conflict, students' sense of belonging and teamwork can suffer.

The result that positive peer interactions and teamwork foster a strong sense of belonging aligns with numerous studies that emphasize the importance of social relationships in education. For example, Deci and Ryan's (2000) Self-Determination Theory (SDT) highlights the fundamental role of relatedness, one of the basic psychological needs, in fostering motivation and engagement. Positive interactions among peers provide emotional support and a sense of community, which can enhance students' intrinsic motivation to participate in physical activities. This is consistent with findings from previous research (Evans *et al.*, 2018), which found that students who feel socially supported in physical education are more likely to engage and enjoy their activities. Conversely, the study also found that negative social dynamics, such as bullying or exclusion, lead to feelings of isolation and disengagement. This reflects the negative impact of social rejection on students' motivation, as supported by Deci and Ryan's work on SDT, where social exclusion is shown to undermine motivation and engagement. In contrast, a study by

Chacón *et al.*, (2020) found that peer exclusion in physical education not only lowered motivation but also led to significant disengagement from physical activities. This suggests that a supportive and inclusive environment is essential for promoting positive outcomes in physical education.

**Research Question 2:** What specific factors contribute to students' engagement in physical education activities?

### Theme 1: Variety and Challenge in Activities.

One of the key factors influencing engagement in PE is the variety of activities offered. A student remarked,

*When we try new sports or activities, like volleyball or gymnastics, it keeps things interesting. I look forward to PE classes because I never know what we're going to do next [ST2]*

Another student shared a similar view, stating,

*The more variety we have in the lessons, the more I enjoy them. I get bored quickly if we do the same thing over and over [ST15]*

This demonstrates that students are more engaged when PE classes are dynamic and diverse.

Moreover, a sense of challenge in activities was noted by a student who explained,

*When the activities are challenging, I feel proud of myself when I succeed. I like when PE pushes me to get better [ST16].*

Another student affirmed this, saying,

*I'm more likely to engage when I feel challenged, but not too much. If it's too easy, I get bored, but if it's too hard, I just give up [ST9].*

These comments reveal that students are motivated when they feel adequately challenged, striking a balance between difficulty and achievement.

### Theme 2: Teacher and Peer Support.

The role of both teacher and peer support in fostering engagement was another prominent theme.

A student highlighted the importance of teacher encouragement, saying,

*My teacher's encouragement makes a big difference. When they cheer me on or give me feedback, I feel motivated to keep going [ST7].*

Similarly, another student shared,

*I like it when teachers make the effort to make PE fun and keep us interested. When they get involved, it feels more exciting [ST10].*

Peer interactions also play a significant role in boosting engagement. A student remarked,

*Having friends in PE makes me more engaged. We motivate each other to keep trying [ST18].*

Another agreed, saying,

*When my classmates cheer me on, I feel like I want to do my best for them. Team spirit really helps me stay engaged [ST1].*

These responses indicate that the combination of supportive teachers and motivating peers contributes to higher levels of student engagement in physical education.

Students engage more when activities are varied and appropriately challenging is consistent with previous research that suggests novelty and challenge are key factors in maintaining engagement. In SDT, competence is a critical psychological need, where students are more motivated when they feel capable of mastering a task (Deci & Ryan, 1985). This is reflected in the finding that students prefer a variety of activities that provide new challenges, as these can enhance their sense of competence and excitement. In line with this, studies by Moreno *et al.*, (2013) and Haapala *et al.*, (2018) suggest that offering diverse physical activities fosters engagement by allowing students to feel both challenged and competent. Moreover, the importance of teacher and peer support in enhancing student engagement supports the notion that relatedness and competence are interconnected in the motivation process. Studies, such as Raineri and Malina (2014), and Kaite (2017) found that when students feel supported by both their teachers and peers, their motivation to participate in physical education increases. The positive reinforcement from both teachers and peers helps build self-efficacy, encouraging students to engage in and enjoy physical activities.

**Research Question 3:** How do instructional approaches affect students' overall experiences in physical education?

### Theme 1: Student-Centred Instruction Enhances Engagement

Student-centred teaching approaches were repeatedly highlighted as key to improving students' experiences in PE. One student expressed,

*I like when we get to choose how we play or what game to play. It makes me feel like I'm in control, and I'm more interested in participating [ST13].*

Another student added,

*When teachers let us decide what we want to focus on or how we want to organize the game, it makes PE feel more personal and enjoyable [ST4].*

These responses suggest that when students have autonomy in their learning, they feel more invested and engaged.

Hands-on, interactive instruction also stood out as a factor that enhances learning. A student noted,

*I learn better when my teacher shows us how to do things and then lets us try it ourselves. It helps me understand better than just listening to instructions [ST5].*

Similarly, another student shared,

*I like it when the teacher demonstrates and then walks around to help each of us. It makes me feel like I'm actually learning something new [ST20].*

These comments reflect the value students place on active, participatory teaching methods that offer opportunities for practice and individualized support.

## **Theme 2: Traditional Instructional Methods Lead to Disengagement.**

On the flip side, traditional teaching methods that lack variety or interaction seem to lead to disengagement. One student remarked,

*When we do the same exercises every class, it's hard to stay motivated. I feel like we could use more fun activities [ST15].*

Another added,

*If the class is too repetitive, I don't feel excited about it. I prefer when we do new or different things each week [ST7].*

These responses suggest that monotonous and repetitive instruction fails to maintain students' interest and enthusiasm.

Limited interaction and feedback were also identified as barriers to engagement. A student said,

*Sometimes I feel like the teacher just gives instructions and expects us to follow without checking if we understand. It would be better if there were more feedback during class [ST12].*

Another student commented,

*When there is not enough interaction with the teacher or other students, I lose interest quickly [ST6].*

These statements point to the need for more personalized, interactive instruction to keep students engaged.

Student-centred teaching methods increase motivation and participation align with the principles of constructivism, a theory that emphasizes active learning and personal involvement in the educational process. According to Piaget (1976), learning is an active process where students construct their understanding through experiences. This aligns with the findings of the study, where students preferred teaching methods that allowed them to make decisions and express themselves, thereby

enhancing their motivation. Previous researches (Cothran & Ennis, 2000; Pate *et al.*, 2011) has shown that active learning and student involvement in decision-making processes improve engagement and motivation, which are essential for creating a meaningful educational experience. In contrast, traditional teaching methods, which often focus on repetitive drills and lack variety, were associated with disengagement. This finding reflects the drawbacks of teacher-centred approaches, which often fail to address the diverse needs and interests of students. According to Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism, learning is more effective when students are actively engaged and their interests are incorporated into the lesson. This was highlighted in the study by Ball *et al.*, (2017), which found that students often lose interest in PE when instruction is overly repetitive and lacks opportunities for personal expression or choice.

## **Research Question 4: What challenges do students encounter during physical education activities?**

### **Theme 1: Physical Limitations and Skill Gaps**

Several students discussed how physical limitations or skill gaps affected their participation in PE. One student noted,

*Sometimes I don't feel confident in my abilities. I'm not very good at some sports, and that makes me feel like I don't belong [ST5].*

Another expressed,

*I find it hard to keep up with others who are more athletic than me. It makes me feel left out or frustrated [ST11].*

These comments highlight the challenges that students with less physical ability may face, leading to a sense of alienation or self-doubt.

Additionally, fear of failure or judgment was mentioned as a barrier. One student shared,

*I get nervous if I make a mistake in front of everyone. It's embarrassing, and I'd rather not try at all [ST8].*

Another echoed this sentiment, saying,

*I sometimes hold back because I'm worried that others will judge me if I don't do something right [ST17].*

These responses suggest that the fear of judgment may prevent some students from fully engaging in PE activities.

### **Theme 2: Social and Organizational Challenges**

Social and organizational factors also emerged as challenges. One student mentioned the negative impact of peer rivalry and exclusion, saying,

*There's a lot of competition, and I don't like it when people show off or make others feel bad. It makes me want to avoid PE sometimes [ST10].*

Another student shared,

*When I'm not picked for the team or I don't fit in, it's hard to stay motivated [ST14].*

These responses point to the difficulties students face when social dynamics in PE are negative or divisive.

Finally, limited resources and poor organization were cited as challenges. One student explained,

*Sometimes we don't have enough equipment, which makes it harder to participate or enjoy the activity [ST12].*

Another added,

*If the class is disorganized or we don't have enough time to do everything, it's frustrating and doesn't feel like we're making progress [ST4].*

These comments suggest that logistical issues can detract from the overall experience and hinder student participation in physical education.

Physical limitations, social exclusion, and logistical issues hindered students' participation in physical education activities, which is supported by both constructivist and Self-Determination Theory. From a constructivist perspective, learning and engagement are shaped by the students' interactions with their environment, including the physical and social context (Vygotsky, 1978). Physical limitations, such as injury or low fitness levels, prevent students from fully participating in activities and can lower their sense of competence, thus leading to disengagement. Similarly, social exclusion, which prevents students from interacting and working collaboratively with peers, disrupts their engagement in the class, as seen in studies like those of Sallis *et al.*, (1999) and Pelak (2010), who found that students' participation is significantly reduced when they experience exclusion or when activities are physically inaccessible. Additionally, logistical challenges such as poor organization, lack of resources, and inadequate equipment were identified as significant barriers to participation. This finding is consistent with research by Bailey *et al.*, (2009) and Jabeen *et al.*, (2017), which emphasized that the lack of sufficient facilities and equipment is a common barrier to student engagement in physical education. From an SDT perspective, competence is significantly influenced by the resources and opportunities provided for learning and participation. Without the necessary tools and proper organization, students may feel they are unable to succeed, thus reducing motivation and engagement.

## FINDINGS

The study revealed the following findings:

1. Positive peer interactions and teamwork foster a strong sense of belonging among students, with many reporting that collaboration with classmates enhances their enjoyment and participation in physical education. Conversely, negative social dynamics, such as bullying or exclusion, often lead to feelings of isolation and disengagement, as students become less motivated to actively participate in activities.
2. Students are more likely to engage in physical education when the activities are varied and provide an appropriate level of challenge. Many students mentioned that when teachers incorporate a range of sports or games, they feel more excited and involved. Additionally, receiving encouragement and support from both teachers and peers plays a crucial role in boosting their engagement and willingness to participate fully in class.
3. Student-centred teaching methods, where students are actively involved in decision-making and provided with opportunities for personal expression, were reported to increase motivation and participation. However, students expressed a lack of interest when teaching approaches were traditional, with repetitive drills and little variety, as these methods made them feel disengaged and less enthusiastic about the lessons.
4. Several challenges hinder students' participation and engagement in physical education, including physical limitations such as injuries or low fitness levels. Social exclusion, either through peer rejection or competition, also negatively impacts students' willingness to participate. Additionally, logistical issues, such as poorly organized classes, inadequate resources, and lack of proper equipment, further discourage students from engaging fully in physical education activities.

## CONCLUSION

The study highlights the significant role that social interactions, instructional methods, and environmental factors play in shaping students' experiences in physical education. It can be inferred that positive peer relationships and teamwork are key to fostering a sense of belonging, which is crucial for motivating students to engage in PE activities. Conversely, negative social dynamics can contribute to feelings of exclusion, leading to disengagement. Furthermore, the findings suggest that varied and challenging activities, coupled with teacher and peer support, are essential for maintaining students' interest and participation. When instructional approaches are student-centred and engaging, students are more likely to stay motivated and involved in physical education. On the other hand, traditional, repetitive methods can dampen students' enthusiasm and hinder active



participation. Lastly, the study points to several barriers, such as physical limitations, social exclusion, and logistical challenges, which can prevent full student engagement in PE, underscoring the need for a more inclusive and well-resourced approach.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study and conclusion drawn, the following recommendations are made:

1. It is crucial to create an inclusive classroom environment where positive social interactions and teamwork are prioritized. This can be achieved through group activities that encourage cooperation and mutual respect.
2. To sustain engagement, PE programmes should incorporate a mix of challenging activities that cater to different interests and abilities. Teachers should offer continuous support and feedback to help students overcome obstacles and stay motivated.
3. Instructional strategies should focus on student-centred methods that encourage active participation, decision-making, and personal engagement in learning. This approach can help maintain students' enthusiasm and investment in their physical education.
4. Schools should ensure equitable access to resources and equipment, particularly for students with physical limitations. Additionally, addressing issues of social exclusion and improving the organization of PE classes will ensure all students feel valued and can participate fully.

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