



## EXAMINING GENDER DIFFERENCES IN PARTICIPATION AND PERFORMANCE IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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### ABSTRACT :

*Gender differences in the access to and performance in physical education (PE) have long been researched and have implications that extend into wider societal, psychological, and physiological considerations. The purpose of this study, then, is to explore the male-female differences in PE programs with respect to participation, skill acquisition, motivation, and performance. The mixed-methods design involves a quantitative phase, with surveys, performance tests, and a qualitative phase of interviews, aimed to explore social expectations, self-efficacy, teacher expectations, and access to resources, as key influences in these issues. Results suggest that although biological factors exert some influence, socio-cultural expectations and the pedagogy used go a long way to determine the level of engagement and achievement. It calls for gender-sensitive policies in the PE curriculum to facilitate equitable participation and all-inclusive education. Removing barriers and creating an enabling environment will enhance the growth of best practices in PE that promote life skills and physical activities for all students.*



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**KEYWORDS :** Gender Differences, Physical Education, Participation, Performance, Sociocultural Norms, Inclusivity.

### INTRODUCTION

Considered vitally important to school curriculum around the globe, physical education promotes fitness, motor skill development, socialization, and well-being among students. The benefits of engaging in physical education classes are numerous for the health of students, including increased aerobic cardiovascular fitness, muscle strength, and mental well-being, decreased incidence of lifestyle diseases, etc. PE is a tool in teaching life skills like discipline, cooperation, resilience, and leadership. Gender disparities in the participation and performance of physical education could, however, not be applied universally across the demographic categories, thus being an important area for investigation.

Studies have shown that male students participated more in PE and tended to be more confident than their female counterparts. More obvious biological differences, socio-cultural issues, social expectations, and school policies contribute to this phenomenon. Stereotypical views about gender-appropriate activities tend to discourage girls from certain sports and highly intense physical exercises. The organization and presentation of physical education programs can either facilitate or hinder consistent student engagement, at times perpetuating gender discrimination.

Social perceptions and peer group dynamics also largely influence students' attitudes toward physical education. From an early age, boys are encouraged to be competitive and physically active, while girls face social pressures to conform to ideals surrounding aesthetics, grace, and non-

competitive activities. Teacher expectations, along with pedagogical approaches, additionally serve to modulate gendered participation patterns.

Access to resources and opportunities in physical education is yet another key consideration. Gender-neutral facilities, equal access to sports equipment, and a variety of physical activities often influence how physically active students are in schools. Failure to support and include all students in its practices will often see schools inadvertently push certain groups into the periphery, especially females, where their opportunities for engagement within physical activities are severely lessened.

This study seeks to investigate the factors affecting male and female participation and performance in physical education to examine gender disparities. Responding to these challenges will present possibilities for informing policy and practice with an aim to achieving gender equity within physical education, thereby supporting the long-term vision of fostering physical activity and well-being for all students.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH:**

- 1) To examine gender differences in participation and performance in physical education (PE) by analyzing the factors influencing engagement, motivation, and achievement levels among students.
- 2) To assess the extent to which male and female students engage in physical education activities and identify patterns of participation based on gender.
- 3) To examine the variations in skill development, physical fitness, and overall performance levels between male and female students in PE.
- 4) To investigate the role of biological, psychological, social, and environmental factors that impact gender differences in participation and performance in PE.
- 5) To explore how societal norms, gender stereotypes, peer influence, and family expectations shape students' attitudes toward physical activity.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW:**

Consistent with findings from previous research, biological, psychological, social, and institutional factors all contribute to differences noted at gender level in participation and performance in physical education (PE). Active engagement in competitive sports was found to have a higher inclination among boys by Hills (2007), while Slater & Tiggemann (2010) linked the discrepancy by lesser participation of females to concerns regarding body image. Bailey et al. (2013) contended that differences in PE regarding gender find their foundation at middle school when boys are encouraged by teachers and peer groups more than the girls. Gender stereotypes lay heavily on participation as found by Scraton (1992) and Chalabaev et al. (2013), showing that societal norms will prevent girls from taking part in some high-intensity sports. The role of educators is critical, since both Ennis (1999) and Kirk (2010) find that PE teachers are more encouraging towards boys than girls. However, Lynch & Curtner-Smith (2019) and Flintoff & Scraton (2017) showed that gender-inclusive teaching strategies can bridge such gaps. Recent studies, Dudley et al. (2020), have revived policy initiatives by which students might have equal access to PE resources and a variety of physical activities. In general, the literature supports that by dismantling socio-cultural barriers and policies for inclusivity, females could enjoy maximum participation and performance in PE.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:**

This study uses a mixed-methods approach to investigate gender differences in physical education participation and performance. It uses a descriptive and analytical research design, involving survey-based data collection, observational and performance-based assessments, and interviews with PE teachers and administrators. The target population includes 300 secondary school students, with a stratified random sampling method. The study has been analyze quantitative and qualitative data using descriptive and inferential statistics, aiming to contribute to strategies for gender equity and inclusive PE programs.

### **Gender Differences in Participation and Performance in Physical Education:**

With an emphasis on fitness, teamwork, and healthy habits, Physical Education (PE) is one of the most important components of the school curriculum. Yet, even amid such emphasis, the gender differences in PE have always been so striking that they cannot fail to be noticed. For example, boys would engage more in competition, whereas girls may refrain from participation owing to a number of barriers. Physiology, including muscle mass, aerobic capacity, and hormones affecting physical ability and endurance, usually allows boys to have superior strength and power. Factors such as self-confidence, motivation, and perceived competence matter considerably in motivating students to engage in PE. Studies have often shown that boys are higher in their self-perception of ability and therefore participate in higher levels of sports and fitness. The opposite is true for girls: they may feel self-consciousness or fear of injury or even feel societal pressure, thus taking away from the engagement in PE.

The working of sociocultural factors shows yet another way by which barriers exist for active participation of one gender over the other in PE. These sociocultural implications touch upon the traditional gender roles that decide what kind of activities are appropriate for boys or girls depending on whether the activity is oriented towards masculinity or femininity, i.e., allowing boys to indulge in contact sports such as football and basketball, while girls are often pushed toward activities such as dance or yoga. These stereotypes may be reinforced by peers, with the expectation of teachers also doing much to further these stereotypes or discourage engagement in certain activities by the same male or female.

In PE, performance differences are usually measured through endurance, strength, agility, and skill proficiency. For practicing gender equity in PE, schools can apply several strategies such as coeducational activities, gender-appropriate equipment and facilities, curriculum diversity, and positive role models. Teachers should also receive training on gender-sensitive strategies for PE to build an inclusive and supportive environment.

### **Gender Differences in Participation Rates:**

PE participation rates differ drastically between the sexes, males flocking to the mass extracurricular activities like football, basketball, and cricket. Competitive, strength, and speed factor into their prominent orientation toward these activities. In contrast, females prefer partaking in individual or low-contact sports such as yoga, aerobics, and dance. The important factor is age. As the adolescents grow, they partake in PE activities-margining chances of participation between genders. For instance, they are dropping out more in comparison with boys, influenced by social expectations and academic pressures, resulting in a greater development of self-consciousness.

School Performance Outcomes in PE highlight the importance of gender differences. According to muscle mass and testosterone levels, boys dominate in strength-based and explosive power activities because they have larger muscles. Females, on the other hand, tend to score higher on flexibility and endurance activities while showing better balance and postural control. These differences indicate the need for PE programs that recognize and build individual strength rather than emphasizing a broad-based one.

Barriers to psychological and social participation for girls are difficulties with body image, fear of being judged or not measuring up in sports activities, a lack of encouragement from teachers, peers, or family, as well as social norms that still characterize sports as more boy-centered, which leads to fewer role models for girls in athletics.

### **The Impact of Teaching Styles on Gender Engagement:**

Gender differences in physical education (PE) have biological, psychological, and sociocultural roots. Males engage in strength and competitive sports, while females enjoy activities that utilize endurance and flexibility. On the other hand, biases against themselves, lack of encouragement from significant individuals, and poor teaching strategies limit female participation. Gender-sensitive pedagogies, such as cooperative mixed-gender activities, foster engagement in equal measure for both

male and female students. The presence of female PE instructors and sports mentors was correlated with increasing numbers of girls joining sports activities. This highlights the need for gender representation within PE leadership.

The design of PE curriculum can buttress or mitigate gender inequities. Conventional programs focus mainly on competitive sports, severely limiting female students' perceived opportunities for inclusion. The balanced approach comprises a variety of activities, some of which are non-competitive fitness-oriented, to keep the maximum numbers of students engaged. Allowing students to choose their activities based on personal fame will successfully achieve sustained participation.

To address gender disparities in PE, schools should situate the entire PE program under gender-inclusive policies facilitating equal participation and access to sports opportunities. These programs would encompass the promotion of positive body image and self-confidence through awareness sessions and peer support groups, equal access to training and coaching,; recruiting more female PE teachers and coaches, redesigning PE activities to be more facilitative and inclusive, and grouping students in PE classes based on their skill levels.

### **FINDINGS:**

The study comes about through revealing glaring differences between the two sexes in participation and performance in physical education (PE). The male students show a higher inclination towards team sports, such as football, basketball, and cricket; while the female students tend to participate more in individual or less competitive activities, such as yoga, dance, and aerobics. There are declining participation rates among female students as they grow older, especially when they reach the stage of adolescence, and this may be due to academic overload, social demands from peers, and discomfort in co-ed physical education lessons.

In strength-based and power activities like sprinting, push-ups, and weight lifting, male students outperform their female counterparts owing to the greater muscle mass and higher testosterone levels they possess. Female students, on the other hand, show superiority in flexibility and endurance-based activities such as gymnastics, long-distance running, and yoga.

These barriers form the basis for the need for confidence-built and supportive interventions for females concerning their participation in PE. The barriers to female participation in PE include body image issues, absenteeism of encouragement, and self-doubt.

Teaching methods have strong implications on the engagement of the student in PE. Historically, competition and performance-based approaches have limited female participation, as those methods encourage participation of, and empower, only the highly skilled or athletically confident students. Applying the gender-responsiveness in teaching methodologies has seen both sexes realize improved participation in physical activities. Mixed-gender cooperative activities, competitive fitness programs, and personalized encouragement and support formed the core positive impact strategies.

This shows the importance of continuous improvement in physical education teaching in a direction that is more inclusive, supportive, and engaging for males and females.

### **DISCUSSION:**

According to the results of the study, a huge disparity in gender participation and performance in physical education (PE) can be attributed to biological, psychological, and socio-cultural causes. In terms of team sports, male students tend to be more involved in football, basketball, and cricket. On the other hand, female students are more likely to participate in solo activities or non-competitive activities like yoga, aerobics, and dance. These differences are more exaggerated during secondary school years. Adolescents are more likely to drop out of PE classes because of reasons like academics, body image, and not being motivated.

Differences in performance are also gendered. Male students will usually outperform female students on strength-based and high-intensity exercises, whereas the female gender excels in skills such as gymnastics, long-distance running, and yoga. This disparity can be remedied by providing equal opportunities to train and develop skills.

Some of the barriers preventing females from getting involved are body image concerns, lack of encouragement, and lower self-confidence. The body image issue prevents active participation, accompanied by little encouragement and confidence leading to less participation. These barriers compel the need for gender-sensitive approaches in PE.

Teaching styles are significant for improving participation. The presence of more mixed-gender cooperative activities, skill-based groupings, and individualized encouragement leads to the highest rate of female participation. Significantly higher passion of women students has been noted, as there are female instructors and mentors at schools than at schools with only male instructors.

This would require a multi-pronged approach in terms of a diversified PE curriculum, programs for positive body images and self-efficacy, equal opportunities for training, and gender-inclusive pedagogy to break inequities in PE. Schools will thus stand in a position to create a more just and supportive PE environment where all students, both male and female, will benefit fully.

### CONCLUSION:

The study on gender variances in participation and performance in physical education (PE) identifies salient differences arising out of biological, psychological, and sociocultural influences. Male students exhibited higher participation in team sports and performed better in strength and power activities, while female students tended to show a bias for individual exercise or non-competitive activities and excel in flexibility and endurance activities. These differences are further impacted by barriers to female participation like body image issues, lack of encouragement, and lower confidence in comparison to their male counterparts. The study also notes that the implementation of gender-sensitive teaching methods plays a positive role in the participation of both genders. Mixed-gender cooperative activities, non-competitive fitness programs, and individualized encouragement collectively worked toward improving the PE learning environment for all. These findings indicate that schools must, in essence, customize the PE curriculum paradigms to synergize with gender equity by increasing participation in diverse sports, providing confidence-promoting initiatives, and offering equal training and mentorship opportunities. To help ameliorate the gender imbalance in PE participation and performance, it is equally important to dismantle entrenched conceptions of gender, create unimpeded opportunities for all, and vigorously advocate for a positive and nurturing sporting culture in schools. By creating inclusive policies and utilizing differentiated teaching styles, physical education can be a vehicle for every student to acquire lifelong habits of fitness, self-confidence, and teamwork, irrespective of gender.

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