

# What's Going on in Physical Education Classes in Turkey? An Insight into Student Attitude Towards Physical Education, Curricular Issues and School Conditions

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** Delivering a quality PE class where factors leading to negative experiences are eliminated and student attitude is kept positive plays a crucial role in their involvement of physical activity. The purpose of this study is to understand what kind of experiences and feelings students have lived through in the physical education classes in Turkey; and whether and how some of the identified factors in the literature- ability, gender and curriculum- and potential other factors interplay to one another. **Method:** The participants of the study were 196 student teachers of varying subject areas (receiving teaching certificate courses in the department of education) who were enrolled in a large-scale university located in one of the large metropolitan cities in Turkey. The study was in descriptive survey methodology; and the data were collected through semi-structured, open-ended questionnaire (n= 196) designed to understand the processes, experiences, the associated feelings in PE classes back in their high and/or middle school years as well as current state of PE classes. **Results:** Inductive thematic analysis of the data revealed that the majority of the participants have negative experiences in PE classes in their middle school and high school years. The findings indicate that teaching style of the instructor, curriculum and school infrastructure were the main determinants of student attitude towards physical education classes. **Conclusion:** It seems that PE class experience is not a joy but a burden for the majority of the participants mostly due to certain external and manipulable conditions.

**Keywords:** Physical education, gender-segregation, attitude towards PE, teaching style, PE curriculum development

## 1. Introduction

When school children are asked about their opinions of physical education classes, desired expectation would be to hear that it is their favourite course regarding that it is most of the time practiced outside the building; it provides a unique opportunity for students to free themselves from the burden of other school subjects and assignments; it is expected to help discover their potentials in certain areas; and they feel good while interacting with their peers. The literature in physical education also suggests that positive attitude towards physical education can also contribute to involvement in physical activity outside the school (Ennis, 1996; McKenzie, 2003; Zeng, Hipscher, & Leung, 2011). However, there are also studies pointing out students' dislike about physical education classes (see Chen, 1998; Cothran & Ennis, 1998; Stewart, Green & Huelskamp, 1991). In line with these, the authors of this article for some time are surprised and disappointed to hear from the children they encounter in school settings in Turkey that there is a negative attitude towards physical education classes. This article is the outcome of the motivation to examine whether these attitudes are shared (at large) and if so, to find out the factors that contribute to the situation.

Considering the potential benefits of these classes (skill development, acquiring social skills and learning in group-oriented environments (McHugh, 1996)) and its importance in health-related matters, this negative attitude may result in threatening situations that bother adult lifestyle and end up with a distancing from sports and physical activity outside the school (Carlson, 1995; Luke & Sinclair, 1991; Säfvenbom, Haugen, & Bulie, 2014). This is especially important as physical education, as an organized educational experience, is regarded as a promising path to developing a physically active and healthy lifestyle for children both in school years and aftermath (Chen & Ennis, 2004; Janzen, 2004). Therefore, it is crucial for teachers and physical education specialists to focus more on the ways to keep students motivated and design such settings that enable students to develop positive attitudes towards physical activity.

### 1.1. Attitude towards Physical Education: Ability, Gender, Curriculum

Attitude is a permeating component in all aspects of human endeavour and determinant of whether one begins, continues and achieves certain activities in any area (Silverman & Subramaniam, 1999). In physical education, students' having positive or negative attitude is especially important in that its influence can be prevalent not only in educational settings but also in future disposition towards physical activity. Graham (2008) states that existing literature on children's attitudes towards physical education indicates three leading factors influencing the attitude: ability, gender and the curriculum.

How ability is understood can explain much of what happens in physical education and each conception

of it may change the expectation from students in PE classes, thus labelling them as high-performing or deficient (Wright & Burrows, 2006). Children's willingness to take part in school subjects and their effort to learn is closely connected to how they perceive their ability (Evans & Penney, 2008). Harter (1981) claims that when individuals perceive themselves as highly-competent and have intrinsic motivation, they are encouraged to put more effort to what they are doing, be more persistent and enjoy high levels of achievement. Therefore, perceived ability may play a crucial role in one's interest and achievement in physical education classes.

A second factor affecting attitude is gender. Hargreaves (1994) asserts that sex-segregated physical education curriculum can be traced back to nineteenth century when male students took part in organized games while female students adopted more "feminine-appropriate" games. Similarly, Waddington, Malcolm and Cobb (1998) claim that physical education has been the most gender-segregated school subject where boys and girls are often separated for team games and they participate in different kinds of sports activities. Silverman and Subramaniam (1999) state that boys' attitude towards physical education is more positive than girls. Gorely, Holroyd, and Kirk (2003) find out that boys are relatively a more advantaged group due to hegemonic masculinity and association of sport. Skelton (1998) explains this gender stereotyping against girls partially based on the fact that physical education provides a site where conventional femininities and masculinities are reproduced. The gender – differentiated structure of PE shapes the curriculum implicitly and may determine which practices and behaviour are seen as appropriate for boys and girls (Nutt & Clarke, 2002).

The improvement of PE programs requires a number of components which involve increased amount of physical activity for students (Sallis & McKenzie, 1991) and development programs that foster lifetime physical activity (Pate & Horn, 1994). Additionally, a multi-activity model that includes a wide variety of school activities has been favoured mostly due to its relevance to diverse needs of students (Kulinna, 2008). However, this model, though still the dominant curricular approach in PE (Siedentop, 2007, as cited in Kulinna, 2008), is also criticized by lack of depth and its failure to engage all students and Kulinna (2008) outlined more contemporary curricular models into four main categories: a) games and sports, b) individual and social development, c) fitness and wellness and d) interdisciplinary. These models differ from one another based on their main focus. For example, the games and sports model deal with the goal of raising skilled sportspeople in different branches. On the other hand, the fitness and wellness model is more related to public-driven goals of decreasing negative health trends. The model adopted by schools can influence every aspect of PE classes from routine practices to expected outcomes.

### *1.2. PE in Turkey*

In Turkey, PE classes in middle school and high school are delivered by PE specialists (In primary school, they are delivered by primary school class teachers, not by PE instructors). After receiving high school degree, the students take the national higher education entrance exam and those who are able to get the passing grade and would like to study physical education teaching are given the right to take special talent exams run by universities. These exams are designed to evaluate the candidates' general psychomotor features, inclination to sports, coordination and skills. Those who are successful in special talent exam (each university has a quota so the most successful ones are accepted for the program) receive a four-year undergraduate program that consists of both practical and theoretical education in many different sports branches and educational sciences (ex: teaching methodologies, educational psychology, physical education sports sociology). The graduates are given the title of Physical Education Teacher and entitled to work in schools and various sports centres.

The total amount of time allocated for PE classes in Turkey is two class hours (weekly) in middle school and high school (Total class hour ranges between 30-40 hours). As for primary school, the curriculum includes a different lesson called 'Game and Physical Activities' (It is actually the first phase of PE). In the first three grades, the time that is mandated to be allocated by the Ministry is five class hours weekly. As for fourth graders, it is again two class hours. The general objectives of physical education classes in Turkey in primary and middle school can be summarized as gaining movement competence, active and healthy living skills, autonomy and social thinking skills. Introducing students to certain sports branches and encouraging them to involve in sports competitions begin at the end of middle school. In high school, students are expected to understand the importance of physical education, spend their free time effectively doing sports, collaborate in sports competitions and lead healthy and active lifestyles.

### *1.3. Research Questions*

The literature cites certain critical factors influencing children's attitude towards PE. However, what we know about PE is often drawn from countries including the UK, Australia and the USA. Therefore, data revealing the attitudes, values and experiences of students in Turkey can broaden our understanding of the subject. In that sense, the purpose of this study was to increase our understanding of what happens in PE classes and how these critical factors in fact interact to each other in shaping students' attitude toward PE. To put it more specifically, our objective was to understand what kind of experiences and feelings students lived through in the physical

education classes in Turkish school context; and whether and how some of the identified factors in the western literature- ability, gender and curriculum- and potential other factors interplay to each other. In line with this purpose, the study sought to answer following specific research questions:

- What were participants' experiences with PE classes?
- What were participants' associated attitudes towards PE classes in their high and middle school years; and their observations (as teacher candidates) about the current state of PE classes?
- What underlying factors engaged with students' attitude towards PE classes?
- How did these critical factors in fact interact to each other in shaping students' attitude toward PE?

## 2. Method

### 2.1. The Participants

The participants of the study were 196 student teachers of varying subject areas who were enrolled in one of the large size metropolitan university in Turkey, receiving teaching certificate courses in the department of education. Based on the literature, as ability and gender were identified as important variables influencing the attitudes of students towards PE course, we purposefully included different gender and ability groups in the study. That is, 96 of the participants were male and 100 were female. As for the ability, we purposefully included students studying physical education teaching (As aforementioned, they have to pass a special talent exam to be able to study PE teaching at university). Overall, 92 out of 196 participants were from PE teaching subjects (prospective PE instructors) and the remaining included those studying math, physics and accounting. All the participants were third year students or graduates from the departments.

We included university students and graduates as participants and asked them about their experiences back in their middle school and high school years; and their current observations as candidate teachers during their school practicum. The reason for this was that they could reflect on their past experiences in PE classes from a more comprehensive standpoint and state their current observations more clearly as prospective educators. As they are believed to be living negative or positive effects of being or not being involved in quality PE classes during their teenage years in the latter part of their lives, they are thought to be highly valuable informants. Based on their age group (ranging from 20 to 23), this was also helpful in gaining insight into the practices in PE classes for approximately a-six-year period and discover whether there happened a shift towards positive or negative. By doing this, we intended to provide rich insights into the research questions we dealt with.

All of the participants were verbally informed about the purpose of the study and they were also assured that their participation or withdrawal from the study would not affect grading for the course.

### 2.2. Data Collection

Descriptive survey method was utilized in this study. The semi-structured open-ended questions covering the stated research questions above were given to participants related to their experiences in a typical physical education class back in their high and/or middle school years. In order to collect data about the current state of physical education classes and reflect upon both the past and the present, PE teacher candidates of this study were also asked to write their current observations related to the topic during their school practicum (As part of their undergraduate program, all students are required to visit real schools and make observations). In order to preserve anonymity, the participants were asked to only write their gender, department and age.

### 2.3. Data Analysis

For the study, inductive thematic analysis was implemented to identify themes and patterns within the data. First of all, the researchers independently coded all the data and met at periodical intervals to discuss over emerging codes, categories and themes from their individual analysis. Through these discussions, they reached consensus over themes and their contents.

## 3. Results

From the detailed analysis of student essays, three main themes were identified and these were labeled as (1) Teaching Style & Student Reflections, (2) Course Process and (3) Gap Between Schools: Infrastructure. These main themes and other sub-themes identified are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Themes and Sub-themes

<b>Theme 1:</b>	<b>Theme 2:</b>	<b>Theme 3:</b>
Teaching Style & Student Reflections	Course Process	Gap Between Schools: Infrastructure
<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>
<i>Strict / disappointment</i>	<i>Military training</i>	<i>It becomes a burden</i>
<i>Indifferent / anger &amp; criticism</i>	<i>Let the kids free</i>	<i>Good examples</i>
<i>Supportive / good memories</i>	<i>Gender Issues</i>	

### 3.1. Theme 1. Teacher Style & Student Reflections

The findings of the study suggest that one important factor interacting with student attitude towards PE classes is the teaching style and perceived personality of PE instructors. The general findings indicate that strict and pushy teachers who focused on discipline and the completion of tasks; and mostly cared about competition resulted in disappointment. Those teachers described as demonstrating authoritative (strict) behaviors and insensitive teaching styles were mostly associated and remembered with anger and criticism as opposed to supportive teachers who were associated with positive feelings. It was found out that students who had supportive and caring PE instructors showed willingness to take part in sports activities and were highly motivated to experiment with different sports. Below, sub-themes were given to detail most frequently reported teaching styles.

*Strict / Disappointment.* Some of the participants frequently reported that their instructors were quite strict both during the class and outside. Their lack of toleration, frequent use of insulting words in front of the others, being pushy upon students' performing certain tasks and physical movements (flip-flapping, laying up shots in basketball etc.) were reported to have influenced their attitude towards these classes negatively. Here, ability was defined as a crucial component. Those participants from PE teaching subjects reflected on their experiences as still disturbing (due to negative teacher attitude) but they also stated that they somehow managed to complete the tasks successfully. As these students often thought of themselves more competent or innately having an aptitude for sports, they reflected on their experiences different from others.

*I was always good at sports. During PE classes in both middle school and high school, I never worried about my performance. I always received the highest grades [...] I had great experiences in PE classes. However; my PE instructor had a very aggressive teaching style. Shouting, telling off and heavy discipline were part of a typical course. The good thing was that I never faced such violence but most of my friends were always tense and hated the class [...] I remember my mates crying during class and pretending to be ill in order not to join classes [...] It wasn't good seeing your friends humiliated and desperate. I would love PE classes but not the instructors. As a prospective teacher, now I better understand how terribly those students who weren't competent enough must have felt. (Participant 47, male, from PE teaching subject)*

However, the others who were suspicious of their ability and failed to do the right thing often reported that they felt embarrassed, incapable and highly demotivated. In their essays, these participants often defined themselves as low-achievers for diverse reasons. Their lack of interest in sports, failure to perform certain movements (flip-flapping, shooting the goal, laying up shot), their peers' comment about their performances in sports competition, the instructors' showing less interest in their needs and requests were all reported as factors interacting with their perception of (in)ability.

*Our PE instructor was very strict [...] with a commanding voice, he would want us to wait in height order and with total silence [...] I would feel scared and very tense when I wasn't able to do certain tasks [...] I've never wanted to remember those days [...] I was always trying to escape from PE classes... (Participant 122, female, from other subject areas)*

One interesting finding was that punishment during the course was a common theme. Apart from those mentioned earlier, students were also put into situations where grading became a major concern. As well as performance, some of the instructors tended to use grading as a threat in matters that are not directly related to the goals of the class. Having sports equipment, nail clipping checks, punctuality, paying the fee for buying sports equipment (it was requested by the school administration), attendance in organized events (national celebration of important days) were some of the things presented as some of the determinants of grading. Combined with negatively perceived ability, all these resulted in tension. The number of those who used the word 'unbearable' for PE classes is significantly high.

*PE class was definitely unbearable. When you are late, forget your sports equipment or refuse to take part in events, you get a low mark as well as being insulted in front of others ... (Participant 73, male, from other subject areas)*

*Indifferent / Anger & Criticism.* Another teaching style commonly witnessed by the participants was indifference. Indifference was defined as the instructor's unwillingness to design and manage a quality curriculum that would involve the students into physical activity. A great many participants stated that their instructor often neglected the importance of physical activity. In their classes, the routine was to let students be free both in the classroom and outside. During these idle moments, the students were often occupied with other things such as chit-chatting or exam preparation. The teacher, on the other hand, were reported to spend time doing his paperwork in the classroom, stay in teachers' room or his private room, and be working with school team and totally ignoring the others.

Those who had such instructors asserted in their essays that PE classes were a complete waste of time; they blamed their instructor for not being good at any sport or not engaging in any kind of sports in their adult life. There were also the ones who stated that their memories of PE classes were often blurry and it didn't

contribute much to their physical and social development.

*I don't remember much about PE class [...] Most of the time, it wasn't something really serious. Our instructor wouldn't teach us all the time [...] I didn't learn much, so now I am incapable of doing any kind of sports ... (Participant 21, female, from other subject areas)*

This is a crucial finding in that failure to perform in well-designed PE activities in their school years was seen as one of the primary reasons for insufficient physical activity. Even those (prospective PE teachers) who found this idleness pleasing in their school years wrote that it was a mistake that they would never do in their future teaching life.

*Supportive / Good Memories.* In contrast to the former problematic attitudes, some participants reported that they experienced teacher support in PE classes. While performing tasks in the curriculum, their PE instructors were said to be very helpful, caring for all students and encouraging those who were hesitant about their performance and ability.

*My teacher was a great one. He showed us the movements, cared for us and helped us do the things one by one. I was quite relaxed even though I couldn't do things right [...] that was important as now I feel positive about sports ... (Participant 138, male, from other subject areas)*

The participants from PE teaching subject areas (They were referred as the high ability group in this study) implied that they learnt a lot from such instructors and their motivation to be PE instructors was positively influenced by them.

*I hope one day I will be as successful as her. (Participant 17, female, from PE subject areas)*

Participants from other subject areas also reported that they enjoyed PE classes in their school years and felt valuable when their instructor helped them perform certain tasks.

### 3.2. Theme 2. Course Process

Based on the participants' reflections on their experiences in PE classes, we gained an insight into a typical PE class session and identified what happened during this time. The findings indicate that PE classes were marked with a strange conflict of strictness and looseness and gender-based segregation.

*Military training.* Based on participants' statements, anyone who witnessed the first five or ten minutes of these PE classes would probably think that students were either trained to be very disciplined soldiers or gladiators as it was common to see students in height order, waiting in silence in the school garden or at the gym and loudly shouting their numbers when the teacher commanded them to do so. The teacher then warned those who didn't have their sports suit with them and sometimes carried out some controls (the length of hair, nail, appropriate clothing). A high number of participants stated that this was the common practice in most PE classes and sometimes it was followed by sprinting. After the warm-up, the teacher explained the subject of the day and the students began to perform the tasks one by one, in pairs or in groups.

*Of all the school subjects, I hated PE most [...] I remember the beginning [...] waited in total silence [...] a very angry face [...] Hygiene and clothing checks [...] the instructor made us sprint for 10 minutes.... (Participant 41, male, from other subject areas)*

If the school didn't have a gym and the weather conditions were not favorable, then the teacher would begin the class similarly (the same discipline was expected to be shown in the classroom) and taught the basics of the subject in the curriculum. Some teachers were reported to get the students to have notebooks and write everything they told.

*Let the Kids Free.* Contrary to the previous sub-theme where one probably predicted that it was a much disciplined class, the latter part of the typical PE class sessions had a totally different practice. In most schools, it was reported that PE class took two class hours in weekly schedule. Following the introduction, letting the students free was a common theme especially in the second half of the class. There are also participants who emphatically stated that the instructor let them free after taking the attendance and carrying out routine controls while they were waiting in height order, without actually teaching anything. Participants' responses revealed that they were either given some sports equipment (mostly a football, a basketball or volleyball) to play without the supervision of the instructor or given nothing at all. One participant statement summarizes the situation as follows:

*PE classes were leisure times. We wandered around the school garden, spent our time in school cafeteria or went upstairs to the class. Some played basketball and the others, mostly girls, played volleyball. The instructor was often not involved in the class. I mean, he sometimes went to teachers' room or stayed in his room dealing with some other things. (Participant 74, female, from PE subject areas)*

These statements point out an interesting controversy and crucial implications for the course process. While the general trend was starting the class seriously (even too serious to include hygiene controls), it was not suggestive of the remaining of the class. Even the instructors who were called as very strict let their students do whatever they wanted in certain times. One student response describes the case as such:

*In those years, I never understood why we had these classes. It didn't contribute to our physical development. One advantage, perhaps the only one, was that we found the opportunity to socialize or study for other school subjects, which could well have been done outside the school... (Participant 111, female, from other subject areas)*

In PE classes where the strictness and looseness conflict wasn't so apparent in one session, there was still some kind of irregularity. In those classes, students might have confronted heavy exercise, extreme discipline and performance evaluations in one or two weeks. Following that, contrary to students' expectation, the consecutive class would be quite loose. It was common to see students wander around the school garden, some playing volleyball, some others studying for other school subjects in the classroom.

*Gender Issues.* One other sub-theme emerging from the findings was a powerful gender stereotyping and segregation represented by PE instructors and students. When students were let free to occupy themselves with certain sports activities, male students mostly performed football, sometimes basketball and female students were involved in volleyball (or watching what the boys were doing). A female participant summarizes the situation by emphasizing the underlying stereotyping and gender-based segregation:

*The instructor used to give the football to one of the male students and the volleyball to one of the females. Even when we took the balls, it was the same as I don't know perhaps instinctively I opted for volleyball. When I think about those days, I assume playing football would have been a great source of fun. (Participant 85, female, from PE subject areas)*

Another participant statement also implies the gender stereotyping.

*We would play football in teams and the girls would sit on a bank and chit-chat. This was routine. When I asked them why they weren't performing sports, they responded like this: Do you expect me to play basketball or football? Girls do not do such stuff. (Participant 33, male, from other subject areas)*

However, in well-designed, relatively higher quality PE classes, especially when the instructor took what he did seriously, things were quite different. Participants whose memories of PE classes were positive often stated that they had the chance to perform a variety of sports available to them. Additionally, student teachers from PE teaching subjects who defined themselves as high-achievers stated that they were involved in diverse sports and learnt the basics in these class settings. This being the case, however, the findings also indicate that even in this group, there were female students who clearly stated that they had never had the chance to participate in sports activities other than basic physical activities and volleyball in their middle and high school years.

*I will be a PE teacher soon but I can comfortably say that my career choice was mostly based on my own motivation, which has always been innate [...] PE classes in those years were nothing but trivia [...] I had the ability but never had the chance to show it in different arenas. (Participant 47, female, from PE subject areas)*

It was also suggested that the instructor's attitude towards gender bias was the determinant of their involvement in certain sports. Based on participants' responses, boys were often expected to be aggressive and assertive while girls were to act in appropriate feminine way. This appropriate feminine way was often associated with being passive most of the time or engaging in sports that have been traditionally considered suitable for female gender. When the PE instructors failed to challenge these orthodox beliefs and practices and design an inclusive and fostering environment that provides equal and diverse opportunities for both gender, girls suffer from being confined to certain and often limited physical activity.

### 3.3. Theme 3. Gap between Schools

The findings point out a crucial problem that is thought to explain much about the negative attitude towards PE classes. In the study, the majority of schools that participants attended were found out to have lacked of even the basics of sports education. Most schools mentioned in the essays were reported to have suffered from insufficient gym, inappropriate changing rooms and showers (if any), insufficient amount of equipment for specific sports (even the most basic ones were missing in some schools), and superficial planning to appropriately schedule PE classes. However, there were also schools that were relatively better (the ones that at least provided students with sports equipment and indoor sports hall) and also high-quality ones where PE education was freed from these hindrances and supported by both PE instructors and school management.

*It becomes a burden.* Participants' essays revealed that the whole PE class experience was perceived as a burden in schools where problems about infrastructure were evident: the lack of indoor sports facilities in schools restricted PE training to favorable weather conditions and in-class theoretical teaching; students, especially girls, suffered from the inconvenience of changing their clothes in their classes due to the absence of changing rooms; and performing with sports equipment was limited due to high number of students and insufficient amount of equipment.

*I hated PE classes for two main reasons: First, we didn't have changing rooms. First, all the boys would change their clothes in our own class where we got education. Then, we would go into the class to dress up. Two of us would hold the door so that no one could enter suddenly and saw us naked.*

*Secondly, we would often have other classes following PE. Some teachers would say Ok when we had our sports clothes on us. Some others would ask us to wear our school uniforms. In either case, it was a real burden. No showers, no changing rooms and break times wasted to clean ourselves in school toilet (Participant 8, female, from PE subject areas)*

The place of PE classes in the daily curriculum was also a source of inconvenience. When it was scheduled between other school subjects, the participants stated that they often hated it.

*Bringing sports clothes to the school, changing the clothes, attending PE class and taking them off again [...] why do I have to put up with that? [...] just for two class hours [...] We even didn't have a gym or equipment. I would go mad when the instructor said: "Ok, you are free." just cruel... (Participant 29, male, from other subject areas)*

The participant response clearly shows that PE, which was supposed to be fun, turned into a real trouble and this led to an increased disappointment, thus contributing to the negative attitude towards it. Physical obstacles, combined with other variables, resulted in such negative emotions.

*Good examples.* So far, we provided an overall picture of a typical PE class from the perspective of young adults and showed the factors contributing to low quality PE classes and students' associated experiences in them. The general state of PE being not so promising and even marked with deep-rooted problems, some participant responses also indicated that there were also good examples where students valued the experience and felt they learnt something.

*Physical education classes were a great source of joy for me [...] We learnt a lot from our instructor [...] I still perform the sports that I learnt there (Participant 161, male, from other subject areas)*

Though given under this main theme (because it was mostly related to availability of facilities), these quality PE classes were often referred as the outcome of a combination of all factors stated here. When the instructors were positive and encouraging; the goals of the class were clearly-stated; the students (both gender) were given equal opportunity to involve in physical activity; classes were scheduled in a way that they didn't disturb the flow of the daily tasks; the schools provided all necessary facilities and equipment, it seems that PE classes turned into a fertile environment where the individuals were motivated to perform and maintained these readily acquired habits.

#### 4. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate student teachers' experiences and attitudes in PE classes back in their high school and middle school years; and observations about the current state of PE teaching in Turkey (approximately a-six-year period) and find out what factors interacted with their attitude towards these organized PE practices. The findings indicate that the general attitude of the participants was negative in the past and there hasn't been a considerable change in PE teaching practices so far. Therefore, it can be claimed that students still suffer from the same problems. Based on the results and from the participants' responses, there are a number of crucial factors interacting with students' attitude towards physical education classes. These include teaching style of instructors, a course process marked with strictness-looseness conflict and gender-based segregation; and a gap between schools where poor infrastructure and curriculum planning led to a decreased interest in PE classes.

As for the teaching style, the participants perceived that strictness and indifference represented by instructors led to negative feelings by students. When the instructors tended to act aggressively and punish students, the students began to feel embarrassed, suspicious of their skills and became highly demotivated. Similarly, when they observed that their instructors failed to design a quality physical education class where guidance was valued, the students felt lost in the process. In the study, the participants frequently expressed their criticism and blamed their instructors for not being able to perform physical activity later in their lives. Contrary to sports where the main emphasis is on competition and participation in sporting events, physical education refers to a broader subject area in which learning necessary information, behavior management strategies and developing motor skill proficiency are the milestones of the process (Chen & Ennis, 2004). In line with this distinction, how educators approach the students may create a major difference in students' motivation and willingness to take part in physical activity (Goudas *et al.*, 1995). The participants of this study delineated a teacher-student interaction pattern that when students were encouraged and given support in PE classes, they enjoyed the class and felt more positive toward it as a whole. Therefore, it is crucial that PE instructors avoid authoritative and aggressive teaching style and employ a more moderate teaching approach; and must be responsive to students' expectations. This can be especially useful in that early involvement in physical activity may benefit the individual in adult years. It can also be suggested that a positive teaching style may improve students' perceived competence. Rather than focusing on perfection and superior performance (there are also not mandated by the Ministry as the objectives of PE classes), building success criteria on learning and self-improvement may help students (especially girls) perceive themselves able to engage in physical activity.

In the study, the design of the curriculum was also an obvious factor considerably shaping the students' attitude. The participants frequently talked about wandering around or doing activities unguided by the PE teachers. It seems that PE curriculum either is not well organized /well planned or the teachers are not following the plan. In either cases, the policy-makers or school administration need to make sure that the curriculum is well organized and the teacher is executing the planned activities.

Williams (1992) identified seven major elements of an inappropriate activity in physical education. Two of them - *absence of the purported objectives of the activity or the game* and *lack of emphasis on teaching motor skills and lifetime fitness skills* - seemed to be inherent in PE classes described by the participants. Contrary to typical PE classes identified in the study, a quality PE class may necessitate a smooth beginning where the tension is reduced and the goals of the course is clearly stated; and a more structured class practice where the activities are designed in a way that boosts positive attitude, learning and social, physical and psychological development of the individual. This can be achieved by appropriate games, activities and teaching practices. Otherwise, compared to those of high ability who may somehow manage to perform more successfully, students who perceive themselves as low-achievers may lose their motivation from the very beginning in unfavorable classroom environments. They may also see the looseness as an opportunity to isolate themselves from physical activity.

Another major finding of the study was gender issues. Results showed that in a typical PE class, girls were often directed either to certain sports branches or to sit and watch while the boys are practicing. It means that they were separated and not equal in physical education classes. Their experiences in PE classes are often associated with less physical activity, gender-segregated sports branches and lack of interest in physical performance. Combined with the underlying social assumptions and stereotypes that limit the interaction between female gender and sport, a curriculum where both instructors and students themselves are biased against the performance of girls in PE classes may lead to an increasing gap between genders in their involvement in physical activity. Hay & McDonald (2010) state that for female students, gender can be seen as a liability considering the expectations from their relatively inferior capacities especially in PE classes and misreading this may lead to such false assumptions that they aren't motivated in PE classes and have low ability. This study proves their earlier findings in that gender-segregated PE classes result in lack of physical activity and create the illusion that PE classes are mainly for boys. Rather than maintaining such conventional practices, the instructors should be more willing and attentive to introduce a wide range of sports activities to girls and encourage them to take up these. It is also suggested that PE instructors be more careful in designing gender-neutral activities. In this study, even very common sports activities, basketball and football were seen only for boys by a great majority of the participants. Therefore, it might be useful first to eradicate these false assumptions by students.

Gender bias can also have a negative effect on improving boys' skills in diverse areas of sports. The study revealed that boys were also involved in limited number of sports; namely basketball and football. However, quality physical education class practice is expected to help students discover their potential in different areas. Though it wasn't brought up in the study, it is predictable that boys wouldn't participate in activities that they think too girly.

Finally, the findings also point out a gap between schools regarding the provision of sports equipment and facilities. While there are good examples where schools have sports facilities and students are given opportunity to practice with a wide range of equipment, most schools are reported to have lacked of even the basic supplies. Combined with previously detailed factors, this may lead to a more pessimistic picture. What was expected to be a relaxing and enjoyable activity was often referred as a burden in the absence of sports hall, changing rooms, showers and sufficient equipment. This was the case especially when PE classes were followed by other school subjects as students had to change their clothes and tried to clean themselves.

## 5. Conclusion

From a more holistic viewpoint, it may become more evident that all those factors that were reported to shape students' attitude towards PE class experience are interconnected. When a well-designed curriculum is supported by positive teacher attitude and necessary means to deliver quality PE education is provided, the whole experience may turn positive. Thus, it can be argued that PE instructors must have the skills and motivation to facilitate learning in PE classes. It is also important that they know the role of in-school PE experience in shaping students' general attitude towards sports in the later phases of their lives. Moreover, they should be aware of various classroom management strategies so that they shift focus from strictness to supportiveness and encouragement. As far as gender concerned, it is crucial that PE instructors must be open-minded and challenge the conventional practices that discriminate against female gender.

This study is hoped to bring the state of PE into policy makers' and curriculum designers' attention who we believe have higher national interest in inculcating positive attitude towards sports and physical activity. The findings are limited to the participants and the setting. Though the research may highlight some potential problem areas in physical education classes in Turkey, further research is needed to test if these and similar



problems are shared at large. For future research, we suggest a large-scale national research drawing from the findings of the current study is recommended to gauge the general current state of PE in Turkey.

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