



The Role of Physical Education towards First Year Sport Participation at the University of Johannesburg

Clinton Swanepoel^{1✉}, Roberto Lourenco², Kezia Appolis³, Craig Harron⁴

Department of Sport and Movement Studies, University of Johannesburg, SOUTH AFRICA¹²³⁴

Article History

Received May 2024

Accepted February 2025

Published Vol.14 No.(1) 2025

Keywords:

Physical Education;
University Sport; Physical
Educator; Physical
Activity; School Sport

Abstract

The purpose of the study was to investigate the impact of Physical Education and school sport on sport participation among first year students taking part in sport at the University of Johannesburg. The integration of the Physical Education as an outcome within the Life Orientation and Life Skills curriculum in South Africa has reduced instructional quality due to a lack of specialised educators. Within the school curriculum, it is uncertain if Physical Education plays a role in learners choosing to take part in school sport, and university sport. This lack of knowledge in understanding the importance of attitudes and perceptions toward Physical Education and school-based sports in the South African context requires further investigation, particularly regarding the impact that Physical Education has on university students' sports participation. The study entailed conducting semi-structured interviews with first-year University of Johannesburg sport students. The researchers obtained consent from athletes, conducted face-to-face semi-structured interviews, transcribed audio recordings, and employed thematic analysis using ATLAS.ti, revealing recurrent themes aligned with study goals. The presence of well-trained Physical Education teachers, adequate facilities, equipment, and support systems positively correlates with increased participation in both school and university-level sports. This study underscores the pivotal influence of well-trained Physical Education educators, coupled with the provision of adequate facilities, equipment, and comprehensive support systems, in bolstering sport participation, encompassing both school and university contexts. This research highlights the paramount importance of these components in fostering active sports engagement among first-year students at the University of Johannesburg.

How to Cite

Swanepoel, C., Lourenco, R., Appolis, K., & Harron, C. (2025). The Role of Physical Education towards First Year Sport Participation at the University of Johannesburg. *Journal of Physical Education, Sport, Health and Recreation*, 14 (1), 1-10.

© 2025 Universitas Negeri Semarang

✉ Correspondence address :
E-mail: cswanepoel@uj.ac.za

INTRODUCTION

In recent literature, it has been demonstrated that specialised physical educators play a significant role in Physical Education (PE) (Cristina, 2023). PE is commonly integrated within the framework of Life Orientation (LO) in primary and secondary schools, focusing on promoting physical exercise and its associated benefits among learners (Stroebel, Hay, & Bloemhoff, 2018). Engaging in sports activities has been shown to act as a preventive measure against risky health-related behaviors in students (Cristina, 2023).

Sport is operationally defined as a structured competition or game involving specific PE activities adhering to predefined rules, in which individuals or teams compete against each other (Thompson, 2019). Participation in sports holds considerable advantages for South Africans, contributing to positive emotional well-being and a sense of community pride (Tichaawa, Bama, & Swart, 2015).

Recognising the influence that educators wield over high school students can significantly enhance our understanding of how PE can be further developed to foster a greater number of athletes from a secondary education perspective. Importantly, the value of Physical Activity (PA) extends beyond physical fitness, as it has been found to have positive implications for academic performance (Kulp & Zhu, 2022). Furthermore, physical inactivity has been associated with mental health deterioration, resulting in decreased concentration, heightened stress levels, and diminished academic achievement (Romanova, Kolokoltsev, Vorozheikin, Konovalov, Vrachinskaya, Fedorov & Garov, 2023). Active participation in PA has been shown to mitigate these negative outcomes and reduce emotional distress, such as depression and anxiety (Lilia, Souheir, Mohammed, Eddine & Asma, 2023). This improvement in mental state following PA is attributed to the release of neurotransmitters like dopamine and serotonin (Romanova et al., 2023). Recent research indicates a decrease in PA due to the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to reduced sport participation and holistic development (United Nations, 2020).

Holistic development in children encompasses cognitive, psychomotor, and social progress, which is facilitated by movement activities in PE (Swanepoel, 2021). The cognitive dimension pertains to memory, attention, and thought processes (Swanepoel, 2021). The psychomotor aspect relates to the development of coordinated motor skills in children (Burnette, 2020), while the social sphere involves communication and

interaction with peers (Morris, Van Ommeren, Belfer, Saxena & Saraceno, 2007). Over time, PE has lost prominence within the education system, with academic excellence taking precedence over holistic development, largely due to inadequate infrastructure (Hendricks, 2004) (Burnette, 2020). Consequently, PE is often delivered by classroom educators rather than qualified specialists, resulting in a decline in the quality of instruction and a subsequent reduction in student development and enjoyment (Roux, 2020).

Infrastructure plays a pivotal role in the quality of PE programs and participation rates. The availability of facilities determines the range of activities that can be offered, while the quantity and condition of equipment significantly influence the effectiveness of PE programs (Swanepoel, 2021). This underscores the critical need for quality facilities and equipment to support effective physical curricula, a perspective supported internationally by Grima, Grima, Thalassinou, Seychell and Jonathan (2017), who noted that China's substantial investment in sports infrastructure led to a marked increase in sport participation.

The present study aims to investigate the impact of PE and school sports on sport participation among first-year sport students at the University of Johannesburg. The accessibility and availability of modern, well-equipped facilities may entice high school students to choose specific sports, a critical consideration for enhancing sports participation rates.

METHODS

The population employed for this study comprised first-year university students who had been participating in sports at the University of Johannesburg. Random sampling was employed in the selection of first-year sport students from the eleven different sports offerings at the University of Johannesburg. The utilisation of random sampling was justified by its ability to minimise bias, enhance generalisability, improve efficiency, and ensure representativeness (Patton & Cocharn, 2002).

A sample size of 10 students was invited to take part in the study. The selection of semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection in this qualitative research study is underpinned by its appropriateness for capturing extensive and in-depth data (Patton & Cocharn, 2002). This method facilitated a complex exploration of the participants' experiences, offering a rich understanding of their perspectives. Ad-

ditionally, it fostered a dynamic and interactive engagement between the interviewer and the interviewees, providing a platform for participants to share their insights and narratives in a comprehensive manner, enhancing the overall quality of the data collected.

The average age range of first-year students ranged from 18 to 24. This age range was selected because it ensured a more recent experience concerning school sports and PE.

The participants were included based on the following criteria:

- Being first-year students at the University of Johannesburg.
- Falling within the age range of 18 to 25.
- Actively participating in sports at the University of Johannesburg.

Participants were excluded from this research study if they met any of the following criteria:

- Not participating in sports at the University of Johannesburg.
- Not being first-year students at the University of Johannesburg,
- Falling below the age of 18 or exceeding the age of 25.
- Participants who fail to sign the consent form.

Instruments

The research project employed a qualitative semi-structured interview as the primary data collection instrument to investigate the role of physical education (PE) in facilitating first-year sport participation at the University of Johannesburg. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the study, the research design incorporated various measures aligned with Lincoln and Guba (1985) four key elements of trustworthiness: conformability, credibility, dependability, and transferability.

Credibility, as a fundamental aspect of trustworthiness, was established through the engagement of specialists in the field of physical education and movement studies. Their expertise was sought to validate the interview questions, ensuring their alignment with the research objectives. Furthermore, feedback and guidance from peers were actively sought and integrated into the research process, thereby enhancing the overall standards and quality of the findings, in line with Anney (2014), recommendations.

To address the element of transferability, a key concern in qualitative research, the study considered the potential applicability of its outcomes in different contexts. The research design

incorporated recommendations from Swanepoel (2021), which underscored the importance of assessing whether the findings can be transferred to other settings, making them relevant and fitting beyond the immediate research context.

Dependability, the final component of trustworthiness, was established by meticulously auditing the records collected throughout the research process. This included documenting all research activities, from the inception of the research plan to the final data analysis phase. Roux (2020) recommendations were instrumental in ensuring the dependability of this study, as a thorough record-keeping process helped maintain the integrity and trustworthiness of the research findings.

The integration of these measures contributed to the overall trustworthiness of this qualitative study, enhancing the credibility of the research findings and their potential to be applied in other contexts, ultimately advancing our understanding of the role of physical education in first-year sport participation at the University of Johannesburg.

Data collection and analysis

The data collection procedure involved obtaining permission from coaches of various University of Johannesburg sports teams to engage directly with their athletes. Subsequently, the researchers provided a verbal explanation of the study's nature, and athletes expressing willingness to participate received information letters and consent forms six weeks before the scheduled semi-structured interviews. Those who consented to participate duly signed the information letters and consent forms, returning them to the researchers. Following this, dates and times for the semi-structured interviews were scheduled with each participant.

The data collection process was executed through face-to-face semi-structured interviews, characterised by open-ended questions to elicit comprehensive and specific responses. Audio recordings of the interviews were made, and later, verbatim transcriptions were transcribed onto a laptop. To ensure participant anonymity and research trustworthiness, the audio recordings were subsequently deleted.

The recruitment of participants was conducted by approaching students who were part of sports teams and consulting with the respective coaches. Information about the study, consent forms, and interview locations were conveyed to potential participants. The interviews took place at various University of Johannesburg campuses,

including Auckland Park Kingsway Campus, Doornfontein Campus private rooms, and the UJ West Sport Campus. The study specifically targeted first-year University of Johannesburg sports participants.

The analyses of the qualitative research served as the methodological approach employed within the framework of this investigation. To facilitate the thematic analysis, version 23.1.1 of the ATLAS.ti software program was deployed (ATLAS.ti, 2023). Subsequently, verbatim transcriptions of audio recordings were executed as part of the data processing procedure.

In the course of data analysis, a systematic process of coding was administered, wherein codes were systematically assigned to specific words and phrases manifesting distinct thematic elements within the dataset (Medelyan, 2019). This meticulous coding procedure facilitated the formation of a network of interconnected concepts, ultimately culminating in the emergence of diverse thematic constructs.

The transcripts underwent iterative analysis to discern recurring patterns and themes inherent within the data. These emergent themes were intricately aligned with the predefined objectives of the study, thus enabling a comprehensive comparison with extant literature (Vosloo, 2014). The confluence of these themes, in turn, served as a foundational framework for the production of a final report, which not only encapsulated the research findings but also engendered a discourse that harmoniously addressed the central research question posited at the outset of the investigation (Clarke & Braun, 2006).

The study has yielded several prominent themes, each of which is a critical facet of the investigation. These emergent themes encompass:

The Proficiency and Experience of Physical Education Instructors: This theme revolves around the proficiency and experience of educators tasked with instructing PE courses. It underscores the significance of instructor qualifications and their impact on the overall quality of PE programs.

Attitudes of First-Year Sport Students towards Their Physical Education Instructors: This theme delves into the attitudes and perceptions held by novice sports students regarding their PE instructors. It examines the dynamics of the student-teacher relationship and its potential influence on the learning experience.

The Involvement of Physical Education Instructors in School Sports: This theme explores the multifaceted roles assumed by PE teachers in the context of school sports. It investigates the ex-

tent to which these instructors actively participate in the organisation and execution of sporting activities within educational institutions.

School Facilities and Equipment: This theme insides on the infrastructural aspects of educational institutions, specifically focusing on the role of facilities and equipment in facilitating a broad spectrum of school sports. It seeks to elucidate how the availability and quality of such resources influence the sporting and PE experience.

Transition from School Sports to Varsity Sport Participation: This theme examines the link between engagement in school sports and subsequent participation in varsity-level sports. It investigates the transferability of skills and experiences acquired during school sports to higher-level sporting endeavours.

Adaptability in the Context of Professionalism, Specialisation, and Curriculum Structuring: This theme underscores the importance of adaptability within the realm of PE. It assesses how instructors respond to shifts in professionalism, the trend toward specialisation, and the implementation of structured curricula in the field.

External Influences: Encouragement, Socioeconomic Factors, Family Support, and Motivation: This theme takes into account the external factors that impact the engagement and performance of students in the domain of PE. It considers external sources of motivation, socioeconomic conditions, familial support structures, and their collective influence on student participation and achievement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This investigation, driven by a specific set of research objectives, has generated a series of thematic outcomes derived from the interview responses, each thoughtfully interpreted within its respective theme seen below.

The Proficiency and Experience of Physical Education Instructors:

This theme explores the perspectives of first-year sport students regarding the qualifications and proficiency of their physical education instructors, shedding light on the influence of these educators on the students' sports participation.

Participant: 'In primary, I can say it was a specialised person, because I did swimming and athletics. So there were some different exercises their high school not so much for me just like a general person who just knew basics on how to exercise how to stretch, because

there's never too much on sports, you could say was Yeah.'

Participant: 'That's a tough one because our PE teacher was a professional MMA fighter. So he was in the field, but I don't know if he had this full qualification of being a PE teacher. Yeah.'

Participant: 'Umm, not really. So high school uhh, at kes yes specialised, qualified in physical education. So he was quite good when, when I moved school so it was just normal teacher that taught LO that was part of your curriculum, so he was actually my cricket coach. He wasn't an athletic at all but yeah, so.'

Participant: 'We had, we had a mixture. So obviously, we had teachers who will just teach us and would help facilitate, just like, but they would do more of the admin stuff. We did have two coaches who were, who had degrees, uhm who you can tell they knew what they were doing, because they if you went up to them, and you asked him, Okay, how to squat properly? Or how to do this, they would help you with that. And it was also very evident in the assessments that we did.'

Participant: 'Yes, we had a specialised teacher qualified to teach PE'

The results from the semi-structured interviews indicate a varied experience among participants with their primary and high school PE instructors. Some participants had specialised and qualified instructors who provided in-depth knowledge and guidance in sports and exercise, particularly in primary school, where swimming and athletics were emphasised. However, there were instances where PE teachers lacked full qualifications but had relevant field experience, such as one participant mentioning a PE teacher who was a professional MMA fighter. In high school, the level of specialisation and qualification varied, with some participants having qualified PE teachers, while others had teachers who primarily taught LO and were also involved in coaching sports. Participants noted that the presence of coaches with degrees in PE was evident in their knowledge and ability to provide guidance in physical activities and assessments. Overall, the experiences with PE instructors ranged from specialised and qualified educators to those with varying levels of expertise in the field.

Attitudes of First-Year Sport Students towards their Physical Education Instructors:

In this theme, the attitudes of first-year sport students towards their physical education instructors are examined, emphasizing the impact of these attitudes on students' engagement in physical education and school sports.

Participant: 'I respect to them. It's not easy. So easy job.'

Participant: 'Ummm A lot of respect for him. You put us through the most but gave us good outcomes.'

Participant: 'Low-key it like he was beneficial. Because now I'm running harder at PT and training because I know now eh if I don't do this the side other side, I won't get the marks or I won't get the starting line-up.'

Participant: 'I think I quite liked him because I think he related to us in a, in a space outside of like classroom and work and stuff like that. Make, like, did his best to make it fun. He was a nice guy. I think so. Yeah. Quite liked him.'

Participant: 'I've always been uhm respectful and I've always tried to have the attitude that they know better than me, and they trying to teach me something. Uhm and essentially, I look up to them as, as an educator and a coach and trying to understand their their point of view and the way they may have something come across and they know better and they're just trying to teach that upon me.'

Participant: 'Uhm, it was a positive attitude like uhm. Because I'd prefer doing that then being in class in that. So when we had that lesson, it was quite nice. Uhm especially in the hockey team as well, the guy that always had proper drills, and that and he knew what he was doing so it felt professional in a way.'

The results pertaining to the attitudes of first-year sport students towards their Physical Education (PE) instructors reveal a range of sentiments. Participants expressed respect and appreciation for their instructors, acknowledging the challenges of the role. Some participants held high regard for instructors who pushed them to their limits, recognising the positive outcomes achieved through demanding training. Others highlighted the motivating impact of their instructors, as they associated performance in PE with academic success or securing a spot in the starting lineup. Additionally, some participants mentioned a favorable attitude towards instructors who made the learning experience enjoyable, creating a sense of liking and connection with their educators. Respect and a willingness to learn were common attitudes among the students, viewing their instructors as knowledgeable educators and coaches who aimed to impart valuable lessons. The overall sentiment towards PE instructors was positive, with a preference for practical and professional learning experiences over traditional classroom settings.

The Involvement of Physical Education Instructors in School Sports:

This theme delves into the extent of physical education instructors' participation in school sports, revealing their roles in shaping students' experiences and interest in sports activities.

Participant: 'He's actually very good in rugby. And that is huge, massive impact. Because without it, I mean, I wouldn't be like a rugby player.'

Participant: 'Uh he was a great teacher. He was good. Cuz he was also like, a sports coach.'

Participant: 'Uhm had quite a big impact because I came here with like a bit of fitness and a bit of conditioning. So I was able to sort of adjust a bit easier than I think I would have without one.'

Participant: 'So in high school, we actually didn't have a girls rugby team at all, it only came towards the end of matric. And that's when I got the interest. But because I grew up watching rugby, like being from a family of rugby players. It's always been in me like, Okay, I want to try it on I tried. And so I just kind of push myself to this year and say not actually, I want to do it for the team and just try and see where I end up because you just never know. The teacher never helped me to become a rugby player.'

Participant: 'No, nothing. Nothing at all, the teacher had no impact or helped me.'

Participant: 'When I was in high school, I was not I was always going to play a lot of sports, but they kind of they kind of pushed me to do more.'

The responses regarding the involvement of Physical Education (PE) instructors in school sports suggest varied experiences among participants. Some participants acknowledged the substantial impact of their PE instructors in shaping their sports interests and abilities, with one attributing their rugby skills and passion to their instructor's influence. Others mentioned that their PE teachers, who also served as sports coaches, had a positive effect by enhancing their fitness and conditioning. For some participants, the absence of a girls' rugby team at their high school did not deter their interest in the sport, as they were already inclined towards rugby due to family influences. However, there were cases where participants felt that their PE instructors had little to no impact on their sports involvement. Overall, the extent of influence and engagement of PE instructors in school sports varied among participants, ranging from significant contributions to minimal involvement.

School Facilities and Equipment:

Within this theme, the influence of school facilities and equipment on students' participa-

tion in diverse sports is investigated, elucidating the role of these resources in fostering or limiting sports engagement.

Participant: 'No, you know, we didn't have a job on the field. Which is just like we feel turned into a sport field to a soccer field, sorry. And a running field, that was it for athletics. This is also a reason why I only started with girls rugby at the end of the matric year.'

Participant: 'You Oh, no, no, we did the basics. Like your crunches, you're running up and down your lunges just basic exercises because we didn't have enough equipment. This made our sport limited.'

Participant: 'Our cricket facilities weren't the greatest. I would say because we didn't have any indoor nets and stuff. So in the rain we were, we were forced to have a team talk and that didn't really help and the squash courts we had were decent squash courts, but they weren't well maintained. So the floors are always slippery, the walls are cracking. So I didn't practice at school. I used to practice outside of school time, so I didn't even attend practices.'

Participant: 'I'd say yes, definitely. They've got good, they've got good facilities, sports facilities, they've got an indoor center where we would do like an indoor hockey, indoor hockey arena, which they use for indoor volleyball as well. So we do PE there and we also do PE out on track. Which was very nice. So even if it was raining, you're still doing PE which was a nice thing. And then they also had a gym. Like I said, it wasn't the biggest gym but it had what you needed. You had like dumbbells you had barbells but that was for that wasn't for PE that was more for specialised gym for that use and stuff like that if you wanted to do that, but otherwise you are they really had everything that we needed, like cones, they had cones, they was they they did proper tests and stuff like that. They had to take measures we used to do jumps stuff like that. So they definitely had everything that we needed for for PE. This is also a reason why everybody wanted to take part in sport at school.'

Participant: 'Yeah, we had a very nice facility. Yeah, a lot of equipment for a very, like, high standard equipment and stuff. That if we also motivated me and my friends a lot to take part in sport.'

Participant: 'You know, into a pretty high in high school. So I mean, the equipment is high grade and definitely positively benefits us. We put it like that.'

Participant: 'Yes. Because I think that's what made me fortunate now cause one thing. Every sport facility or equipment is always available for once you saw. I believe this is also a reason why I took part in school sport.'

The results regarding the impact of school facilities and equipment on diverse school sports highlight the significance of these resources in

shaping students' sports experiences. Participants expressed varying experiences with their school facilities and equipment. Some participants noted limitations in their school's sports infrastructure, with insufficient or basic equipment restricting the variety of exercises and sports activities. These limitations occasionally influenced their sports choices, with one participant mentioning a delayed start in girls' rugby due to inadequate facilities.

Conversely, other participants reported positive experiences, where well-maintained facilities and high-quality equipment motivated their active participation in various sports. The availability of indoor centers, tracks, gyms, and specialised equipment contributed to an enriched physical education (PE) experience. The accessibility and quality of sports facilities and equipment played a pivotal role in attracting students to engage in school sports.

Transition from School Sports to Varsity Sport Participation:

This theme explores the transition process from school sports to university-level sports, uncovering the factors that facilitate or hinder this shift, and their effects on students' continued sports participation.

Participant: 'I had said had a quite a large impact obviously did sports in high school uhm and I think that set me up to, to aim at doing sports at university uhm obviously luckily I was, fortunate enough to come to university that had the sport I did in high school and I think I also aimed at getting into university that did the sport that I did in high school so it kind of set me up to move straight into the sports field at university.'

Participant: 'Uh, I think just the fact that I've been doing sports uhm, like my entire high school career, and that the university I was going to obviously offered the sport like it kind of the high school sports set me up to continue into university.'

Participant: 'Yes, and no, because obviously, I'd say that from the no aspect, like it's general stuff that you learn in school and that stuff, but I've always been like, playing cricket on that. So no, but yes, also, because it kept me in the sports and that stuff.'

Participant: 'Oh, so the effects on me now, currently, I'd say I'd say that had a great effect. Because they kind of they kind of pushed me to do more. Because it kind of like sometimes it felt like you were playing for them as well, which was a nice thing I'm not saying was a bad thing. It was very nice thing. Because if you if you were successful, then they were successful reflected while on the mound as well. And I think differently moving into varsity. The biggest thing that they did for me was teaching me how like, how to do exercises properly. But beyond that, they got me in better

shape football city, if that makes sense. Because I was wasn't in great shape in high school. And even though there's a jump from high school to university, towards matric i was, one of the fittest, I was like one of the fittest people. And I didn't start off like that, if that makes sense. And granted, I wasn't fit, but then they got me there.'

Participant: 'They push us to be the best. And one that not only the best for the team, but the best for the individuals as well.'

Participant: 'So each and every time with most activities had to do had a certain aspect that you need on the rugby field. So every time he'd encourage me to do better in PT so that I can just now I'm just one notch above everyone else on the training field or on the sporting field.'

The responses regarding the transition from school sports to varsity sport participation indicate that participants attribute their sports involvement at the university level to their experiences in high school sports. For some, their active participation in sports during their high school years set them on a path to continue sports at the university, where the availability of the same sport was a significant factor. The continuity of their sports journey was facilitated by the foundation laid during high school, where they acquired valuable skills and a strong sports background.

Participants expressed mixed sentiments, acknowledging both the general aspects they learned in school sports and the lasting effects. High school sports played a pivotal role in motivating them to pursue sports at the varsity level. Participants recognized that their high school sports coaches not only pushed them to excel as a team but also emphasised personal development. They learned proper exercise techniques and improved their physical fitness, contributing to their readiness for university-level sports. The influence of high school sports coaches was evident in their commitment to excellence, both for the team and as individuals.

Adaptability in the Context of Professionalism, Specialisation, and Curriculum Structuring:

Investigating the adaptability of physical education instructors within the evolving landscape of professionalism, specialisation, and curriculum design, this theme highlights the educators' ability to meet the changing demands of physical education.

Participant: 'The curriculum of PE influenced me positively like, found I found myself doing more exercise away from the classes and that at school, so it just, like got me into a good routine and good habit to exercise.'

Participant: 'Well, I was fortunate enough to obviously go to a high school that had decent facilities and had the funding for decent facilities, and I think the facilities being at the standard that they are, which are now view as being some of the better facilities in that sport. Uhm definitely helped in, in continuing my interest in the sport.'

Participant: 'No there was a specific curriculum when it came to the PE, but it wasn't really like it was basic, PE like as you get from grade eight to matric the running, pushups, sit ups, squats in a minute, and then basic sport games and stuff like that.'

The results regarding adaptability in the context of professionalism, specialisation, and curriculum structuring reveal the influence of the Physical Education (PE) curriculum and school facilities on students' physical activity engagement. Participants shared positive experiences where the PE curriculum encouraged them to establish exercise routines beyond school classes, fostering a habit of regular physical activity. In contrast, the influence of the PE curriculum varied, with one participant describing it as basic and encompassing activities like running, pushups, sit-ups, squats, and fundamental sports games. Participants who attended high schools with well-funded and well-maintained sports facilities found their interest in sports and physical activities nurtured by the availability of top-notch facilities. These facilities played a significant role in motivating and sustaining their engagement in sports.

External Influences such as Encouragement, Socioeconomic Factors, Family Support, and Motivation:

Focusing on external influences, this theme examines the impact of encouragement, socioeconomic factors, family support, and motivation on students' engagement in physical activities, providing insights into the multifaceted factors that drive sports participation.

Participant: 'Probably mental health like when I would do exercise or anything physical it would clear my mind no matter what was on it. So I just thought if I keep doing that, it's a way to like keep healthy and that.'

Participant: 'Uh, I think just the fact that I've been doing sports uhm, like my entire high school career, and that the university I was going to obviously offered the sport like it kind of the high school sports set me up to continue into university.'

Participant: 'I think how can I say I enjoyed it growing up, like I think it's a good way to socialise, to get out of the house to like, take a break from school-work, and all of that. So I think it was mainly just getting out there and having fun. That was like the big-

gest influence like it was something that I enjoyed, like being fit being playing whatever.'

Participant: 'If you have a sibling older than me, and you play sports, you probably want to be better than them.'

Participant: 'Just the relationship built with the teachers and stuff. Always just talking positively to me, and just encouraging me to carry on so.'

Participant: 'Okay, I would say more from the sport I did externally, dance more from I saw how that that once you willing to do something, you can actually go very far. So, I was advancing the first year doing it, that oh actually now celebrities are coming to actually judges us. I'm like, okay, so I could actually be in where they sitting. So, this also motivated me to do another sport and see, okay, but if I could also maybe one day be pitched for the Springboks or something, so that was just my motive of like, just being that person seemed like I'm gonna get, that's what motivated me to do it. Yes.'

The interview responses in the theme of External Influences highlight various factors that drive and sustain individuals' engagement in physical activities. These responses underscore the multifaceted nature of motivation and support for sports and physical education.

One participant emphasises the positive impact of physical activity on mental health. Engaging in exercise serves as a means to clear the mind and maintain overall well-being. This finding suggests that the mental health benefits of physical activity act as a motivating factor, encouraging continued participation to promote health and well-being.

Several participants attribute their ongoing sports engagement to their positive experiences in high school sports. The foundation laid during their high school sports careers and the alignment of university sports offerings with their interests and experiences play a pivotal role in motivating their continued commitment to sports.

Many participants express that the primary influence on their sports participation is the enjoyment, social interaction, and the desire to take a break from academic responsibilities. These factors highlight the recreational and social aspects of physical activity and emphasize its role as an enjoyable and meaningful pastime.

Some participants acknowledge the influence of older siblings who are engaged in sports. The desire to excel or outperform siblings becomes a motivational factor for sports participation.

Positive relationships with teachers and external role models, such as celebrities in the field of sports or dance, serve as sources of motivation and encouragement for students. The en-

couragement and support from these role models and teachers play a significant role in motivating students to continue their engagement in physical activities.

The research delved into the multifaceted insights derived from study, which illuminates various aspects of students' experiences in PE and sports. This comprehensive examination offers a fresh perspective on the impact of PE instructors, school facilities, and external influences on students' attitudes and engagement. Emphasising both the new and vital facets of our findings, we uncover the diverse and complex relationships between students and their PE environments. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how students' journeys in PE and sports are influenced and propelled, ultimately providing valuable implications for enhancing PE programs and encouraging lasting participation in sports.

The study reveals a significant array of experiences with primary and high school PE instructors, highlighting the importance of diverse instructor backgrounds. While some participants were fortunate to have highly specialised and qualified educators who shaped their PE foundation, others were exposed to PE teachers with distinctive field experiences. This study underscores the valuable role of instructors, regardless of formal qualifications, in influencing students' PE journeys.

In a different light, the study brings to the forefront the multifaceted attitudes of first-year sport students toward their PE instructors, emphasising their respect, motivation, and appreciation. Participants recognised the invaluable role of instructors in pushing them to achieve their physical potential and the consequent positive outcomes. Moreover, the study emphasises the significance of a positive and enjoyable learning experience, which fosters not only physical development but also a positive mind-set.

Furthermore, the study elucidates the varying degrees of involvement of PE instructors in school sports, showcasing the profound influence of instructors on students' sports interests and abilities. The findings emphasise the complex role of PE instructors in enhancing students' fitness and conditioning, contributing significantly to their sports journey. However, it also acknowledges instances where instructors had minimal influence, highlighting the complexity of their involvement.

Taking a different perspective, this theme highlights the substantial impact of school facilities and equipment on diverse school sports, underlining their critical role in shaping students' sports experiences. The study underscores how the availability and quality of these resources can

either facilitate or hinder students' sports participation. This study provides new insights into how schools' investment in sports infrastructure can be a decisive factor in attracting and retaining students' engagement in PE.

The study emphasises how high school sports play a pivotal role in motivating and preparing students for university-level sports participation. It underlines the importance of consistent sports experiences throughout a student's educational journey. These experiences not only help students to build fundamental skills but also foster a mind-set of commitment to excellence and personal development, enabling a smooth transition to university sports.

In a different context, the study accentuates the adaptability of students within the framework of the PE curriculum and school facilities. The findings shed light on the significance of school facilities and equipment, providing students with the motivation and resources for PA. It further underscores the role of the PE curriculum in cultivating exercise routines, fostering habits of regular physical activity beyond formal classes.

The study further stresses how various influences, including mental health benefits, enjoyable experiences in high school sports, familial encouragement, and support from teachers and external role models, act as crucial motivators for continued physical activity. It introduces a comprehensive perspective on the diverse influences that underpin students' commitment to PE. The study reveals the dynamic interplay between personal motivation, support systems, and mental well-being, underscoring the importance of holistic factors in shaping students' engagement in physical activities. These findings underscore the complexity and multi-faceted nature of students' engagement in PE and sports, emphasising the importance of a holistic and supportive approach to fostering lifelong PA and well-being.

CONCLUSION

This comprehensive study has illuminated a spectrum of experiences and perspectives among students, encompassing a broad array of dimensions. These include their interactions with PE instructors, attitudes toward these instructors, their level of engagement in school sports, the pivotal role of school facilities and equipment, the transition from school-level sports to university participation, adaptability within the curriculum and facilities, and the numerous external influences that act as driving forces for sustained involvement in physical activities. The findings unequivocally reveal the multifaceted nature of

students' journeys in PE, with a multitude of interrelated factors contributing to their motivation and continued participation. These factors extend beyond the confines of formal academic settings and encompass essential external elements, notably the vital influence of family support, the intrinsic value of addressing mental health considerations, and the transformative inspiration offered by educators and role models. In essence, this research demonstrates the complexity of the subject matter and highlights the significance of addressing each facet comprehensively. By offering a multifaceted view of the subject, it prompts a re-evaluation of our understanding and underscores the paramount importance of considering the diverse factors that shape students' engagement in physical activities, providing valuable insights for educators, institutions, and policymakers in optimising the role of PE within academic institutions.

REFERENCES

- Anney, V. N. (2014). Ensuring the Quality of the Findings of Qualitative Research: Looking at Trustworthiness Criteria. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies*, 5(2), 272–281. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Ensuring-the-Quality-of-the-Findings-of-Qualitative-Anney/7428c4909feee722a717527d4a835320cf18a106>
- Burnett, C. (2020). A national study on the state and status of physical education in South African public schools. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 26(2), 179–196. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17408989.2020.1792869>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2008). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>
- Cristina, M. A. (2023). The Role of Physical Education Teacher in Achieving Education for a Healthy Life. *Science, Movement & Health*, 23(1), 39–42. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=s3h&AN=163064183&site=ehost-live&scope=site>
- Grima, S., Grima, A., Thalassinou, E., Seychell, S., & Jonathan. (2017). Theoretical Models for Sport Participation: Literature Review. *International Journal of Economics and Business Administration*, V(Issue 3), 94–116. <https://doi.org/10.35808/ijeba/138>
- Hendricks, P. C. (2004). The role of physical education in South African schools. *UWC Scholar - ETD Repository*. <https://etd.uwc.ac.za/handle/11394/1510>
- Kulp, A. J., & Zhu, X. (2021). Before School Exercise Effects on Fitness and Academic Performance in Schoolchildren: A Retrospective Case-Controlled Study. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jtpe.2021-0058>
- Lilia, K., Souheir, B., Mohammed, K., Eddine, R. D., & Asma, I. (2023). The Effect of Physical Activity on the mental Health of the Individual. *HIV Nursing*, 23(3), 243–246.
- Lincoln, Y. S., Guba, E. G., & Pilotta, J. J. (1985). Naturalistic inquiry. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 9(4), 438–439. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767\(85\)90062-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767(85)90062-8)
- Medelyan, A. (2019). Coding Qualitative Data: How To Guide. *InSights*. <https://getthematic.com/insights/coding-qualitative-data/>
- Morris, J., van Ommeren, M., Belfer, M., Saxena, S., & Saraceno, B. (2007). Children and the Sphere standard on mental and social aspects of health. *Disasters*, 31(1), 71–90. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7717.2007.00341.x>
- Patton, M. Q., & Cochran, M. (2002). A Guide to Using Qualitative Research Methodology. *Médecins Sans Frontières*. <https://evaluation.msf.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/An%20MSF%20guide%20to%20Using%20Qualitative%20Research%20Methodology.pdf>
- Romanova, E., Kolokoltsev, M., Vorozheikin, A., Konovalov, D., Vrachinskaya, T., Federov, V., Kondrashova, Y., Aganov, S., & Garov, S. (2023). The dependence of the academic performance of university students on the level of their physical activity. *Journal of Physical Education and Sport*, 23(2), 404–409. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v10i1.813>
- Roux, K. C. J. (2020). The delivery of primary school physical education in South African public schools: The perceptions of educators. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v10i1.813>
- Stroebe, L. C. E., Hay, J., & Bloemhoff, H. J. (2018). Challenges facing life skills and life orientation subject advisors in implementation of physical education. *South African Journal for Research in Sport*, 40(3), 121–136. <https://doi.org/10.4314/sajrs.v40i3>
- Swanepoel, C. D. (2021). The state and status of physical education in the intermediate phase of selected public schools in Gauteng, South Africa.
- Thompson, W. (2019). *Sports | Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/sports/sports>
- Tichaawa, T. M., Bama, H. K. N., & Swart, K. (2015). Community perceptions of the socio-economic legacies of the 2010 FIFA World Cup in Nelson Mandela Bay, Port Elizabeth, South Africa: A four-year post-event analysis. *African Journal for Physical, Health Education, Recreation & Dance*, 21(4.2), 1376–1388.
- United Nations. (2020, May 15). The impact of COVID-19 on sport, physical activity and well-being and its effects on social development. United Nations. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/2020/05/covid-19-sport/>
- Vosloo, J. J. (2014). A Sport Management Programme for Educator Training in Accordance with the Diverse Needs of South African Schools. <http://hdl.handle.net/10394/12269>