

Teachers' perspectives toward bullying on physical education in elementary schools

Setiawan Ipang^{1*}, Kurniawan Wahyu Ragil¹, Rozi Fatkhur², Hartono Mugiyo¹

¹ Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia.

² Universitas Islam Negeri Salatiga, Indonesia.

* Correspondence: Setiawan Ipang; Ipang_setiawan@mail.unnes.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Bullying in physical education (PE) classes remains a significant issue, impacting student well-being and participation in physical activities. This study explored the perspectives of PE teachers regarding bullying in elementary school settings. Through qualitative analysis, four key themes emerged: teacher awareness of bullying, PE as a trigger for bullying, the role of learning approach models, and the impact of bullying on students. The findings indicate that while many PE teachers recognize bullying as a problem, their responses vary from proactive interventions to perceptions of bullying as normal peer interactions. Additionally, the study highlights how the competitive nature of PE can exacerbate bullying behaviors, particularly among students with lower skill levels. The selection of appropriate learning approaches, such as cooperative and inclusive teaching methods, is suggested to mitigate bullying incidents. The study further emphasizes the need for professional development programs to equip teachers with effective bullying prevention strategies. Future research should explore intervention models tailored to PE settings and conduct longitudinal studies to assess the long-term effectiveness of different teaching methodologies in reducing bullying.

KEYWORDS

Bullying; Elementary School; Perspectives; Physical Education; Teacher

1. INTRODUCTION

Bullying is intentional and aggressive action or behavior that can occur in the form of ostracism from social groups or ridicule that is done repeatedly from time to time by students, groups, or people against victims who cannot easily defend themselves (Bascón-Seda & Ramírez-Macías, 2020). Teachers play a very important role in providing awareness about bullying and

developing a firm and consistent policy against this behavior as well as increasing skills and support for both perpetrators and victims of bullying so that a safe environment for students will be achieved (Oliveira et al., 2017). Studies also reveal that peer bullying can be combatted through intervention programs added to the physical education curriculum and through creating a suitable environment (Jiménez-Barbero et al., 2020).

One of the factors causing bullying behavior is the school situation which is not harmonious or discriminatory (Octavia et al., 2020). The impact that often occurs on victims of bullying is an excessive sense of fear of the perpetrator or bullying which even causes depression. The most fatal consequence is the aftereffect of depression, namely the desire to commit suicide (Trisanti et al., 2020). Cases of bullying are terrible cases in Indonesia and occur at the elementary school level to tertiary institutions. Based on the results of the Program for International Students Assessment (PISA) research, Indonesia is the fifth highest country from the members of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which is only 22.7%. Indonesia is in the fifth highest position out of 78 countries as the country with the most students experiencing bullying with a total number of victims of 41.1% (Ramadhanti & Hidayat, 2022).

Teachers can contribute to the school situation as an obstacle with their attitudes and behavior towards bullying (Yoon & Bauman, 2014). Physical education teachers can play key role in bullying prevention (Flores Aguilar et al., 2021). Teachers are often present when bullying occurs at school, and they are often the first-person student contact when bullying occurs at school (Wachs et al., 2019). Students expect the teacher to intervene when bullying occurs, even though in some cases the teacher is not aware of the intimidation experienced by children and in fact the child views the teacher as not defending him (Rigby, 2014). This phenomenon often occurs and is felt by physical education teachers. In physical education, children relate to their peers in a way that is very different from the way they relate to another subject, and there is usually physical contact in physical education (Roman & Taylor, 2013).

Bullying occurs at all levels of education in Indonesia. The results of observations in the field show that bullying in elementary school children is still common (Chodijah, 2019). Generally, parents and schools assume that taunting, fighting, or disturbing other children is something that normally happens to school children and is not a serious problem (Efianingrum et al., 2021). Education in elementary schools is focused on elementary grade students between grades 1 to grade 6 where the provisions of the material and subjects are regulated in the basic education curriculum.

This shows that education in primary schools is a very important aspect (Wuryandani & Herwin, 2021).

Wu et al. (2023) show that various forms of bullying occur among elementary school students. Physical education teachers have the most important role in reducing bullying in children in the classroom. However, it was also found that the PE class provides a suitable environment for bullying to arise, but no solution has yet been found for this problem (Sağın et al., 2022a). The results of a study by Montero-Carretero & Cervelló (2020) indicate that bullying occurs more frequently in physical education. These findings provide useful information for physical education teachers interested in preventing bullying and have implications for developing learning approaches that are more in line with bullying prevention goals.

The research gap that has occurred until now is the paradigm of the benefits of Physical Education that can be felt in various aspects, especially in terms of strengthening children's psychology, as explained in a study by Bamta et al. (2023) which showed that Physical Education is very beneficial in forming children's character and psychology. However, on the other hand, there are quite a few research results that reveal that Physical Education is one of the potential places for bullying behavior. As explained in the results of a study by Wei & Graber (2023) that Physical Education is a space that has the potential to give rise to bullying actions among students, even not a few occur between teachers and students. The two results of this study are certainly opposite and this is an interesting phenomenon related to bullying behavior and Physical Education activities or learning in the school environment. Moreover, Galán-Arroyo et al. (2023) showed how the role of Physical Education in maintaining students' physical fitness but is overshadowed by the potential for bullying behavior in it.

Based on the preliminary study and explanation of some of the research results, this study explores the perspectives of PE teachers regarding bullying in elementary school settings. The research is conducted specifically in the province of Central Java according to the research team's work area and with the third most bullying cases in schools. So that, it is hoped that it can be produced, and answers were found whether physical education could be an alternative solution to reduce bullying, or instead become a very comfortable place to do bullying.

2. METHODS

2.1. Design and Participants

The design chosen for this study is qualitative using interviews, observations, and documents. The survey research design was used to see the perspective of physical education teachers on bullying in physical education in elementary schools based on three components: experience, challenges faced, and prevention strategies that they usually apply if bullying occurs in physical education classes. Data were collected from physical education teachers who had graduated from the teacher professional education program, especially physical education teachers. The research survey was conducted based on one of the closed and open questions.

Homogeneous informants consisting of 70 physical education teachers (58.6% men and 41.4% women) who voluntarily participated in this study were selected with special provisions according to the needs of the researchers who were considered to help with the suitability of the data needed (Table 1). This informant sampling approach was adopted because of its ease of access for data collection, time savings, quality, and cost effectiveness. This method can also produce clearer data (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of study participants (n=70)

Gender	n(%)	Mean age (years)	Mean teaching experience (years)	Bachelor n (%)	Master n (%)	Certified n (%)
Men	41 (58.6%)	35±1.2	10±1.1	17 (41.5%)	24 (58.5%)	41 (100%)
Women	29 (41.4%)	30±1.01	7±0.9	11 (37.9%)	18 (62.1%)	29 (100%)

2.2. Procedure

The teachers' perspectives are seen as a whole, collected and interpreted following their responses to three different main items, namely about Physical Education Teacher Experience, Challenges faced while teaching physical education, and Prevention strategies carried out to anticipate the emergence of bullying behavior. The three main items were developed into 5 closed questions and 5 open questions addressed to 70 elementary school physical education teachers.

After the informants were obtained and the interview question instruments and observation guidelines were prepared. Interviews and participant observations were then conducted. Structured interviews with participants were conducted separately. Conversations were recorded during the entire interview process. After the interview was completed, the data was organized and analyzed first. The recording results were formulated and grouped into several main themes of information

from all participants. Observations as supporting data were also carried out by joining the physical education teacher classes via the virtual zoom meeting platform. By observing the physical education learning activities carried out by the informants as a medium of proof of the truth of the information conveyed through previous interviews. Several other documents such as teaching modules were also collected during this process stage.

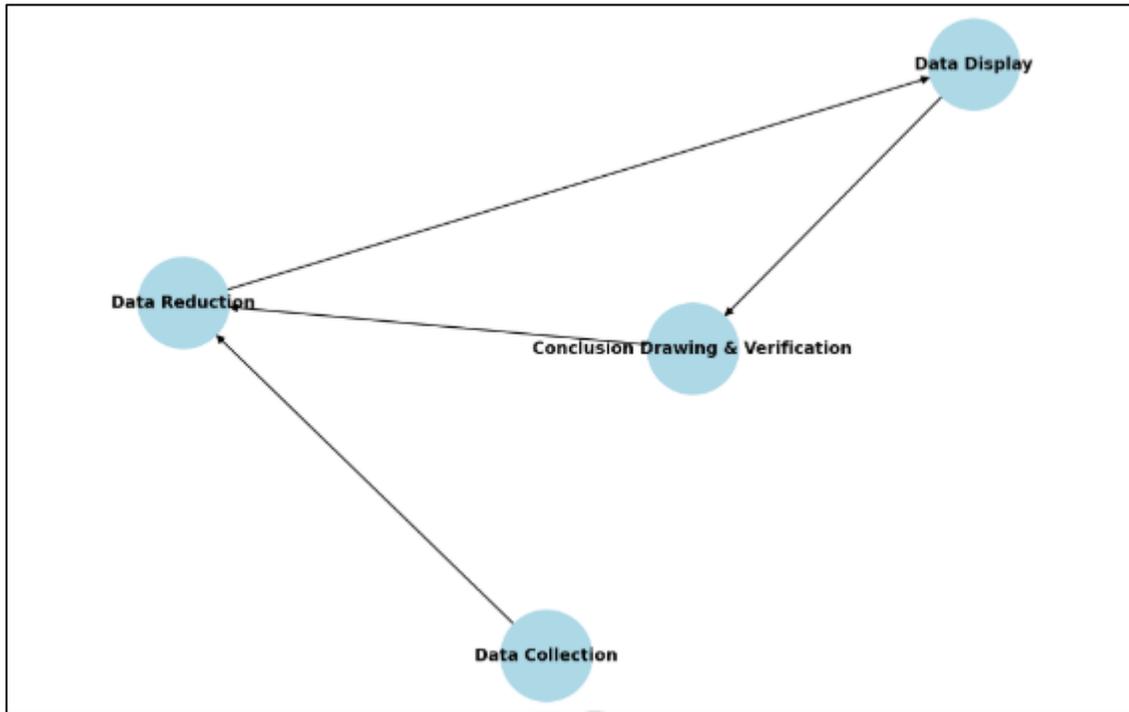


Figure 1. Miles & Huberman's qualitative data analysis model

The stages in this research as shown in the image above begin with the first stage is data collection, then continued with data reduction. After the data is reduced, the next step is to present the data, then draw conclusions. A more detailed explanation is as follows:

2.2.1. Data Collection

This is the initial stage where qualitative data is gathered through interviews, observations, documents, or recordings. The data should be rich and detailed to allow for meaningful analysis.

Data was collected through interviews using 10 questions with explanations in the following table 2:

Table 2. Interview guidelines

No.	Questions	Why is it used/ Reason
1	How do you define bullying in the context of physical education?	Helps understand the teacher's personal definition of bullying and whether it aligns with standard definitions
2	Have you ever witnessed bullying during PE classes? Can you describe the situation?	Encourages teachers to share real experiences, providing insight into the prevalence and nature of bullying in PE.
3	In your opinion, why does bullying occur in PE settings?	Identifies potential triggers or risk factors unique to physical education that may contribute to bullying incidents.
4	What strategies do you use to prevent bullying in your PE classes?	Provides insight into the proactive measures teachers take to create a safe environment.
5	Do you believe that certain teaching approaches or models can minimize bullying incidents? If so, which ones?	Helps identify best practices and effective teaching methods that promote inclusivity and respect.
6	Do you think physical education classes create more opportunities for bullying compared to other subjects? Why or why not?	Explores whether PE's structure (competition, physical contact, team selection) makes bullying more likely.
7	How do you support students who may feel excluded or intimidated in PE class?	Explores the teacher's role in fostering an inclusive and supportive environment for all students.
8	How do you think bullying in PE affects students' participation and motivation in physical activities?	Examine the psychological and emotional impact of bullying on student engagement in sports and exercise.
9	Have you received any training on identifying and addressing bullying in PE?	Determines whether teachers are equipped with the knowledge and skills to handle bullying effectively. ¹
10	What improvements would you suggest making PE a safer and more inclusive environment for all students?	Encourages teachers to share their recommendations for better policies, teaching strategies, or school-wide initiatives.

2.2.2. Data Reduction

This step involves selecting, simplifying, organizing, and transforming raw data. Researchers code the data, remove irrelevant parts, and focus on essential aspects related to the research question. This process helps in identifying patterns and themes from the data.

2.2.3. Data Display

After reducing the data, it is presented in an organized format like tables, matrices, graphs, or diagrams. The goal is to visualize relationships and gain deeper insights. This step makes it easier to compare different pieces of data and identify key findings.

2.2.4. Conclusion Drawing & Verification

Researchers interpret the patterns, relationships, and themes that emerge from the data. They compare findings with previous research, theories, or models. Verification ensures that conclusions are supported by strong evidence and are not biased. This might involve cross-checking data, triangulation, or revisiting raw data.

This model is not strictly linear; researchers may move back and forth between these stages. For example, if new insights arise during data display, they might go back to data reduction to refine their codes or categories. The other reasons why using this model are; provides structured steps for handling large qualitative datasets; encourages continuous reflection and refinement of findings; ensures validity and reliability by allowing iterative analysis.

2.3. Data Analysis

Qualitative research focuses on understanding meaning, experiences, and concepts rather than numerical data. In this study, the researcher used the thematic analysis method of qualitative data to identify patterns, themes, and insights from informants. Analysis in this research carried out with some steps, they are Identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data. Begin with; Familiarization with data (reading transcripts, notes, etc); Generating initial codes (organizing data into meaningful categories); Searching for themes (grouping similar codes into broader themes); Reviewing and refining themes; Defining and naming themes; Writing the final report with interpretations.

Data analysis in this study displays the grouping of informant response results displayed in code form. The first data display is about how many similar responses appear from informants. This data is displayed in the form of a Bar Chart. In addition to the Bar Chart, the data collected results are also visualized in the form of a Thematic Comparison Table to show a summary of the information provided and also examples of information from informants.

In this research data analysis, it is also equipped with a Circular Network Diagram display, which shows the interrelationship of the four response themes that often appear from informants. At the end, as a complement and one of the characteristics of qualitative research, this study also displays a word cloud as a form of visualization of text data which is the keyword in this study.

3. RESULTS

The results of the study were obtained from interviews with 70 elementary school physical education teachers by telephone. The answers were recorded and recorded by the research team. Based on the 10 questions given, the collected data is displayed in the form of a Bar Chart as follows. The data collected is related to the perspective of physical education teachers on bullying behavior in physical education. The response of the Physical Education teachers about peer bullying in PE classes is grouped into 4 themes: Teacher awareness of the possibility of bullying in physical education activities; Physical education trigger acts of bullying; The selection of learning approach models is important to minimize bullying; The impact on students exposed to bullying in physical education.

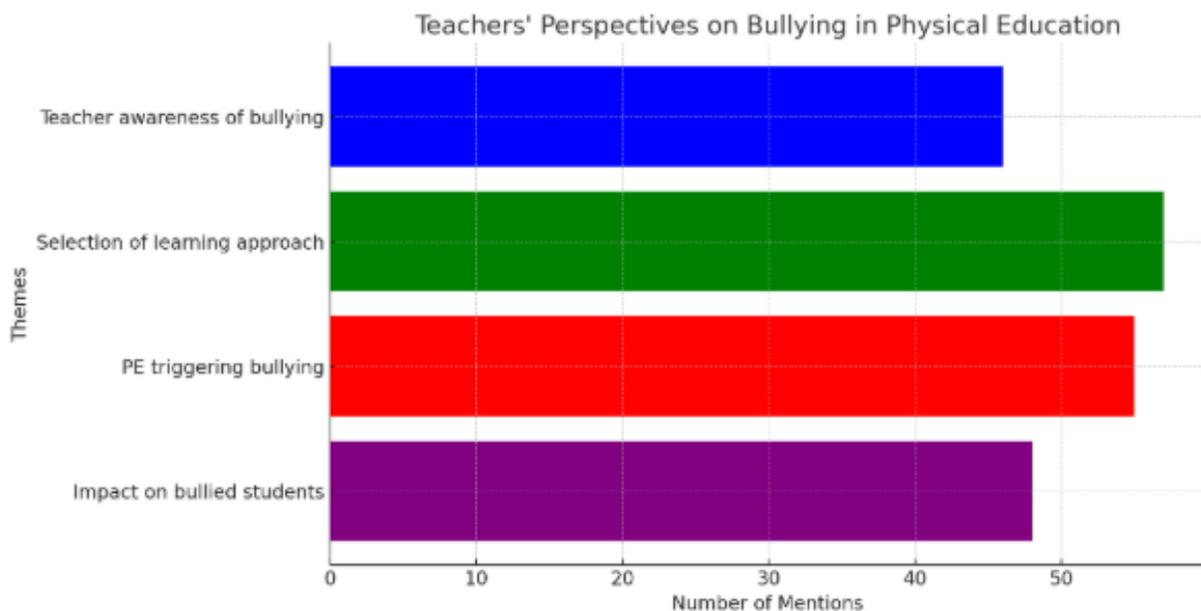


Figure 2. The frequency of mentions for each theme

The bar graph shows how frequently four major themes in teachers' opinions about bullying in physical education are mentioned. According to the most often cited theme (57 mentions), "Selection of learning approach models to minimize bullying," instructors think that instructional strategies are essential to stopping bullying. Concerns that particular activities or competitive conditions may unintentionally promote bullying behaviors are also expressed by the high citation rate of "Physical education triggering bullying" (55 references).

Furthermore, "Impact on students exposed to bullying" (48 mentions) draws attention to the serious negative effects bullying can have on kids, including decreased engagement, diminished self-

esteem, or unfavorable views toward physical education. Last but not least, "Teacher awareness of the possibility of bullying" (46 mentions) demonstrates that although many educators are aware of the problem, awareness might not be enough to solve it. These results point to a critical need for organized interventions and proactive teaching methods to establish a more secure and welcoming physical education setting.

The results of the data collection are also displayed next to the form of a table containing the four themes that frequently emerge from informants, complete with descriptions and one example of information from the results of interviews with informants is included as follows (Table 3):

Table 3. Description of themes identified in the data collection and examples of informants' responses

Theme	Description	Example Quotes from Participants
Teacher awareness of bullying	Teachers recognize bullying but may struggle to address it effectively.	<i>"I often see students being excluded, but it's hard to intervene without disrupting the lesson."</i>
Selection of learning approach models	Choosing the right teaching method helps prevent bullying in PE.	<i>"Team-based activities help reduce bullying, while competitive games increase it."</i>
Physical education triggering bullying	Certain PE activities can encourage bullying, especially when focused on physical ability.	<i>"Some students get mocked for their lack of skills, which makes them avoid PE altogether."</i>
Impact on bullied students	Bullying in PE negatively affects students' participation and self-esteem.	<i>"After being bullied in class, I noticed some students completely withdraw from physical activities."</i>

Based on the coding results of the collected data, the results of this study also show that there is a relationship between the four themes that emerged and were explained in the previous sub-topics above. The relationship is visualized in figure 3:

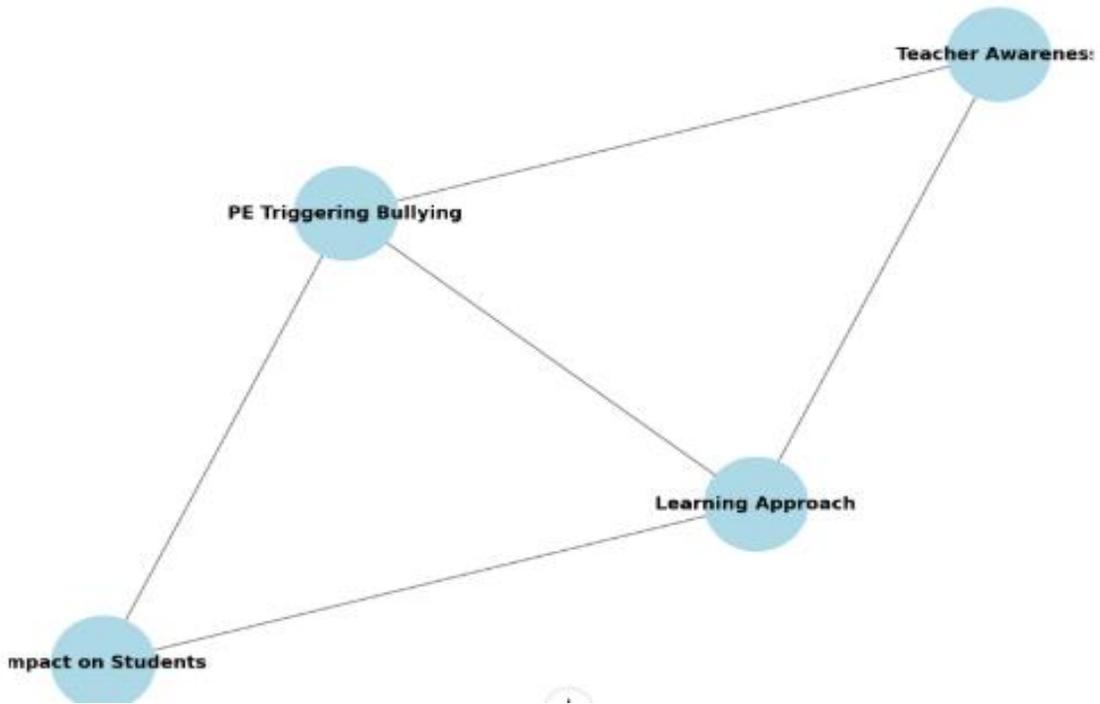


Figure 3. Circular Network Diagram

Here is the network diagram illustrating the relationships between the four key themes. The connections show how teacher awareness, learning approaches, physical education environments, and the impact on students are interrelated. For example, teacher awareness influences both learning approaches and the recognition of bullying triggers, while learning approaches directly affect student experiences and bullying risks.

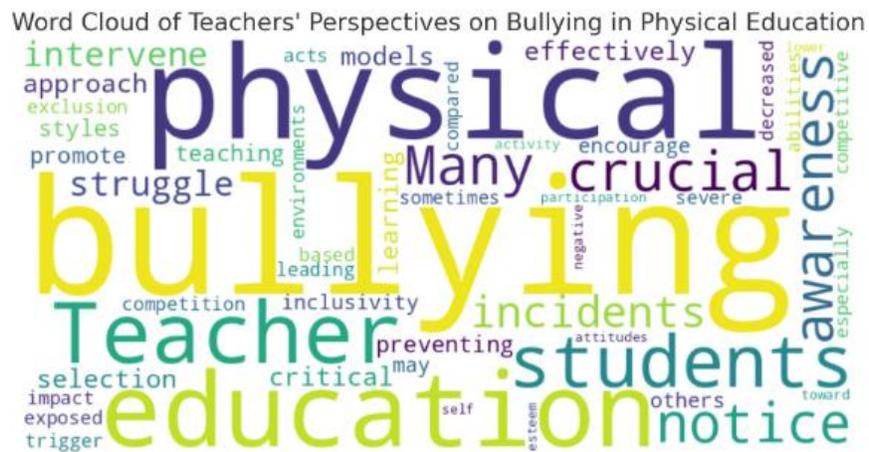


Figure 4. Word cloud of teacher’s perspectives on bullying in physical education

The terms that teachers use the most while discussing bullying in physical education are graphically represented by the word cloud. Key ideas in the discussion are highlighted by larger words, which imply higher incidence. "Bullying," "teacher," "awareness," "learning approach," and "impact" are prominent terms that imply educators acknowledge bullying as a serious problem and stress the significance of teaching strategies to reduce it.

Furthermore, terms like "physical," "education," "competition," and "students" suggest that the way physical education events are structured can occasionally encourage bullying. Instructors understand that competitive settings might lead to negative comparisons or exclusion of pupils. The word cloud's overall findings support the necessity of careful teaching strategies to guarantee a secure and welcoming environment. Teachers can lessen the risk of bullying behavior by creating a welcoming and inclusive environment in physical education classes that makes students feel appreciated and respected. Implementing cooperative games, emphasizing teamwork, and providing opportunities for all students to participate can help create a positive learning environment. Ultimately, it is essential for teachers to be proactive in addressing bullying and promoting kindness and acceptance in all aspects of physical education.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the critical role of physical education (PE) teachers in addressing bullying in elementary school settings. The responses from participants revealed four major themes: teacher awareness of bullying, the selection of learning approach models, PE as a trigger for bullying, and the impact of bullying on students. These themes provide valuable insights into the relationship between PE and bullying, reinforcing existing literature while also shedding light on the perspectives of teachers in managing and mitigating this issue.

Teacher Awareness of Bullying in PE

One of the key themes that emerged was the level of teacher awareness regarding bullying in PE classes. Teachers acknowledged that bullying is prevalent in PE settings, aligning with previous research by Sağın et al. (2022b) which found that PE teachers play a crucial role in reducing bullying but often struggle to find effective solutions. This study confirms that many teachers recognize the issue and understand its implications. However, some teachers still perceive bullying as a normal part of childhood interactions, a perspective also noted by Ghofur et al. (2022). This belief can hinder proactive intervention efforts, underscoring the need for professional development programs to enhance teachers' ability to identify and respond to bullying effectively. While previous studies

highlight the role of PE teachers in preventing bullying, our findings suggest that awareness alone is insufficient without concrete intervention strategies. Unlike Huang et al. (2018), who emphasize family and individual factors as key contributors to bullying, our study underscores the institutional and environmental aspects within PE that exacerbate the issue. This suggests that addressing bullying in PE requires not just awareness but also active pedagogical restructuring.

PE as a Trigger for Bullying

Another significant finding was the notion that PE itself can be a setting that triggers bullying. Participants noted that competition, skill differences, and the physical nature of activities contribute to the occurrence of bullying. This aligns with previous findings by Montero-Carretero et al. (2020), which indicate that bullying is more prevalent in PE due to the emphasis on performance and comparison among students. The study participants also reported that bullying in PE often manifests as verbal ridicule, physical aggression, and social exclusion, which is consistent with the typology of bullying described by Wicaksono et al. (2022). Furthermore, as Oliveira et al. (2017) suggested, cooperative games may be an effective strategy to mitigate such behaviors by fostering teamwork rather than competition. However, our findings extend previous research by demonstrating that PE may serve as both a trigger and a space where bullying behaviors are normalized. Unlike, Sağın et al. (2022a), who identified PE as merely a high-risk environment, our study suggests that the structure of PE classes—such as competitive elements and lack of teacher intervention—actively facilitates bullying. This critical distinction implies that a fundamental change in PE curriculum design is necessary to minimize bullying risks.

Selection of Learning Approach Models to Minimize Bullying

Teachers in this study expressed the importance of selecting appropriate learning approaches to reduce bullying incidents. While some educators attempted punitive measures such as exclusion from activities or reporting incidents to school administrators, others emphasized the role of instructional strategies in fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment. The findings align with research by Jiménez-Barbero et al. (2020), which advocates for implementing structured interventions and pedagogical approaches tailored to bullying prevention. The integration of cooperative and inclusive teaching methods may contribute to a safer and more engaging learning environment in PE classes. Although previous research suggests that modifying teaching styles can mitigate bullying (Montero-Carretero & Cervelló, 2020) our findings indicate that teachers still struggle with implementing these strategies effectively. While Oliveira et al. (2017) propose

cooperative games as a solution, our participants reported difficulties in enforcing such methods consistently, especially in large or mixed-skill classrooms. This suggests that additional institutional support, such as teacher training and modified PE curricula, may be necessary for meaningful change.

Impact on Bullied Students

The final theme concerns the impact of bullying on students, particularly at the elementary school level. Participants emphasized that bullying in PE can have lasting negative effects, including reduced self-confidence, social withdrawal, and reluctance to participate in physical activities. These findings are consistent with prior research, which highlights that bullying can lead to depression, difficulty in peer relationships, and strained family interactions (Sağın et al., 2022c). However, while previous studies such as Wu et al. (2023) focused on broader psychological consequences, our study highlights the immediate and specific effects of bullying in PE settings, such as avoidance of physical activity and disengagement from sports. This is a crucial distinction, as it suggests that the long-term effects of bullying in PE may contribute to negative attitudes toward physical health and fitness, reinforcing the need for targeted interventions at an early stage.

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that physical education teachers receive specialized training in bullying prevention and intervention strategies. Professional development programs should focus on equipping teachers with techniques for fostering an inclusive environment, recognizing early signs of bullying, and implementing appropriate conflict resolution strategies. Additionally, schools should establish clear anti-bullying policies that specifically address bullying within PE settings, ensuring that teachers have institutional support in addressing this issue effectively. Teachers should also consider adopting cooperative and non-competitive learning models to minimize opportunities for bullying. Integrating team-building exercises, emphasizing personal progress over competition, and encouraging peer support can create a more positive and inclusive learning environment. Moreover, continuous communication between teachers, students, and parents is essential in identifying bullying behaviors early and fostering a culture of respect and support within the school community.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of PE in bullying, supporting prior research while also identifying gaps in existing strategies. While awareness among teachers exists, it must be paired with actionable interventions to be effective. The study also

highlights the need for a shift in PE pedagogical approaches, moving from competitive and skill-based structures to more inclusive and cooperative models. Finally, the long-term consequences of bullying in PE settings emphasize the urgency of implementing preventative measures at the elementary level. Future research should explore comprehensive strategies that integrate institutional, teacher, and student-based solutions to create a safer and more supportive PE environment.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

For future research, it is recommended to explore the effectiveness of specific intervention strategies that PE teachers can implement to minimize bullying. Additionally, longitudinal studies tracking the impact of different teaching methodologies on bullying prevention in PE could provide valuable insights. Future researchers may also consider a comparative analysis between different educational settings and age groups to understand how bullying behaviors evolve and how intervention strategies can be adapted accordingly.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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