

The Differences in Elementary School Student's Motivational Levels.

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this descriptive study was to examine the differences in elementary school students' motivational levels and how their motivation to participate in physical education differs between grade levels. The researcher collected data on the motivational levels of 601 elementary school students. Data was then broken down by grade level to determine if there were any significant changes in motivation based on grade. The researcher found that there were some differences in grade level. Additionally, the researcher identified the main factors that were associated with students displaying a low level of motivation in order to help teachers and future research target these areas and improve physical education curriculum. Research in this area should continue and remain focused on why students have a low level of motivation and how that can be changed to increase physical education participation. Future research should also include multiple schools and age ranges in order to help gain a better understanding of student motivation and the factors that affect motivation.

# **CHAPTER I**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Overview**

Motivation is defined as one's determination, drive, or desire to act on their social and emotional forces to participate in an activity (Bennie, Peralta, Gibbons, Lubans, & Rosenkranz, 2017). In the physical education setting, motivation to participate is what drives a student to learn a new skill, complete an assignment, and engage in each lesson. Without the proper motivation a student has no desire to participate in a physical education class. As a result, these students are less physically active both in and out of the classroom.

For most students the motivation to participate in an elementary physical education class is high. They enjoy the curriculum, working with the other students and learning new skills and how to apply them. However, there are some students that do not enjoy physical education and lack the motivation necessary to participate. As a result, teachers must find creative ways to increase student's motivation and encourage them to participate. In fact, many physical education teachers state that it is a challenge to find ways to motivate their students to participate (Bennie et al., 2017).

When working with elementary students, there are many factors that go into their motivation. Some of these factors include enjoyment of the skill or sport that they are learning, engaging lessons, accessibility of the curriculum for all students, a safe learning environment, and an understanding of the class requirements. For some students the content will be enough to motivate them. However, for others they need to understand the requirements for the class in order to be properly motivated to participate.

As a physical education teacher, the researcher found that there are many times where student motivation was affecting participation. In an effort to meet all students needs the researcher wanted to gain a better understanding of how motivation can affect a student and their desire to participate. Additionally, the research wanted to gain an understanding of how a teacher can have an effect on a student's motivation and as a result increase their participation while meeting each students' individual needs.

To influence a student's motivational level, a teacher must understand what it is that motivates each student to participate. In chapter II we will expand further on the factors that affect motivation. The importance of motivation and the affect it has on participation will be explained to help teachers understand this connection.

### **Statement of Problem**

This descriptive study examines the differences in elementary school students' motivational levels and how their motivation to participate in physical education differs between grade levels.

### **Operational Definitions**

**Motivation** is defined as a person's drive to participate in an activity (Bennie et al., 2017). In this study there are three different levels of motivation that each student can be categorized as. Highly motivated students participated in all activities despite the sport or personal skill level. Students with a medium level of motivation participated occasionally. This level of motivation could be a result of student interest in the activity, or their confidence in the skill level for the activity. Then a student with low motivation is one that rarely feels the need to participate and will generally display the bare minimum in order to receive a grade for the unit.



Motivation in physical education will be explored within the context of an elementary school in grades kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup>.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

#### **Overview**

This literature review takes a look at the connections between student motivation and their participation in physical education programs. Section one of this review looks at what motivation is in the context of physical education class and how motivation can impact student participation. Section two will discuss participation in physical education and why it is important. Section three will take a look at how motivation and participation are connected. Then, section four will discuss some strategies that can be used to increase student participation in physical education.

#### **What is Motivation?**

In order to understand how motivation impacts a student's participation in physical education class, it is important to understand what motivation is. Simply put, "motivation refers to an individual's determination, drive or desire to act on social, emotional, and psychological forces" (Bennie et al., 2017, p. 303). In order to understand how motivation affects participation in physical education, it is important to understand what types of motivation there are, how these types of motivation may affect a student's choice to participate, and the impact that motivation has on participation.

In an article about student learning and motivation in physical education, Richards and Levesque-Bristol (2014) discussed two forms of motivation that affect students in physical education, intrinsic motivation, and extrinsic motivation. The first of these two types of motivation, extrinsic motivation, is explained by these researchers as occurring "when students believe that they are learning materials because they feel it is something that they have to do"

(p. 45). They then go on to explain that this type of motivation occurs when students are motivated to learn as a result of punishment avoidance or to gain a reward. Out of the two forms of motivation, these researchers found that this is the weaker of the two. When students are extrinsically motivated, they are simply participating because it is a requirement, the content of the lesson holds no meaning to them, and they are far less likely to take anything away from the lesson and transfer it outside of the classroom. This form of motivation often comes from students that have no interest in the topic. Because interest is a critical part of motivation, especially within the classroom, uninterested students will lack the proper motivation to engage in the learning process (Otundo & Garn, 2019).

The second form of motivation that is explored by Richards and Levesque-Bristol (2014) is intrinsic motivation, the stronger of the two types, which is more likely to allow students to participate in a way that will have a lasting impact on their education. Intrinsic motivation is seen in individuals that are motivated to act for the fun or challenge of the behavior instead of the external pressures (Tessier, Sarrazin, & Ntoumanis, 2010). Intrinsic motivation can be seen in students that are more engaged in their learning process and are driven by the pursuit of learning for the joy they derive from the content itself (Richards & Levesque-Bristol, 2014). These students are participating in physical education because they find it enjoyable rather than something they have to do. While researching student interest and engagement in physical education, Otundo and Garn (2019) find that students that are interested in physical education are more likely to participate in class, as well as increase their achievement of class outcomes and knowledge of the subject. These researchers feel that interest is a powerful motivational factor in physical education learning contexts and students that are interested in the subject can have a higher level of motivation, which increases student learning and active participation in the

classroom activities. Additionally, McNeill, Fry, and Hairil (2011) find that intrinsic motivation also leads to increased effort and perseverance, intentions to participate, and positive attitudes towards physical education.

It is clear from the research, which two types of motivation can lead to participation in physical education. While both types of motivation may lead to student participation, intrinsic motivation is the stronger of the two types and is more likely to lead to lasting motivation that increases student learning along with participation. While extrinsic motivation can lead to participation, it is more likely that the level of participation will reflect in the student doing the bare minimum simply to receive a grade in the class.

### **Why is Participation in Physical Education Important?**

There are multiple reasons as to why participation in physical education is important for young children in elementary school. In an article about flow experiences in physical education class, Ada, Cetinkalp, Altiparmak, and Asci (2018) expresses that physical education is one of the most important classes for helping students to obtain lifelong physical activity habits.

Physical education and physical activity can have the potential benefits of developed physical skills, building character, fostering life skills, encouraging sportsmanship, increasing teamwork, and generally preparing students for their adult life (Ada et al., 2018). Additionally, participating in school based physical education can lead to an increase in a student's daily physical activity (Gao, Lee, Xiang, & Kosma, 2011). This connection of participating in physical education and increased physical activity outside of the classroom has important implications for all students' lifelong health. Students that feel motivated in physical education are far more likely to participate in physical activity and gain lifelong exercise habits (Ada et al., 2018). Bennie et al. (2017), stated that "students' motivation to participate in physical education is important not only

because of its influence on physical activity during the lesson but also, and perhaps most importantly, because students experiences during physical education lessons may influence their physical activity habits outside school and later in life” (p. 302).

In a time when the movement of children is limited and students are continuously influenced by developing technology and evolving times, physical education has become a necessity for children (Acar & Gündüz, 2017). The lack of participation in physical education and physical activity contributes to the rise of obesity among young children and can also increase health problems throughout life (Gao et al., 2011). At a young age children are forming important lifelong habits. During this time, it is important that connections are made that help students to become healthy individuals both in and out of school. The connections between the habits formed with physical activity as a child and adult exercise habits are a vital reason why physical education participation is important, and why developing these tendencies towards physical activity is critical for the child’s future (Prichard & Deutsch, 2015). The ability for a child to understand the importance of physical activity can have a lasting effect on them throughout their lifetime, through physical education children can learn about the importance of physical activity.

Participation in physical education is not only important because of the educational requirements put on students in elementary school, but also because of the effects, it has on students outside of physical education. The purpose of physical education goes beyond the classroom to teach students to be physically active individuals. In an effective physical education program, students are not only learning the skills and rules of games, but they are learning how to apply what they are learning in the classroom to the rest of their life.

## **How Does a Student's Motivation Affect Their Participation in Physical Education?**

Motivation plays a key role in a student's choice to participate in a physical education class. Despite the type of motivation that a student has, if they are motivated, they will most likely participate. According to Kiliç (2019), "motivation is the power which directs the individual to the behavior, determines the volume of the behavior, and ensures its continuation" (p.172). This explains why motivation is what drives students to participate in physical education. In fact, without motivation, there is no need, drive, or interest in participating in anything, including physical education (Kiliç, 2019). A student's motivation has a large role to play in their participation in physical education since a student's motivation is linked to the quality of their participation (McNeill et al., 2011).

In a study done by Shen, McCaughtry, Martin, and Fahlman (2009), they explain how self-determination is associated with motivational behaviors, and that students that have a high sense of self-determination in physical education will display positive class behavior and in turn higher levels of participation. Along with these positive outcomes Tessier et al., (2010) stated that self-determined motivation leads to increased student effort, higher academic achievement, and a higher quality of learning. Students who feel motivated towards physical education will most likely gain lifelong skills from their desire to participate in class, and these positive experiences in physical education can play a key role in a student's motivation to participate in future classes (Ada et al., 2018). This leads us to believe that not only does motivation greatly affect a student's participation in physical education, but that the inverse is true as well, a student's participation and quality of the class can affect their motivation. There cannot be quality participation without motivation, and for motivation to remain there must be quality participation and instruction.

But how and why are some students motivated in a way that affects their participation? In a study on participation in extracurricular sports, Acar and Gündüz (2017) discovered which students' reasons for participation included: doing something they are good at, being a part of a team, and having fun. Prichard and Deutsch (2015) agree that the top reasons for participation are to have fun and improve skills. Additionally, students' express that they do not participate in these types of activities to gain popularity, but instead for the reasons listed previously (Acar & Gündüz, 2017). While both of these studies were done on extracurricular activities, they have clear connections to physical education class and a student's participation in physical activity.

It is clear that a student's motivation affects their participation in physical education. When asking how a student's motivation affects their participation in physical education, it is clear that the effect can be a positive one. Without motivation, participation is not likely to occur, and the stronger the motivation the higher the level of participation. All of the research done on the topic of motivation and participation shows a strong and positive connection between the two and helps to explain what the effects of motivation on participation are.

### **Strategies That Can Be Used to Increase Student Participation in Physical Education**

The connection between student motivation and participation has been made clear, and now that we understand not only how motivation affects student's participation, but also how important student participation in physical education is, how can student participation be improved? In her article about creating a caring learning environment, Li (2015) points out that "getting students engaged in physical education is one of the greatest challenges that physical educators face" (p. 35). This researcher acknowledges that most students lack interest in learning and are often disengaged from physical education, making it difficult to increase their

participation levels. So how can we improve this? What are some strategies that can be used to remedy this problem?

One strategy discussed by Li (2015) is to develop teaching behaviors that help lend to a caring learning environment that helps to build caring relationships with students. Evidence shows that teachers caring behaviors are strongly connected to the student's attitude and engagement in physical education class. In fact, when teachers were successful at creating a more caring learning environment where students felt the teacher showed a willingness to work with them, that they were concerned for the student's well-being, and that they were creating a safe and supportive learning environment, students were more engaged in physical education. When teachers actively work with students and show that they care about their learning students are more motivated to participate in physical education classes.

Another strategy that has been researched by McNeill et al. (2011) is the introduction of games lessons in physical education. In this research, found that including game experiences more often in physical education classes generated higher motivation in elementary school students and increased their participation in physical education classes. Furthermore, argued "if the play component of games lessons were to be maximized then learners would be more engaged in lessons than they reportedly have been in traditional, technically-taught physical education" (p. 34). By including more gameplay to learn skills and mastery, students are more likely to participate in physical education, versus the traditional form of physical education where the skill is practiced on its own and then students build onto the next skill with minimal gameplay and practice.

A final strategy for improving student participation in physical education is to use a needs-based learning theory of self-determination. Research in the area of motivation and



participation in physical education has shown that self-determined motivation leads to positive class behavior and increased participation (Shen et al., 2009). Just as in any other subject area, when a student shows their own drive and determination to learn something, they have a better chance of being successful and continuing this learning beyond the classroom. By nurturing a student's self-determination in physical education, researchers find that students are more likely to continue the pursuit of physical activity outside of the mandatory physical education class. This is key to influencing students to make positive lifelong decisions that will affect their health and physical activity levels. These researchers found that when a physical education teacher supported a needs-based, self-determination environment, a student's autonomous motivation led to increased learning in physical education. An effective and successful teacher is consistently working with each student to meet individual needs. By creating a class environment that uses a needs-based approach and encourages student's self-determination, teachers were able to increase participation that in turn allowed the students to increase their level of learning and health.

Each of the above strategies can be implemented by the physical education teacher within their classroom. By utilizing one or more of these strategies' teachers are helping to increase student motivation and participation in physical education. Additionally, teachers are improving the chances of their students to have an active and healthy lifestyle as they continue to grow. Participation in physical education is important for a child's future, and when each of these strategies is implemented in the physical education classroom teachers are helping to ensure a better future for their students.

## **Summary**

In this literature review several important topics about student motivation and participation in physical education have been discussed including, what motivation is in relation to physical education and how it influences participation, why participation is important in physical education and the lasting effects that participating in physical education can have, how student motivation can affect their participation levels in physical education, and what strategies can be introduced into the physical education classroom to increase student participation.

Throughout this literature review, the importance of student participation and motivation was consistently backed by research. It was made clear that student motivation does indeed have a direct effect on student participation in a physical education class. As teachers understand and encourage student motivation they will see an increase in positive student participation.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODS**

The purpose of this study was to examine student motivation to participate in physical education and the differences in motivation across grade levels. Student participation was observed and students were placed into a level of motivation based on participation and student knowledge.

#### **Design**

This study consisted of a descriptive design. Data collection for this research was done during the first and second semesters of the 2019 – 2020 school year. This study examines the differences in motivation levels in physical education class at an elementary school level. Student participation and motivation data was sorted into three categories, students with a high level of motivation, students with a medium level of motivation, and students with a low level of motivation. Highly motivated students generally participated in all activities, students with a medium level of motivation participated occasionally, and then students with low motivation to participate rarely participated. All students received physical education twice a week with the exception of two 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade classes.

#### **Participants**

For this study, a convenience sample was used of all students that receive physical education at a Baltimore County elementary school. Students in grades Kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade were included in this research; students in Pre-K do not receive physical education in this school. In total there were 601 students included in this study that were in physical education during the first and second semesters at this public school, 305 students were male, and 296 students were female. The breakdown of all students included in the study is shown in Table 1.

Of the students enrolled in the school, 20% are English Language Learners (ELL) and 11% of students are in Special Education.

### **Instrument**

Data for this study was collected and entered into an excel spreadsheet. .  
Motivational levels were determined based off of student participation in physical education class along with teacher knowledge of the students. All students that received physical education were included on this spreadsheet.

### **Procedure**

The physical education teacher at the elementary school observed student participation levels and recorded the data. All students that received physical education were observed and all students in Kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade receive physical education at least once a week, with most classes receiving it twice a week. As the teacher noted the student's participation, they worked with them in an attempt to increase their participation and understand their motivation.

**Table 1**

#### **Summary of Participants**

	<i>Total Number of Students</i>	<i>Male Students</i>	<i>Female Students</i>
<i>Kindergarten</i>	109	56	53
<i>1st</i>	82	46	36
<i>2nd</i>	122	60	62
<i>3rd</i>	119	54	65
<i>4th</i>	89	48	41
<i>5th</i>	80	41	39
<i>All Students</i>	601	305	296

Based on teacher observation and anecdotal information, each student was placed into a category that determined the student's level of motivation. The different categories of motivation included: high level of motivation to participate, medium level of motivation to participate, and low level of motivation to participate. All student ratings were confirmed with the additional physical education teacher at the school in order to ensure validity. The additional physical education teacher was shown the spreadsheet that recorded each students' motivational level. He was informed of what each level of motivation looked like. It was explained that high level of motivation to participate meant that these students were consistently showing effort and participation in class, medium level of motivation to participate meant that students mostly participated in class but would occasionally choose not to participate based off of their motivation, and that a low level of motivation to participate meant that the student would rarely participate in the class and consistently displayed a low level of motivation. Once the additional teacher understood each level of motivation, he was then asked to review the data and to give input on student rankings. This data was then analyzed to help teachers have a better understanding of what affects student's motivation for participating in a physical education class. The results of this data are shown and explained in Chapter IV.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **RESULTS**

The purpose of this study was to examine the differences in elementary school students' motivational levels and how their motivation to participate in physical education differs between grade levels. The physical education teacher in this study collected data on student motivation based off of observation and anecdotal data. Anecdotal data included general knowledge of the students that the teacher had gained through working with each student and building a teacher student relationship. This information included an understanding of why students choose not to participate. Based off of participation students were placed in to three levels of motivation, high level of motivation to participate, medium level of motivation to participate, and low level of motivation to participate. Students that were placed into the medium and low level to participate were then coded with a reason as to why their motivation would place them in one of these categories. Throughout this chapter you will find the results of the data collection.

Table 2 shows the results of all students and their level of motivation from the first and second semesters of the 2019-2020 school year. Based on the overall results, 69% of students fell into the high motivation to participate category, followed by the medium motivation to participate with 28% of students, and then the low motivation to participate with 3% of all students meeting this criteria. Based on the data, kindergarten students were most likely to have a high level of motivation and had 82% of students in this category, followed by fifth grade with 78% of students. First, second, third, and fourth were all relatively similar in their motivation levels with a range of 61% to 68% of students in these grades falling in the high level of motivation category.

**Table 2****Summary of Data**

	<i>High Level of Motivation</i>	<i>Medium Level of Motivation</i>	<i>Low Level of Motivation</i>
<i>Kindergarten</i>	82%	18%	0%
<i>1st</i>	68%	32%	0%
<i>2nd</i>	61%	34%	5%
<i>3rd</i>	65%	33%	3%
<i>4th</i>	61%	34%	6%
<i>5th</i>	78%	15%	8%
<i>All Students</i>	69%	28%	3%

motivation to participate. In the medium level to participate, second and fourth grade had the most students in this category with 34% each, and the lowest was fifth grade with only 15% of their students falling into this category. Finally, in the low level of motivation, fifth grade had the most students with 8% of their population while both kindergarten and first grade had no students in this category.

In Tables 3 and 4 that data is broken down further to show the difference in male and female participation for each grade level. Table 3 breaks down the data for male students. Based on the data for males in elementary school physical education, the highest category mirrored the overall population with high level of motivation containing 64% of the male students in this category. This was followed by medium motivation to participate with 33%, and finally low motivation to participate with 3%. This highest percentage of male students in the high motivation to participate category was in fifth grade with 85%, closely followed by kindergarten with 80%. In the medium level of motivation to participate first and second grade had the highest percentages with 43% of males falling in this category in each grade, and again fifth grade males

**Table 3****Summary of Data Broken Down by Male Students**

	<i>High Level of Motivation</i>	<i>Medium Level of Motivation</i>	<i>Low Level of Motivation</i>
<i>Kindergarten</i>	80%	20%	0%
<i>1st</i>	56%	43%	0%
<i>2nd</i>	49%	43%	8%
<i>3rd</i>	57%	41%	2%
<i>4th</i>	63%	31%	6%
<i>5th</i>	85%	15%	0%
<i>All Male Students</i>	64%	33%	3%

were the lowest with 15% of male students in this category. In kindergarten, first, and fifth grade there were no male students that fell into the low motivation to participate category. For male students that did display a low motivation to participate second grade contained the most students with 8%, followed by fourth grade with 6%, and third grade with 2%.

Table 4 shows the breakdown of data for female students that were included in the study. Similar to Tables 1 and 2, this table shows that most female students fell into the high motivation to participate category with 73%. This was followed by 23% of female students in medium level to participate and 4% in the low level to participate category. The grade with the highest percentage of females in this category was kindergarten and first grade with 83% each. This is followed by second grade with 74%, third grade with 71%, fifth grade with 70%, and fourth grade with 59%. In the medium motivation to participate category fourth grade had the most female students with 37%, and again fifth grade had the lowest number of students with 15%.



**Table 4**

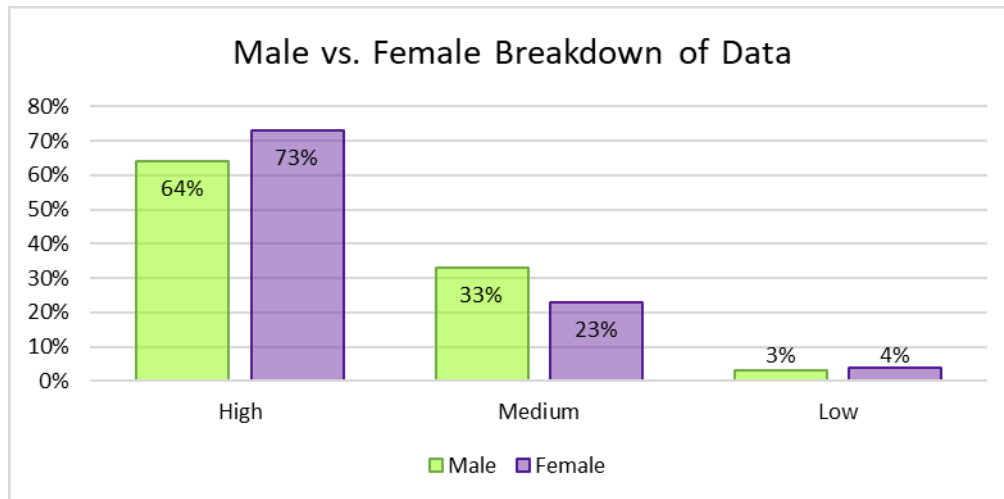
**Summary of Data Broken Down by Female Students**

	<i>High Level of Motivation</i>	<i>Medium Level of Motivation</i>	<i>Low Level of Motivation</i>
<i>Kindergarten</i>	83%	17%	0%
<i>1st</i>	83%	17%	0%
<i>2nd</i>	74%	24%	2%
<i>3rd</i>	71%	26%	3%
<i>4th</i>	59%	37%	4%
<i>5th</i>	70%	15%	15%
<i>All Female Students</i>	73%	23%	4%

Fifth grade had the most female students that did not participate with 15%, fourth grade was next with 4%, then third grade with 3%, and second grade with 2%.

Figure 1 compares the overall percentages of male and female students in each of the three motivational levels. When looking at this chart it can be observed that most students were in the high level of motivation category with 64% of males and 73% of females overall. Again, this category is followed by the medium level of motivation then the low level of motivation with the fewest number of students in this category with 3% of males and 4% of females. Based on the data presented females had the highest percentages in the high and low levels of motivation, and males had the highest percentage for the medium level.

**Figure 1**



Along with all data that is listed above, students were coded with a reason as to why they were placed in the medium or low levels of motivation categories. These reasons included disinterest in content, social skills, English language learners (ELLs), and skill level. The following table gives a break down for how many students in the combined levels of medium and low motivation were coded for each reason. The highest category overall for reasons that students showed medium or low levels of motivation to participate was disinterest in content with 54% of students coded as having this reason. Social skills was the second highest with 26%, followed by ELLs with 11% and skill level with 9%. Fifth grade students showed the highest level of disinterest in content with 83% of students coded for this reason. First grade was the highest in social skills with 12% of students. Kindergarten was highest for ELLs with 35%, which was significantly higher than any other grade level. Then, first grade was the highest for skill level with 12% of students falling in this category.

**Table 5**

**Breakdown of Reasons for Motivational Level**

	<i>Disinterest in Content</i>	<i>Social Skills</i>	<i>English Language Learners</i>	<i>Skill Level</i>
<i>Kindergarten</i>	15%	10%	35%	10%
<i>1st</i>	0%	12%	12%	12%
<i>2nd</i>	57%	9%	4%	9%
<i>3rd</i>	74%	7%	12%	7%
<i>4th</i>	77%	9%	9%	9%
<i>5th</i>	83%	6%	6%	6%
<i>All Students</i>	54%	26%	11%	9%

*Grade*

Based on this data, it is easy to see the highest category by each grade level. In second, third, fourth, and fifth grades, disinterest in content is the highest reason for medium or low level of motivation. These results closely mirror the total population of students that were observed for this study. Whereas in kindergarten the highest is ELLs and first grade is evenly spread out between social skills, ELLs, and skill level.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this descriptive study was to examine the differences in elementary school students' motivational levels to participate in physical education, and how these motivational levels differed by grade level. During this study 601 elementary school students were observed during physical education class. Student participation was recorded, and motivation levels were determined. According to the results of this study, 69% of students have a high motivation to participate in physical education at the elementary level, while 28% of students showed a medium level of motivation, and only 3% of students showed a low level of motivation to participate. Once students' motivational levels were determined the factors for non-participation were examined to determine what the differences are in student motivational levels. Because this study was completed as a descriptive study there was no hypothesis created.

#### **Implications of Findings**

The data from this study indicates that a majority of elementary students enjoy participating in physical education without any additional motivation needed. It can also be assumed that since the second highest category of motivation was the medium level of motivation, most students are only displaying lack of motivation to participate a portion of the time, and very few students displayed low motivation consistently.

When comparing grades kindergarten through fifth grade, fifth grade showed the highest percentage of students with low motivation to participate at 8%, and second and fourth grades tied for most students with a medium level of motivation with 34% each. While this information is important and can lead to a better understanding for teachers in student motivational levels, it

is important to note that these grade levels did not show large differences when compared to the percentages of other grade levels.

When looking at reasons for why students have medium and low levels of motivation to participate it can be helpful for teachers to have an idea as to the reasons why students display lower levels of motivation to participate. According to the research, student disinterest in content was the most prevalent reason for students to show medium to low levels of motivation with 54% of students having this reason. When students dislike the lesson content, they are less likely to be motivated to participate and engage in the lesson leading to lower levels of motivation. Along with disinterest in content, the study showed that for 26% of students, social skill development contributed to their lack of motivation to participate. More often than not physical education class requires students to work with their peers, for students that struggle with peer interactions this can affect their level of motivation to participate in class. Again, this information can be used by teachers to help come up with ways to increase student motivation and participation in physical education.

### **Theoretical Consequences**

The data from this study supported multiple theories that were presented in Chapter II. Acar and Gündüz (2017) pointed out that most students are motivated to participate in physical education when they are having fun, and Li (2015) said that when students lack interest they are often disengaged from learning. When looking over the data for this study it was observed that the largest factor for low motivation was student disinterest in the content. When students are not enjoying the class or do not like the topic of the unit their motivation to participate is lower. In order to bring their motivational levels up their interest must be gained.

### **Threats to Validity**

Threats to the validity of this study include the fact that all data that was collected was based partially off anecdotal information of students, which could result in error based off of teacher knowledge and relationships with students. To help with this threat an additional physical education teacher that works with all students was consulted to give input and verify all data. Additionally, this study had no random selection of students, instead all students in grades kindergarten through fifth grade were included in this study and all students were from one school. To increase the validity of this study the researcher could have used a random sampling of students from multiple schools in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of student motivation.

### **Connections to Previous Studies**

Other studies that have been conducted in this field show similarities to the results of this study. In this study, disinterest in the content was the highest reason shown for students displaying a medium to low level of motivation to participate with this being the reason for 54% of students in these categories. In a study done by Otundo and Garn (2019), they found that interest was a critical part of motivation within the classroom, that when students were uninterested in the content, they lacked the proper motivation to engage in the class. Additionally, Richards and Levesque-Bristol (2014), found that students that were intrinsically motivated were the ones that participated because of the joy they found from the content they were learning. From each of these studies it is clear that when a student is interested in the topic, they are more likely to be motivated to participate.

An additional similarity to previous studies involves student skill level and how it can influence their motivation to participate. When Prichard and Deutsch (2015) conducted a study

on student participation in extracurricular activities they found that one of the top reasons for student motivation and participation was for students to improve their skills. Based off of the data in this study student skill level was the lowest reason for low motivation at 9% of students. Meaning, that this lack of skill was not a significant reason as to why students displayed medium and low levels of motivation to participate. From both this study and Prichard and Deutsch's study there seems to be an agreement that a student's lack of skill does not equal a lack of motivation, instead students will choose to participate to improve their skills and are motivated by this idea.

### **Future Research**

There are a few changes that would be done to this researcher's method and study if repeated. First, the researcher should work with students from more than one school. It would be beneficial to have a sample that included students from all socio-economic ranges as well as different communities in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of student motivation to participate and the reasons for low motivation.

Based off of what the researcher observed, disruptive behavior seemed to strongly influence student participation rates. While student behavior was not a factor when considering the reasons for low motivation, it did play into student's participation levels. In the future it would be beneficial to take a deeper look at how student behaviors affect their participation and in turn their motivation.

Finally, the researcher could utilize surveys to gain insight from each student as to what they feel does or does not motivate them to participate. While the researcher did have an understanding of each student and their reasons for low motivation, there could be additional insight gained from allowing the students to give input regarding their motivational levels.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding in the motivational levels of students to participate in physical education, and if there was a difference between motivational levels across grade levels. Based off of the data collected during this study the researcher observed that a majority of students were highly motivated to participate in physical education. The researcher also observed that differences in the motivational levels between grade levels did exist. Along with identifying student motivational levels the researcher was able to identify four major reasons why students displayed low motivation to participate in physical education. Of these four reasons, it was determined that disinterest in content was the main reason for which students displayed low motivation, and additional research studies agreed that when students do not display interest in the lesson content, they will have lower motivation.

The information from this study has important implications for physical education teachers in understanding student's low motivation and participation levels. With this information teachers can work with students to increase motivational levels and build interest in the content and lessons. Teachers can utilize this information to create lessons that help to foster high levels of motivation to participate and as a result can meet all students' needs.



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