



## Analyzing the Lived Experiences and Perceptions of Physical Education Teachers Regarding Participation in School Sports in Tehran

Zoleikha Sobati 

PhD Candidate, Department of Sport Sciences, Faculty of Humanities, Eyvanekey University, Eyvanekey, Iran.

Seyedeh Farideh Hadavi\* 

Professor of Sport Management, Department of Sport Sciences, Faculty of Humanities, University of Eyvanekey, Eyvanekey, Iran.

Mehdi Mahmoudi Yekta 

PhD in Sport Management, Lecturer in the Department of Sport Sciences, Faculty of Humanities, University of Eyvanekey, Eyvanekey, Iran.

### Abstract

The aim of the present study was to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of physical education teachers in order to identify factors affecting the improvement of their participation in school sports in Tehran. This study was qualitative and was conducted with a phenomenological approach. Participants included physical education teachers in Tehran schools who were selected through purposive sampling ( $N = 19$ ). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The results of the study showed that several factors affect the participation of physical education teachers in school sports, which can be categorized into several main axes. These factors included individual factors (motivation, expertise, attitude), organizational factors (management, support, facilities, curriculum), and sociocultural factors (organizational culture, parental and community expectations). Finally, the findings of this study confirm that improving the quality of physical education requires a shift from a one-dimensional perspective to a systemic and comprehensive approach in which the removal of structural-economic barriers is pursued in parallel with the comprehensive empowerment of teachers as the main pillar and the active participation of all stakeholders (parents, administrators, and social institutions) in order to create a sustainable sports ecosystem. Based on the findings of this study, suggestions are provided for improving the participation of physical education teachers in school sports that can help policymakers and educational planners to improve the quality of physical education lessons and increase students' physical activity.

### Introduction

School sports, as one of the main pillars of the physical education system, play a significant role in promoting the physical and mental health of students. In this regard, physical education teachers, as the main executors of school sports programs, have a special position. The quality of these teachers' participation in school sports activities directly affects the effectiveness of the programs and, ultimately, the health and comprehensive development of students. As a result, the physical education teacher in schools is responsible for designing and implementing physical

\* Corresponding Author: Fa.hadavi@gmail.com

**How to Cite:** Sobati, Z., Hadavi, S. F., & Mahmoudi Yekta, M. (2026). Analyzing the lived experiences and perceptions of physical education teachers regarding participation in school sports in Tehran. *Journal of Sustainable Development in Sport Management*, 7(16), 126–153. <https://doi.org/10.22054/qrsm.2026.89732.279>

education programs for students. Overall, the physical education teacher plays an important role in promoting the physical health and well-being of students and helping them develop lifelong habits of physical activity and fitness. The aim of the present research is to analyze the lived experiences and perceptions of physical education teachers in order to identify factors affecting their participation in school sports in Tehran.

### **Methods and Materials**

This applied research used a qualitative strategy and an interpretive phenomenological approach. This approach is situated within interpretive paradigms and focuses on understanding and interpreting individuals' subjective experiences. The research participants were physical education teachers active in the field of sports in schools in Tehran. Purposive sampling was conducted using the snowball method and continued until theoretical saturation was reached. To ensure coverage of a wide range of experiences, the principle of maximum variation was also observed. The main data collection tool was semi-structured in-depth interviews. In addition, secondary sources including websites, internet portals, books, and scientific articles related to the subject were also reviewed to complete the information. Ethical principles were carefully observed in the data collection process. Before the interviews, the main objectives and questions of the research were specified and an interview protocol with open and flexible questions was developed. Potential participants were contacted, the interview time was coordinated, and a full explanation was provided regarding the purpose of the research and how the data would be used. Informed consent was obtained from them and the confidentiality of the responses was guaranteed (with anonymous coding). The interviews were conducted in a quiet and distraction-free environment, and each lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, following the step-by-step approach of Braun and Clarke (2006) and an inductive approach. The analysis steps included (1) familiarization with the data, (2) initial coding, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing a report. This process led to the identification of factors affecting the improvement of teachers' participation in sports in Tehran schools.

### **Results and Discussion**

The participants in this study were 19 people, 13 of whom were male and 6 were female. Twelve of the participants had a PhD; 4 were PhD students and 3 had a master's degree. Almost all of the participants except 3 had more than 20 years of service experience and were active in executive and academic fields. The following is a review of the research findings. Step 1: Familiarization with the data. In this stage of the research, the researcher achieved a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and perceptions of physical education teachers by carefully and repeatedly reading interviews, documents, and notes. Step 2: Initial coding: In the initial coding stage, 698 initial codes were identified in different areas. These codes include the following: "Challenges and Opportunities" 100 initial codes, "Importance of Sport and the Role of Physical Education" 60 initial codes, "Barriers to Participation" 121 initial codes, "Individual Factors" 112 initial codes, "Organizational Factors" 69 initial codes, "Environmental Factors" 68 initial codes, "Educational Needs" 55 initial codes, "Motivational Programs" 52 initial codes, and "Collaboration and Participation" 61 initial codes. Step 3: Creating themes. In the theme creation stage, 198 themes were identified in different areas. These themes include the following: "Challenges and Opportunities" 40 themes, "Importance of Sport and the Role of Physical Education" 20 themes, "Barriers to Participation" 35 themes, "Individual Factors" 23 themes, "Organizational Factors" 22 themes, "Environmental Factors" 15 themes, "Educational Needs" 12 themes, "Motivational Programs" 14 themes, and "Collaboration and Participation" 17 themes. And potential themes were identified that provide useful information about the data for research purposes. Step 4: Reviewing themes. In the theme review stage, 98 themes were identified in different areas according to Table 3 (an example of theme review). These themes include the following: "Challenges and Opportunities" 10 themes, "Importance of Sport and the Role of

Physical Education" 11 themes, "Barriers to Participation" 20 themes, "Individual Factors" 15 themes, "Organizational Factors" 11 themes, "Environmental Factors" 9 themes, "Educational Needs" 6 themes, "Motivational Programs" 9 themes, and "Collaboration and Participation" 7 themes. Step 5: Defining and naming themes. After the list of themes was finalized, at this stage, each theme was carefully defined and named. Step 6: Creating a theme network. In the qualitative method of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, drawing a theme network is not required. However, since the theme network is a visual method for organizing, understanding, and analyzing qualitative data and is used in the theme analysis process, by creating it, the understanding of the relationship between different codes became quantitative; this shows how the primary codes relate to each other and form larger categories.

### **Conclusion**

School sports in Iran face numerous obstacles and challenges, including resource and facility constraints (such as lack of budget, sports space, and equipment), time and structural constraints (such as a crowded curriculum and principals' attitudes), student-related challenges (such as lack of motivation and awareness of the benefits of sports), parent-related challenges (such as concerns about injury or lack of support), deficiencies in the quality and content of programs (including lack of specialized teachers, lack of diversity, weakness in talent identification, lack of use of new technologies, and weakness in evaluation), and finally, challenges related to equity and access (such as regional inequality and restrictions for specific groups). These obstacles operate as an intertwined network, indicating that the problem of improving participation in school sports is not limited to a single factor, but is the result of a complex and intertwined system that requires a systemic and comprehensive approach to address it.

**Keywords:** lived experiences, perceptions, physical education teachers, participation, school sports.

### **Acknowledgments**

Since this article is an excerpt from my doctoral dissertation, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all the professors who helped me write, review, and revise this article.