

Enhancing Physical Education Activities for Mental Health: Positive Mindset and Motivation Among Non-Physical Education Enthusiast Learners

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HOW TO CITE:

Dante T. Ramirez (2026).
Enhancing Physical Education
Activities for Mental Health: Positive
Mindset and Motivation Among Non-
Physical Education Enthusiast
Learners.
International Journal of Special
Education, 41(13s), 460-474

ABSTRACT:

This study investigated how inclusive and non-competitive physical education (PE) activities can enhance mental health, positive mindset, and motivation among college students who are identified as non-enthusiasts of physical activities. Despite the recognized benefits of PE, many students participate only out of obligation, perceiving it as tiring or irrelevant. This disengagement highlights a critical gap in understanding how PE can be restructured to support both psychological and emotional well-being, especially for learners with low motivation toward physical activity. Anchored in Self-Determination Theory (SDT), the study explores how autonomy, competence, and relatedness key elements of intrinsic motivation can be fostered through inclusive, enjoyable, and non-competitive PE activities. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed, using semi-structured interviews with college students aged 18–23 who are classified as non-PE enthusiasts. The data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns in students' experiences, perceptions, and emotional responses toward inclusive PE practices. The expected outcomes suggested that when PE activities emphasize participation, enjoyment, and personal growth rather than competition, students are more likely to develop a positive mindset, enhanced self-worth, and greater emotional balance. Regular engagement in these supportive PE environments is anticipated to contribute to stress reduction, improved mood, and increased motivation for physical participation. This research aimed to bridge the gap between physical education and mental health promotion, proposing that PE can serve as a vital platform for nurturing not only physical fitness but also psychological resilience and well-being among non-enthusiastic learners.

Keywords: Physical Education, Mental Health, Positive, Motivation

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1. Introduction

In the contemporary educational landscape, physical education (PE) serves as a vital component of the curriculum, aimed not only at improving students' physical fitness but also at fostering psychological and social development (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vasconcellos et al., 2020; Bondoc, 2023). However, despite its recognized importance, many learners particularly at the tertiary level approach PE with reluctance or indifference. These non-physical education enthusiast learners often view PE as a compulsory requirement rather than an enjoyable or meaningful experience. They may perceive it as tiring, stressful, or irrelevant to their personal interests, which can lead to disengagement, decreased motivation, and even negative emotional outcomes (Zhou et al., 2025; Barbara et al., 2024). Such attitudes undermine the holistic goals of physical education, which ideally should promote not only physical health but also mental and emotional well-being (Vasconcellos et al., 2020; Haerens et al., 2011; Bondoc, 2024).

This issue becomes increasingly relevant as mental health concerns among adolescents continue to rise. Early adolescence, typically between the ages of 12 and 17, is a developmental stage marked by heightened self-consciousness, emotional fluctuations, and sensitivity to social comparison. Within this context, PE can either provide a supportive environment that enhances self-confidence and emotional balance or become a source of stress and exclusion, particularly when the focus is on competition and athletic performance (Quisay & Aquino, 2024; Cutillas, 2026). Traditional PE programs often emphasize skill mastery and competitive achievement, which may alienate non-athletic students and reinforce feelings of inadequacy (Vasconcellos et al., 2020; Espartero et al., 2024). This pattern highlights a significant need to reimagine PE as an inclusive and motivating space that supports both physical and mental health, especially for learners who are less enthusiastic about sports and physical activities (Llanos-Muñoz et al., 2023; Calzada, 2024). Recent qualitative evidence suggests that students' participation in physical education is influenced not only by individual motivation but

also by the inclusivity of the learning environment. Among female Muslim students, reluctance to participate in physical education was found to be associated with institutional and cultural barriers rather than a lack of interest in physical activity, highlighting the importance of culturally responsive and inclusive PE programs that accommodate diverse learner needs (Arlin et al., 2025a).

Anchored on Self-Determination Theory (SDT) developed by Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000), this study explores how inclusive and non-competitive PE activities can promote a positive mindset and motivation among non-enthusiast learners. SDT posits that human motivation and psychological growth are driven by the satisfaction of three innate psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2020). When these needs are fulfilled, individuals experience intrinsic motivation, emotional well-being, and a greater sense of engagement (Ntoumanis et al., 2017). However, a gap remains in understanding how PE programs can be designed to meet these needs specifically for students who lack natural interest in physical activity. Most existing studies focus on athletic or highly motivated students, leaving limited insight into how PE can be made more meaningful and beneficial for non-enthusiast learners in terms of their mental health and emotional resilience (Zhou et al., 2025; Standage et al., 2012; Murro, 2024).

To address this gap, the present study aimed to investigate how inclusive and non-competitive PE activities can enhance non-enthusiast learners' positive mindset, motivation, and emotional well-being. It sought to examine how consistent participation in supportive, participation-based activities contributes to reduced stress, improved mood, and a more positive perception of self-worth (Quisay & Aquino, 2024). Central concepts such as autonomy, competence, relatedness, and intrinsic motivation were examined within this framework to understand how PE can contribute to holistic student development (Haerens et al., 2011; Llanos-Muñoz et al., 2023; Bondoc, 2024; Calzada, 2024).

It was expected that when PE activities prioritize enjoyment, self-improvement, and social connection rather than competition and performance, students who are typically disengaged from physical education will develop a more positive attitude toward participation. By fostering a sense of autonomy, competence, and belonging, inclusive PE environments can increase students' intrinsic motivation and self-confidence (Ntoumanis et al., 2017; Llanos-Muñoz et al., 2023). Ultimately, the study anticipates that PE can serve as a powerful avenue for promoting mental health and emotional resilience among adolescents. Beyond enhancing physical fitness, an inclusive and psychologically supportive PE program can help students cultivate a healthier mindset, stronger motivation, and a greater sense of personal well-being, addressing both physical and mental dimensions of adolescent growth (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Vasconcellos et al., 2020; Murro, 2024).

2. Literature Review

Physical Education and Its Role in Mental Health. Physical Education (PE) has long been recognized not only for its physical benefits but also for its contribution to students' mental and emotional well-being. Research has shown that regular participation in physical activities can reduce anxiety, depression, and stress while improving mood and self-esteem. Within the school context, PE provides structured opportunities for social interaction, emotional expression, and self-regulation factors that contribute to overall psychological health. Bailey et al. (2013) emphasize that when PE incorporates psychological and social dimensions, it supports resilience, emotional control, and cognitive focus. However, despite these benefits, some learners remain disengaged from PE, particularly those who perceive physical activities as difficult or irrelevant to their interests. Local studies have also acknowledged the relationship between learning environments, health, and emotional resilience. For instance, Chavez (2020) found that students experiencing academic and health insecurities often rely on adaptive strategies to maintain psychological balance under stressful learning conditions. Similarly, Castro et

al. (2024) emphasized that emotional adaptation and instructional flexibility play vital roles in sustaining well-being and engagement in demanding academic contexts. These findings parallel the psychological support that PE can offer as a structured avenue for emotional release and stress management.

Challenges Faced by Non-Physical Education Enthusiast Learners. Students identified as non-physical education enthusiasts often display low motivation, minimal engagement, and negative perceptions toward PE. According to Standage et al., (2006) learners frequently experience low perceived competence and heightened self-consciousness during physical activities, leading to avoidance behaviors. Such challenges are amplified by competitive classroom climates that emphasize winning or performance over participation. Jekauc et al., (2019) found that adolescents who lack confidence in their physical abilities are more likely to experience social anxiety, body image concerns, and reduced enjoyment in PE settings. These negative experiences can, in turn, diminish motivation and negatively impact mental health, highlighting the need for inclusive, supportive, and non-judgmental PE environments. In the Philippine context, Inoferio et al. (2024) observed similar patterns among students coping with anxiety and low confidence, noting that supportive and adaptive learning interventions significantly reduce emotional distress. Savellon et al. (2024) also reported that learners dealing with public-speaking anxiety benefited from motivational and confidence-building activities underscoring the importance of creating psychologically safe environments for hesitant participants. These insights reflect the emotional challenges faced by non-PE enthusiasts and the need for strategies that foster confidence and acceptance.

Inclusive and Non-Competitive Physical Education Approaches. Creating inclusive and non-competitive PE environments has been shown to positively influence students' attitudes toward participation and self-worth. Research has shown that cooperative and non-competitive physical education activities increase students' enjoyment by fostering social connectedness and perceived

competence rather than emphasizing competition and performance outcomes (Engels & Freund, 2020). Similarly, a systematic review by Rodríguez-Macías et al. (2021) concluded that student-centered instructional approaches in physical education consistently promote greater enjoyment and engagement, supporting the inclusion of non-competitive activities such as cooperative games, dance, yoga, and fitness challenges in school-based physical education programs. Recent qualitative evidence indicates that students' confidence and participation in physical education are strengthened through supportive relationships and inclusive learning environments. Among female Muslim students, empowerment was found to develop through teacher accommodation, peer encouragement, and inclusive instructional practices that enabled learners to participate meaningfully despite cultural and institutional challenges (Arilin et al., 2025b). By focusing on collaboration rather than competition, students can engage at their own pace and develop confidence in their abilities. Similarly, Dyson (2016) noted that cooperative learning models in PE promote teamwork, empathy, and personal responsibility, all of which enhance students' sense of belonging. Inclusive PE practices also support psychological safety, allowing non-athletic students to feel accepted and motivated to participate, thus fostering both physical engagement and emotional well-being. Supporting this, Leon et al. (2024) highlighted that inclusive classroom practices strengthen students' sense of belonging and engagement, especially when teachers receive training to address student diversity. In the same vein, Barbara et al. (2024) emphasized the power of emotional connection in learning environments, demonstrating that educators who emotionally connect with learners enhance motivation and retention. These local findings reinforce the notion that inclusivity, empathy, and non-competitiveness are key to motivating non-enthusiastic learners in PE.

Physical Education as a Tool for Stress Reduction and Emotional Balance. Physical activity has well-documented benefits for stress management and emotional regulation. Lubans et al. (2016) found

that exercise activates physiological processes that elevate mood, increase energy, and decrease symptoms of stress and depression. For adolescents balancing academic workloads and social pressures, PE can serve as a healthy outlet for tension and emotional expression. Reed et al. (2018) demonstrated that students who regularly engage in PE report improved mood, focus, and classroom behavior, suggesting a link between physical activity and cognitive-emotional balance. Recent qualitative evidence indicates that physical education-based activities, including running, team sports, and yoga, serve as effective coping strategies for academic stress by promoting emotional well-being, improving mood, and enhancing students' focus during periods of heavy academic workload (Tresmanio, 2026). Moreover, when PE integrates mindfulness and relaxation components such as stretching, breathing exercises, or reflective journaling, it further enhances self-awareness and emotional resilience among learners. Local research aligns with this view. Chavez and Lamorinas (2023) noted that adaptive learning strategies promote student well-being, engagement, and self-regulation, particularly during high-stress periods such as the pandemic. Likewise, Cabiles et al. (2025) explored how emotional expression even through informal or playful language serves as a coping mechanism for stress relief among Filipino youth. These insights suggest that emotional expression, whether through communication or physical activity, can contribute to psychological balance and stress management.

Developing Positive Mindset and Motivation through PE. A positive mindset and intrinsic motivation are crucial for sustained engagement in PE. According to Self-Determination Theory, intrinsic motivation flourishes when individuals experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). PE teachers who foster these conditions by promoting student choice, recognizing effort, and emphasizing personal progress can transform students' attitudes toward physical activity. Dweck's (2017) concept of growth mindset believing that abilities can be developed through

effort and learning also applies effectively in PE contexts. When students perceive challenges as opportunities for growth rather than threats to self-worth, they develop greater persistence and enjoyment. Such psychological shifts can help non-enthusiast learners redefine their relationship with physical activity, viewing it as a means of enhancing both mental and physical health.

The reviewed literature underscored that Physical Education, when implemented through inclusive, supportive, and non-competitive strategies, can significantly enhance the mental health and motivation of learners, particularly those less enthusiastic about physical activity. By reframing PE as a holistic practice that nurtures emotional balance, confidence, and social connection, educators can help students develop a positive mindset toward physical participation. Ultimately, a well-designed PE curriculum not only promotes physical fitness but also strengthens resilience, reduces stress, and fosters a more optimistic outlook among adolescents navigating the challenges of early adolescence.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore how Physical Education (PE) activities can enhance mental health, positive mindset, and motivation among non-physical education enthusiast learners. The qualitative approach allows for a deeper understanding of students' lived experiences, perceptions, and emotional responses toward PE participation. Through open-ended interviews, the study seeks to capture students' genuine insights on how inclusive and non-competitive PE activities influence their mindset, confidence, and emotional well-being. This design is appropriate because it focuses on describing and interpreting participants' perspectives rather than quantifying variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.2. Population and sampling

The study was conducted in selected higher education institutions in Zamboanga City where Physical Education subject, such as PathFit, is a mandatory subject for all students. The school

provides an ideal setting since it represents a diverse group of learners, including those who display low enthusiasm or confidence toward sports and physical activities. Conducting the research in this environment allowed the researcher to gather authentic responses and observe how PE experiences relate to students' mental and emotional well-being. The participants of this study were college students aged 18 to 23 years who were identified as non-physical education enthusiasts. These are students who engage in PE mainly because it is a required subject and who tend to show low interest, motivation, or confidence in physical activities. 15 students were purposively selected for this study. A purposive sampling technique was used to identify participants who fit this description. The selection was based on teacher recommendations, classroom observations, and students' own self-perceptions regarding their level of interest in PE. This sample size was considered adequate for qualitative research as it allows for detailed exploration of each participant's experience.

3.3. Instrument

The main research instrument for this study is a semi-structured interview guide designed to gather students' perspectives on their experiences in Physical Education (PE). The questions are based on the study's objectives to ensure alignment with the research focus. The guide explores two key areas: (1) how inclusive and non-competitive PE activities help non-enthusiast learners develop a positive mindset and self-worth, and (2) how consistent participation in PE influences their emotional well-being and stress levels.

Questions address students' feelings toward participation-focused activities, their sense of confidence and acceptance, and how PE affects their mood and stress management. To ensure quality and reliability, the interview was validated by experts in education and psychology to assess the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of each question. Table 1 presents the list of guide questions used by this research study.

Table 1. Interview guide questions.

Objectives	Interview question
1. To examine how inclusive and non-competitive PE activities help non-enthusiast learners develop a more positive mindset toward physical participation and self-worth.	1. How do you feel when PE activities focus more on enjoyment and participation rather than competition?
	2. What kind of PE activities make you feel accepted or confident even if you're not athletic?
	3. Can you share how your attitude toward PE has changed after joining more inclusive or less-competitive activities?
2. To explore how consistent participation in PE activities influences the emotional well-being and stress levels of non-enthusiast learners.	4. How do you feel after joining PE classes physically, mentally, or emotionally?
	5. Do you think PE activities help you release stress or improve your mood? In what way?
	6. How do you balance your academic stress and mental health with the physical activities in PE?

3.4. Data Gathering Procedure

The data collection procedure began by securing approval and consent from the school administration, as well as informed consent from both the participants and their parents or guardians. When the permission was obtained, interviews were scheduled at times convenient for the students to ensure their comfort and openness during the discussion. The interviews were conducted individually in a quiet and private setting within the school campus, with each session lasting approximately 20 to 30 minutes. With the participants' consent, audio recordings were made to ensure accuracy in capturing responses, while notes were taken to record non-verbal cues and emotional expressions. Afterward, all interviews were transcribed verbatim for data analysis, and pseudonyms were used in place of participants' real names to maintain confidentiality and protect their privacy.

3.5. Data analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2021). This method involves becoming familiar with the data through repeated reading of the interview transcripts, generating initial codes to identify recurring ideas or patterns, and then searching for themes that emerge from

the coded data. The identified themes were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately represent the participants' perspectives, after which they were clearly defined and named to capture the essence of each theme. The final report presents the themes supported by direct participant quotations, enhancing the validity and authenticity of the findings. Thematic analysis is particularly suitable for this study as it enables the researcher to interpret participants' experiences in relation to emotional well-being, motivation, and the development of a positive mindset through physical education.

4. Results

Research Objectives 1. To examine how inclusive and non-competitive PE activities help non-enthusiast learners develop a more positive mindset toward physical participation and self-worth.

Question No. 1. How do you feel when PE activities focus more on enjoyment and participation rather than competition?

1.1 *Feels relieved*

Ten (10) respondents expressed that they actually feel relieved when PE is more about fun and participation. They are not that athletic, so they get anxious when everything feels like a

competition. When the teacher just wants them to enjoy and move, they don't feel pressured or embarrassed if they are not good at it. They start to see PE as something they can actually join without worrying about being judged. Additionally, they mentioned that they think activities that focus on enjoyment make students like them feel included, especially those who don't usually stand out in sports. It changes their mindset to want to do their best and have fun. It also makes them realize that being active doesn't always mean being competitive it can just be about staying healthy and enjoying time with classmates.

"I actually feel relieved when PE is more about fun and participation. I'm not that athletic, so I get anxious when everything feels like a competition."

"I think activities that focus on enjoyment make students like me feel included, especially those who don't usually stand out in sports."

1.2 Enjoys PE more when activities are fun and inclusive

Eight (8) respondents shared that they enjoy PE more when the focus is on enjoyment. It feels more inclusive, and they actually end up participating more because the activities are fun. It makes them see physical activity as something they can do for themselves, not just for grades or competition. When the atmosphere is relaxed, they feel more comfortable trying new things without worrying about mistakes. Additionally, they mentioned that it also helps them connect better with their classmates since everyone is just there to have fun instead of proving who's the best. They notice that when they are having fun, they move more, laugh more, and forget that they are exercising because it feels natural. They think this kind of approach helps students like them develop a more positive attitude toward fitness and see it as something enjoyable, not just a school requirement.

"I enjoy PE more when the focus is on enjoyment. It feels more inclusive, and I actually end up participating more because the activities are fun."

"It also helps me connect better with my classmates since everyone is just there to have fun instead of proving who's the best."

1.3 Confidence improved

Seven (7) respondents expressed that they used to hate PE because they felt they couldn't keep up. But when their teacher started focusing more on participation, they felt more confident. They learned that being active doesn't mean being the best, it's about trying and enjoying it. Before, they used to worry a lot about making mistakes or slowing the team down, but now they just focus on doing their part. Additionally, they shared that when the lessons became more about effort and fun, they started to realize that everyone has different strengths. They might not be the fastest or the strongest, but they can still contribute and enjoy the activity. This change made them see PE in a more positive light because it's not something to be scared of anymore. It also motivated them to move more outside class, because they began to appreciate the feeling of being active without pressure.

"I used to hate PE because I felt I couldn't keep up. But when my teacher started focusing more on participation, I felt more confident."

"When the lessons became more about effort and fun, I started to realize that everyone has different strengths."

Question No. 2. What kind of PE activities make you feel accepted or confident even if you're not athletic?

2.1 Team-building and relay activities

Eleven (11) respondents expressed that they feel more accepted during team-building games or relay activities because they focus on cooperation rather than competition. In these activities, success doesn't rely only on athletic skills like speed or strength, it also values communication, teamwork, and encouragement. Even if they are not the most athletic person, they can still contribute by helping plan strategies, motivating their teammates, or taking on supportive roles. Additionally, they mentioned that it also helps that in these games, everyone feels equally important to the group's success. There's less pressure to perform perfectly and more emphasis on working together and having fun. When teammates cheer for one another, it creates a

positive environment where they feel comfortable participating. It reminds them that PE isn't just about physical ability, it's also about building connections and learning to work as a team.

"I feel more accepted during team-building games or relay activities because they focus on cooperation rather than competition."

"It also helps that in these games, everyone feels equally important to the group's success. There's less pressure to perform perfectly and more emphasis on working together and having fun."

2.2 Dancing activity

Ten (10) respondents expressed that dance activities make them feel confident because it allows them to express themselves freely without worrying about competition or athletic performance. Unlike sports that focus on speed or strength, dance highlights creativity, rhythm, and personal style, which makes it more inclusive for students with different abilities. Additionally, they mentioned that there's also a sense of freedom and individuality. Everyone can interpret the movements in their own way, so there's no wrong way to participate. Even when they make mistakes, they don't feel like failures instead it becomes part of the learning process. The supportive atmosphere, music, and group energy make it easier to let go of self-consciousness and just enjoy moving. Dance helps them see that PE can be about self-expression, enjoyment, and confidence, not just competition or performance.

"Dance activities make me feel confident because it allows me to express myself freely without worrying about competition or athletic performance."

"There's also a sense of freedom and individuality. Everyone can interpret the movements in their own way, so there's no wrong way to participate."

2.3 Zumba or simple obstacle courses

Six (6) respondents mentioned that they enjoy activities like Zumba or simple obstacle courses because it makes PE feel fun and inclusive instead of stressful or competitive. These activities focus on participation and enjoyment, which takes away the pressure to be the best or the fastest. Everyone can move at their own pace, and the

goal is just to have a good time while being active. Additionally, they mentioned that it creates a positive atmosphere where every effort is appreciated, not just the achievements of the more athletic students. That kind of encouragement helps them feel motivated and accepted, even if they are not naturally athletic. When the environment is supportive and non-judgmental, they feel more comfortable participating and even start to enjoy moving more.

"I enjoy activities like Zumba or simple obstacle courses because they make PE feel fun and inclusive instead of stressful or competitive."

"It creates a positive atmosphere where every effort is appreciated, not just the achievements of the more athletic students."

Question No. 3. Can you share how your attitude toward PE has changed after joining more inclusive or less-competitive activities?

3.1 Gained confidence by being in a supportive environment

Twelve (12) respondents expressed that before, they didn't really like PE because they felt embarrassed whenever they couldn't do well. They used to get nervous whenever they had to play competitive sports since they weren't as athletic as others. But when their teacher started doing group games and dance routines instead of just sports, they began to enjoy it more. They felt like everyone had a role, and it didn't matter if they weren't the fastest or the strongest. Additionally, they mentioned that the activities made them more comfortable moving and expressing themselves without worrying about mistakes. It also helped them build confidence because they realized that being active isn't about being perfect, it's about enjoying the experience and supporting their teammates.

"Before, I didn't really like PE because I felt embarrassed whenever I couldn't do well. I used to get nervous whenever we had to play competitive sports since I wasn't as athletic as others."

"The activities made me more comfortable moving and expressing myself without worrying about mistakes."

3.2 *Felt accepted and less pressured*

Nine (9) respondents expressed that they used to avoid PE because they were shy and not athletic. They often felt out of place when they had to play competitive games, especially when others were really good at sports. But during activities like Zumba and team relays where everyone could join at their own pace, they felt more confident and included. No one was judging who was the best because it was more about having fun together. Additionally, they mentioned that those activities made them realize that PE isn't just about winning or showing skills, it's also about moving their body, relieving stress, and feeling good about themselves. They started to look forward to PE because it became something that made them feel active, relaxed, and happy, not pressured.

"I used to avoid PE because I was shy and not athletic. I often felt out of place when we had to play competitive games, especially when others were really good at sports."

"Those activities made me realize that PE isn't just about winning or showing skills, it's also about moving your body, relieving stress, and feeling good about yourself."

3.3 *Felt more included and comfortable participating*

Eight (8) respondents expressed that they were never into sports, so they didn't really look forward to PE. They used to feel like it wasn't for people like them who weren't athletic or competitive. But when they started doing activities that focused more on participation and cooperation, they began to feel more included. Additionally, they also note that they stopped comparing themselves to others and started focusing on how good it felt to just move and be part of the group. It made them realize that everyone can enjoy PE in their own way. That change helped them relax and enjoy being active without worrying about being judged.

"I was never into sports, so I didn't really look forward to PE. I used to feel like it wasn't for people like me who weren't athletic or competitive."

"I stopped comparing myself to others and started focusing on how good it felt to just move and be part of the group."

Research Objectives 2. To explore how consistent participation in PE activities influences the emotional well-being and stress levels of non-enthusiast learners.

Question No. 1. How do you feel after joining PE classes—physically, mentally, or emotionally?

1.1 *Feels physically tired but in a positive and productive way*

Thirteen (12) respondents expressed that physically, they feel tired after PE, but in a good way. They don't really like sports, but moving around helps them release stress and feel more energized. Even though they get tired easily, it's the kind of tiredness that feels productive and refreshing. Mentally, PE gives them a break from all the academic pressure because it clears their mind and helps them focus better afterward. Additionally, they mentioned that they've also realized that exercise can be a form of self-care, not just a school requirement. Even if they are not sports enthusiasts, they appreciate how PE reminds them to take care of themselves and enjoy being active without feeling pressured to compete. It reminds them that being active doesn't always have to mean competing, it can just be about taking care of themselves and feeling good physically and mentally.

"Physically, I feel tired after PE, but in a good way. I don't really like sports, but moving around helps me release stress and feel more energized."

"I've also realized that exercise can be a form of self-care, not just a school requirement. Even if I'm not a sports enthusiast, I appreciate how PE reminds me to take care of myself and enjoy being active without feeling pressured to compete."

1.2 *Boosted confidence*

Twelve (12) respondents expressed that they used to dread PE because they are not athletic. But after joining more cooperative games, they started to feel more confident. Mentally, it's less stressful now because they don't feel pressured to be the best. They realized that PE isn't just about competition, it's also about teamwork, participation, and having fun with classmates. Additionally, they mentioned that when the focus is on cooperation instead of performance, they

feel more included and motivated to join. It made them see that being active can be enjoyable even for someone who isn't naturally sporty.

"I used to dread PE because I'm not athletic. But after joining more cooperative games, I started to feel more confident."

"When the focus is on cooperation instead of performance, I feel more included and motivated to join."

1.3 Emotional relief and lightness

Six (6) respondents expressed that emotionally, PE helps them feel lighter. Even if they don't like sports, the fun activities with classmates make them laugh and forget about school stress for a while. It's one of the few times in the day when they can relax and just enjoy the moment. Additionally, they mentioned that the laughter and teamwork during games make them feel connected with their classmates, and it really lifts their mood. Even if they are not the most active person, those small moments of joy and interaction make PE something they actually look forward to sometimes.

"Emotionally, PE helps me feel lighter. Even if I don't like sports, the fun activities with classmates make me laugh and forget about school stress for a while."

"The laughter and teamwork during games make me feel connected with my classmates, and it really lifts my mood."

Question No. 2. Do you think PE activities help you release stress or improve your mood? In what way?

2.1 PE helps relax and release academic stress through enjoyable activities.

Nine (9) respondents expressed that they are not really into sports, but PE helps them relax after long hours of studying. When they do activities like stretching, dancing, or simple games, it makes them forget school stress for a while. They feel lighter after moving around, even if they are not that active. It's like a short break where their mind can rest from academics. Additionally, they mentioned that they also notice that after PE, they can focus better in their next classes because they've released some of their tension. Even though they don't enjoy competitive games, the

simple movements and fun atmosphere make them feel more energized and in a better mood.

"I'm not really into sports, but PE helps me relax after long hours of studying. When we do activities like stretching, dancing, or simple games, it makes me forget school stress for a while."

"I also notice that after PE, I can focus better in my next classes because I've released some of my tension."

2.2 Providing a space to release tension

Five (5) respondents expressed that they don't really see themselves as athletic, but they admit PE helps them emotionally. On bad days, just moving or laughing with classmates lifts their mood. It's not about sports for them but it's more about releasing tension and feeling free for a bit. Even if they are not good at the activities, they still enjoy the light moments during class. Additionally, they mentioned that it reminds them that PE isn't just about performance or competition, it's also about feeling good and connecting with others. After participating, they often feel more positive and less overwhelmed by schoolwork or personal stress.

"I don't really see myself as athletic, but I admit PE helps me emotionally. On bad days, just moving or laughing with classmates lifts my mood."

"It reminds me that PE isn't just about performance or competition, it's also about feeling good and connecting with others."

2.3 Feeling included and connected with classmates

Four (4) respondents expressed that they don't enjoy PE that much, but they like the part where they interact with classmates. When everyone laughs and cheers each other on, it improves their mood. They may not love physical activities, but they enjoy the teamwork and fun moments. It makes them feel included, especially during group games where everyone has a role. Additionally, they mentioned that even if they are not good at sports, they still feel connected because they were all having fun together. Those moments remind them that PE isn't just about fitness but it's also about building friendships and learning how to support one another.

"I don't enjoy PE that much, but I like the part where we interact with classmates. When everyone laughs and cheers each other on, it improves my mood."

"Even if I'm not good at sports, I still feel connected because we're all having fun together."

Question No. 3. How do you balance your academic stress and mental health with the physical activities in PE?

3.1 PE serves as a mental break from academic stress

Fourteen (14) respondents expressed that even though they are not really into PE, they see it as their break from academics. When they are stressed with schoolwork, moving around or just laughing with their classmates during activities helps them release tension. It's like a reset before going back to studying. PE gives them a chance to clear their mind and step away from the pressure of deadlines and grades. Additionally, they mentioned that it reminds them that taking care of their body also helps their mental health. After PE, they usually feel lighter and more focused, which makes it easier to handle school tasks again. They may not be the most active person, but the simple act of participating helps them recharge.

"Even though I'm not really into PE, I see it as my break from academics. When I'm stressed with schoolwork, moving around or just laughing with my classmates during activities helps me release tension."

"It reminds me that taking care of my body also helps my mental health. After PE, I usually feel lighter and more focused, which makes it easier to handle school tasks again."

3.2 Social interaction and teamwork

Twelve (12) respondents shared that PE helps balance their stress because they get to interact with their classmates. They may not be good at physical activities, but the teamwork and fun moments make them forget their worries for a while. It's one of the few times in school when they can just enjoy being with others instead of thinking about assignments or exams. Additionally, they mentioned that the laughter, cheering, and cooperation during games make the atmosphere lighter. Even if they are not

competitive, they still feel included and connected with everyone. Those moments remind them that school isn't just about academics instead it's also about building friendships and enjoying small experiences that help with their mental well-being.

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3.3 PE as a space for participation

Seven (7) respondents mentioned that they balance things by not thinking about PE as a competition. They joined just to participate and move a little. That mindset helps them enjoy it more and not feel stressed about being good at sports. When they stopped comparing themselves to others, they started to feel more comfortable and confident. They realized that PE doesn't have to be about winning or proving anything it can simply be about having fun and staying active. Additionally, they shared that by focusing on participation instead of performance, they were able to relax and even look forward to class. It also helps them manage academic stress because they can move freely without pressure and just enjoy the moment.

"I balance things by not thinking about PE as a competition. I joined just to participate and move a little."

"By focusing on participation instead of performance, I'm able to relax and even look forward to class."

5. Discussion

Self-Determination Theory (SDT), proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985), emphasizes the importance of fulfilling three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness to foster intrinsic motivation, well-being, and personal growth. Applying SDT to physical education (PE) activities provides a valuable framework for understanding how non-enthusiast learners can develop a positive mindset

and emotional resilience through inclusive, non-competitive PE experiences.

Developing a Positive Mindset and Sense of Self-Worth Through Inclusive PE Activities. The first objective of this study was to examine how inclusive and non-competitive PE activities influence non-enthusiast learners' attitudes toward physical participation and self-worth. According to SDT, fostering autonomy allowing students to choose activities aligned with their interests or skill levels can transform PE from a mandatory chore into a source of personal satisfaction. When learners feel that participation is voluntary and self-directed, they are more likely to internalize positive attitudes toward physical activity. Moreover, activities that emphasize competence rather than competition help students recognize their abilities and progress without the fear of comparison or failure. Many respondents indicated feeling more accepted and confident when PE activities were tailored to diverse skill levels or focused on collaborative goals rather than winning. This aligns with SDT's assertion that perceived competence strengthens intrinsic motivation and enhances self-esteem.

Finally, inclusive PE activities promote relatedness a sense of belonging and connection with peers. Non-competitive games, group exercises, or team-building activities create an environment where students support one another rather than compete against each other. Participants in this study reported feeling more socially accepted and less self-conscious, demonstrating that fostering relatedness can mitigate anxiety and promote a positive mindset even among those who are less naturally inclined toward physical activity.

Emotional Well-Being and Stress Reduction Through Consistent Participation. The second objective explored how regular engagement in PE activities affects emotional well-being and stress management. SDT posits that when the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are satisfied, intrinsic motivation flourishes, which can significantly enhance mental health outcomes. Respondents frequently reported feeling calmer, more energized, and less

stressed after participating in PE activities. This can be understood through SDT's perspective: activities that fulfill autonomy empower learners to take ownership of their participation, reducing feelings of external pressure and obligation. Competence is reinforced when students notice personal improvements or successfully accomplish tasks, fostering a sense of mastery and confidence that extends beyond the gymnasium. Meanwhile, relatedness ensures that PE becomes a supportive social context, allowing learners to experience emotional support, shared enjoyment, and reduced feelings of isolation. Importantly, the findings suggest that non-competitive and inclusive PE does not only contribute to physical health but serves as a proactive strategy for stress management, emotional balance, and mood regulation. By embedding SDT principles into PE curricula, educators can create an environment where non-enthusiast learners are intrinsically motivated to engage in physical activity, ultimately benefiting both mental health and personal development.

Anchored in Self-Determination Theory, the study highlights that inclusive, non-competitive PE activities can foster a positive mindset, self-worth, and emotional resilience among non-enthusiast learners. By addressing the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, PE classes can transform from obligatory sessions into empowering experiences that support mental health, stress reduction, and overall well-being. The results underscore the importance of designing PE curricula that prioritize enjoyment, participation, and social support, particularly for students who may initially feel disconnected from or intimidated by traditional competitive sports.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal that inclusive and non-competitive physical education (PE) activities significantly enhance the mental health, positive mindset, and motivation of non-enthusiast learners. For students who are not naturally inclined toward sports or athletic activities, shifting the focus from competition to enjoyment and participation fosters a sense of

relief, inclusion, and confidence. Respondents reported that activities such as team-building exercises, relay games, dance, Zumba, and simple obstacle courses allow them to contribute meaningfully regardless of their athletic ability. This inclusivity promotes self-worth, reduces anxiety about performance, and encourages a more positive attitude toward PE. Consistent participation in these activities also has clear benefits for emotional well-being and stress management. Students noted that PE provides a productive form of physical tiredness that is refreshing rather than exhausting, serving as a mental break from academic pressures. Engagement in non-competitive activities fosters emotional relief, improves mood, and strengthens

social connections with peers. By focusing on teamwork, cooperation, and enjoyment, learners experience increased motivation to participate, a stronger sense of belonging, and a more positive mindset toward movement and physical activity. Overall, the results indicate that PE can serve as an effective avenue for promoting mental health among non-enthusiast learners when it prioritizes inclusivity, participation, and enjoyment over competition. These findings highlight the importance of designing PE programs that support self-confidence, emotional balance, and social connectedness, showing that physical education can contribute to both physical and psychological well-being.

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