



# Students' Perceptions Of The Benefits And Institutional Needs Of Physical Education: A Qualitative Thematic Analysis

Nupur Nath<sup>1</sup>, Madhab Chandra Ghosh<sup>2</sup>, Subhashis Biswas<sup>3\*</sup>, Priyan Kurumbeparambil Mohanan<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup>Department of Physical Education, The ICFAI University Tripura

<sup>4</sup>Department of Education, The ICFAI University Tripura

## Abstract

This study investigates students' perceptions of physical education (PE) and its contribution to their physical, psychological, social and academic development. Responses from nineteen students across varied academic programmes were examined through thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's framework. Five themes emerged, demonstrating PE's value in holistic development, social competence, academic discipline and emotional well-being. Students advocated improvements in infrastructure, professional guidance and activity diversification. The findings offer insights for strengthening PE programmes within higher education.

**Keywords:** Physical Education; Student Perceptions; Academic Engagement; Well-being; Behavioural Outcomes; Social Development.

## 1. Introduction

Contemporary education increasingly highlights the importance of balanced development that integrates physical, emotional, social and academic competencies. The National Education Policy (2020) reiterates the significance of physical education in fostering resilience, health and well-being. Students today encounter heightened academic demands and reduced physical activity, making structured PE essential for strengthening focus, emotional regulation and interpersonal skills.

This study examines students' perceptions of the benefits of physical education, its academic relevance and the institutional enhancements required. A qualitative approach allows deeper exploration of learners' experiences and expectations.

## 2. Review of Related Literature

Empirical research widely supports the multifaceted contributions of physical education to student development. Trudeau and Shephard (2008) observed that PE participation enhances concentration, behaviour and scholastic performance. Bailey (2006) emphasised PE's social, emotional and moral benefits. Dwyer et al. (2001) reported improvements in fitness, reduced anxiety and improved classroom engagement among students participating in daily physical activity.

Singh et al. (2012) found that physically active learners displayed improved memory and executive functioning. Fernandes and Sturm (2011) noted enhanced mood, reduced stress and elevated confidence among physically active college students. These studies collectively affirm PE's role in supporting physical, cognitive and emotional growth.

### 3. Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative descriptive design to explore students' perceptions of physical education in a naturalistic and context-sensitive manner. This approach was selected because it allows detailed examination of subjective experiences and interpretations that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measures.

#### 3.1 Participants

Nineteen students from diverse academic programmes; including B.Sc., BCA, BA.LLB, BBA, B.Ed., B.Tech. and M.Phil. participated voluntarily. Their ages ranged from 19 to 27 years, and the sample included both male and female students across different years of study. A **purposive sampling technique** was employed to ensure representation from multiple academic streams.

#### 3.2 Data Collection

Data were gathered using three open-ended questions designed to elicit participants' reflections on:

The most beneficial aspects of their physical education experience.

Their views on whether PE should hold equal academic priority.

Suggestions for improving institutional PE programmes.

Responses were collected in written form to allow students to express their views independently and without external influence.

#### 3.3 Data Analysis

Data were analysed using **Braun and Clarke's six-step thematic analysis framework**, which included familiarisation with the dataset, generation of initial codes, organisation of codes into sub-themes, development of overarching themes, review and refinement of thematic structure and construction of the final analytic narrative. Coding reliability was ensured through repeated reading and cross-verification of meaning units (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

#### 3.4 Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of confidentiality. No identifying information was collected, and all data were used exclusively for academic purposes.

#### 4. Coding Framework

**Table 1: Coding Framework of the Thematic analysis**

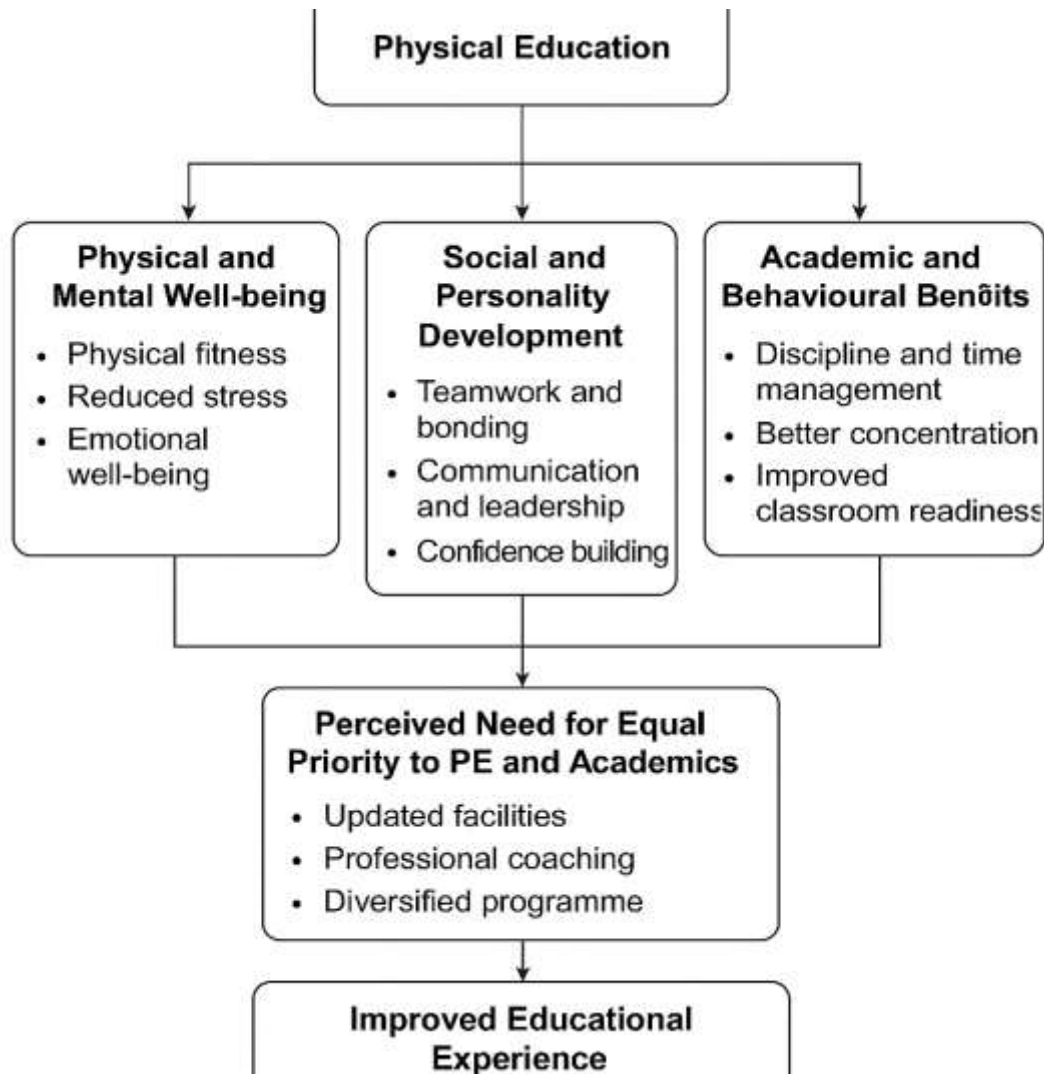
Codes	Sub-themes	Themes
Physical fitness, stamina	Physical well-being	Holistic well-being
Reduced stress, emotional relief	Mental well-being	Holistic well-being
Alertness, focus	Cognitive readiness	Holistic well-being
Teamwork, cooperation	Collaboration	Social & personality development
Leadership, communication	Personality development	Social & personality development
Discipline, time management	Behavioural discipline	Academic & behavioural benefits
Reduced anxiety, study balance	Academic support	Academic & behavioural benefits
Equal priority, essential	Holistic education	Equal priority to PE & academics
Lack of equipment, outdated facilities	Infrastructural needs	Institutional gaps
Need for trained coaches	Professional requirements	Institutional gaps

#### 5. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework illustrates the pathway through which physical education influences learners' well-being, social competence, academic engagement and institutional expectations.

PE → Well-being → Social Development → Academic Benefits → Equal Priority → Institutional Improvement → Holistic Development

The conceptual framework illustrates how physical education influences students through a sequence of interconnected outcomes. It begins with PE as the core input, which contributes directly to three developmental domains: physical and mental well-being, social and personality development and academic and behavioural benefits. These outcomes collectively strengthen students' overall functioning and shape their perception that PE should receive equal priority with academic subjects. This perceived need is further reinforced by expectations for improved facilities, professional coaching and diversified programmes. When these institutional enhancements align with students' developmental needs, the overall educational experience becomes richer, more balanced and more conducive to holistic development.

**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the study**

## 6. Results: Thematic Analysis

### Theme 1: Physical Education as a Promoter of Holistic Well-being

Students regarded PE as instrumental in enhancing physical vitality, emotional stability and readiness for learning.

### Theme 2: PE as a Catalyst for Social and Personality Development

Respondents highlighted teamwork, communication and confidence-building as significant outcomes of PE engagement.

Theme 3: Academic and Behavioural Benefits Improved discipline, organisation and reduced anxiety were frequently associated with PE participation.

Theme 4: Need for Equal Priority to PE and Academics Students expressed strong support for elevating PE to the same academic importance as theoretical subjects.

Theme 5: Institutional Gaps and Recommendations. Learners emphasised the need for improved infrastructure, professional coaching and diversified activities.

## 7. Discussion

The findings are consistent with existing literature affirming the academic, emotional and social benefits of physical education. Students' emphasis on stress reduction aligns with Fernandes and Sturm (2011), while benefits related to teamwork support Bailey's (2006) observations. Academic improvements associated with PE echo Trudeau and Shephard (2008) and Singh et al. (2012). The need for infrastructural enhancement reflects broader concerns regarding PE implementation.

## 8. Conclusion

Students view physical education as essential for balanced development. They advocate equal prioritisation of PE within academic structures and highlight several areas requiring institutional strengthening. Enhanced PE provision may significantly improve student well-being, discipline and academic engagement.

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