

Motivation in Physical Education Activity Engagement: Perceptions of Senior High School Students

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Abstract

Low engagement in physical education activities is worrying. I explored the motivation to engage in physical education activities as perceived by senior high students. Qualitative descriptive research design, purposive sampling, in-depth interview, and thematic analysis were the methods I applied. My conversations with my seven participants laid that students' motivation to engage in physical education activities are shaped by skill development, social connection, and meaningful engagement. Future research may adopt a quantitative research design using multiple regression analysis and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to examine predictors of students' motivation in Physical Education and to develop and validate a reliable measurement instrument. Physical Education may be enhanced by supporting autonomy through choice, building competence through structured and creative skill-based activities with feedback, fostering relatedness through positive social interactions, and integrating intrinsic and extrinsic motivation strategies.

Keywords: Motivation in physical education activity engagement, perceptions of senior high school students

Introduction

Globally, low motivation among students in Physical Education (PE) activity engagement has been identified as a persistent problematic situation within school-based learning environments. Studies in international educational and health contexts reported that many students exhibited limited willingness to actively participate in PE tasks, showing reduced enthusiasm and minimal sustained engagement during structured physical activities. This condition has been consistently observed across diverse educational systems where student motivation in Physical Education remains a concern in promoting active learning experiences (Fierro-Suero et al., 2023; Lee & Park, 2024).

In various countries, low motivation in PE activity engagement among students has also been documented as a continuing educational issue. In the United States, recent findings indicated that a considerable number of secondary school students demonstrate low levels of interest in participating in PE classes (Brown & Davis, 2023). In Japan, research highlighted that students often display limited voluntary engagement in physical activities during school-based PE programs (Yamamoto et al., 2024). Similarly, in Australia, studies have reported that student participation in PE lessons is frequently characterized by passive involvement and reduced motivational drive (Williams & Clarke, 2023).

In the Philippine context, low motivation among students in PE activity engagement has also been recognized as a significant educational concern. Recent local studies suggested that many Filipino students exhibited limited enthusiasm and inconsistent participation in PE classes, particularly in structured physical activities that require sustained effort and active involvement (Reyes et al., 2023; Santos & Cruz, 2024). This pattern has been observed across various school settings, reflecting a continuing challenge in fostering consistent student engagement in PE programs within the country.

The consequence of low motivation in the PE activity engagement of students presents a critical concern in education, development, and health. When students demonstrate limited interest in participating in PE classes, it can lead to a range of negative outcomes, including decreased physical fitness, reduced social skills, and lower academic achievement. Furthermore, low motivation in PE can contribute to a cycle of inactivity and disengagement that may persist into adulthood, leading to long-term health issues and a lack of active lifestyle habits. Therefore, understanding the factors that influence student motivation in PE is crucial for developing effective interventions to enhance engagement and participation in physical education programs.

physical activities becomes inconsistent, which undermines the intended learning experiences in PE programs. This situation also affects the ability of educational institutions to promote holistic student development through physical education, as sustained engagement is essential in achieving PE learning objectives (Anderson et al., 2023; Martinez & Green, 2024).

Significance of the study

This study is significant as it sought to provide valuable insights into the motivational experiences of students in Physical Education (PE), with implications for various stakeholders in the field of education. Further, this study is important because it may help students gain a deeper understanding of the internal and external influences on their motivation in physical education, which could encourage them to engage more meaningfully in PE, not just to meet academic requirements but as a path to personal growth, health, and wellness.

This study may also give teachers (especially PE instructors) insight into how students perceive motivation, allowing them to design classes that foster autonomy, competence, and relatedness, key ingredients for a motivating PE environment. For schools and education institutions, the findings may guide improvements in curriculum and programs so that they more effectively support students' physical fitness, holistic development, and lifelong healthy habits.

Finally, the study contributes to scholarly work by adding empirical data about students' lived experiences, which future researchers can build upon. In terms of global goals, this research aligns strongly with United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 (Quality Education), ensuring inclusive, equitable and quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities, and also supports SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), since motivated participation in physical education is closely tied to better health outcomes and well-being.

Overall, this study holds significance both academically and practically. By uncovering the lived motivational experiences of students in PE, it aims to encourage meaningful changes in teaching, program development, and future research that promote engagement, learning, and lifelong physical activity

Research Questions

I explored the motivation to engage in physical education activities as perceived by senior high students. Specifically, I sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the descriptions of sense of autonomy in engaging in physical activities?
2. What are the descriptions of their competence in engaging physical activities?
3. What are the descriptions of relatedness in engaging in physical activities?
4. What are the descriptions of motivation in engaging in physical activities?

Theoretical Framework

My phenomenological study is grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT) developed by Deci and Ryan (1985). This theory explains that human motivation is influenced by the fulfillment of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. It emphasizes that individuals are not solely driven by external factors but also actively regulate their motivation through a sense of choice, effectiveness, and social connection. Autonomy refers to the need to feel in control of one's actions, competence involves feeling capable and effective in tasks, and relatedness reflects the need to feel connected and supported by others. Together, these components explain how motivation is developed and sustained in different learning contexts.

In the context of this study, students' lived experiences in PE are shaped by how they perceive their level of choice in activities, their confidence in performing tasks, and their relationships with peers and teachers. This framework highlights that students' motivation and participation in PE are the result of a dynamic interplay between their sense of self, their engagement in activities, and the social environment in which they are situated.

Conceptual Framework

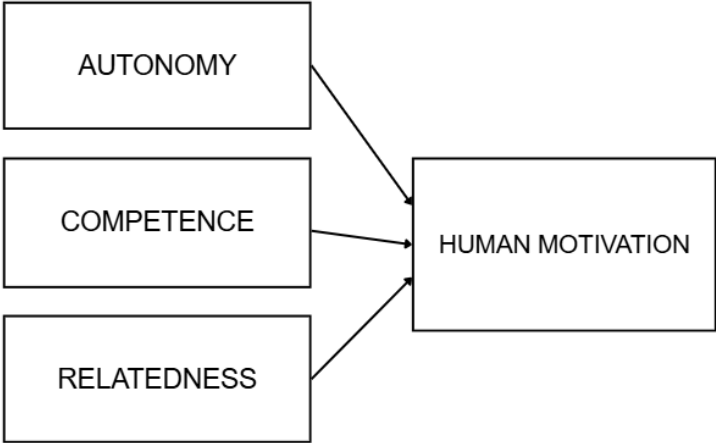


Figure 1. Paradigm of the Study based on Self Determination Theory

Assumptions

In this study, I believe that reality is not fixed but constructed through the unique lived experiences of individuals, and that each student's motivation in Physical Education (PE) represents a distinct reality shaped by personal perceptions, social interactions, and environmental influences. For me, knowledge is best understood through the personal stories and insights of participants, co-constructed between researcher and student through dialogue and reflection, making it subjective, contextual, and deeply tied to human experience. Since I am using a phenomenological approach, I assumed that the best way to capture these motivational experiences is not by measuring or predicting them, but by listening to students' narratives through interviews and discussions, immersing myself in their perspectives, and drawing out the themes that reveal the essence of their motivation. I also chose to frame this study using Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), as it highlights autonomy, competence, and relatedness as the core needs that shape students' experiences in PE, allowing me to better interpret whether these needs are being supported or hindered in their classes. At the same time, I acknowledge that students' motivation does not exist in isolation but is strongly influenced by cultural norms and values, where Filipino culture, family expectations, peer approval, and academic priorities play a role in how they engage with PE. By holding these assumptions, I positioned this study as an exploration of students' lived realities, shaped by both personal meaning and broader cultural contexts.

Method

In this chapter, I presented the methodology I used in this study. I discussed the research design, locale of the study, sample and sampling technique, data gathering technique I followed, the data analysis and the measures I took to ensure the study's trustworthiness.

Research Design

In this study, I employed a qualitative phenomenological research design. A phenomenological approach is appropriate because it seeks to uncover the essence of individuals' subjective experiences and how they make sense of them through their lived experiences (Neubauer et al., 2023). In analyzing the data, I used Colaizzi's phenomenological method because I believe it is the most suitable approach for capturing the essence of students' lived motivational experiences in Physical Education. For me, this process of extracting significant statements, formulating meanings, clustering themes, and developing rich descriptions allows the voices of the participants to be faithfully represented and meaningfully interpreted. To ensure that my interpretation remains credible, I applied strategies such as member checking, peer debriefing, and triangulation, which are recognized in recent qualitative research as essential practices for ensuring rigor, trustworthiness, and accuracy of findings (Varpio et al., 2023). By doing so, I aimed to arrive at a deeper and more trustworthy understanding of how students make sense of their motivation in Physical Education, which I see as essential in creating more supportive and engaging learning environments.

Research Locale

This study was conducted in Davao City, one of the major urban centers in Mindanao, Philippines. Davao City was chosen as the locale of the study because it is home to several higher education institutions that offer Physical Education (PE) courses as part of their curriculum, making it an appropriate setting for exploring students' motivational experiences in PE. In addition, the city has a diverse student population coming from various socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, which allows for a richer and more varied understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Senior High School students enrolled in PE courses within selected institutions in Davao City served as the participants, as their lived experiences provide meaningful and relevant insights into motivation in Physical Education.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The participants of this study were seven (7) senior high school students who were enrolled in Physical Education (PE) during the school year 2025-2026 and had direct experiences related to motivation in the subject. They were selected to provide rich and relevant insights through Individual In-Depth Interviews (IDI). In this study, I employed purposive sampling as the primary sampling technique because it allowed me to deliberately choose participants who could best contribute meaningful and experience-based information about the phenomenon

being studied.

Purposive sampling is a non-probability technique used in qualitative research where participants are selected based on specific criteria, particularly when the goal is to identify information-rich cases rather than generalize findings. It is commonly applied in phenomenological studies to gain an in-depth understanding of lived experiences such as motivation, perceptions, and behavior. One of its main advantages is that it ensures the collection of detailed and relevant data since participants are carefully chosen based on their direct experience of the phenomenon (Neubauer et al., 2023; Varpio et al., 2023).

Data Gathering Technique

In this study, I employed the Individual In-Depth Interview (IDI) technique as the primary method of data collection. IDI is a qualitative data gathering technique that involves a one-on-one interview between the researcher and the participant, allowing the participant to freely and deeply share their lived experiences, perspectives, and meanings related to a specific phenomenon. It is commonly applied in qualitative and phenomenological research when the goal is to obtain rich, detailed, and personal narratives that cannot be easily captured through surveys or group discussions. In this study, it was particularly appropriate for exploring students' motivational experiences in Physical Education, as it allowed participants to openly express their thoughts in a private and comfortable setting. One of the key advantages of IDI is that it generates in-depth and detailed data, encourages honesty and openness, and allows the researcher to probe further for clarification and deeper understanding of responses. It is also effective in capturing sensitive or personal experiences since participants may feel more comfortable speaking individually rather than in a group setting (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2023).

Data Analysis Technique

Colaizzi's phenomenological data analysis technique was used to extract, organize, and interpret the data gathered in this study, complemented by thematic analysis to systematically identify and interpret patterns within the participants' responses. Following Colaizzi's (1978) method, the transcribed interviews were repeatedly read for familiarization, after which significant statements related to students' motivational experiences in Physical Education were identified and meanings were formulated. These meanings were clustered into themes and subthemes reflecting autonomy, competence, and relatedness, forming a clear representation of the participants' lived experiences. In addition, thematic analysis supported the coding and refinement of themes through a systematic process of identifying, reviewing, and defining patterns in the data, ensuring a coherent interpretation of results (Kiger & Varpio, 2023; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of this study, I applied the four criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was achieved through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, supported by member checking and peer debriefing to validate the interpretations of students' lived motivational experiences. Transferability was addressed by providing a thick description of the context and participants so that readers can judge the relevance of the findings to their own settings. Dependability was ensured by documenting the entire research process, including interview protocols, consent procedures, and analysis steps, so that the study can be audited or replicated. Finally, confirmability was strengthened through an audit trail of transcripts, coding notes, and thematic clustering, as well as reflective journaling, to make sure that the findings reflect the voices of the participants rather than my own biases.

Results and Discussion

In this section of the study, the researcher presents the modified paradigm and themes from in-depth interviews on students' motivation for engaging in Physical Education. Careful analysis revealed recurring patterns: perceived independence and motivational catalyst; skill development and capability; support and sense of connection; and intrinsic, extrinsic, integrated drive, and autonomous force all of which contribute to students' integrated and autonomous drive toward meaningful, sustained participation.

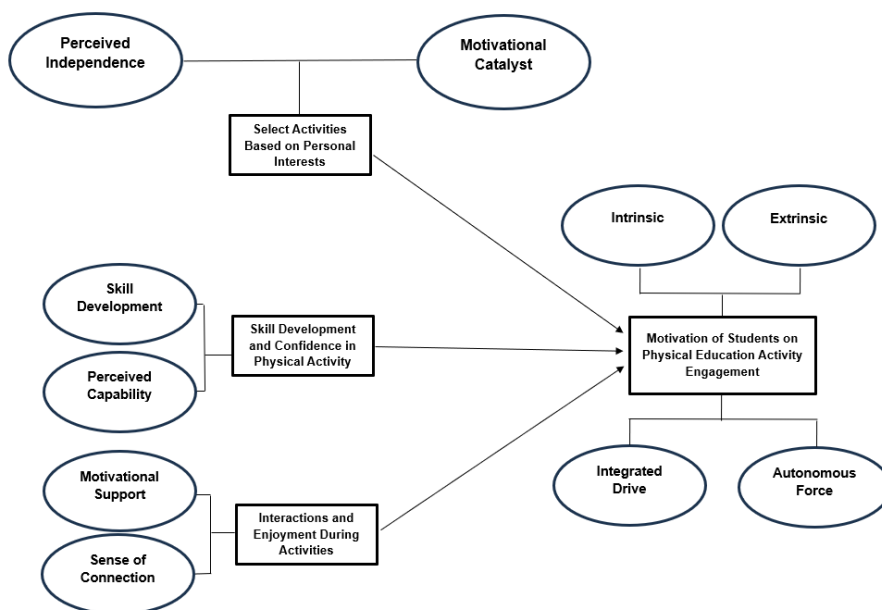


Figure 2: Modified Paradigm of Self Determination Theory

Sense of Autonomy in Engaging in Physical Activities

In reflecting on the participants' experiences, it became evident that their sense of autonomy plays a crucial role in shaping their engagement in physical activity. From their responses, two key ideas emerged: perceived independence and motivational catalyst. Together, these ideas defined their sense of autonomy in participating in Physical Education.

As participant accounts were examined, perceived independence emerged as the freedom to make choices within PE activities, allowing students to align tasks with their interests and personal goals. One participant explained:

"Ang makapili ko sa mga activity o pagdecide kung unsaon nako pagpractice sa isa ka skill, nakatabang nako nga makapokus ko sa akong ganahan o gusto pa nakong maimprove." (Being able to choose between activities or decide how to practice a skill helped me focus on what I enjoyed or wanted to improve.) (P1, IDI Line No. 12–13).

In a similar way, another participant noted:

"Ang pag allow saamo nga makapili sa among gusto na music sa Zumba naghatag namo og pagbati nga kami naay papel ug kontrol sa klase." (Being allowed to choose our own music in Zumba, giving us a sense of ownership in class) (P1, IDI Line No. 130–132).

This idea was also reflected when another student shared:

"Usahay makapili ko sa lain-laing mga activity, nga naghimo nga mas malingaw ko." (I sometimes get to choose between different activities, which makes it more enjoyable.) (P4, IDI Line No. 361–362).

Taken together, one participant after another pointed to how choice shaped their sense of control and enjoyment in PE.

Alongside perceived independence, another theme that emerged was autonomy as a motivational catalyst, where having control over participation increased enthusiasm and reduced pressure. One participant stated:

“Kaning naay freedom, mas dili siya stressful ug mas lingaw ang klase, unya ma-encourage pud ko nga mas moapil ug aktibo.” (Having that freedom made the class feel less stressful and more fun, and it encouraged me to participate more actively.) (P1, IDI Line No. 13–14).

Supporting this, another participant shared:

“Kung naa koy control sa PE activities, mas motivated ko. Kung makapili ko, mas excited ko moapil ug mo-push pa gyud sa akong kaugalingon.” (Having control over PE activities boosts my motivation. When I get to choose, I'm more excited to participate and push myself.) (P2, IDI Line No. 153–154).

As each participant expressed, autonomy was consistently linked to increased willingness and energy to engage.

During my face-to-face interviews, I observed that participants often showed subtle emotional cues that reflected their experiences in Physical Education. When they talked about autonomy and having choices, I noticed they were more relaxed, smiling, and using hand gestures, which suggested enjoyment, engagement, and a sense of ownership over their learning. In contrast, when they described situations with limited control, their expressions became more neutral, with pauses and lowered gaze that seemed to indicate reflection or mild frustration. However, when they shifted back to moments of freedom or self-selected activities, they became more animated again, showing increased energy, positive emotions, and motivation. Overall, I saw that their facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language aligned with their narratives, suggesting that autonomy in PE is experienced both cognitively and emotionally.

Competence in Engaging Physical Activities

In reflecting on the participants' experiences, it became evident that their sense of competence plays a crucial role in shaping their involvement in physical activity. From their responses, two key ideas emerged: perceived ability and skill acquisition. Together, these ideas defined their competence in participating in Physical Education.

As participant accounts were examined, perceived ability emerged as their sense of confidence in performing tasks, especially when they understood the activity and were given sufficient time to practice. One participant shared:

“Makafeel ko nga kaya nako ang PE kung masabtan nako ang activity ug naa koy time magpraktis.” (I feel capable in PE when I understand the activity and have time to practice.) (P1, Line No. 42).

In the same way, another participant emphasized the role of encouragement, stating:

“Kung hatagan ko sa teacher og positive feedback, mas mosalig ko sa akong kaya buhaton.” (When the teacher gives positive feedback, I feel more confident in what I can do.) (P1, Line No. 63).

As another participant echoed similar feelings, saying that confidence was consistently tied to both clarity of instruction and supportive feedback from the teacher.

Alongside perceived ability, another participant explained that competence was strengthened through skill acquisition, where improvement and mastery led to feelings of success and personal achievement. One student narrated:

“Naa'y mga higayon nga mas maayo akong nahimo kaysa sa akong gi-expect, ug nakapabati na nako og garbo sa akong kaugalingon.” (There were moments when I did better than I expected, and that made me feel proud of myself.) (P2, IDI Line No. 162–163).

In the same direction, another participant added:

“Nakafeel ko nga successful ko katong nakompleto nako ang lisod nga activity nga sauna lisod kaayo nako buhaton.” (I felt successful when I was able to complete a difficult activity that I struggled with before.) (P6, IDI Line No. 641)

As one account after another revealed, progress, no matter how small, became a meaningful source of accomplishment.

During my face-to-face interviews, I observed that participants generally showed calm and attentive expressions when discussing their perceived ability in Physical Education, often using steady tones and slight nodding when recalling successful tasks or understanding activities, which suggested growing confidence and clarity. When talking about practice time and teacher feedback, some leaned forward or showed subtle smiles and relaxed shoulders, indicating engagement, comfort, and appreciation of guidance. As they reflected on skill development, their expressions became more animated, with gestures, excited tones, and occasional smiles or laughter when describing improvement and completing difficult tasks, often showing pride and a sense of progress when comparing past struggles to present performance. However, when initially discussing difficulties, some displayed pauses, lowered gaze, or thoughtful expressions, which gradually shifted into more positive emotions as they described improvement over time. Overall, I observed that their emotions, gestures, and expressions aligned with their narratives of competence, suggesting that confidence in Physical Education is experienced through both skill development and emotional growth.

Relatedness in Engaging Physical Activities

In reflecting on the participants' experiences, it became evident that their sense of relatedness plays a crucial role in shaping their involvement in physical activity. From their responses, two key ideas emerged: sense of connection and motivational support. Together, these two ideas defined their relatedness in participating in Physical Education.

As participant narratives were examined, a sense of connection emerged through the relationships they formed with peers during shared activities, collaboration, and group engagement. One participant explained:

“Ang PE makatabang gyud nako nga makaconnect sa akong classmates ug peers kay magtrabaho mi in groups ug magsalig mi sa usag usa.” (PE actually helps me connect with my classmates and peers because we work in groups and rely on each other.) (P3, IDI Line No. 305–306).

In the same way, another participant shared:

“Kung ma-feel nako nga included ko, mas ma-enjoy nako ang mga activities ug mas moapil ko ug aktibo.” (When I feel included, I enjoy the activities more and participate actively.) (P4, IDI Line No. 433–434).

As one account after another showed, being part of group activities strengthened their sense of belonging and made participation more meaningful.

Alongside this, relatedness was also expressed through motivational support, where encouragement from peers and teachers strengthened confidence and persistence. One participant narrated:

“Gicheeran ko sa akong classmates during sa game bisan nervous ko, ug nakahatag to nako og confidence nga magpadayon.” (My classmates cheered for me during a game when I was nervous, and it gave me the confidence to keep going.) (P4, IDI Line No. 426–427)

Similarly, another participant shared,

“Gi-encourage gyud ko sa akong groupmates nga mutindog... giingnan ko nila nga ayaw undang, ug akong adviser pud miingon nga kaya ra gyud nako.” (My groupmates really encouraged me to stand up... they told me not to give up and my adviser too said I can really do it.) (P5, Line No. 548–549).

As each story revealed, encouragement from others became a key source of strength during moments of hesitation.

When I conducted the face-to-face interviews, I observed that participants often showed warm and engaged expressions when describing their sense of connection in Physical Education, using relaxed tones, soft smiles, and occasional nodding, especially when recalling group activities and peer interactions, which suggested comfort, belongingness, and positive social engagement. As they talked about teamwork and shared tasks, some leaned forward and became more animated, often smiling or laughing lightly, indicating enthusiasm, openness, and enjoyment of collaboration. When reflecting on encouragement from peers and teachers, their expressions often became brighter, with more expressive tone and visible smiles, suggesting gratitude, confidence, and emotional support that helped sustain their participation. However, when recalling moments of nervousness or hesitation, some showed pauses, lowered gaze, or quieter speech, reflecting uncertainty or self-doubt, though these expressions often shifted positively when they described receiving encouragement. Overall, I observed that relatedness in Physical Education was communicated not only through words but also through facial expressions, tone, and gestures, highlighting PE as a social space that fosters connection, confidence, and engagement.

Motivation in Engaging Physical Activities

I was considering whether my participants' motivation in engaging in physical activities might be connected to their involvement in Physical Education. From their responses, four key ideas emerged: integrated drive, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and autonomous force. Together, these ideas describe how their motivation is experienced and shaped in PE.

In reflecting on the participants' experiences, it became evident that motivation in Physical Education is not a single, isolated construct but a dynamic interplay of internal and external influences. As one participant explained, this can be understood as an integrated drive, wherein personal effort and environmental support work together in shaping engagement. One respondent shared:

“Ang akong motivation sa PE gikan sa akong kaugalingong paningkamot ug sa suporta sa akong classmates ug teacher.” (My motivation in PE comes from both my own effort and support from my classmates and teacher.) (P1, IDI Line No. 98–99).

In the same way, another participant emphasized this combination, stating:

“Ang akong motivation sa PE gikan sa akong personal nga interest nga mahimong active ug sa external factors sama sa classmates, klase sa activities, ug labi na sa support sa teacher.” (My motivation in PE comes from both my personal interest in being active and external factors like classmates, type of activities, and especially teacher support) (P6, IDI Line No. 680–682).

As each account suggests, motivation becomes stronger when internal willingness and external encouragement are aligned.

Further narratives revealed that motivation is also grounded in intrinsic motivation, particularly through enjoyment, interest, and satisfaction in the activity itself. One participant noted:

“Usahay ma-enjoy gyud nako ang activity, labi na kung lingaw o engaging siya.” (Sometimes I genuinely enjoy the activity, especially if it's fun or engaging.) (P3, Line No. 331–332).

As another participant similarly implied, engagement becomes more meaningful when students find

personal enjoyment in what they are doing. In these moments, participation is not driven by obligation, but by genuine interest, which naturally sustains effort and focus during Physical Education activities.

At the same time, one participant after another acknowledged the presence of extrinsic motivation, where engagement is influenced by external factors such as grades, teachers, and peers. One participant shared:

“Usahay motivated ko tungod sa grades, sa akong teacher, o sa akong classmates.” (Other times, I’m motivated because of grades, my teacher, or my classmates.) (P2, Line No. 219–220).

In the same direction, another participant added:

“Gina-isip pud nako ang grades, labi na kung makaapekto siya sa akong overall average.” (I also think about grades, especially when it affects my overall average.) (P3, Line No. 332–333).

As these responses showed, external expectations and academic considerations also play a role in sustaining participation and effort in PE.

Beyond individual and external influences, the learning environment itself emerged as a powerful shaping force of motivation, which I conceptualized as an autonomous supportive force. One participant explained:

“Mas meaningful ang PE kung ang mga estudyante mabati nga suportado ug kampante, ug naa silay kagawasan nga ma-enjoy ang physical activity sa ilang kaugalingong pace.” (PE is more meaningful when students feel supported and confident, and free to enjoy physical activity at their own pace.) (P6, Line No. 700–701).

In the same way, another participant expressed:

“Kung mas gamay ang pressure ug mas daghan ang encouragement gikan sa teachers, mas mahimong enjoyable ang PE.” (Less pressure and more encouragement from teachers would make it more enjoyable.) (P2, Line No. 225–226).

As each narrative reveals, motivation is strengthened when students experience a supportive environment that reduces pressure while encouraging participation.

When I conducted the face-to-face interviews, I observed that participants showed meaningful emotional expressions when discussing their motivation in Physical Education, with steady tones, eye contact, and nodding that suggested reflection and awareness of how internal effort and external support influence their participation. When describing an integrated drive, they often showed thoughtful pauses and subtle smiles, especially when mentioning teachers and classmates, indicating appreciation and support. Their expressions became more animated when talking about intrinsic motivation, with livelier tones and soft smiles reflecting enjoyment and engagement, while discussions of extrinsic motivation such as grades were more neutral and reflective, suggesting awareness of responsibility or pressure. When describing autonomy-supportive environments, participants showed relaxed posture and brighter expressions, while references to pressure were linked with quieter speech or lowered gaze. Overall, motivation in Physical Education was expressed through both verbal and nonverbal cues, reflecting a dynamic interaction of enjoyment, responsibility, and environmental support

Summary of Findings

1. The sense of autonomy in engaging in physical activities are perceived independence which allows the students to select activities based on their personal interest and perceived catalyst which enhances their motivation and reduces their stress.
2. Participants’ competence in engaging in physical activities are described as their perceived ability and

skill development. Skill development is improvement of physical skills through instruction, practice, and feedback. Perceived capability which the students' belief in their ability to perform physical tasks successfully, as well as improvement and mastery of skills that lead to a sense of achievement.

3. Participants' relatedness in engaging in physical activities are described as their sense of connection and motivational support. Sense of connection which is shown through peer interactions that build sense of connection and belongingness. Motivational Support from classmates and teachers that boosts confidence and persistence, leading to greater enjoyment during group activities.
4. Participants' motivation in engaging in physical activities is described as a combination of internal and external influences. It includes intrinsic motivation from enjoyment and interest, extrinsic motivation from grades, teachers, and peers, and an integrated drive supported by personal effort and external factors. An autonomous force environment also enhances motivation by reducing pressure and encouraging participation, making engagement in Physical Education more meaningful and sustained.

Discussions

This section presents the discussion of the findings in relation to existing literature and theoretical perspectives. The themes derived from the participants are examined alongside relevant studies.

Select Activities Based on Personal Interests

I found out that the sense of autonomy in engaging in physical activities include perceived independence which allows the students to select activities based on their personal interest and perceived catalyst, which enhances their motivation and reduces their stress. This finding agrees with the claims of Sánchez-Oliva et al. (2020), stating that autonomy-supportive environments in Physical Education enhance students' self-determined motivation by fostering a sense of ownership and independence in choosing activities aligned with their personal interests, leading to more meaningful and sustained participation. Similarly, my finding affirms Baños et al. (2020), who found that autonomy support increases students' enjoyment and satisfaction while reducing negative experiences such as boredom and psychological pressure, thereby enhancing emotional well-being and promoting more active engagement in Physical Education.

In contrast, my current finding disagrees with Noll et al. (2020), who stated that autonomy alone does not always enhance motivation and may even reduce engagement when it is not supported by sufficient structure and guidance. While their finding emphasized that autonomy without clear direction or perceived competence can lead to unstable or lower motivation, my finding showed that autonomy in Physical Education is not solely dependent on independence but is also shaped by supportive teaching practices, clear expectations, and guided structure that help students maintain engagement, strengthen confidence, and sustain meaningful participation.

Skill Development and Confidence in Physical Activity Engagement

Herewith, I also claim that student's competence in engaging in physical activities are described as their perceived ability and skill development. Skill development is improvement of physical skills through instruction, practice, and feedback. Perceived capability is the students' belief in their ability to perform physical tasks successfully, as well as improvement and mastery of skills that lead to a sense of achievement. With this claim I affirm the claims of Gil-Arias et al. (2020), stating that students' perceived competence improves when they are engaged in structured Physical Education programs that provide clear instruction, guided practice, and constructive feedback, allowing them to develop physical skills and confidence through mastery experiences. Similarly, my finding affirms Taylor and MacLeod (2024), who found that competence is strengthened when learners are given repeated opportunities for skill development and mastery-oriented learning, enabling them to recognize their progress and build confidence in successfully performing physical activities.

However, my current finding disagrees with Noll et al. (2020), who stated that competence and skill development alone may not consistently lead to higher motivation or engagement. While their finding emphasized that perceived competence can have limited impact when it is not supported by other motivational factors such as relatedness or social connection within the learning environment, my finding showed that competence in Physical Education is more effectively developed and sustained when it is accompanied by supportive interpersonal

relationships, meaningful peer and teacher interactions, and a positive classroom climate that together enhance students' engagement and motivation.

Interactions and Enjoyment During Activities

In line also with the findings of my study, I identified that student's relatedness in engaging in physical activities are described as their sense of connection and motivational support. Sense of connection is shown through peer interactions that build sense of connection and belongingness. Motivational support from classmates and teachers boosts confidence and persistence, leading to greater enjoyment during group activities. Such findings from my study corroborate the claims of Ferraz et al. (2021), stating that students' motivation in Physical Education is influenced by both intrinsic factors, such as enjoyment and interest, and extrinsic factors, including grades, teacher expectations, and peer influence, demonstrating that motivation is shaped by multiple interacting sources. Similarly, my finding affirms Wang et al. (2025), who found that motivation develops through the integration of internal and external influences, where intrinsic enjoyment and external support work together to promote more sustained and self-determined engagement in Physical Education.

In contrast, my current finding disagrees with Howard et al. (2021), who stated that the combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation may not always lead to sustained engagement in Physical Education, particularly when external factors are highly controlling. While their finding emphasized that students may experience reduced interest and well-being when external incentives such as grades or teacher expectations undermine their sense of autonomy, my finding showed that motivation in Physical Education is more effectively sustained when extrinsic factors are used in a supportive way that enhances rather than controls students' intrinsic motivation within an autonomy-supportive learning environment.

Multidimensional Motivation

Based on the results of my study, I found that student's motivation in engaging in physical activities is described as a combination of internal and external influences. It includes intrinsic motivation from enjoyment and interest, extrinsic motivation from grades, teachers, and peers, and an integrated drive supported by personal effort and external factors. An autonomous force environment also enhances motivation by reducing pressure and encouraging participation, making engagement in Physical Education more meaningful and sustained. My findings are in line with the claims of Hu et al. (2022), stating that students' motivation in Physical Education is influenced by both intrinsic factors, such as enjoyment and personal interest, and extrinsic factors, including instructional methods and external support, demonstrating that motivation develops through the interaction of internal and environmental influences. Similarly, my finding affirms Simón-Chico et al. (2023), who found that students' motivation and engagement are enhanced when learning environments support both internal interest and external factors such as structured activities and supportive teaching, leading to more meaningful and sustained participation in Physical Education.

In contrast, my current finding disagrees with Van den Broeck et al. (2021), who stated that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation do not always function as a unified or equally beneficial combination. While their meta-analysis emphasized that intrinsic motivation is strongly linked to well-being and that certain forms of extrinsic motivation, particularly externally controlled regulation, may have limited or even negative associations with engagement and psychological outcomes, my finding showed that motivation in Physical Education is more effectively sustained when intrinsic and extrinsic factors are integrated in a supportive manner that strengthens students' internal drive and encourages meaningful participation within an autonomy-supportive learning environment.

Future Direction

Future research may examine the factors influencing students' motivation, engagement, and participation in Physical Education by employing multiple regression analysis. Specifically, selection of activities based on personal interests, skill development and confidence in physical activity engagement, and interactions and enjoyment during activities may be treated as determinant variables. These may be used to identify which factors significantly predict students' motivation toward engagement in physical education activities, which serves as the criterion variable.

Additionally, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) may be conducted to develop and validate an instrument based on these determinants, with their subthemes serving as measurable indicators. Data suitability may be assessed

using the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity. Principal axis factoring and Promax rotation may be applied to extract underlying factors. Furthermore, the reliability of the identified constructs may be evaluated using Cronbach’s alpha. Expanding the study across different year levels, school contexts, and Physical Education program structures may further enhance the generalizability of the findings.

Implications for practice

The finding of my study highlights practical ways to strengthen students’ motivation and engagement in Physical Education (PE). PE teachers may promote autonomy by allowing students to choose activities based on their personal interests, which may enhance perceived independence and intrinsic motivation. Providing opportunities for choice may serve as a motivational catalyst that encourages active participation. School leaders, through club officers, may create a positive and enjoyable learning environment by promoting inclusive and supportive policies, ensuring safe and well-equipped spaces, and encouraging participation through structured and engaging activities such as fitness challenges, dance sessions, and cooperative games which are done during intramurals. These activities may ultimately increase the participation of students.

To build student competence, PE teachers may focus on developing physical skills and confidence through structured activities by implementing skill-based drills, progressive fitness circuits, and modified games such as Capture the Flag, relay races, and small-sided games. They may also incorporate creative physical activities such as obstacle course challenges and dance-based games, along with providing continuous and specific feedback. These strategies may help strengthen students’ perceived capability, improve engagement, and sustain their participation in physical activities.

At the same time, relatedness may be strengthened by fostering positive social interactions through activities such as partner work, team-building games, peer-assisted tasks, and cooperative challenges (e.g., group relays, trust-based activities, and small-group problem-solving games). Teachers may create a supportive classroom environment by encouraging teamwork, open communication, and inclusive participation. Motivational support may be reinforced through peer encouragement, group recognition, and teacher feedback during activities. These strategies may help enhance students’ sense of belonging, increase engagement, and sustain their participation in Physical Education.

My finding indicates that students’ motivation, engagement, and participation in PE may be enhanced by supporting autonomy through choice, building competence through structured and creative skill-based activities with feedback, fostering relatedness through positive social interactions, and integrating intrinsic and extrinsic motivation strategies.

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Appendix A. Interview Guide Questions

Research Title: Motivation in Physical Education Activity Engagement: Perceptions of Senior High School Students

Research Questions	Interview Questions	Probing Questions
What are the experiences of students in describing their sense of autonomy in Physical Education?	Can you describe your experiences of making choices or having freedom in your Physical Education classes?	1.1 How much freedom do you feel you have when participating in PE activities? 1.2 In what ways does your PE teacher allow you to express your preferences or make choices? 1.3 How does having (or lacking) control over PE activities affect your motivation to participate?
What are the experiences of students in developing and perceiving their competence in Physical Education?	Can you share your experiences of feeling capable or confident when participating in PE activities?	2.1 How confident do you usually feel when performing the activities in PE? 2.2 Can you describe a specific time when you felt successful in PE? What contributed to that feeling? How do PE tasks or activities affect your belief in your physical abilities? 2.3 How does teacher feedback influence your confidence and willingness to try?
What are the experiences of students building relatedness in Physical Education?	How would you describe your experiences of connecting and building relationships with others during PE?	3.1 How do your relationships with classmates affect your motivation? 3.2 Can you share an experience where support or encouragement from classmates or your teacher motivated you? 3.3 How important is it for you to feel connected with others when participating in PE?
What are the experiences of students with the interplay of their motivational needs in relation to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation?	How would you describe your overall motivational experience in PE, considering both your internal drive and external influences?	4.1 Looking back, what changes would make PE more enjoyable and motivating for you? 4.2 What improvements do you think would help you and your classmates feel more motivated in PE? 4.3 Is there anything else you would

		like to share about your experiences or motivation in Physical Education?
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