



Original article. Perceived competence as a predictor of exercise motivation in Physical Education: a pathway to sustained health-promoting behaviors. Vol. 12, nº. 4; p. 1-25, August 2026.

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Perceived competence as a predictor of exercise motivation in Physical Education: a pathway to sustained health-promoting behaviors

La competencia percibida como predictor de la motivación hacia el ejercicio en la Educación Física: una vía hacia conductas sostenidas de promoción de la salud

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Abstract

This study examined perceived competence as a predictor of exercise motivation in Physical Education, aiming to clarify how students' self-perceptions of ability influence their motivational orientation toward physical activity. A quantitative research design, specifically descriptive-correlational, was employed involving 425 university students selected through simple random sampling. Data were collected using standardized instruments, including the Perceived Competence Scale and the Behavioral Regulation in Exercise Questionnaire-3, both of which demonstrated acceptable reliability indices. Descriptive statistics such as mean and composite mean were used to assess levels of perceived competence and exercise motivation, while Spearman's rank-order correlation was utilized to test the relationship between the variables. Results revealed that perceived competence was very high ($M = 3.34$), with strong indicators across skill competence ($M = 3.33$), improvement perception ($M = 3.42$), and comparative competence ($M = 3.26$). Exercise motivation was also found to be highly elevated ($M = 3.52$), encompassing intrinsic motivation ($M = 3.51$), identified regulation ($M = 3.56$), and external motivation ($M = 3.49$). Correlation analysis indicated a strong and statistically significant relationship between perceived competence and exercise motivation ($r = .724$, $p = .001$). These findings suggest that students' belief in their physical abilities is closely associated with their level of motivation to engage in exercise, reflecting the importance of psychological determinants in Physical Education. The results further imply that competence perceptions play a vital role in shaping students' engagement and persistence in physical activity. In conclusion, perceived competence serves as a critical predictor of exercise motivation, reinforcing its importance in understanding and promoting sustained participation in health-related behaviors among university students.

Keywords: autonomous regulation; physical activity engagement; psychological determinants; self-efficacy; student motivation

Resumen

Este estudio examinó la competencia percibida como predictor de la motivación hacia el ejercicio en la Educación Física, con el objetivo de aclarar cómo las autopercepciones de capacidad de los estudiantes influyen en su orientación motivacional hacia la actividad física. Se empleó un diseño de investigación cuantitativo, específicamente de tipo descriptivo-correlacional, con la participación de 733 estudiantes universitarios seleccionados mediante muestreo aleatorio simple. Los datos se recopilaban utilizando instrumentos estandarizados, incluyendo la Escala de Competencia Percibida y el Cuestionario de Regulación Conductual en el Ejercicio-3, ambos con índices de confiabilidad aceptables. Se utilizaron estadísticas descriptivas como la media y la media compuesta para evaluar los niveles de competencia percibida y motivación hacia el ejercicio, mientras que la correlación de rangos de Spearman se empleó para analizar la relación entre las variables. Los resultados revelaron que la competencia percibida fue muy alta ($M = 3.34$), con indicadores sólidos en competencia de habilidades ($M = 3.33$), percepción de mejora ($M = 3.42$) y competencia comparativa ($M = 3.26$). La motivación hacia el ejercicio también se encontró en un nivel elevado ($M = 3.52$), abarcando motivación intrínseca ($M = 3.51$), regulación identificada ($M = 3.56$) y motivación

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externa ($M = 3.49$). El análisis de correlación indicó una relación fuerte y estadísticamente significativa entre la competencia percibida y la motivación hacia el ejercicio ($r = .724$, $p = .001$). Estos hallazgos sugieren que la creencia de los estudiantes en sus habilidades físicas está estrechamente asociada con su nivel de motivación para participar en el ejercicio, lo que refleja la importancia de los determinantes psicológicos en la Educación Física. Los resultados también implican que las percepciones de competencia desempeñan un papel vital en la configuración del compromiso y la persistencia de los estudiantes en la actividad física. En conclusión, la competencia percibida actúa como un predictor clave de la motivación hacia el ejercicio, reforzando su relevancia para comprender y promover la participación sostenida en conductas relacionadas con la salud entre estudiantes universitarios.

Palabras clave: autorregulación; compromiso con la actividad física; determinantes psicológicos; autoeficacia; motivación estudiantil

Introduction

Exercise motivation in Physical Education refers to the internal and external drives that energize, direct, and sustain students' participation in physical activity (Mainsbridge et al., 2025). It encompasses a continuum of regulatory processes, ranging from intrinsic motivation characterized by enjoyment and personal interest to extrinsic forms driven by external rewards or pressures (Longakit et al., 2025). Within educational settings, motivation plays a central role in shaping students' engagement, persistence, and overall attitude toward physical activity (Gapa & Tagare Jr, 2023). High levels of exercise motivation are consistently associated with increased participation and adherence to active lifestyles among students. Conversely, diminished motivation often corresponds with disengagement and reduced involvement in Physical Education contexts (Lin & Zhao, 2025).

Perceived competence refers to an individual's belief in their capability to successfully perform specific tasks or activities, particularly within achievement-oriented contexts such as Physical Education (Martinen et al., 2020). It is a central construct in motivational psychology, reflecting how individuals evaluate their own skills and effectiveness in performing physical activities (Zalech, 2021). Students with high perceived competence are more likely to approach tasks with confidence, persist in the face of challenges, and experience greater satisfaction in their performance. This perception is shaped by prior experiences, feedback from teachers, and social comparisons within the learning environment (Dyson et al., 2021). As a psychological



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determinant, perceived competence has been identified as a critical factor influencing both affective and behavioral outcomes in physical activity settings (Esser-Noethlichs & Hegland, 2025).

Despite the recognized importance of exercise motivation, many students exhibit declining levels of engagement in Physical Education, often resulting in sedentary behaviors and poor health outcomes (Velez, 2023). Low motivation has been linked to a lack of interest, perceived irrelevance of activities, and negative past experiences in physical activity contexts (Jovita et al., 2025). At the same time, perceived competence among students remains a persistent concern, as many individuals report feelings of inadequacy and low confidence in their physical abilities (Barro et al., 2025). These perceptions are often exacerbated by performance-oriented environments and limited individualized support from educators (Webster et al., 2022). The coexistence of low motivation and diminished perceived competence contributes to a cycle of disengagement, limiting students' participation and long-term adherence to physical activity (Richards et al., 2022). Addressing these intertwined challenges is essential in understanding the psychological barriers that hinder active lifestyles among students (Jørgensen et al., 2020).

Existing research has extensively examined exercise motivation within Physical Education, highlighting its complex nature and its influence on student behavior. Studies have shown that intrinsically motivated students are more likely to demonstrate sustained engagement and enjoyment in physical activities (Storr et al., 2022). Additionally, the quality of motivation, rather than merely its quantity, has been emphasized as a crucial determinant of long-term participation (Mancera et al., 2025). Empirical findings indicate that supportive learning environments and autonomy-enhancing teaching strategies significantly foster higher levels of motivation among students (Rayon, 2025). Furthermore, motivation has been linked to positive psychological outcomes, including improved well-being and reduced anxiety in Physical Education settings (Aton, 2025).

Research on perceived competence has consistently underscored its pivotal role in shaping students' engagement and performance in Physical Education. Students who perceive themselves as competent are more likely to participate actively, demonstrate persistence, and exhibit higher levels of enjoyment in physical activities (Guerrero et al.,



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2025). Empirical studies have also highlighted that perceived competence is influenced by instructional practices, feedback mechanisms, and peer interactions within the classroom (Piores et al., 2023). Moreover, it has been identified as a strong predictor of both motivational and behavioral outcomes, reinforcing its significance in educational contexts (Peromingan et al., 2025). The relationship between perceived competence and positive affective responses further strengthens its role as a foundational psychological construct in Physical Education research (Subang, 2022).

Despite the growing body of literature on exercise motivation and perceived competence, there remains insufficient empirical evidence examining the direct relationship between these variables within Physical Education contexts. While previous studies have explored each construct independently, limited attention has been given to understanding how perceived competence functions as a predictor of exercise motivation among students. This gap restricts a comprehensive understanding of the psychological mechanisms that underpin sustained engagement in physical activity. The present study seeks to address this limitation by investigating the extent to which perceived competence influences exercise motivation. Specifically, it aims to answer the general research question: To what extent does perceived competence predict exercise motivation in Physical Education?

This study holds significant implications for students, as it provides insights into the psychological factors that enhance motivation and engagement in Physical Education. By identifying perceived competence as a key predictor, the findings can inform strategies that foster confidence and encourage active participation among learners. For educators, the results offer a deeper understanding of how instructional practices can be structured to support students' psychological needs and improve motivation. The study also contributes to the broader body of knowledge by advancing theoretical perspectives on motivation within educational and physical activity contexts. Its findings have the potential to inform evidence-based interventions aimed at promoting sustained health-promoting behaviors among students.

At a broader level, this research addresses an urgent need to combat declining physical activity levels and the increasing prevalence of sedentary lifestyles among young populations. By elucidating the relationship between perceived competence and exercise

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motivation, the study offers a novel perspective on how psychological constructs can be leveraged to promote long-term engagement in physical activity. Its contribution extends beyond Physical Education, providing valuable insights for health promotion, sports psychology, and educational policy. The study's emphasis on a predictive framework enhances its relevance for future research employing advanced analytical approaches such as structural equation modeling. Ultimately, this research positions itself as a meaningful step toward developing sustainable, theory-driven strategies that support lifelong health and well-being.

Methods and instrumentation

Research design

This study employed a quantitative research design, specifically utilizing a descriptive-correlational approach to examine the relationship between perceived competence and exercise motivation among university students. Quantitative research is a systematic investigation that focuses on quantifying variables and analyzing numerical data to identify patterns, relationships, or effects (Creswell, 2014). It emphasizes objectivity, measurement, and statistical analysis to draw valid and generalizable conclusions. Descriptive-correlational design, on the other hand, is used to determine the degree and direction of relationships between variables without manipulating them (Fraenkel et al., 2012). This approach allows researchers to explore naturally occurring associations among variables within a given population.

The use of a quantitative descriptive-correlational design is appropriate for this study as it seeks to examine the predictive relationship between perceived competence and exercise motivation without introducing experimental manipulation. This design enables the researcher to gather measurable data from a relatively large sample, ensuring statistical robustness and generalizability of findings. It also allows for the identification of trends and associations that can inform theoretical and practical implications in Physical Education. Given that both variables are psychological constructs that can be quantified through validated instruments, this approach provides a rigorous and objective framework for analysis. Furthermore, it supports the study's aim of establishing whether



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perceived competence significantly predicts exercise motivation among university students.

Respondents of the study

The respondents of this study consisted of 733 university students enrolled in various academic programs, representing a diverse population in terms of age, gender, and academic discipline. These participants were selected using simple random sampling, a probability sampling technique in which each member of the population has an equal and independent chance of being chosen (Etikan & Bala, 2017). This method ensures that the sample is representative of the larger population, thereby minimizing selection bias and enhancing the validity of the results. University students were deemed appropriate respondents due to their active participation in Physical Education and exposure to structured physical activity environments. The use of simple random sampling is particularly suitable for this study as it promotes fairness in selection and supports the generalizability of findings across the student population.

Research instrument

This study utilized standardized and validated questionnaires to measure both perceived competence and exercise motivation. Perceived competence was assessed using the Perceived Competence Scale (Cairney et al., 2012), which has demonstrated strong internal consistency with a reported Cronbach's alpha of 0.80 and above. Exercise motivation was measured using the Behavioral Regulation in Exercise Questionnaire (Silverman, 2017), showing reliability coefficients ranging from 0.73 to 0.89 across its subscales. These instruments are widely used in Physical Education and exercise psychology research due to their strong psychometric properties and theoretical grounding in motivation theory. The questionnaires were adapted to suit the context of Physical Education among university students while maintaining their original structure and intent. The use of these validated tools ensures the reliability and validity of the data collected in this study.

Statistical procedure and interpretation

This study employed both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics, including mean and composite mean, were used to summarize and describe the levels of perceived competence and exercise motivation



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among the respondents. For inferential analysis, Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient was utilized to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between the two variables. Spearman correlation is particularly appropriate for this study as it does not assume normal distribution of data and is suitable for ordinal or non-parametric data derived from Likert-scale questionnaires. This method provides a robust measure of association, especially when the data may not meet the assumptions required for parametric tests. The combination of these statistical tools allows for a comprehensive analysis of both the characteristics and relationships of the variables under investigation.



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Results

Table 1 presents the level of perceived competence in Physical Education among the respondents across three dimensions: skill competence, improvement perception, and comparative competence. It highlights the mean scores and corresponding verbal descriptions for each indicator and dimension. The table also provides the composite and grand mean to reflect the overall perceived competence of the students.

Table 1: Perceived Competence in Physical Education

Statements	Mean	Verbal Description
A. Skill Competence		
4. I feel skilled in different physical activities.	3.36	Strongly Agree
3. I perform well in sports and exercises.	3.35	Strongly Agree
5. I can execute movements effectively.	3.34	Strongly Agree
1. I am good at performing physical activities.	3.31	Strongly Agree
2. I have strong skills in PE.	3.28	Strongly Agree
Composite Mean	3.33	Very High Perceived Competence
B. Improvement Perception		
4. I improve when I practice regularly.	3.48	Strongly Agree
1. I see improvement in my physical abilities.	3.41	Strongly Agree
3. I can notice progress in my skills.	3.41	Strongly Agree
2. I feel that I am getting better in PE.	3.40	Strongly Agree
5. I feel more capable over time.	3.39	Strongly Agree
Composite Mean	3.42	Very High Perceived Competence
C. Comparative Competence		
3. I believe I am capable in group activities.	3.34	Strongly Agree
4. I can keep up with others in PE tasks.	3.32	Strongly Agree
5. I feel competent when working with peers.	3.30	Strongly Agree
2. I feel confident in my ability compared to others.	3.22	Agree
1. I perform well compared to my classmates.	3.13	Agree
Composite Mean	3.26	Very High Perceived Competence
Grand Mean	3.34	Very High Perceived Competence

Scale Range	Verbal Interpretation	Analytical Meaning
3.26 – 4.00	Very High Perceived Competence	Indicates a strong perception of one's ability to perform effectively in Physical Education activities.
2.51 – 3.25	High Perceived Competence	Reflects a generally positive belief in one's capability to perform Physical Education tasks.
1.76 – 2.50	Low Perceived Competence	Suggests limited confidence in one's ability to perform Physical Education activities effectively.
1.00 – 1.75	Very Low Perceived Competence	Indicates a poor perception of ability that may hinder participation and performance in Physical Education.



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Table 2 shows the level of exercise motivation among the respondents, categorized into intrinsic motivation, identified regulation, and external motivation. It displays the mean scores and verbal interpretations for each statement under the respective dimensions. The composite and grand mean are included to describe the overall motivation level of the participants.

Table 2: Exercise Motivation among the Respondents

Statements	Mean	Verbal Description
A. Intrinsic Motivation		
4. I enjoy learning new physical skills.	3.55	Strongly Agree
5. I feel good when I am physically active.	3.53	Strongly Agree
2. I feel satisfied when I engage in physical activities.	3.52	Strongly Agree
1. I participate in exercise because I enjoy it.	3.48	Strongly Agree
3. I exercise because it is fun.	3.47	Strongly Agree
Composite Mean	3.51	Highly Motivated
B. Identified Regulation		
5. I think exercise is important for my future well-being.	3.57	Strongly Agree
3. I believe exercise helps me improve myself.	3.56	Strongly Agree
4. I participate in exercise because it is beneficial for me.	3.56	Strongly Agree
1. I exercise because it is important for my health.	3.55	Strongly Agree
2. I value the benefits of physical activity.	3.55	Strongly Agree
Composite Mean	3.56	Highly Motivated
C. External Motivation (Positive Framing)		
6. I am motivated to exercise when others encourage me.	3.50	Strongly Agree
7. I participate in exercise to achieve good performance.	3.50	Strongly Agree
9. I feel motivated when I receive recognition in PE.	3.50	Strongly Agree
10. I try to perform well to gain positive feedback.	3.47	Strongly Agree
8. I exercise to meet expectations in PE.	3.46	Strongly Agree
Composite Mean	3.49	Highly Motivated
Grand Mean	3.52	Highly Motivated

Scale Range	Verbal Interpretation	Analytical Meaning
3.26 – 4.00	Highly Motivated	Indicates strong internal drive and commitment to engage regularly in physical activity.
2.51 – 3.25	Moderately Motivated	Reflects a generally positive willingness to exercise with occasional fluctuations in motivation.
1.76 – 2.50	Low Motivation	Suggests limited drive to engage in physical activity and inconsistent participation.
1.00 – 1.75	Very Low Motivation	Indicates lack of interest or intention to participate in exercise.

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Table 3 presents the test of relationship between perceived competence in Physical Education and exercise motivation. It includes the correlation coefficient, p-value, and interpretation of the relationship between the variables. The table provides evidence on whether the relationship between the two variables is statistically significant.

Table 3. Test of Relationships Between the Variables

Variables	Correlation Coefficient	p-value	Interpretation
Perceived Competence in Physical Education and Exercise Motivation	.724	.001	Significant

Discussion

Perceived competence in physical education by the respondents

Based on the results, the first domain of the perceived competence in Physical Education which is **skill competence**, the highest mean is the statement “I feel skilled in different physical activities.” which got a mean of 3.36 with a verbal interpretation of Strongly Agree. Meanwhile, the lowest mean is the statement “I have strong skills in PE.” which got a mean of 3.28 with a verbal interpretation of Strongly Agree. The remaining indicators also fall within a narrow range, indicating consistency in responses among students regarding their skill-related abilities. Overall, for this domain, it had a composite mean of 3.33 with a verbal interpretation of Very High Perceived Competence.

This means that students generally perceive themselves as capable and proficient in performing a variety of physical activities within the Physical Education context. This implies that their self-assessment of skill execution is not limited to isolated tasks but extends across different forms of movement and exercise. It further suggests that students possess a stable sense of confidence in their physical abilities, which may shape how they approach participation and performance. Such a perception reflects a strong internal belief system that supports engagement and persistence in physical tasks.

These findings are consistent with prior studies indicating that perceived skill competence is strongly associated with positive engagement in Physical Education settings. Students who believe they are skilled tend to participate more actively and exhibit higher levels of confidence during physical activities (Bahir et al., 2023).

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Moreover, competence perceptions have been shown to influence students' willingness to try new activities and sustain effort despite challenges (Smith et al., 2022). Research also highlights that consistent positive self-evaluations of skills contribute to a more adaptive motivational pattern in educational contexts (Venter, 2022).

Further, in the second domain of perceived competence which is improvement perception, the highest mean is the statement "I improve when I practice regularly." which got a mean of 3.48 with a verbal interpretation of Strongly Agree. Meanwhile, the lowest mean is the statement "I feel more capable over time." which got a mean of 3.39 with a verbal interpretation of Strongly Agree. The responses indicate that students strongly acknowledge their ability to improve through consistent effort and practice. Overall, for this domain, it had a composite mean of 3.42 with a verbal interpretation of Very High Perceived Competence.

This means that students recognize growth and development as integral components of their physical learning experience. This implies that their competence is not viewed as fixed but rather as something that evolves through continuous engagement and effort. It also reflects an internalized understanding of progress, where improvement is perceived as achievable and observable over time. Such a mindset suggests that students are likely to interpret challenges as opportunities for development rather than barriers to participation.

Moreover, these findings align with literature emphasizing the importance of perceived improvement in fostering sustained engagement in Physical Education. Students who recognize their progress are more likely to develop a sense of mastery and persistence in physical tasks (McNamara et al., 2022). Additionally, perceptions of improvement have been linked to higher levels of satisfaction and continued participation in exercise-related activities (Chen et al., 2025). Empirical evidence also supports that recognizing personal progress enhances students' confidence and reinforces positive behavioral patterns in physical activity contexts (González-Calvo et al., 2021).

Furthermore, in the third domain of perceived competence which is comparative competence, the highest mean is the statement "I believe I am capable in group activities." which got a mean of 3.34 with a verbal interpretation of Strongly Agree. Meanwhile, the lowest mean is the statement "I perform well compared to my classmates." which got a

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mean of 3.13 with a verbal interpretation of Agree. While all indicators remain positive, there is a slight variation in how students perceive their abilities relative to others. Overall, for this domain, it had a composite mean of 3.26 with a verbal interpretation of Very High Perceived Competence.

This means that students generally feel confident in collaborative and group-based physical activities, even when comparisons with peers are involved. This implies that their sense of competence is not entirely diminished by social comparison but remains relatively stable within group contexts. It also suggests that while students acknowledge differences in performance, these comparisons do not significantly undermine their overall confidence. Such a pattern reflects a balanced perception of self-competence, where individuals maintain confidence while being aware of others' abilities.

Further, these results are supported by studies highlighting the role of social comparison in shaping perceived competence in Physical Education. Research indicates that students often evaluate their abilities relative to peers, which can influence their confidence and participation (Rudd et al., 2020). However, when students maintain a positive perception of their abilities within group settings, they are more likely to engage actively and collaboratively (C. Li & Zhang, 2024). Additionally, supportive peer environments have been shown to buffer negative effects of comparison, sustaining students' sense of competence (Rosa & Abad, 2023).

The grand mean for perceived competence in Physical Education is 3.34 with a verbal interpretation of Very High Perceived Competence. This means that, overall, students possess a strong and consistent belief in their ability to perform effectively across various physical activities. This implies that their confidence is not limited to specific domains but extends broadly across skill execution, improvement, and social comparison contexts. It further indicates a well-established perception of competence that likely supports active engagement and sustained participation in Physical Education.

These findings are supported by existing literature emphasizing the central role of perceived competence in shaping students' experiences in Physical Education. High levels of perceived competence have been consistently associated with increased participation, enjoyment, and persistence in physical activity (Magalona, 2025). Moreover, students with strong competence beliefs tend to exhibit more adaptive



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motivational patterns and positive behavioral outcomes (Ali et al., 2021). Empirical evidence also suggests that perceived competence serves as a foundational psychological factor influencing long-term engagement in health-promoting behaviors (Dong et al., 2023).

Exercise motivation among the respondents

Based on the results, the first domain of the exercise motivation which is intrinsic motivation, the highest mean is the statement “I enjoy learning new physical skills.” which got a mean of 3.55 with a verbal interpretation of Strongly Agree. Meanwhile, the lowest mean is the statement “I exercise because it is fun.” which got a mean of 3.47 with a verbal interpretation of Strongly Agree. The responses across all indicators remain consistently high, reflecting strong internal enjoyment and satisfaction derived from physical activity. Overall, for this domain, it had a composite mean of 3.51 with a verbal interpretation of Highly Motivated.

This means that students are primarily driven by internal factors such as enjoyment, interest, and satisfaction when engaging in physical activities. This implies that their participation is largely self-determined and rooted in personal fulfillment rather than external pressures. It also suggests that physical activity is perceived as inherently rewarding, which strengthens sustained engagement. Such internalized motivation reflects a deeper psychological connection to exercise, where the activity itself becomes the source of gratification.

These findings are supported by studies emphasizing the importance of intrinsic motivation in fostering long-term participation in physical activity. Intrinsically motivated individuals are more likely to engage consistently and experience greater enjoyment in exercise contexts (Jeong & So, 2020). Moreover, intrinsic motivation has been linked to enhanced psychological well-being and reduced dropout rates in Physical Education (Mesias & Pelicano, 2024). Research further indicates that enjoyment-driven participation promotes sustained adherence to active lifestyles over time (García-Fariña, 2025).

Further, in the second domain of exercise motivation which is identified regulation, the highest mean is the statement “I think exercise is important for my future well-being.” which got a mean of 3.57 with a verbal interpretation of Strongly Agree.

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Meanwhile, the lowest mean is the statement “I value the benefits of physical activity.” which got a mean of 3.55 with a verbal interpretation of Strongly Agree. The results indicate that students strongly recognize the personal importance and benefits of engaging in physical activity. Overall, for this domain, it had a composite mean of 3.56 with a verbal interpretation of Highly Motivated.

This means that students engage in exercise because they consciously value its outcomes and relevance to their personal goals. This implies that their motivation is guided by a sense of purpose and recognition of long-term benefits, rather than mere obligation. It also reflects a level of internalization where external goals, such as health and well-being, are integrated into their personal value system. Such motivation demonstrates a more autonomous form of regulation that supports consistent participation in physical activities.

Moreover, these findings align with existing research highlighting the role of identified regulation in sustaining exercise behavior. Individuals who value the benefits of physical activity are more likely to maintain consistent participation over time (Liu & Zhang, 2024). Identified regulation has also been associated with greater persistence and commitment to exercise, even in the absence of immediate enjoyment. Empirical studies further show that recognizing the personal importance of exercise enhances adherence and promotes healthier behavioral patterns (Burhaein et al., 2020).

Furthermore, in the third domain of exercise motivation which is external motivation (positive framing), the highest mean is the statement “I am motivated to exercise when others encourage me.” which got a mean of 3.50 with a verbal interpretation of Strongly Agree. Meanwhile, the lowest mean is the statement “I exercise to meet expectations in PE.” which got a mean of 3.46 with a verbal interpretation of Strongly Agree. The results indicate that external influences such as encouragement, recognition, and expectations also play a role in motivating students. Overall, for this domain, it had a composite mean of 3.49 with a verbal interpretation of Highly Motivated.

This means that students are responsive to external sources of motivation, particularly those framed positively, such as encouragement and recognition. This implies that social factors and environmental cues contribute to their engagement in physical activity. It also suggests that external motivation, when experienced in a supportive and



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affirming manner, can coexist with internal forms of motivation without undermining them. Such a pattern reflects a balanced motivational profile where both internal and external factors influence behavior.

Further, these findings are supported by studies that highlight the role of external regulation in shaping exercise behavior. Positive reinforcement and social encouragement have been shown to enhance participation and performance in Physical Education settings (Kiremitci et al., 2023). Additionally, external motivation, when aligned with supportive environments, can complement intrinsic motivation and sustain engagement (Calderón et al., 2020). Research also indicates that recognition and feedback play a significant role in reinforcing students' commitment to physical activity (Kosholap et al., 2021).

The grand mean for exercise motivation is 3.52 with a verbal interpretation of Highly Motivated. This means that, overall, students demonstrate a strong and consistent drive to engage in physical activity across different forms of motivation. This implies that their motivation is multifaceted, encompassing both internal enjoyment and external influences. It further indicates that students possess a well-established motivational foundation that supports regular participation in exercise. Such a high level of motivation reflects a positive orientation toward physical activity within the Physical Education context.

These findings are supported by literature emphasizing the multidimensional nature of exercise motivation. High levels of motivation, particularly when combining intrinsic and identified forms, have been associated with sustained engagement in physical activity (Sert Gürbüz & Top, 2025). Moreover, a balanced motivational profile contributes to improved psychological outcomes and long-term adherence to exercise behaviors (J. Li et al., 2025). Empirical evidence also suggests that strong motivation serves as a key determinant of active lifestyles and overall well-being (Dizon, 2025).

Relationship between variables

Table 3 presents the relationship between perceived competence in Physical Education and exercise motivation. The computed correlation coefficient is .724, indicating a strong positive association between the two variables. The p-value of .001 shows that the relationship is statistically significant, suggesting that the observed association is unlikely to have occurred by chance. The interpretation provided in the



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table confirms that there is a significant relationship between perceived competence and exercise motivation. These results indicate that higher levels of perceived competence correspond with higher levels of exercise motivation among the respondents.

This means that students who view themselves as capable in Physical Education are more likely to demonstrate stronger motivation to engage in physical activities. This implies that perceptions of ability play a central role in shaping the intensity and direction of motivational processes. It also reflects that competence beliefs are closely tied to how students internalize and respond to physical activity experiences. The strength of the relationship suggests that perceived competence is not merely associated with motivation but is deeply embedded in the psychological mechanisms that drive participation. Such a pattern indicates that confidence in one's abilities is a critical determinant of how individuals approach and sustain engagement in exercise.

These findings are consistent with existing research highlighting the link between perceived competence and motivation in Physical Education contexts. Studies have shown that competence perceptions significantly predict both intrinsic and extrinsic forms of motivation, reinforcing their role as a key psychological factor (Gonçalves et al., 2022). Additionally, research indicates that students with higher perceived competence exhibit stronger motivational orientations and greater persistence in physical activities (Graciano, 2022). Empirical evidence further supports that competence beliefs are strongly associated with increased engagement and positive behavioral outcomes in exercise settings (Koka et al., 2020).

Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the central role of perceived competence as a foundational psychological construct that shapes students' exercise motivation in Physical Education. Students' strong sense of capability reflects a stable and internalized belief in their ability to successfully engage in physical activities. This perception extends across different dimensions, including skill execution, personal improvement, and social comparison, indicating a comprehensive sense of competence. At the same time, exercise motivation emerges as a multifaceted construct, encompassing both internal enjoyment and externally influenced engagement. Together, these variables reflect a dynamic



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interplay between self-perception and motivational processes within the Physical Education context.

The established relationship between perceived competence and exercise motivation highlights the critical influence of self-beliefs on students' motivational orientation. A strong sense of competence appears to reinforce students' willingness to participate, sustain effort, and find meaning in physical activity. This connection suggests that motivation is not merely situational but is deeply rooted in how individuals evaluate their own abilities. The findings further imply that fostering positive competence perceptions may contribute to more enduring forms of motivation, ultimately shaping long-term engagement in health-promoting behaviors. This relationship reinforces the importance of psychological factors in understanding participation patterns in Physical Education.

Future research may expand on these findings by examining additional variables that interact with perceived competence and exercise motivation, such as teacher support, learning climate, or emotional well-being. Longitudinal designs could also provide deeper insights into how these constructs evolve over time and influence sustained physical activity beyond the academic setting. Moreover, exploring diverse populations and educational contexts may enhance the generalizability of the findings. There is also value in employing more advanced analytical approaches to further clarify the mechanisms underlying this relationship. These directions may contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how to support lifelong engagement in physical activity.

Limitations of the study

This study is limited by its reliance on self-reported data, which may be subject to response bias and social desirability effects. The cross-sectional design also restricts the ability to infer causality between perceived competence and exercise motivation. Additionally, the sample was confined to university students, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other age groups or educational settings. The use of standardized questionnaires, while reliable, may not fully capture the complexity of students' experiences in Physical Education. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the results.



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