



Original article. Inclusion of students with special needs from the perspective of the physical education teacher. Vol. 12, n. ° 3; p. 1-20, July 2026. <https://doi.org/10.55040/yqh8yg50>

Inclusion of students with special needs from the perspective of the physical education teacher

Inclusión de estudiantes con necesidades especiales desde la perspectiva del docente de educación física

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Abstract

Physical Education at the primary level plays an important role in promoting inclusive learning environments where all learners, including those with special needs, are provided opportunities to participate in physical activities and social interaction. This study aims to determine the views of physical education teachers regarding the integration of students with special needs in physical education classes. Utilizing a mixed-methods design, the study collected quantitative data using an adapted version of the ATTAS-mm and qualitative data through open-ended questionnaires. The survey evaluated teachers' cognitive, affective, and behavioral attitudes toward inclusive physical education. The results indicate generally affirmative attitudes toward the inclusion of students with special needs, with teachers strongly agreeing that children with low to moderate disabilities should be included in regular classes. However, several challenges were identified, including student reluctance, limited resources, and concerns related to health and safety. The qualitative findings further revealed significant themes such as equal opportunities, empathy, respect, and the importance of belongingness. Teachers also emphasized the need for improved professional development and greater provision of resources to effectively support inclusive practices. The findings suggest that while teachers demonstrate strong commitment to inclusive education, additional institutional support is necessary to address practical barriers and strengthen the implementation of inclusive physical education.

Keywords: inclusive; Physical Education; students with disabilities

Resumen

La Educación Física en primaria desempeña un papel importante en la promoción de entornos de aprendizaje inclusivos donde todos los estudiantes, incluidos aquellos con necesidades especiales, tienen la oportunidad de participar en actividades físicas e interactuar socialmente. Este estudio busca determinar la opinión del profesorado de educación física sobre la integración del alumnado con necesidades especiales en las clases de educación física. Mediante un diseño de métodos mixtos, el estudio recopiló datos cuantitativos mediante una versión adaptada del ATTAS-mm y datos cualitativos mediante cuestionarios abiertos. La encuesta evaluó las actitudes cognitivas, afectivas y conductuales del profesorado hacia la educación física inclusiva. Los resultados indican, en general, actitudes afirmativas hacia la inclusión del alumnado con necesidades especiales, y el profesorado se muestra firmemente de acuerdo en que los niños con discapacidades leves a moderadas deberían ser incluidos en las clases regulares. Sin embargo, se identificaron varios desafíos, como la reticencia del alumnado, la escasez de recursos y las preocupaciones relacionadas con la salud y la seguridad. Los hallazgos cualitativos también revelaron temas importantes como la igualdad de oportunidades, la empatía, el respeto y la importancia del sentido de pertenencia. El profesorado también destacó la necesidad de mejorar el desarrollo profesional y aumentar la dotación de recursos para apoyar eficazmente las prácticas inclusivas. Los hallazgos sugieren que, si bien los docentes demuestran un fuerte compromiso con la educación inclusiva, es necesario apoyo institucional adicional para abordar las barreras prácticas y fortalecer la implementación de la educación física inclusiva.

Palabras clave: inclusiva; Educación Física; estudiantes con discapacidades



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Introduction

In recent years, the field of Physical Education (PE) has increasingly recognized the importance of addressing the diverse abilities and needs of learners through inclusive practices. Inclusive Physical Education (IPE) goes beyond simply allowing students with disabilities to participate in physical activities; it involves the use of inclusive pedagogies that intentionally respond to the learning needs, abilities, and participation levels of all students (Griggs & Medcalf, 2015). These pedagogical approaches emphasize differentiated instruction, flexible teaching strategies, and adaptive activities that enable students with special needs to meaningfully participate alongside their peers in physical education settings.

The theoretical foundation of Inclusive Physical Education is grounded in the principle that all learners should have equal opportunities to develop physical skills, experience movement, and participate in social interactions through physical activity. Within school settings, this principle requires teachers to modify curricula, instructional strategies, and assessment practices to accommodate a wide range of abilities. Such adaptations may include modifying equipment, adjusting rules of games, or designing activities that allow varied levels of participation. Through these strategies, IPE promotes not only physical development but also social inclusion, cooperation, respect, and mutual understanding among students.

A key component of inclusive physical education is the development of a supportive environment that fosters a sense of belonging among all learners. When students with disabilities feel accepted and valued in physical education classes, they are more likely to actively participate and engage in learning activities. This engagement contributes to improved physical well-being, social interaction, and positive attitudes toward physical activity. Moreover, inclusive practices in physical education can challenge traditional barriers related to ability and gender participation, thereby promoting equality and encouraging all students to take part in various physical activities (Guerrero & Guerrero, 2023).

Despite these principles, implementing Inclusive Physical Education remains complex. Students with special needs represent a diverse group with varying physical, cognitive, and learning challenges, which may require individualized accommodations



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and support. Within integrated PE settings, where students with disabilities participate in regular classes, teachers play a critical role in ensuring that activities remain inclusive while maintaining the educational objectives of the lesson. However, research indicates that the experiences of students with disabilities in integrated physical education settings may vary, and questions remain regarding the extent to which these environments truly support meaningful participation (Haegele, 2019). Continuous evaluation and adaptation of teaching practices are therefore necessary to ensure that inclusive PE programs meet the needs of all learners.

Inclusive pedagogy in physical education also relies on collaborative and reflective teaching practices. Hoppey et al. (2018) emphasize the importance of a shared vision of inclusion, collaborative structures among educators, and data-informed decision-making to support inclusive school practices. In the context of PE, these elements enable teachers to plan appropriate instructional modifications, monitor student participation, and create learning experiences that are responsive to diverse needs. Similarly, Ioannidi and Malafantis (2022) highlight that inclusive teaching practices focus on recognizing the strengths and challenges of each learner while promoting meaningful engagement in learning activities. In Finnish curriculum, teachers decide how they will teach, but there is still a need to study how this freedom actually affects their ability to practice inclusive education in real classrooms (Mihajlovic & Meier, 2022).

In the Philippines, inclusive education has been strengthened through the enactment of Republic Act 11650, which emphasizes the rights of learners with disabilities to equitable access to quality education. While this legislation supports inclusive education across all learning areas, its effective implementation in Physical Education presents unique challenges due to the physical, social, and instructional demands of PE activities. Teachers must balance safety considerations, participation requirements, and individualized adaptations while ensuring that students with disabilities remain actively involved in the learning process.

Although several studies have examined inclusive education in general, research specifically focusing on Inclusive Physical Education remains limited, particularly in terms of teachers' perspectives and experiences in implementing inclusive practices. Teachers often encounter challenges such as limited resources, lack of specialized



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training, and difficulties in adapting physical activities to suit diverse abilities. Furthermore, the effectiveness of inclusive practices in physical education largely depends on teachers' attitudes, preparedness, and the level of institutional support available to them.

Given these considerations, further research is needed to better understand how teachers perceive and implement inclusive physical education in school settings. Examining teachers' attitudes, challenges, and strategies in integrating students with special needs into PE classes can provide valuable insights for improving inclusive practices and support systems within schools.

Thus, the purpose of the present study is to determine the attitudes and perceptions of physical education teachers regarding the inclusion of students with special needs in Physical Education. Specifically, the study aims to determine the level of teachers' attitudes toward the inclusion of learners with special needs in PE, examine teachers' perspectives on inclusive physical education, identify the challenges encountered in implementing inclusive practices, and explore strategies that may enhance the effectiveness of Inclusive Physical Education programs.

Materials and Method

This study employed a mixed-methods research design in this study to find out the teachers' attitudes and views on the inclusion of students with special needs in Physical Education. The quantitative component employed the upgraded ATTAS-mm by Gregory and Noto (2012). This 9-item questionnaire, which uses a 7-point Likert scale, aims to assess the cognitive, affective and behavioral dimensions of attitude of the teachers. The cognitive dimension refers to the basic skills related to thinking, learning or remembering. The affective dimension refers to feelings and other socially-emotional matters. And finally, the behavioral dimension refers to observable reactions or responses to a stimulus. The accuracy of the instrument was guaranteed through matching with available literature and experts checking, and it was piloted using SurveyMonkey.

The qualitative design uses an open-ended questionnaire constructed by the researchers to capture the richness of teachers' experiences in inclusive physical education. This method provides more insight into what teachers believe and allows for flexible detailing. A thematic analysis was performed to identify reoccurring themes



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within the responses using an initial coding phase where codes were created, followed by a grouping and organizing of the codes to form overarching themes.

Sixteen physical education teachers from different universities in Bulacan were invited to participate in the study based on their experience in teaching Physical Education. The participants represented diverse teaching contexts, including public and private institutions and both urban and rural settings. They were selected to ensure representation from different levels of Physical Education instruction, such as basic education and tertiary education. In addition, the participants had varying years of teaching experience in Physical Education, which provided a broader perspective on inclusive practices in the field. All ethical principles of research were strictly observed throughout the study. The researcher obtained informed consent from all participants and clearly explained the purpose of the research. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and participants were assured that their responses would be treated with confidentiality and used solely for academic purposes.



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Results

Table No 1. Level of attitude of teachers towards the inclusion of students with special needs in Physical Education

Indicators	MEAN	INTERPRETATION
1. Most or all separate classrooms hat exclusively serve students with mild to moderate disabilities should be eliminated.	4.08	Neither Agree nor Disagree
2. Students with mild to moderate disabilities can be more effectively educated in regular classrooms as opposed to special education classrooms.	6.15	Strongly Agree
3. I would like to be mentored by a teacher who models effective differentiated instruction.	6.38	Very Strongly Agree
4. I want to emulate teachers who know how to design appropriate academic interventions.	6.23	Very Strongly Agree
5. I believe including students with mild/moderate disabilities in the regular education classrooms is effective because they can learn the social skills necessary for success.	5.84	Strongly Agree
6. I would like people to think that I can create a welcoming classroom environment for students with mild to moderate disabilities.	5.69	Strongly Agree
7. Students with mild to moderate disabilities can be trusted with responsibilities in the classroom.	5.84	Strongly Agree
8. All students with mild to moderate disabilities should be educated in regular classroom with non handicapped peers to the fullest extent possible.	3.92	Neither Agree nor Disagree
GRAND MEAN	5.52	Strongly Agree

Table 1 presents the teachers' attitude towards the inclusion of students with special needs in physical education along with interpretation. The teachers' responses indicate overall positive attitudes towards inclusion. In Particular, the statement with the highest mean score expresses strong agreement with the notion of placing students with mild to moderate disabilities in ordinary classrooms rather than in specialized schools. Moreover, teachers have a high need for mentorship in effective differentiated instruction (6.38) and a strong interest in following a colleague who excels at designing appropriate academic interventions (6.23). In contrast, there are statements with a neutral impression by teachers, such as eliminating separate classrooms for students with disabilities (4.08), and that all students should be educated in regular classrooms as much as possible (3.92). It indicates the need for greater investigation into aspects of inclusive education that may require some additional help and support from educators. The overall mean of 5.52



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suggests that teachers agree that students with special needs should be included in physical education classes. On the contrary, teachers do not seem to strongly agree with inclusive practices in physical education for students with special needs. According to Smith (2004) and Morley et al. (2020), despite the assurance, teachers find it difficult to do it in practice. Teachers' professional experience, training and type of disability influence their attitudes towards inclusion (Lee et al., 2015; Greguol et al., 2018).

Teachers' views on inclusive physical education

Participants expressed their views regarding Inclusive Physical Education which were grouped in seven categories like Equal opportunities, Empathy and Respect, Sense of Belonging, Overall Development, Empowerment through Diversity, Student-Centered Learning, and Lifelong physical activity.

Equal Opportunities. This theme suggests that inclusive physical education should extend equal benefits to everyone regardless of their ability. Teachers believe that all students, regardless of ability, should be included together. According to Saharan and Sethi (2009), teachers remove barriers, do not judge, create peer support and are always there for students (with or without a disability) for equal access to P.E.

Empathy and Respect. Teachers know that inclusion teaches empathy for others with different abilities. The experts demand the students for not disrespecting anybody's capabilities which further leads to the respect of one another. When a teacher models respect for others, it promotes inclusion and creates a welcoming environment (Kurz & Paul, 2006).

Sense of Belonging. This theme aims to foster a feeling of connection among students within inclusive settings. Teachers try to make students feel part of a team. The aim is to develop a supportive and inclusive community where students and their peers experience shared inclusion, regardless of abilities (Lyons et al., 2016). Positive teacher–student relationships are very important for students with special educational needs. This study identified different types of relationships between teachers and students and found that closer relationships are associated with better student behavior, although teachers and students may not always see their relationship in the same way (Alsem et al., 2024)

Holistic Development. Inclusive physical education helps in not only the physical growth of students but also social, emotional and life skills growth. According to Fletcher



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(2009), teachers emphasize on nurturing students in a holistic way, imparting social life skills, beyond the gym. According to educators, physical education is crucial in making students life-ready.

Empowerment Through Diversity. Teachers view inclusive practices as enabling students to value diversity. When teachers adapt activity in accordance with students' needs, it provides an opportunity for showcasing their strength and collaborating with peers. Empowering students through diversity helps them to feel they can make decisions about their life and experience inclusion (Pocock & Miyahara, 2018). As stated also by Strogilos & Ward (2023), flexibility in inclusive service and safe space may contribute to the human rights and individual diversity perspectives.

Student-Centered Learning. The focus of this theme is centered on students, where every student is considered as a hero. Teachers celebrate success, big or small, and ensure a culture where every student's success gets recognition. By instilling a sense of worthiness in every student, this method mobilizes them to learn (Conroy et al., 2009).

Lifelong Physical Activity. A tool to promote lifelong health and fitness is considered inclusive physical education by teachers. Through their efforts, they hope to instill a love of moving, instilling a lifelong commitment to movement in our students. This point of view demonstrates the long-term value of inclusive physical education and promotes respect and a willingness to be open-minded about lifelong fitness (Craft, 1994).

Challenges that teachers face in implementing inclusive practices

Teachers indicated that they face eight challenges when it comes to implementing inclusive practices.

Student Reluctance. Some students are reluctant to engage in inclusive practices. They may be uncomfortable or simply not interested. Overcoming this reluctance requires creating better and more engaging activities (Johnson, 2019).

Resource Constraints. Inadequate tools and accessories limit the scope of inclusive education, making things a little limited. Teachers stress the necessity for appropriate resources for inclusive physical education delivery (Bekele, 2017).

Health and Safety Concerns. Teachers must find ways to keep students with asthma or heart condition safe and well, according to OFSTED. It is very important to modify activities to ensure the students' safety (Sandsund et al., 2011).

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Diverse Needs Management. It is not easy to deal with the diverse abilities found in inclusive classes. Lesson plans should be designed to accommodate the diverse needs of students and to ensure all students are challenged adequately (Gould & Vaughn, 2000).

Attitudinal Barriers. Another challenge is changing perceptions about students with special needs. Teachers need to work against negative stereotypes regarding themselves in the classroom (Brown, 2019).

Time Constraints. Due to the lack of time in class, inclusive practices cannot be done. According to Nishan (2019), teachers often face the dilemma of meeting curriculum requirements of their students with varying learning needs.

Professional Development. Teachers require ongoing development that provides them with the skills needed to teach inclusively. Teachers stress the importance of ongoing training to cater to the changing needs of students (Lang & Fox, 2003).

Administrative Support. One of the barriers could be the school administration's lack of support for inclusion. According to Beres (2001), teachers stress the need for collaboration with administrators to maintain these programs.

Suggestions to improve the inclusive physical education to better meet the needs of all students

The suggestions shared by the participants for making physical education more inclusive were organized into ten groups.

Understanding and Communication. It is also important to communicate to them the aim and benefit of what they are doing (Halawah, 2011).

Inclusive Training and Equipment. Educators should have access to improved training and adaptive equipment so they can meet student needs. Investment in these areas allows for more effective and inclusive practices (Akbar et al., 2023).

Peer Support and Collaboration. Peer support and collaboration assist inclusion and contribute to a supportive environment among students (Speck, 2003).

Personalized and Diverse Activities. Supporting the engagement of learners in physical education enables learners to tap into their physical potential and reinforces the value of exercise (Bukowsky et al., 2014).



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Buddy System. Creating a buddy arrangement creates a mutual support system and breaks down the social barriers between students of different abilities (Naidoo et al., 2021).

Universal Design. When designing lessons, using universal design principles ensures all students can participate, being inclusive from the beginning (Rao & Meo, 2016).

Individual Progress Assessment. When students are judged by their progress, rather than comparing them to others, a culture of continuous improvement is supported (Linn et al, 1991).

Parental Involvement. According to Leddy (2018), involving parents in the PE curriculum will enhance the support mechanisms and continuity between school and home.

Variety of Class Formats. The use of various forms of classes, such as group activities, individual workouts, and online resources, helps to cater for different students or scheduling needs (Blank et al., 2003).

Open Communication Channels. The physical education programs are made more inclusive through open communication between teachers, students, and parents (Mcnaughton & Vostal, 2010).

Discussion

This study contributes to the ongoing discussion on Inclusive Physical Education (IPE) by examining teachers' attitudes, experiences, and challenges in integrating students with special needs into physical education classes. The discussion follows the same sequence as the quantitative and qualitative findings, focusing on teachers' attitudes toward inclusion, the values that support inclusive practices, the challenges encountered in implementation, and the strategies recommended to improve inclusive physical education.

The findings reveal that physical education teachers generally demonstrate positive attitudes toward the inclusion of students with special needs in PE classes. Teachers expressed the highest level of agreement with the idea that students with mild to moderate disabilities should be educated in regular physical education settings. This finding is consistent with previous research indicating that teachers often support the



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concept of inclusion but encounter difficulties in its implementation (Smith, 2004; Morley et al., 2020). Similarly, research by Greguol et al. (2018) highlights that teachers frequently show a strong interest in mentorship and differentiated instruction, emphasizing the importance of ongoing professional development to effectively implement inclusive physical education.

In addition to attitudes toward inclusion, the qualitative findings emphasize the importance of values such as empathy, respect, and a sense of belonging in creating inclusive physical education environments. Teachers highlighted the need to foster supportive learning spaces where all students feel accepted and valued. These findings align with the work of Saharan and Sethi (2009), who emphasize that inclusive education involves removing barriers and strengthening peer support systems. Likewise, Kurz and Paul (2006) note that when teachers model respect and inclusivity, students are more likely to develop empathy and reduce stereotypes toward classmates with disabilities.

Despite teachers' positive attitudes, several challenges in implementing inclusive physical education were identified in the study. These include student reluctance to participate in adapted activities, limited resources, health and safety concerns, and the complexity of addressing diverse student needs within the same class. Similar barriers have been documented in previous studies, which highlight the lack of adaptive equipment, insufficient resources, and limited training as major obstacles to successful inclusive physical education implementation (Bekele, 2017; Sandsund et al., 2011). In addition, Johnson (2019) reported that some students may show reluctance to participate in inclusive activities, which can influence classroom engagement and participation.

The results also indicate that teachers recognize the importance of adapting physical education activities to accommodate diverse learning needs. However, many participants reported difficulties in doing so due to time constraints and insufficient administrative support. These concerns are supported by earlier studies which found that limited class time and lack of institutional support hinder the effective implementation of inclusive practices in physical education (Nishan, 2019; Beres, 2001). Furthermore, the need for sustained professional development was emphasized by the participants, supporting the argument that teachers require continuous training to address the evolving needs of students with disabilities (Lang & Fox, 2003).



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Another important finding of the study is the teachers' belief in the potential of all students to succeed regardless of their abilities. By recognizing both small and significant achievements, teachers aim to create a positive and inclusive learning environment. This perspective aligns with the findings of Conroy et al. (2009), who emphasized that acknowledging student success contributes to the development of an inclusive school culture. Similarly, Craft (1994) noted that inclusive physical education provides a strong foundation for promoting lifelong health, physical activity, and overall well-being.

Finally, the recommendations proposed by teachers in this study are consistent with previous research on improving inclusive physical education practices. Participants emphasized the importance of enhanced teacher training, the provision of adaptive equipment, peer support systems, and the application of universal design principles in physical education activities. These recommendations align with the findings of Akbar et al. (2023) and Blank et al. (2003), who highlight the importance of professional capacity building and collaborative practices in supporting inclusive education. Moreover, effective communication among teachers, students, and parents was also emphasized as a key factor in sustaining inclusive practices, supporting the findings of McNaughton and Vostal (2010).

The findings of this study contribute to the growing body of literature on Inclusive Physical Education by confirming that teachers generally hold positive attitudes toward the inclusion of students with special needs. However, the results also highlight the practical challenges teachers face and emphasize the need for stronger institutional support, professional development opportunities, and adequate resources to ensure the effective implementation of inclusive practices in physical education.

Conclusions

The theoretical framework, rooted in Bronfenbrenner's theory and inclusive education theories including behaviorism, cognitivism, and constructivism provides a lens through which to interpret and connect the study's findings. The conclusion of the study echoes the themes highlighted by teachers in connection to the challenges of inclusive physical education. The positive outlook of teachers corresponds with the theoretical stress on an environment that is inclusive and stimulating. The challenges like



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students' reluctance towards playing games, a lack of resources, and weak teacher training are aligned with barriers to learning in the theory. In addition, the conclusion applies theoretical principles to suggest ways to improve physical education inclusivity. These factors indicate that the emphasis was placed on the behaviorism, cognitivism and constructivism theories through open communication, inclusive training, accessible equipment and peer support and cooperation. The emphasis on individual activities, universal design and buddy system is in sync with the constructivist perspective of learning relating to the construction of knowledge and learning through each other's interaction. Essentially, the framework in the study explains the teachers' perception while the conclusion presents the practical use and recommendation drawn from the framework. Consequently, the study, therefore, connects theory and practice with its assessment of the challenges and opportunities for inclusive physical education.

To support inclusion in physical education, it is recommended that the difficulties identified be targeted to be addressed. To begin with, the teachers must do something creative and engaging to get the students to participate without reluctance. The reasonable allocation of resources such as adaptive equipment and facilities is essential to overcoming resource constraints. Modifications to physical education activities aimed at individual health can address safety issues and health concerns. To meet diverse needs, teachers must be equipped with adaptive teaching strategies to plan for all. Students will need continuous input to build up a climate where students accept and learn with each other. Use time management and an innovative system of teaching to overcome a time-related challenge without compromising the curriculum objectives and inclusiveness. The continual professional development of educators is essential in keeping up with the needs. Collaboration among teachers and administrators can help in establishing a communication channel that serves as an insight for administrative support for inclusion. If they will put these measures in place, it can help make a more inclusive and enriching physical experience.

Limitations of the study

Based on the findings, there were several limitations. First, the number of participants in the study was relatively small that may affect the generalizability of the results to a broader population of physical education teachers. Moreover, teachers from



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others regions or areas may have different perspective and experiences about the inclusion of students with special needs in physical education. Educational policies, available resources, institutional support, and teacher training opportunities may vary across schools and regions, which could influence teachers' attitudes and experiences in implementing inclusive physical education.

The study also relied primarily on self-reported data obtained through surveys and open-ended questionnaires. Although these methods allowed participants to express their perceptions and experiences, self-reported responses may be influenced by personal bias or the tendency of respondents to provide socially desirable answers. Teachers may have expressed more favorable attitudes toward inclusion due to professional expectations or institutional policies supporting inclusive education. Furthermore, the study focused mainly on teachers' perspectives regarding inclusive physical education. While these insights are important, the experiences of other stakeholders such as students with special needs, their peers, school administrators, and parents were not included in the investigation. Including these perspectives could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how inclusive physical education is implemented and experienced within the school environment. Lastly, the study examined teachers' attitudes, challenges, and suggested strategies but did not directly observe physical education classes or evaluate the actual implementation of inclusive practices in the classroom. As a result, the findings reflect teachers' perceptions rather than documented classroom practices. Future research may benefit from incorporating classroom observations, case studies, or mixed stakeholder perspectives to gain deeper insights into the effectiveness of inclusive physical education programs.



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