

# Students Perceptions of Enjoyment in Physical Education

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## Abstract

This study investigated middle school students' perceptions of specific factors related to enjoyment in physical education (PE). Middle school-aged students (269 males, 349 females) responded to an Likert type question on general enjoyment in PE and an open-ended question regarding the factors underlying enjoyment in PE. Descriptive statistics and Chi-square analyses revealed that approximately 85.3% of the students reported that they like PE. Gender differences in the level of enjoyment in PE were found with higher enjoyment for male students (75.0%) compared to female students (30.1%). A total of 1399 response on the open-ended question were content-analyzed. 12 general dimensions of enjoyment were emerged: (1) specific types of activities (e.g., soccer, basketball), (2) PE is fun and enjoyable, (3) PE is a break from classroom work, (4) PE affords contact with friends, (5) PE is not theory subjects, (6) PE helps to release stress, (7) PE provides for health and fitness, (8) learning new skills is enjoyable, (9) feelings of achievement, (10) PE teachers, (11) easy to get high grade in PE, and (12) others (e.g., good facilities). The dimensions generally fit into the students' experience categories (Kwack & Park, 1998; Luke & Sinclair, 1991) and reasons for participating in PE (Baker et al., 1982; Browne, 1992; Butcher, 1976, 1980; Earl & Stennett, 1983). However, some unique aspects of enjoyment in PE (e.g., PE is not theory subjects and easiness to get high grade) reflect the nature of middle school PE in Korea. Gender differences in the dimensions of PE enjoyment were also identified. The findings provided greater understanding for the specific aspects of enjoyment in PE.

Key words: students' perception, enjoyment

## I . Introduction

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Physical education (PE) teachers often experience difficulties in making PE classes an enjoyable experience for their students. Enjoyment of participation in PE indicates positive experiences for students and effective teaching for teachers. Recent studies (e.g., Goudas & Biddle, 1993) have demonstrated that enjoyment is a key determinant for students' motivation and participation. Similarly, students' interest and enjoyment in PE are important indicators of the desired outcomes of PE teaching (Physical Education Association, 1987).

Attitude toward PE teacher and PE as a subject matter has been found to affect students' level of enjoyment in PE (Carlson, 1995; Luke & Sinclair, 1991). Gender differences in preferred activities were found. Male students like challengeable and risk-taking activities, while female students prefer aesthetic activities such as dance (Folsom-Meek, 1992). Lower grade students (i.e., younger students) tend to have more a positive attitude toward PE. For example, Smoll, Schutz, and Keeney (1976) found that younger students had more positive attitudes toward PE and participated more actively compared to older students. Silverman (1993) pointed out that skill level was an important determinant for PE experiences. Low-skilled students reported negative experiences in PE and had less appropriate feedback from their PE teachers.

Recent findings from Western countries and Korea suggest the need to focus on enjoyment perceived by students. The number of students who take PE as an elective course decreased in the United States and Australia. According to the 7th Korea National Curriculum, high school students in 2nd and 3rd grades are to take PE as an elective course. This raised great concerns for PE researchers and teachers as the number of students who take PE are expected to decrease. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to explore Korean middle-school students' perception of enjoyment in PE. Specifically, this study focused on specific sources of enjoyment in PE. Since enjoyment in PE is a relatively unexplored area of study, the open-ended questioning approach was considered appropriate.

## **II . Methods**

Participants consisted of 638 (269 males, 349 females) middle-school aged students from 6 public schools located in Seoul. Permission for the study was obtained by the school administrators and PE teachers. Students responded to a 5-point Likert-type question on general enjoyment in PE and an open-ended question regarding the factors underlying enjoyment in PE ("What do you like most about PE? List three important things you like about PE.).

Meaningful responses were typed in to computer. Most participants provided more than one responses for the open-ended question. These varied from one word to two sentences. They were content-analyzed by classifying and grouping responses into

higher-order themes.

### III. Results

#### A. Overall Enjoyment

Descriptive statistics and Chi-square analyses revealed that approximately 85.3% of the students reported that they like PE. Gender differences in the level of enjoyment in PE were found with higher enjoyment for male students (75.0%) compared to female students (30.1%). Gender differences in enjoyment and attitude in PE are strong as evidenced in the previous studies with Korean middle school students and those in other countries (e.g., Tannehill & Zakrajsek, 1993).

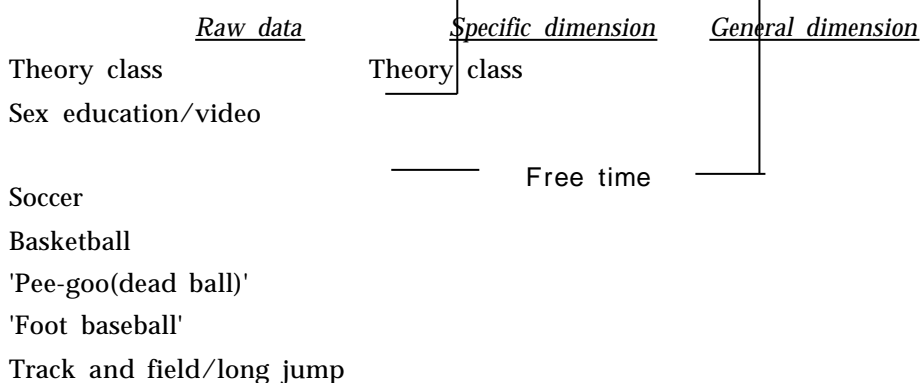
Table 1. Enjoyment in physical education by gender

Gender	Not at all	Almost not	Average	A little	Very much	Total
Male	2(0.7%)	10(20.8%)	60(20.8%)	109(37.6%)	108(37.4%)	289(100%)
Female	21(6.0%)	61(17.5%)	162(46.4%)	81(23.2%)	24(6.9%)	349(100%)
Total	23(3.6%)	71(11.1%)	222(34.8%)	190(29.8%)	132(20.7%)	638(100%)

$$\chi^2 (4) = 152.48, p = .000.$$

#### B. Dimensions of Enjoyment in PE

A total of 1399 response on the open-ended question were content-analyzed. Twelve (12) general dimensions of enjoyment emerged (Figure 1). They include (1) specific types of activities/sports, (2) PE is a break from classroom work, (3) PE is fun and enjoyable, (4) PE affords contact with friends, (5) PE is not a theory subject, (6) PE helps to release stress, (7) PE provides for health and activities, (8) learning new sports is enjoyable, (9) feelings of achievement, (10) PE teachers, (11) easiness to get a high grade, and (12) others (e.g., good facilities).



Weight training

/rope skipping

Badminton

Ball game

Volleyball

Baseball

Gymnastics/horizontal bar

Handball

Rubber band

Dance and aerobics

Free time

Free play

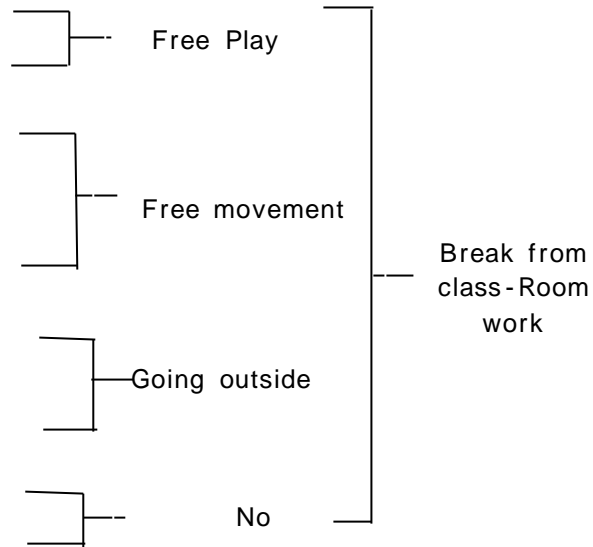
Play one's own way

Move around at will

Move freely

Light exercise

Active



Doing outside classroom

Going outside

Playing outside

Casual uniform

No punishment

Fun & enjoyment

Figure 1. Content-analysis of enjoyment responses.

Raw data

Specific dimension

General dimension

Fun and enjoyment

Doing sports you like

Like physical education

Doing whatever you like

Playing sports you like

Do what you are good at

Time goes fast

Getting along with friends

Playing with friends

STUDENTS PERCEPTIONS OF EMOTIONAL IN PHYSICAT EDUCATION

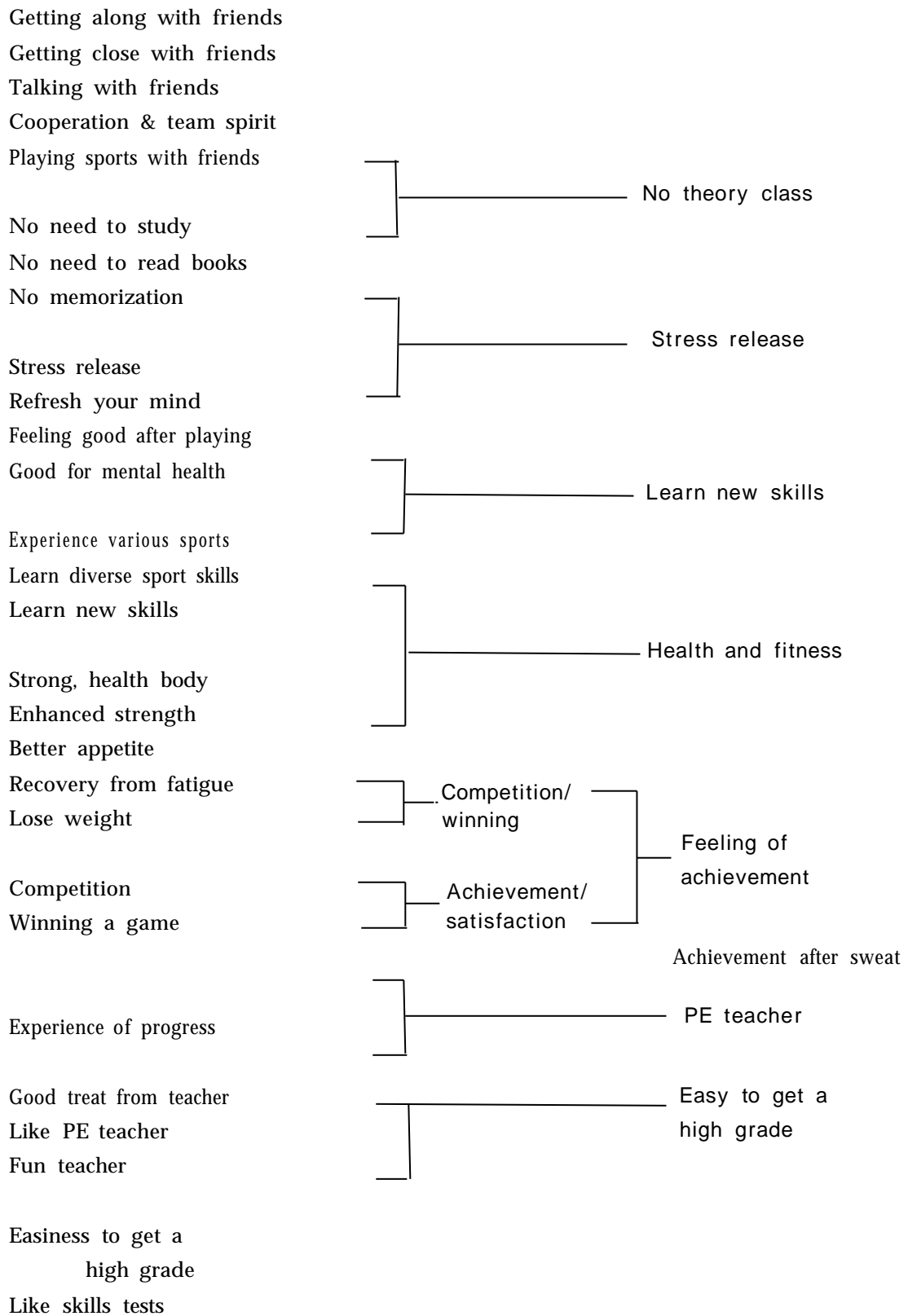


Figure 1. Continued.

As shown in Table 2, specific activities/sports were most frequently mentioned as enjoyment factors in PE, followed by break from classroom work and fun/enjoyment aspects of PE. Males tended to endorse this factor more frequently (53.2%) compared to females (35.2%). On the other hand, female students reported that a break from classroom work (24.1%) and the opportunities to get along with their friends (11.4%) were important reasons they like PE. Thus, male students are more likely to participate in PE for intrinsic reasons such as physical activity itself, while female students like extrinsic and social reasons. These findings support the notion that males like more achievement-oriented, competitive activities compared to females (Wersch, Trew, & Turner, 1992).

Table 2. Frequency and percentage of major dimensions of enjoyment in PE

Categories	Total	Male(%)	Female(%)
1. Specific activities/sports	625(44.6%)	393(53.2%)	232(35.2%)
2. Break from classroom work	278(19.9%)	119(16.1%)	159(24.1%)
3. Fun and enjoyment	136(9.7%)	68(9.2%)	68(10.3%)
4. Getting along with friends	114(8.1%)	39(5.3%)	75(11.4%)
5. No theory class	77(5.5%)	25(3.4%)	52(7.9%)
6. Stress release	61(4.4%)	36(4.9%)	25(3.8%)
7. Learning new skills	29(2.1%)	14(1.9%)	15(2.2%)
8. Health and fitness	24(1.7%)	18(2.4%)	6(0.9%)
9. Feeling of achievement	21(1.5%)	9(1.2%)	12(1.8%)
10. PE teacher	13(0.9%)	9(1.2%)	4(0.6%)
11. Easy to get high grade	8(0.6%)	6(0.8%)	2(0.3%)
12. Others	13(0.9%)	8(0.4%)	10(1.5%)
Total	1,399(100%)	739(100%)	660(100%)

### C. Dimensions of Enjoyment by Gender

Table 3 displays the rank order by gender of the major dimensions of enjoyment in PE. Both male and female students mentioned specific activities/sports most frequently, followed by break from classroom work. The frequency on the specific activities/sports dimension for males was significantly higher than other dimensions, reflecting male's focus on the physical activity aspect in PE. Female students tended to emphasize the opportunities of break from classroom work. Further analyses of specific activities/sports revealed that male students like soccer and basketball most, while females tend to like 'pee-goo (dead ball)' and 'foot baseball.'

Table 3. Rank of major enjoyment dimensions by gender

Order	Male	Female
1	Specific activities/sports (53.2%)	Specific activities/sports (35.2%)
2	Break from classroom work (16.1%)	Break from classroom work (24.1%)
3	Fun and enjoyment (9.2%)	Getting along with friends (10.3%)
4	Getting along with friends (9.2%)	Fun and enjoyment (10.3%)
5	Stress release (4.9%)	No theory class (7.9%)
6	No theory class (3.4%)	Stress release (3.8%)
7	Health and fitness (1.7%)	Learning new skills (2.2%)

### IA. Discussion

The dimensions generally fit into the students' experience categories (Kwack & Park, 1998; Luke & Sinclair, 1991) and reasons for participating in PE (Baker, Campbell, Paterson, & Wideman, 1982; Browne, 1992). However, some unique aspects of enjoyment in PE (e.g., PE is not a theory subject and ease in getting a high grade) reflect the nature of middle school PE in Korea. Gender differences in the dimensions of PE enjoyment were also identified. Males tended to focus on more achievement-related aspects of physical education. Female students tended to rate break from classroom work more enjoyable than male students. These findings suggest that PE teachers should design PE classes with gender differences in mind.

The findings in this study provided greater understanding for what constitutes enjoyment in PE from students' perspectives. The open-ended approach to enjoyment appeared successful in determining diverse sources of enjoyment in Korean middle school settings. However, students' responses were not sophisticated enough to analyze their meanings. Subsequent research may (a) use in-depth interviews and participant observation techniques and (b) examine ways enjoyment in PE affects long-term

participation in physical activity.

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