



Students Apathy Towards Physical Education in Higher Education

Janzen Joy A. Bano, LPT

Instructor, College of Arts and Sciences, PHINMA-Araullo University, Philippines

Abstract - This study entitled “Students Apathy Towards Physical Education in Higher Education” focused on level of student apathy toward Physical Education (PE) among freshmen and examined the relationship between their demographic profiles and levels of apathy across five dimensions: behavioral, cognitive, emotional, social, and physical. Using a quantitative-descriptive correlational research design, data were collected from 120 freshmen students at PHINMA – Araullo University enrolled in Physical Activity Towards Health and Fitness 2 (PathFit) during the academic year 2024–2025 second semester. Accordingly, the study's findings served as the foundation for the proposed intervention plan. These suggested intervention strategies may be helpful in strengthening and enhancing the techniques, approaches, and practices in physical education classes, thus it is recommended by the researcher to use those intervention plan by the physical education teachers and school administration as it will lead to increase and improve the motivation and participation of students.

Key Words: Apathy, Physical Education, Higher Education, Intervention Plan, PathFit

1. INTRODUCTION

Apathy can usually be referred to as the absence of interest, motivation, or concern about something particular. Apathy is becoming more problematic in the college classes, especially in classes associated with physical education (PE) where student apathy is prevalent. PE brings importance for many reasons, for example physical health, mental health, and social development, yet many college students are apathetic towards PE. This emerging apathetic attitude will overshadow the real relevancy of the subject and prompts many questions concerning Physical Education in higher education.

Apathy in PE show up in many forms. Some students attend their subject without being engaged, perform physical activities without any effort, or just don't attend the class. Others demonstrate no appetite for learning about health, fitness, or movement, and or believe the areas are unrelated to their academic or career goals. Their apathy has ramifications beyond their physical health; it also diminishes the important life skills discipline, perseverance, and cooperative skills that PE is designed to develop young students.

There are many factors that contribute to inattention to Physical Education in higher education.

Students may lack self-confidence and feel embarrassed or self-conscious about their physical ability when participating in the presence of friends. Some students may have memorable negative past experiences with PE classes, while others may simply not understand or recognize the many benefits of a physically active lifestyle beyond their time in university.

If PE is deemed as a minor or non-academic subject, then logically it is easier for the student to simply not prioritize the time and effort. Often academic overloaded schedules, poor physical conditioning and sedentary lifestyles will cause students to be disconnected from the subject as well.

This apathy creates real challenges not only for students but for teachers. For example, for PE teachers who have to properly motivate uninterested students, provide accurate evaluations, and provide meaningful lessons with inadequate participation. The considerations of students not enjoying participating in physical activity can induce stress, affect instructional quality, and possibly lead to the burnout of PE teachers who evidently care about doing their part in promoting physical health and active living.

Given these challenges, studying apathy toward Physical Education is both timely and necessary. Recognizing the root origins of student disinterest can guide educators and administrators in developing solutions that make PE more relevant, engaging, and supportive of student need. It is important to address this not only for the improvement of PE outcomes but also to cultivate a school context that recognizes physical activity as a key contributor to holistic development.

Review of Related Literature

This chapter presents the literature and different studies that are related to the present study.

1. Behavioral Apathy

According to Zamarripa, Rodríguez-Medellín, and Otero-Saborido (2020), the fulfillment of basic psychological needs autonomy, competence, and relatedness—is fundamental in fostering

autonomous motivation and distinct forms of engagement, whereas its frustration leads to disaffection and withdrawal behaviors. When students perceive their needs are unmet, they may exhibit avoidance behaviors such as making excuses or neglecting proper attire, as these actions reflect reduced behavioral engagement and emotional disconnection from class activities.

2. Cognitive Apathy

Ávalos-Ramos et al. (2024) identify academic pressures as a key factor contributing to students' disengagement from physical activity, with 34.1% of respondents citing fatigue as a significant barrier. When students are genuinely interested in the activities offered, they are more likely to actively engage and enjoy the lessons.

3. Emotional Apathy's

Students who struggle to meet physical fitness standards commonly experience feelings of inadequacy and shame, which can lead them to withdraw from physical activities. As Metz, Zander, and Hunger (2024) explain, students often report heightened anxiety and stress regarding their physical performance, causing hesitation to participate.

4. Social Apathy

Casey, Goodyear, and McKenna (2020) noted that student disengagement in PE is often rooted in relational disconnections. Their findings suggest that students are more likely to become socially passive when they feel undervalued or excluded from group learning experiences. This form of disengagement is often subtle and may go unnoticed by educators, as students remain physically present in class but psychologically and socially detached.

5. Physical Apathy

Suguis and Belleza (2022) found that college students who viewed PE as a mere academic requirement were significantly less engaged in physical tasks compared to those who viewed it as an opportunity for personal growth and wellness. This highlights the impact of motivational orientation: students driven by external rewards, such as grades or compliance, are less likely to invest effort in physically demanding activities. The absence of internal motivation often leads to diminished interest in fitness improvement or goal setting related to physical ability.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to evaluate the Students Apathy towards Physical Education in Higher Education. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How may the profile of the respondents be described as to the following:
 - 1.1 Age
 - 1.2 Sex
 - 1.3 Course
 - 1.4 School graduated in SHS
 - 1.5 Favorite subject
2. How may the level of apathy in physical education of freshmen among the following dimensions:
 - 2.1 Behavioral Apathy
 - 2.2 Cognitive Apathy
 - 2.3 Emotional Apathy
 - 2.4 Social Apathy
 - 2.5 Physical Apathy
3. Is there a significant relationship between the demographic profile of the respondents and their level of apathy in Physical Education?
4. Is there a significant interrelationship among the different dimensions of apathy?
5. What intervention plan may be proposed to increase the interest and participation based on the result of the study.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative-descriptive correlational research design. The descriptive approach was used to present the profile of the respondents and their levels of apathy in Physical Education across five dimensions: behavioral, cognitive, emotional, social, and physical.

Respondents of the study

The participants of this study were all freshmen students enrolled in the subject Physical Activity Towards Health and Fitness 2 (PathFit2) at PHINMA - Araullo University during the academic year 2024-2025. The researcher included one hundred twenty students under three different courses as respondents to this study. Table 1 presents the participants of the study.

Instrumentation

A structured survey questionnaire was used as the primary data collection tool. It was divided into six main parts:

Part I: Demographic Profile

Part II: Behavioral Apathy

Part III: Cognitive Apathy

Part IV: Emotional Apathy

Part V: Social apathy

Part VI: Physical Apathy

Each item will use a 4-point Likert scale (1 = no extent to 4 = very great extent)

Procedures

The researcher obtained permission to the Chief Operating Officer of PHINMA - Araullo University. Once approval was obtained, informed consent was secured from all participants.

The questionnaire was administered during scheduled PE classes with the coordination of the instructors. Instructions were clearly explained before the distribution of the survey. Afterward, the accomplished forms were collected, organized, and prepared for data analysis. Throughout the process, confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained.

Statistical Treatment

Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize the demographic characteristics of the respondents, such as age, sex, course, senior high school graduated, and favorite subject. Measures such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to provide a clear profile of the participants and to present the central tendencies and variations in the data.

To evaluate the levels of apathy in Physical Education across multiple dimensions namely behavioral, cognitive, emotional, social, and physical mean scores and standard deviations were computed. These descriptive measures allowed the researcher to identify which dimensions demonstrated higher or lower levels of apathy among the respondents. The levels were interpreted using a standardized Likert scale to categorize responses accordingly.

Spearman's rho for correlation was used to establish the relationship between respondents' profile and the level of apathy and the interrelationship among the variables of apathy.

2. RESULTS

This section presents the analysis and interpretation of the data gathered from the respondents of the study.

Table -1: Profile of the Students

PARAMETERS	FREQUENCY n = 120	PERCENTAGE %
Age		
Below 18 years old	-	-
18 – 19 years old	98	81.67
20 years old and above	22	18.33
Sex		
Male	37	30.83
Female	83	69.17
Course		
BSA	15	12.50
BSBA	15	12.50
BSTM	15	12.50
BSED	15	12.50
BSHM	15	12.50
BS PSYCH	15	12.50
BSN	15	12.50
BSCE	15	12.50
School Graduated in SHS		
Public	73	60.80
Private	47	39.20
Favorite Subject		
English	39	32.50
Mathematica	27	22.50
Filipino	5	4.17
Science	10	8.33
Physical Education	6	5.00
Others	33	27.50

Table – 2: Level Of Apathy

Behavioral Apathy	WM	Verbal Description
I make excuses to avoid participating in PE.	2.03	Moderate Extent
I do not wear or bring proper PE attire.	1.87	Moderate Extent
I exert minimal effort when performing physical activities.	2.28	Moderate Extent
I come late or miss PE classes.	2.13	Moderate Extent
I participate actively during PE class.	1.84	Moderate Extent
Average	2.03	Moderate Extent
Cognitive Apathy	WM	Verbal Description
I find PE lessons boring or irrelevant.	1.91	Moderate Extent
I do not understand why PE is part of the curriculum.	2.34	Moderate Extent
I do not see the connection between PE and my course.	2.78	Great Extent
I think PE is less important than other subjects.	3.00	Great Extent
I have little to no interest in learning about health and fitness.	1.67	No Extent
Average	2.34	Moderate Extent
Emotional Apathy	WM	Verbal Description
I feel bored or uninterested during PE activities.	1.81	Moderate Extent
I do not enjoy participating in physical exercises.	1.73	No Extent
I feel uncomfortable or anxious during PE classes.	2.03	Moderate Extent
I lack excitement or enthusiasm for PE activities.	2.06	Moderate Extent
I do not feel any personal satisfaction after completing physical tasks.	1.63	No Extent
Average	1.85	Moderate Extent

Table – 3: Relationship between Profile and level of Apathy

	Age	Sex	Course	School Graduated in SHS	Favorite Subject
Apathy					
Behavioral Apathy	.148	-.288**	.370**	.129	-.146
Correlation Coefficient	.107	.001	.001	.159	.111
Sig.	120	120	120	120	120
N					
Cognitive Apathy	.148	-.112	.332**	.032	-.012
Correlation Coefficient					

Social Apathy	WM	Verbal Description
I tend to avoid interacting with my classmates during PE sessions.	1.53	No Extent
I feel disconnected from my peers during group activities.	1.50	No Extent
I do not contribute to teamwork or group-based tasks in PE.	1.58	No Extent
I choose to work alone rather than join group activities.	1.73	No Extent
I find little to no enjoyment in socializing during physical activities.	1.68	No Extent
Average	1.61	No Extent

Physical Apathy	WM	Verbal Description
I have no interest in improving my physical fitness.	1.71	No Extent
I don't feel the need to improve my physical abilities.	1.85	Moderate Extent
I don't care if I improve in PE performance or not.	1.63	No Extent
I ignore opportunities to develop my physical fitness.	2.12	Moderate Extent
I lack motivation to maintain a healthy and active lifestyle.	2.17	Moderate Extent
Average	1.89	Moderate Extent
OVERALL	1.94	Moderate Extent

Legend: 3.26- 4.00 Very Great Extent; 2.51- 3.25 Great Extent; 1.76 – 2.50 Moderate Extent; 1.00- 1.75 No Extent

Table – 4: Interrelationship among Dimensions

	Behavioral Apathy	Cognitive Apathy	Emotional Apathy	Social Apathy	Physical Apathy
Behavioral Apathy	1				
Cognitive Apathy	0.732**	1			
Emotional Apathy	0.431*	0.504**	1		
Social Apathy	0.415**	0.356**	0.616**	1	
Physical Apathy	0.600**	0.599**	0.602**	0.561**	1

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

DISCUSSION

The overall mean of all apathy revealed that freshmen students' overall degree of disinterest in physical education (PE) was 1.94, which is considered to be of moderate extent. According to this result, it is prevalent to a degree that may be negative to students' learning outcomes and complete involvement in physical education. The dimensions examined cognitive, emotional, social, physical, and behavioral reveal a varied distribution of apathy, offering a nuanced understanding of how students perceive, feel about, and engage in physical education.

Although the findings under the physical apathy dimension indicated only a moderate extent overall, suggesting that students were not entirely indifferent toward improving their physical health and fitness, PE teachers had observed that physical disengagement often manifested in persistent and noticeable ways.

3. CONCLUSIONS

1. In physical education, students show a moderate level of apathy, which is between being completely disengaged and completely motivated. Both behavioral and cognitive apathy were the most observed apathy.
2. Behavioral apathy is greatly influenced by sex, with male students being more likely to behaviorally disengage from physical education. This shows that additional gender-responsive PE techniques are required.
3. The fact that academic courses are a strong predictor of both behavioral and cognitive apathy suggests that students in specific subject areas may view physical education as



less valuable or relevant, which lowers their level of participation.

4. On all dimensions of apathy, age, SHS background, and favorite subject have no significant influence. This implies that attitudes about physical education today are influenced more by one's distinctive disposition and current academic environment than by prior education or academic pursuits.

5. Intervention plans is proposed to address the distinct types of apathy for Physical Education teachers that may assist them to enhance and increase the interest and engagement of freshmen student.

REFERENCES

- [1] Ávalos-Ramos, M. A., Vidaci, A., Pascual-Galiano, M. T., & Vega-Ramírez, L. (2024). Factors influencing physical activity and sports practice among young people by gender: Challenges and barriers. *Education Sciences*, 14, 967. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14090967>
- [2] Casey, M., Goodyear, M., & McKenna, J. (2020). Exploring student engagement and disengagement in physical education at the tertiary level. *Journal of Physical Education and Sport*, 20(4), 1237–1245. <https://doi.org/10.7752/jpes.2020.0428>
- [3] Metz, S., Zander, B., & Hunger, I. (2024). The suffering of students in physical education. Unsettling experiences and situational conditions. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17408989.2024.23528>
- [4] Saguis, J. E., & Belleza, S. S. (2022). Student engagement as influenced by physical activity and student motivation among college students. *International Journal of Sports Science and Physical Education*, 7(1), 28–40. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ijsspe.20220701.15>
- [5] Zamarripa, J., Rodríguez-Medellín, R., & Otero-Saborido, F. (2020). Basic psychological needs, motivation, engagement, and disaffection in Mexican students during physical education classes. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 41(3), 436–445. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jtpe.2021-0006>