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Loughborough University

The Global State of Play

Report and recommendations on quality physical education

fit for life

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SHORT SUMMARY

Invest in quality physical education (PE) to boost rounded youth development

Active lifestyles are key to ensuring both individual well-being and sustainable, social development. Quality Physical Education (QPE) plays a key role in achieving this by fostering lifelong physical activity, improving young people's mental and emotional well-being, and developing critical life skills. UNESCO's sport initiative, Fit for Life, advocates QPE as a cost-effective investment.

Despite its potential as a core curricula subject, UNESCO data reveal that PE is often under-prioritized and due to a lack of investment in certain areas, such as staff training and facilities, potential benefits are not fully realised for students around the world. This investment gap connects directly to a delivery gap. Although 83% of countries worldwide report PE as compulsory in schools, there remain significant issues with the quality of delivery and the diversity of lesson planning within curricula:

- Only 1 in 3 secondary school students worldwide meet the minimum requirement of 180 minutes of PE minutes per week set out in UNESCO's Quality Physical Education Policy Guidelines.
- Only 61.7% of schools fully include students with disabilities alongside their peers without disabilities in PE classes.
- Only 7.1% of schools implement equal PE time for boys and girls, despite 54.5% of countries having policies or plans for it.

Policymakers, PE practitioners and academia are encouraged to take action to implement PE policies, increase investment in PE, upskill PE teachers, enhance PE curricula and promote more equitable and inclusive PE environment.

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"Since wars begin in the minds of men and women it is in the minds of men and women that the defences of peace must be constructed"

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Loughborough University

The Global State of Play

Report and recommendations on quality physical education

fit for life

Call to Action

Active lifestyles are key to ensuring both individual well-being and sustainable, social development. This is the mantra of UNESCO's Fit for Life sport initiative. Investing in and enhancing the quality of our PE is key to multiply its impact and drastically improve young people's mental and emotional well-being, as well as to help them develop life skills that will serve them throughout their lives.

It has been shown time and again that engaging in regular values-based sport and PE decreases the chances of engaging in risky behaviours, contributes to enjoyment of education, promotes equality, and enhances employability.

Every young person has the right to access education worldwide. Quality PE is an integral part of students' education, as it helps them develop essential skills to lead healthy, active, and fulfilling lives. Consequently, ensuring access to quality physical education should be a priority in educational systems worldwide. With this call for action, we call upon policy and sport decision-makers to prioritize action and investments in the most pressing areas and the five points highlighted below.

Research has also demonstrated that quality PE is a driver of inclusion, particularly for girls and students with disabilities, and can foster intercultural exchange. Students who participate in quality PE programmes grow in confidence and in terms of their physical literacy. This, in turn, makes them more likely to lead active lives and participate in community sport outside of the school setting. As such, quality PE provides a springboard to wider patterns of lifelong activity, health, and inclusivity. This is why at UNESCO we have been working to define, promote, and expand the reach of Quality Physical Education in policy frameworks and schools around the world: investing in QPE is investing in the physical and mental well-being of our future generations.

Despite the established benefits of PE, and more precisely quality PE, significant challenges persist at policy and practice level. Indeed, data from UNESCO's Global Quality Physical Education survey detailed in this report identify some troubling realities and highlight shortcomings in terms of:

- PE provision, with 68% of upper secondary schools failing to meet UNESCO's minimum recommended weekly guidelines,
- human capital, with 57% of primary school PE teachers lacking specialized training, and
- inclusivity, with 1 in 3 students with disabilities having no access to PE.

With a global majority of countries investing less than 2% of their education budgets in PE, we need to act quickly and decisively to ensure that this fundamental right to movement and play, encoded in UNESCO's International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport, is accessible to all. Quality PE provision does not happen by itself: it requires systemic change that is underpinned by evidence-based policy.

UNESCO's Global State of Play Report, and recommendations on QPE, present unique insights and concrete actions to support public policy makers address challenges from policy to practice, and to maximize the return on investments in doing so. Informed by the evidence provided, now is the time to act, to ensure equality of access to QPE, to enhance teacher capacities, and to frame the value of QPE as a core curricula subject contributing to key learning domains.

Let's get to work, let's get Fit for Life!

Gabriela Ramos
Assistant Director-General for Social and Human Sciences
UNESCO

5 priorities for action

1. Implement effective PE policies

Despite global commitment to compulsory PE, many schools struggle to implement effective national policies. To bridge gaps between policy and practice, ensure that enhanced alignment and implementation strategies are in place, so that policies translate into meaningful action and positive outcomes in schools.

2. Increase investment in PE

Many countries have insufficient funds allocated to PE, leading to underfunded facilities, equipment, and resources. Provide the necessary infrastructure and resources to improve the quality of PE delivery, ensuring successful PE implementation and positive student experiences.

3. Upskill PE teachers

Qualified, specialized PE teachers are vital for the effective delivery of QPE, but disparities in their availability and inconsistent professional development weaken PE delivery across regions. To enhance PE quality, improving student engagement and educational outcomes, invest more in the professional development and equitable deployment of specialized PE teachers.

4. Promote equitable and inclusive PE

To promote more inclusive educational environments, ensure that PE implementation is gender equitable and accessible to students with disabilities, and embed these principles into curriculum development. This contributes to reduced dropout rates, lifelong engagement in physical activity, and overall educational equity.

5. Enhance PE curricula

Establish clear guidelines and benchmarks for curriculum development to improve pedagogical practices and effective assessment strategies. Conduct regular curriculum reviews, based on research and feedback from teachers and students, to ensure relevance and responsiveness to changing educational needs.

Acknowledgements

This report was co-written by Dr Rachel Sandford, Dr Oliver Hooper, Professor Lorraine Cale, Dr Julie Stirrup, and Professor Paula Griffiths from the School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences at Loughborough University (LU) and Nancy McLennan, Sarah Lüdecke, and Dr Gerard Masdeu Yélamos, from UNESCO's Sport Section. The quantitative analysis was led by Anna Rita Manca, with early inputs from Damith Chandrasenage.

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Last but not least, special thanks are extended to the members of ministries and to the teachers who responded to the surveys.

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Section 1: Introduction

Box 1. Section Highlights

- Quality Physical Education (QPE) is distinct from traditional physical education (PE), focusing on factors such as frequency, variety, inclusivity, and content.
- UNESCO data show that PE is under-prioritized and faces implementation challenges. Key deficiencies include ineffective policy implementation, insufficient funding, lack of skilled PE teachers and issues with the diversity and inclusivity of PE classes.
- Fit for Life, UNESCO's sport flagship initiative, focuses on activating smart investments in sport and PE to support sustainable development agendas. Activities are specifically designed to bolster evidence-based policies and support the capacity-building of teachers and coaches to deliver inclusive and quality PE.

Overview

Physical Education (PE) has been a subject of extensive discussion among health and education professionals worldwide due to its potential to support learning and contribute to the holistic development of students. UNESCO, the only United Nations agency mandated to take the lead in championing the transformative power of PE and sport, developed the concept of Quality Physical Education (QPE) to distinguish it from traditional PE and highlight the importance of core factors such as frequency, variety, inclusivity, and value content.

QPE includes the learning of a variety of motor skills that are designed to enhance the physical, mental, social and emotional development of every child (UNESCO, 2015a). On the one hand, participation in PE should support the development of physical literacy and, on the other, contribute to global citizenship, through the promotion of life skills and values. The outcome of QPE is a physically literate young person, possessing both the skills and confidence to bridge the transition between adolescence and adulthood while maintaining an active lifestyle throughout their life. Consequently, acknowledging QPE's role in disrupting cycles of inequalities and increasing the impact of traditional PE curricula is crucial, as it forms the basis for an inclusive continuum of civic participation over the full lifespan.

QPE is the planned, progressive, inclusive learning experience that forms part of the curriculum in early years, primary and secondary education. In this respect, QPE acts as the foundation for a lifelong engagement in physical activity and sport. The learning experience offered to children and young people through physical education lessons should be developmentally appropriate to help them acquire the psychomotor skills, cognitive understanding, and social and emotional skills they need to lead a physically active life.

– UNESCO QPE Policy Guidelines (UNESCO, 2015a)

Participation in regular physical activity is a cost-effective investment with significant benefits in health, education, and personal resilience. It can reduce obesity by 30% (Jakicic, et al., 2019), improve test scores by 40% (Aspen Institute, 2024) and decrease depression and anxiety, especially among girls and young women (UEFA, 2017). QPE can not only increase regular physical activity for students but also promote peer-led learning and well-rounded skills development. These aspects contribute to a student's physical and psychosocial well-being, fostering resilience and a sense of self.

Schools are natural gateways to develop the healthy habits of young people. QPE can be an effective investment to help address the rise of non-communicable diseases, the primary cause of premature mortality, while contributing to the generation of 8 billion euros in health cost savings at the global level (OECD/WHO, 2023). This potential, along with student learning and well-being outcomes in the longer term, are compromised by the systematic under-funding of PE and the under-implementation of QPE. UNESCO data reveal that PE is often under-prioritized and inadequately implemented. This includes deficiencies in infrastructures, resources, inclusivity, allocated time, and a shortages of specialized and well-trained staff. In addition, teachers responsible for PE lack preparation time or resources to create content and adequate curricula for their classes. They also receive limited administrative support and lack much-needed teaching assistance. These structural deficiencies have a significant impact, exacerbated by the fact that PE teachers are often dealing with large numbers of students with diverse physical abilities, backgrounds, learning needs and behaviours. This diversity is not addressed in curricula, teaching materials or resources. Furthermore, this challenge is pronounced for new or younger teachers, many of whom may encounter unfamiliar working conditions, insufficient training and high pressure due to unrealistic expectations and learning targets set at the school, regional or national level.

Overcoming structural barriers to the access of good-quality [physical] education is vital for realizing education rights for all. Inclusive [physical] education – differentiated to meet the full range of needs across geographic location, gender, economic or ethnic background, or disability status – is the primary mechanism to break the structural inequalities that impede sustainable development and prevent social cohesion.

– UNESCO QPE Policy Guidelines (UNESCO, 2015a)

Opportunities for professional development are scarce due to budgetary constraints and/or insufficient time allocated in teacher schedules to attend training. For instance, only 33% of countries reported providing in-service training (INSET) and continuous professional development (CPD) to their PE workforce every five years, which significantly deviates from the recommended annual frequency.

Significant advancements have been made in recent years to support the development and implementation of QPE, such as increases in the number of specialized teachers in secondary schools worldwide since the last UNESCO Status report (UNESCO & NWCPEA, 2013). However, certain noteworthy gaps remain to be addressed in national policies and guidelines. These include the low status of PE in schools, and outdated PE curricula, insufficient inclusion and equality measures, limited access to facilities and space, shortage of qualifications and opportunities for teacher training. The marginalized position of PE within the education sector, coupled with the suboptimal integration of QPE in school curricula, can be connected to systemic underfunding. This leads to global inequalities in access to and the practice of PE:

Box 2. Key findings

LACK OF FUNDING

63.8% of countries spend less than 2% of their education budget on physical education

LACK OF INCLUSION

1 in **3** students with disabilities have no access to PE

LACK OF QPE TIME

32.2% of upper secondary school and **34.7%** of lower secondary school students meet the minimum criteria of 180 minutes of PE per week; **52.6%** of primary school students meet the minimum requirement of 120 minutes of PE minutes per week[1]

LACK OF TRAINING

Only **44.7%** of PE teachers in primary schools are PE specialists

These challenges pose a risk to public health, well-being and the overall rounded development of citizens and societies. UNESCO's sport initiative, Fit for Life, aims to address funding shortfalls, structural deficiencies, and capacity gaps by offering resources, guidance and common metrics. By doing so, young people's mental and emotional well-being will be enhanced.

1. According to UNESCO's Quality Physical Education (QPE) guidelines, 120 minutes per week in primary school and 180 minutes per week in secondary school.

Box 3. Enhancing QPE through UNESCO's sport initiative, Fit for Life

Enhancing Quality Physical Education through UNESCO's sport initiative- Fit for Life

Fit for Life is UNESCO's global sport initiative. It is designed to activate smart investments in sport and physical education to boost social and developmental outcomes, particularly in equality, education and employability, and well-being. Through its Global Alliance of public and private sector partners, Fit for Life acts as a framework for collective action, harnessing the power of sport to address contemporary social crises.

Fit for Life prioritizes activities which:

- Increase grassroots participation in sport, QPE and physical activity;
- Build the capacity of key national stakeholder groups (policy makers, educators and civil society) to deliver high-impact activities and values-based curricula which enhance the physical and mental well-being of participants;
- Support Member States to develop inclusive sport and PE policies informed by data and knowledge of good practices.

Fit for Life recognizes the role of QPE in fostering lifelong participation in physical activity and promotes it as a core driver of well-rounded development. Through peer-led learning and values-based activities, QPE equips students with diverse physical and social skills, fostering teamwork, resilience and leadership and positively impacting academic performance, employability and emotional well-being.

UNESCO supports the development and delivery of evidence-based policies in QPE through:

1. Data Collection and Research: UNESCO administers a unique Global QPE Survey periodically to assess the state of PE worldwide, gathering data on policy, inclusivity, delivery, and training to update indicators and aid Member States in measuring and enhancing QPE.

2. Capacity-Building and Advocacy: UNESCO's QPE Resource Package equips decision-makers with the tools needed to design and implement effective and inclusive physical education policies. These include a QPE methodology, guidelines, advocacy toolkit, policy brief, and other resources.

3. In-Country Pilot Projects: UNESCO's QPE Policy Project supports countries in revising their national physical education policies, implementing and testing QPE tools and documented good practices through new policy instruments and multistakeholder cooperation.

UNESCO's QPE Surveys and Indicator Framework

To map existing policies and practice, UNESCO designed and disseminated three QPE surveys, in collaboration with members of the QPE Steering Committee[2]: a ministerial-level survey, a school-level survey[3] and a COVID-19 top-up survey. These surveys were designed to collect data on physical education policies and practices across nations and regions. Data were collected from 117 countries and 2,545 teachers. The resulting global dataset will be used to support governments enhance policy quality and delivery.

UNESCO's Global QPE surveys are unique at the international level and provide an unparalleled opportunity to collect comparable national-level datasets, both policy and practice, for aggregate analysis and to benchmark practice. To analyse data, regional groupings following UNESCO Institute for Statistics were used, similar to those used in UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring report (UNESCO, 2023). Annex B can be consulted for more information on regional clusters.

The Global QPE indicators (Box 4) were designed for universal application and to ensure alignment between surveys. These indicators are included in the Sport and SDG indicator bank developed in follow up to UNESCO's 6th International Conference of Ministers and Senior Officials Responsible for Physical Education and Sport (MINEPS VI). The QPE indicators cover 8 thematic areas: PE delivery and participation; inclusion; teacher specialisation; facilities, equipment and resources; teacher education; curriculum quality; monitoring; and budget.

Box 4. QPE indicators

Indicator 1. Percentage of countries reporting compulsory PE provision

Indicator 2. Percentage of countries reporting implementation of minimum number of PE minutes

Indicator 3. Percentage of countries reporting compulsory participation of girls in PE

Indicator 4. Percentage of countries reporting participation of persons with and without disabilities in the same PE classes

Indicator 5. Percentage of countries reporting PE specialist teachers

Indicator 6. Percentage of schools reporting adequate, functioning and safe equipment to support quality and inclusive PE

Indicator 7. Percentage of countries that have an accreditation system for PE teachers

Indicator 8. Percentage of countries monitoring the implementation of PE policy instruments

Indicator 9. Percentage of schools reporting full and/or partial implementation of QPE as defined by UNESCO's QPE Policy Guidelines

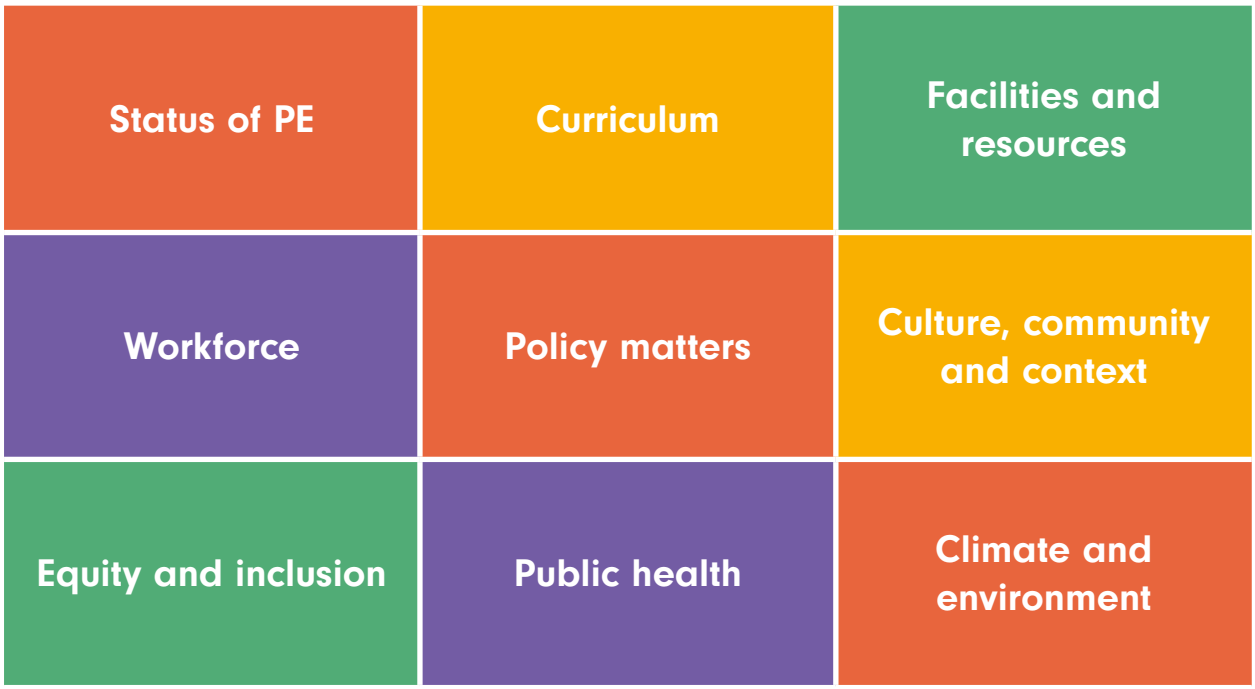
Indicator 10. Proportion of national education budget invested in PE

2. The QPE Steering Committee comprised experts from organizations such as the African Union, the Commonwealth Secretariat, International Federation of Physical Education and Sport (FIEPS), International Council of Sport Science and Physical Education (ICSSPE), ILO, UNDESA, UNESCO, UNICEF, UN Women, UNESCO Chair Munster Technological University, World Federation of Sporting Goods Industry (WFSGI), WHO and the Global Observatory on Women and Sport.
3. The International Federation of Physical Education and Sport (FIEPS) supported data collection at the school level through their networks in 146 countries.

UNESCO QPE Report: Purpose & Themes

This Global Status report is divided into four sections: Introduction, Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations. Findings are presented according to the themes identified during the analysis, with concluding policy recommendations for the attention of governments and other stakeholders within the PE and sport ecosystems. The qualitative analysis resulted in the identification of eight core themes that were common to both the ministerial- and school-level surveys. In addition, a further theme was identified as being specific to the Global QPE school-level survey data: Climate and Environment. The main findings are highlighted in these nine core themes (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Themes of UNESCO's QPE survey analysis



This report aims to serve as a resource for policymakers and PE/sports practitioners seeking to enhance their understanding of QPE and make informed decisions in their respective domains. The insights provided herein aim to promote a shared understanding of the key issues relating to global PE delivery, inform policy formulation, and inspire the implementation of good practices. As the field of PE continues to evolve, this report stands as a guiding reference to promote the vision of a healthier, fitter, and more physically active society.

Section 2: Findings

Section 2: Findings

In this section, the findings from an analysis of the data collected by UNESCO's QPE surveys are presented. Findings are structured across nine core themes, supported by relevant data, graphs and tables. The insights provided are drawn from the data collected and aim to enhance the quality, inclusivity and targeted nature of investments in PE.

Regarding the inclusion of girls and students with disabilities in PE, 58% of countries worldwide report their participation in mainstream settings, yet significant disparities still exist between regions. A concerning issue is the discrepancy between policy and practice. For instance, while 54.5% of countries report policies, strategies, guidelines or plans to provide equal amounts of PE time for boys and girls, in practice, only 7.1% of schools report that equal PE time is actually implemented for boys and girls. This equates to a 47.4% difference between policy and practice, a result that is observable across all regions. Similarly, 1 in 3 students with disabilities still have no access to PE.

The deployment of PE specialist teachers is at a record high especially in lower and upper secondary schools, with percentages reaching 94.6% and 96.4%, respectively. However, the figure drops to only 44.7% in primary schools, whereas in 2013 53% of ministries reported specialist teachers (UNESCO & NWCPEA, 2013). In relation to their qualifications, graduate (bachelor's level) and post-graduate qualifications (master's level) were most frequently reported.

Finally, 87.6% of countries monitor the implementation of PE, including quality assurance (97.9%) and student health (75.9%). Yet at school-level, only 68.5% of countries track full and/or partial implementation of QPE. Annex C contains detailed data for each of the 10 indicators.

Box 5: QPE Indicators

Legend

Good **Moderate** **Poor**

1. Percentage of countries/schools reporting compulsory PE provision

Globally, 83% of countries report compulsory PE provision in school across all levels

Primary schools (120 minutes per week)	**87.9%**
Lower secondary schools (180 minutes per week)	**86.8%**
Upper secondary schools (180 minutes per week)	**74.5%**

2. Percentage of countries reporting implementation of minimum number of PE minutes

Globally, 39.8% of countries implement the minimum number of PE minutes per week

Primary schools (120 minutes per week)	**52.5%**
Lower secondary schools (180 minutes per week)	**34.8%**
Upper secondary schools (180 minutes per week)	**32.2%**

3. Percentage of countries reporting compulsory participation of girls in PE

Globally, 82.7% countries report compulsory participation of girls in PE

Central and Southern Asia	**50%**
Eastern and South-eastern Asia	**81.8%**
Europe and Northern America	**100 %**
Latin America and the Caribbean	**86.4%**
Northern Africa and Western Asia	**100%**
Oceania	**33.3%**
Sub-Saharan Africa	**60%**

4. Percentage of countries/schools reporting participation of persons with and without disabilities in the same PE classes:

Globally, 58.3% of countries report that persons with disabilities attend the same PE classes as persons without disabilities

Central and Southern Asia[4]	**N/A**
Eastern and South-eastern Asia	**50%**
Europe and Northern America	**71%**
Latin America and the Caribbean	**63.6%**
Northern Africa and Western Asia	**64.3%**
Oceania	**50%**
Sub-Saharan Africa	**45.5%**

5. Percentage of countries/schools reporting PE specialist teachers

Primary schools	**44.7%**
Lower secondary Schools	**94.6%**
Upper secondary Schools	**96.4 %**

6. Percentage of schools reporting adequate, functioning and safe equipment to support quality and inclusive PE[5]

School-level data breakdown of space-equivalence available for PE

Classroom size	**9.8%**
Tennis/basketball court	**42.5%**
Full gymnasium	**18.9%**
Football field	**13.7%**
More than a football field	**15.1%**

7. Percentage of countries that have an accreditation system for PE teachers

Graduate (bachelor's level) and post-graduate qualifications (master's level) were most frequently reported. PE teachers with post-graduate level qualifications were noted for:

Primary schools (120 minutes per week)	**42.6%**
Lower secondary schools (180 minutes per week)	**48.2%**
Upper secondary schools (180 minutes per week)	**52.6 %**

8. Percentage of countries monitoring the implementation of PE policy instruments

Globally 87.6% monitor the implementation of PE policy instruments. Most specifically, PE monitoring includes the following:

Quantity of provision	**80.9%**
Quality assurance	**97.9%**
Advisory and guidance	**90.7%**
Teacher performance	**89.5%**
Student health	**75.9%**
Academic achievement	**78.8%**
Child protection/safeguarding	**80.7%**

4. Only three countries responded to the questions pertaining to this indicator, which explains the negative result.
5. No specific questions pertaining to this indicator were included, resulting in a lack of clear data. Nonetheless, questions addressing related issues were present and generated relevant data.

9. Percentage of schools reporting full and/or partial implementation of QPE as defined by UNESCO's QPE Policy Guidelines

Globally 68.5% countries track full and/or partial implementation of QPE

Central and Southern Asia	**75%**
Eastern and South-eastern Asia	**100%**
Europe and Northern America	**76.7%**
Latin America and the Caribbean	**50%**
Northern Africa and Western Asia	**73.3%**
Oceania	**60%**
Sub-Saharan Africa	**61.9%**

10. Percentage of national education budget invested in PE

Less than 2%	**63.8%**
Between 2%-5%	**19.1%**
Between 5%-7%	**6.7%**
Greater than 7%	**10.5%**

Theme 1: Status of PE

Box 6. Theme 1 - Status of PE highlights

- UNESCO's QPE surveys indicate a high global rate of compulsory PE. The majority of countries report national policies that mandate PE as a compulsory subject in primary schools (87.9%), lower secondary schools (86.8%), and upper secondary schools (74.5%)
- Despite the widespread adoption of compulsory PE policies, discrepancies exist between policy directives and their implementation on the ground. While ministries often report high levels of compulsory PE provision (87.9%), school provision may not fully reflect these rates (71%), highlighting the need for measures to align policy with practice.
- Implementation of quality PE was perceived to be easier where there was sufficient resourcing, a well-defined curriculum and a specialized workforce.
- 80.6% of respondents globally reported that the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on PE provision, due to the shift to remote delivery and the lack of technologies necessary for delivering quality sessions effectively.

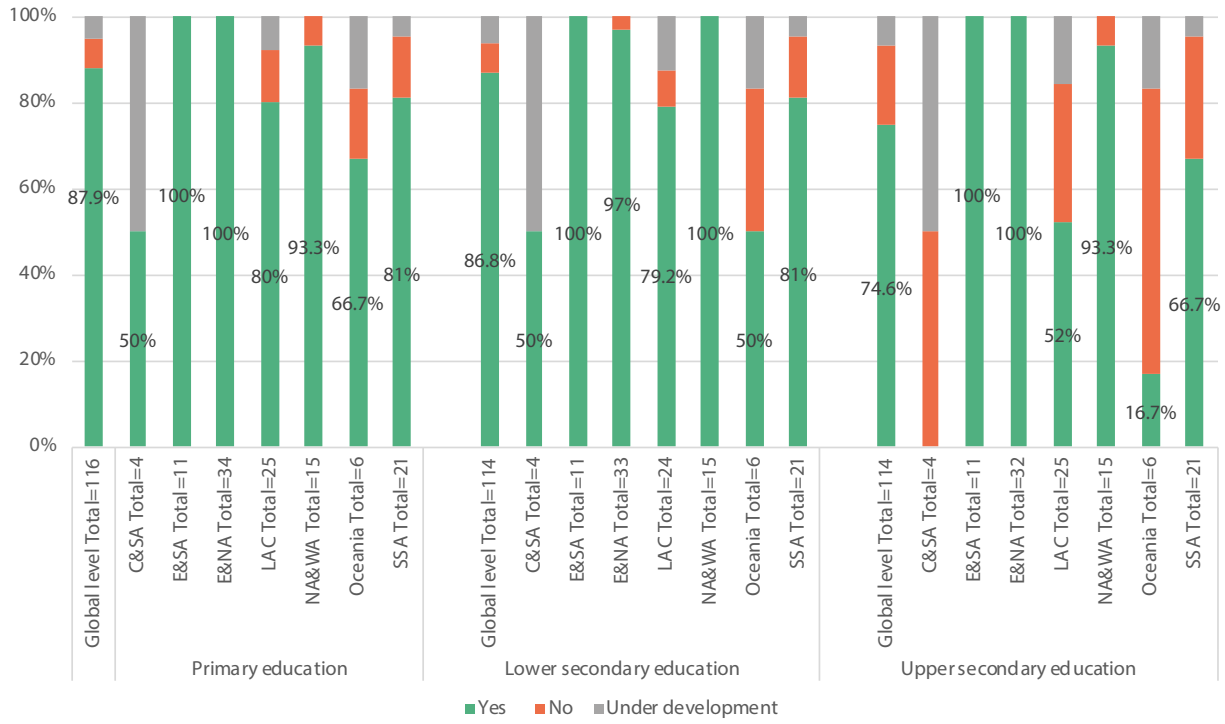
Compulsory PE provision

Indicator 1. Percentage of countries reporting compulsory PE provision

The increasing evidence and recognition of the potential of PE to support holistic development has led to many countries making it a compulsory subject in school curricula. Since the last world-wide survey of school PE in 2013 (UNESCO & NWCPEA, 2013), there has been an increase in the percentage of prescribed national physical education curriculum: from 79% in 2013 to 83% in 2024. Academics and advocates argue that its inclusion in educational curricula ensures more students benefit from PE's physical, cognitive, and social aspects (Hooper et al., 2020; Luguetti & Oliver, 2020; Lamb et al., 2021). However, despite these efforts, the status of PE relative to other subjects in the curriculum remains a concern (Harris, 2018; afPE, 2021). As outlined below, findings from UNESCO's QPE surveys reinforce the need for concerted efforts to promote the value and status of PE at policy-level and in all schools.

UNESCO's insights indicate that there is globally a high rate of compulsory PE. Almost 83% of countries reported national policies which require PE to be a compulsory subject in primary, lower secondary and upper secondary schools, with respective rates of 87.9%, 86.8% and 74.5%. The trend remained consistent across all seven regions, as defined by UNESCO's Institute of Statistics. For example, the majority of ministries in Europe and Northern America reported high levels of compulsory PE, across all educational levels (primary – 100%; lower secondary – 97.5%; upper secondary – 100%). Moreover, rates of compulsory PE trended relatively high in the remaining regions (Figure 2).

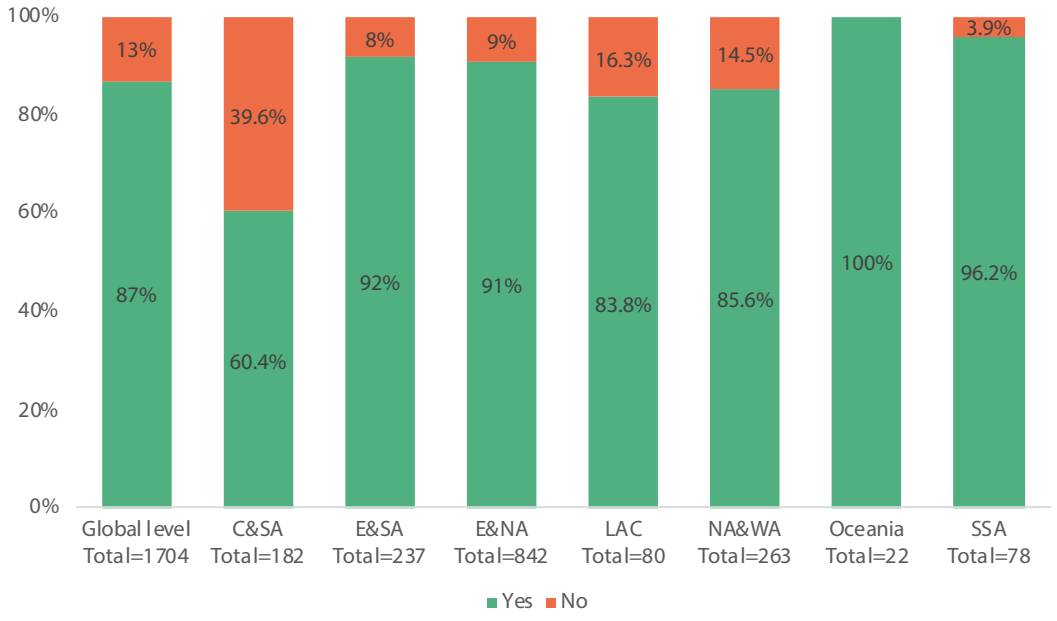
Figure 2: Ministerial-level: is PE a compulsory subject in school?



Central and Southern Asia (C&SA); Eastern and South-eastern Asia (E&SA); Europe & Northern America (E&NA); Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC); Northern Africa & Western Asia (NA&WA); Oceania; Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)

School responses mirrored ministry responses: the majority of schools (87.9%) reported that PE is compulsory (Figure 3). While most regions show a high percentage of compulsory PE, it is worth noting that only 60.5% of schools in Central and Southern Asia reported PE as compulsory. When the ministerial data was cross analysed with the school-level data, discrepancies related to the principle of compulsory provision and its implementation became apparent.

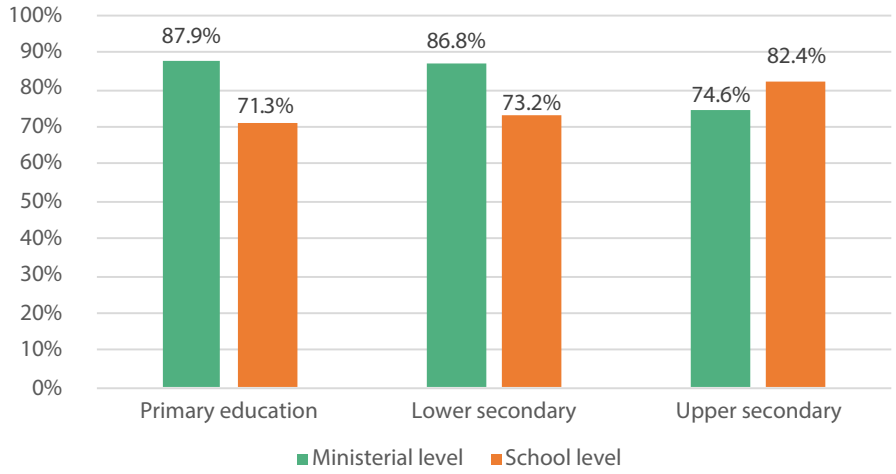
Figure 3: School-level: compulsory PE in school



Central and Southern Asia (C&SA); Eastern and South-eastern Asia (E&SA); Europe & Northern America (E&NA); Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC); Northern Africa & Western Asia (NA&WA); Oceania; Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)

On average, ministerial responses indicated higher levels of compulsory provision than responses at the school-level (Figure 4). In primary education, 71.3% of school-level respondents reported compulsory PE. This represents a 16.9% implementation gap with ministerial-level respondents (87.9%). In lower secondary school 73.2% of respondents reported compulsory provision, which represents a 13.6% implementation gap with ministerial-level data (86.8%). This pattern is inverted at the upper secondary level, where 74.6% of ministerial-level respondents reported compulsory PE, lower than school-level respondents (82.4%). These differences may be due to challenges in policy implementation at primary and lower secondary schools, whereas in upper secondary schools, teachers may be prioritizing other subjects of the curriculum over PE. These results highlight the challenges faced in translating PE policy into practice. Consequently, there is a need to apply measures, such as monitoring mechanisms, to facilitate the implementation of policy directives to enhance the significance and impact of QPE.

Figure 4: Comparison of compulsory PE provision at ministerial- and school-level.



UNESCO data from both the ministerial and school surveys across all regions indicated that PE was considered less important, particularly at higher levels of secondary education, where more traditionally 'academic' subjects are favoured. This shows there is still work to be done in evidencing and advocating the benefits of PE as a subject which supports physical literacy and rounded development. The strengthening of monitoring and evaluation frameworks that measure the impact of QPE at policy and practice levels is a crucial aspect.

Despite it being a compulsory national curriculum subject, PE is regarded as a fringe subject in many schools. It is common for students to have fewer than ten PE lessons in the entire year as teachers, with the approval of their principals, routinely ignore the requirement to teach it'

– Ministerial respondent, Latin America and the Caribbean

Reflecting calls in academia for PE to be considered not only a compulsory, but a core subject (i.e. as a protected, central element of the curriculum offer), a number of school-level respondents underscored the value of PE for students' rounded development, making it an integral part of compulsory school curricula. For instance, a PE teacher stressed the value of having PE positioned on a par with other school subjects. The designation of PE as a core subject in this example was seen to enhance its status within the school and afford better opportunities regarding timetabling.

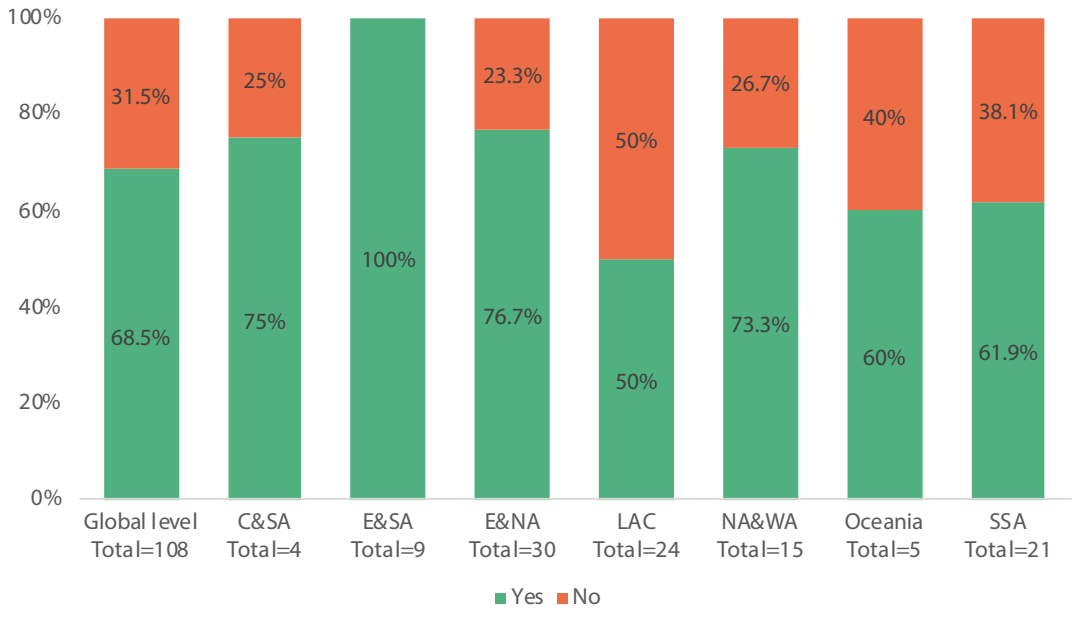
> **Physical education is considered in my school as a core subject, and we have the choice of the best timetable for the lessons.**
>
> - PE teacher, Northern Africa and Western Asia

Implementation of Quality Physical Education (QPE)

Indicator 9. Percentage of schools reporting full and/or partial implementation of QPE as defined by UNESCO's QPE Policy Guidelines

Research shows that it is not only the quantity of PE within curricula that is of importance, but also the quality of provision (Dyson, 2014; UNESCO, 2015a; Bailey, 2018; Harris, 2018; to WHO, 2018). This is why UNESCO first established its QPE concept in 2015, to better support governments develop and implement PE policies and programmes which maximize the engagement, skills acquisition and enjoyment of all students. Since then, there has been an improvement in the quality of PE provision. For example, in 86.7% of countries where PE is mandatory, there are overseeing authorities responsible for monitoring compliance with regulations. This indicates concerted efforts towards effective policy implementation and the monitoring of PE classes. However, UNESCO data reveal that just 68.5% of countries report that compulsory provision includes active monitoring of quality components, including, but not limited to, frequency (Figure 5). Moreover, the integration and monitoring of QPE in national PE strategies varies across regions. Eastern and South-eastern Asian countries demonstrate the highest adoption rates, with 100% actively tracking QPE implementation. In contrast, only 1 in 2 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean report monitoring QPE.

Figure 5: Countries monitoring full/partial implementation of QPE

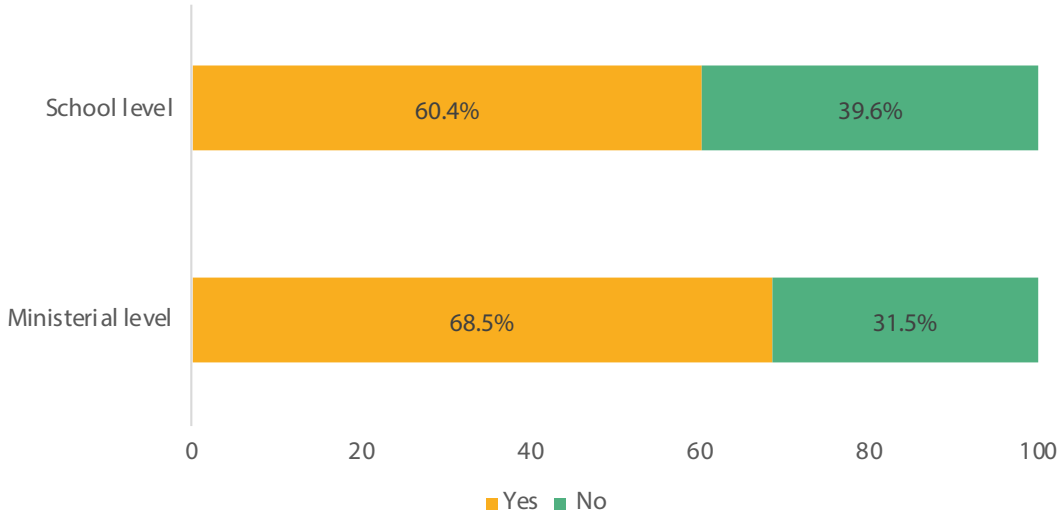


Central and Southern Asia (C&SA); Eastern and South-eastern Asia (E&SA); Europe & Northern America (E&NA); Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC); Northern Africa & Western Asia (NA&WA); Oceania; Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)

Consistent with earlier findings on compulsory PE provision, UNESCO insights reveal discrepancies between policy and practice. 68.5% of ministerial respondents declared full or partial implementation of QPE, while only 60.4% of schools did so, indicating an implementation gap of 8.15% (Figure 6). School respondents recognized that implementation of QPE was perceived to be easier where there was sufficient resourcing, a well-defined curriculum, and a specialized workforce (see also Themes 2, 3 and 4). Conversely, challenges reportedly arose where such elements were not in place. Issues such as the absence of a dedicated PE curriculum, competing agendas (e.g. sports performance, health promotion, citizenship), and limited curriculum time exacerbated the challenges of QPE implementation. Moreover, some respondents highlighted additional hurdles such as insufficient specialist training, large class sizes, and high student-teacher ratios (Theme 4).

Studies indicate that PE is more impactful when provision is inclusive, well resourced, delivered by trained practitioners, and tailored to the needs of learners (Ho et al., 2021; O'Connor, et al., 2022; Gray et al., 2022). Consequently, further actions to identify implementation challenges, such as strengthening data collection and evaluating procedures, are required to bridge the gap between policy and practice.

Figure 6: Percentage of schools reporting full and/or partial implementation of QPE as defined by UNESCO's QPE Policy Guidelines compared to ministerial-level responses



It is not universal, it is not compulsory, there are very few minutes per week, we work in poor facilities, with little material, in primary school with very large groups, we have many pending issues with Physical Education.

– Ministerial respondent, Latin America and the Caribbean

Despite these obstacles, instances of effective implementation showcase the positive impacts of ministerial support and investments in PE, particularly in teacher training and professional development, which significantly enhance schools' capacity to deliver QPE.

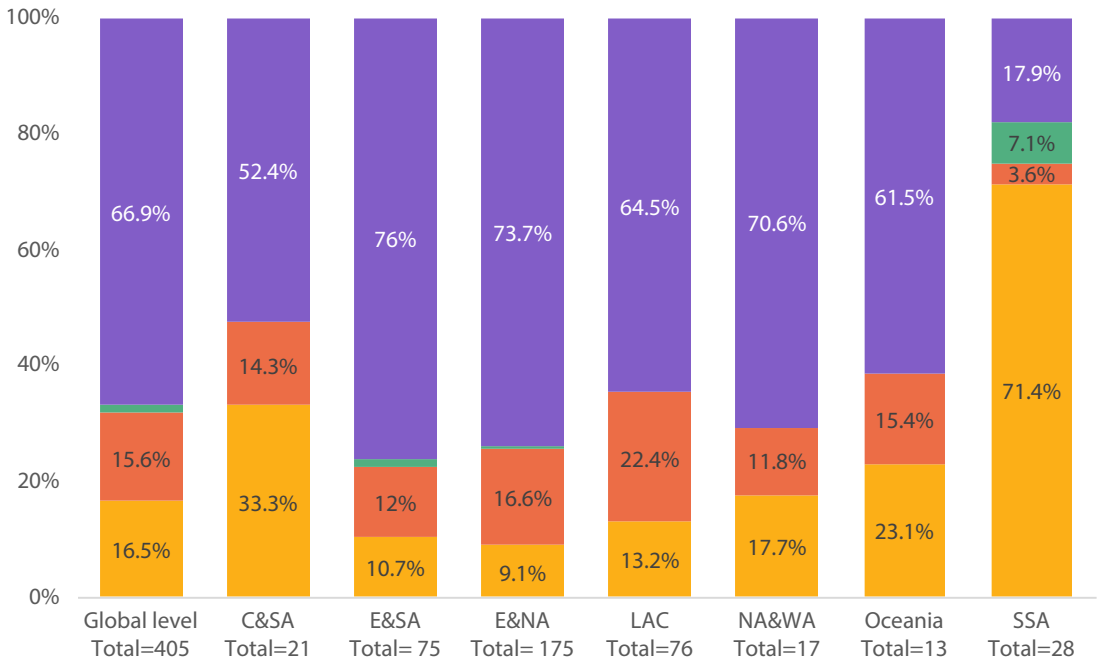
Impact of COVID-19 on PE provision

Globally, 80.6% of respondents in UNESCO's QPE COVID-19 top up survey reported that the pandemic negatively impacted PE provision. Responses attributed the negative impacts to the remote mode of delivery, as 66.9% of classes were delivered online, 15.7% in hybrid formats, and just 1.1% in person. As a result, there was a notable decline in student participation. On many occasions PE teachers did not have the skills or technologies needed to effectively deliver quality PE classes. Additionally, 16.4% of PE classes were cancelled for a variety of reasons, including lack of internet, lack of equipment or lack of practical guidance. Moreover, of the PE classes that did continue, 52.8% were reduced in length.

COVID-19 limited the delivery of PE with 52.8% of respondents reporting that lessons were reduced in length due to the pandemic

The examination of the modalities of PE delivery during COVID-19 reveal significant differences across regions. As shown in Figure 7, respondents from Sub-Saharan Africa reported the highest rate of class cancellation (71.4%), followed by Central and Southern America (33.3%). On the other hand, participants from Europe and Northern America (9.1%) and from Eastern and South-eastern Asia (10.7%) reported the lowest rate of cancelled classes. All regions, except Sub-Saharan Africa, delivered most PE classes online, ranging from 52.4% in Central and Southern Asia to 76% in Eastern and South-east Asia. Hybrid PE lessons were also delivered during this time period at the expense of purely in person lessons.

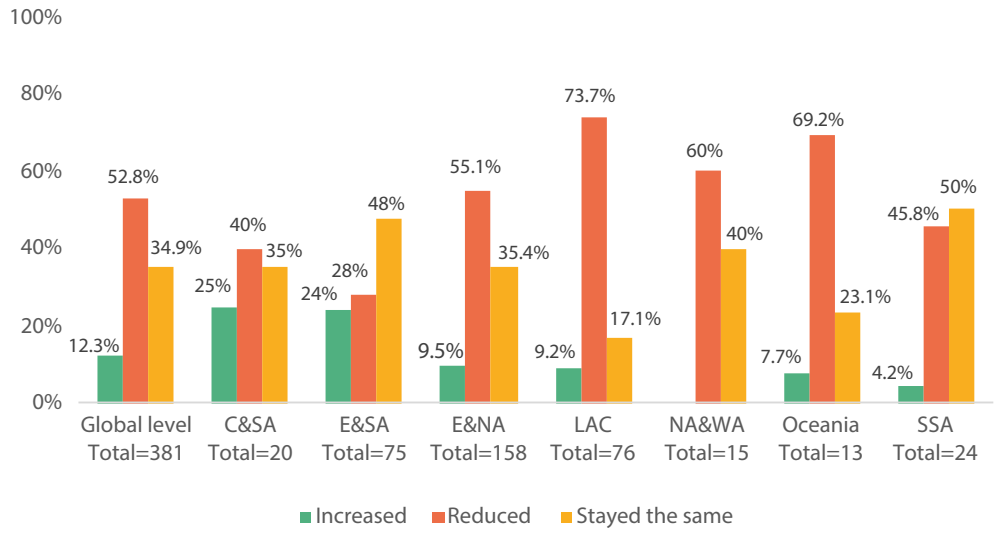
Figure 7: PE lessons delivered during COVID-19



Central and Southern Asia (C&SA); Eastern and South-eastern Asia (E&SA); Europe & Northern America (E&NA); Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC); Northern Africa & Western Asia (NA&WA); Oceania; Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)

Not only was the number of PE classes affected, but also the duration of classes was negatively affected in 53% of case, as illustrated in Figure 8. Latin American and Caribbean respondents reported that 73.7% of PE classes were reduced in length, which, together with Oceania (69.2%), is much higher than the reductions reported in other regions. Eastern and South-eastern Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa were the only two regions where the duration of PE classes remained the same overall.

Figure 8: Duration of PE classes during COVID-19



Central and Southern Asia (C&SA); Eastern and South-eastern Asia (E&SA); Europe & Northern America (E&NA); Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC); Northern Africa & Western Asia (NA&WA); Oceania; Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)

These findings highlight how crises can negatively affect global PE provision, demonstrating the vulnerability of PE to external disruptions. Insights from the COVID-19 survey align with broader research findings and reinforce the need to learn from the experience of the pandemic to ensure that QPE is better placed to face potential future challenges (e.g. Hambali et al., 2020; Centeio et al., 2021, Parris et al., 2020). Facilities, infrastructures, and resources available in the respective regions appear to be impacted by contextual factors, as demonstrated by Sub-Saharan African countries, which experienced more challenges during the pandemic than other regions. The detrimental effects of a future crisis, such as another global pandemic, must be minimized by proposing, testing, validating, and implementing solutions.

Theme 2: Curriculum

Box 7. Theme 2 - Curriculum highlights

- 1 in 2 primary schools (52.6%) meet the UNESCO recommended levels of PE of at least 120 minutes per week. In secondary school, 1 in 3 schools meet the 180 minutes of recommended PE time weekly (34.8% in lower secondary and 32.2% in upper secondary).
- A significant gap is evident between the reported implementation of minimum PE minutes by ministries and schools, with schools consistently reporting higher amounts than those reported by ministries. This highlights the need for enhanced monitoring of PE minutes and improved communication channels between ministries and schools regarding PE curriculum expectations.
- Despite most countries implementing a PE curriculum (82.8%), challenges such as overcrowded or outdated content persist. These highlight the importance of considering other implementation factors.

Challenges regarding PE curricula were a recurrent topic in both the ministerial and school survey data across all regions. PE curricula serve as an overarching framework that inform the planning and implementation of pedagogical practice, while emphasizing the knowledge, skills and understanding valued in the subject (Penney et al., 2009; Lund & Tannehill, 2015; Gray et al., 2022). Therefore, a PE curriculum is far from neutral and is more than outlining the content to be taught, it is a key organiser of student learning experiences (Penney, 2013; Bartlett & Burton, 2016).

There is a need for subjects like PE to consider future orientations and curriculum developments to ensure continued relevance and effectiveness in relation to meeting student needs and learning outcomes. A teacher's delivery of a PE curriculum is a central aspect to be considered to ensure practice is meaningful, inclusive and meets the needs of a diverse range of learners. This clearly relies on a well-educated workforce (see also Theme 4) with access to continuous professional development opportunities (Alfrey & O'Connor, 2022; Gray et al., 2024).

In terms of UNESCO data related to this theme, ministerial responses often focused on the development (or lack) of specific PE curriculum and the need for effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess practice. Recognized challenges included the limited time allocated to PE for curriculum delivery and the lack of specialist provision in some contexts, particularly within primary schools. School responses echoed some of these points, but also identified more specific challenges associated with implementing curricula and delivering PE in practice.

Given that curriculum development emerges from a complex array of decisions and negotiations that are influenced by both the broader political context and practical considerations (Adams, 2014), the challenges outlined in this section should be considered when reviewing PE curriculum to improve QPE provision.

Achieving recommended levels of PE per week

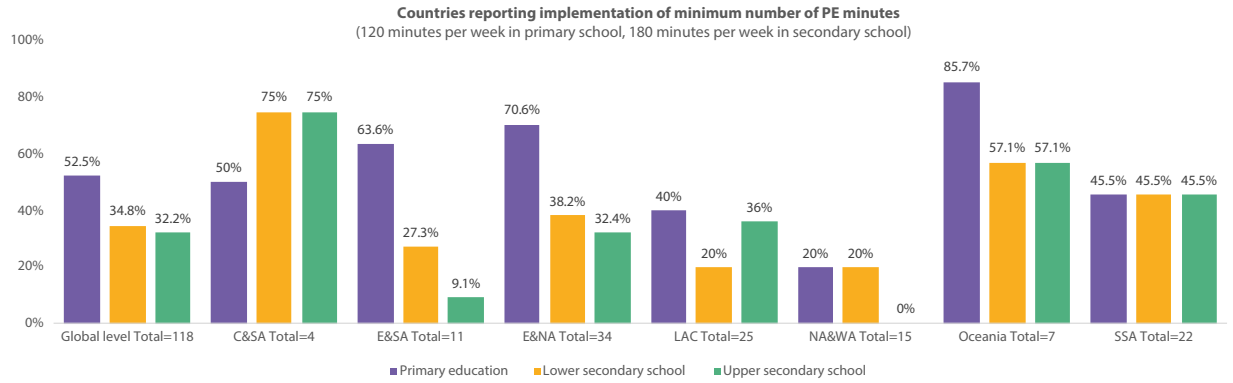
Indicator 2. Percentage of countries reporting implementation of minimum number of PE minutes

UNESCO global data reveal a concerning situation: only 52.5% of primary schools worldwide meet the UNESCO recommended levels of 120 minutes of PE per week (Figure 9). This issue is even more pronounced in certain regions, with Sub-Saharan Africa at 45.5%, Latin America and the Caribbean at 40%, and Northern Africa and Western Asia at 20%.

At the secondary level, where the UNESCO recommended weekly PE time increases to 180 minutes, this issue is heightened: only 34.8% of lower secondary school and 32.2% of upper secondary meet this worldwide. UNESCO's ministerial data underscore the severity of this issue across regions. In Central and Southern Asia, and in Oceania, 75% and 57.1% of schools respectively meet the recommendation. However, in contrast, in Eastern and South-eastern Asia minimum requirements are met only by 27.3% of countries in lower secondary

and 9.1% in upper secondary; in Europe and Northern America, 38.2% of countries meet minimum PE requirements for lower secondary, dropping to 32.4% at the upper secondary level; in Northern Africa and Western Asia, only 20% of countries meet the minimum PE requirements in lower secondary and no country meet the minimum recommended number of minutes in upper secondary; while in Sub-Saharan Africa, minimum requirements are met by 45.5% of countries for all three levels of education.

Figure 9: Implementation of minimum number of PE minutes per region



Central and Southern Asia (C&SA); Eastern and South-eastern Asia (E&SA); Europe & Northern America (E&NA); Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC); Northern Africa & Western Asia (NA&WA); Oceania; Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)

A notable inconsistency emerges in the reported implementation of minimum PE minutes between ministries and schools, as illustrated in Figures 10, 11 and 12. UNESCO data unveil a consistent pattern wherein ministries underestimate the implementation of minimum PE minutes compared to schools. To illustrate this, in primary education, 75% of schools reported meeting the target time for PE compared to only 52.5% of ministries. Similarly, in lower secondary education, 54.4% of schools reported meeting targets compared to 34.8% of ministries, and in upper secondary education, 53.7% of schools and 32.2% of ministries reported meeting targets respectively.

At the regional level, some variations are observed. For instance, in primary education, ministerial respondents from Latin America and the Caribbean reported less than half 'the' PE time (40%) than that reported by school respondents (85.2%). This trend continues to increase as we progress into lower secondary and upper secondary. On the contrary, in Oceania ministries claimed more than double the PE time (85.7%) to be offered than schools did (40%) at primary and lower secondary level, and at a lower level in secondary education.

Figure 10: Ministerial- vs school-level comparison: implementation of minimum PE activities per week in primary education

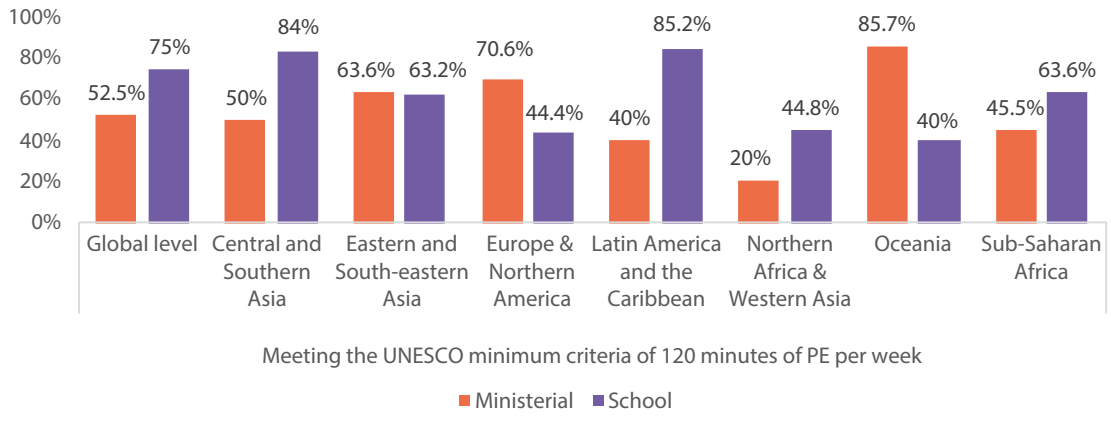


Figure 11: Ministerial- vs school-level comparison: implementation of minimum PE activities per week in lower secondary education.

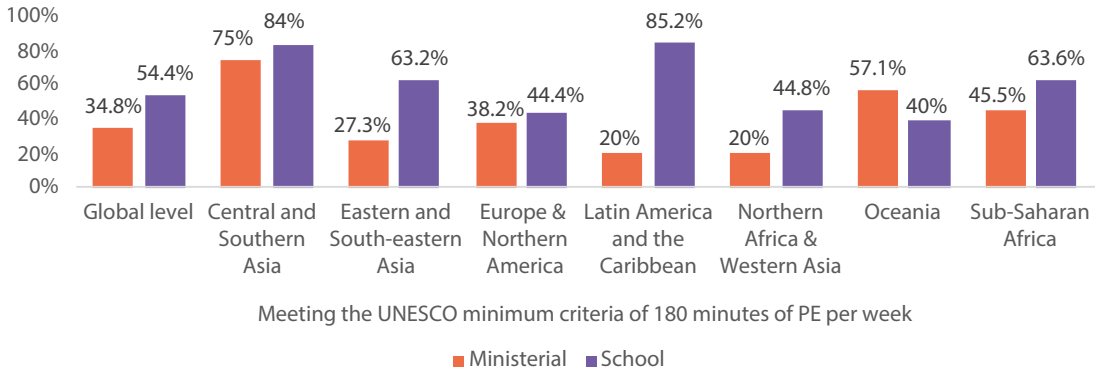
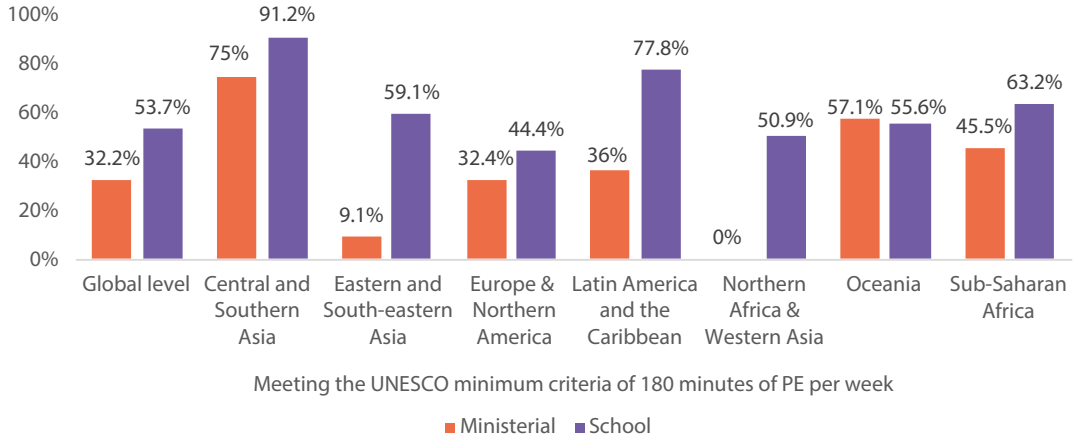


Figure 12: Ministerial- vs school-level comparison: implementation of minimum PE activities per week in upper secondary education

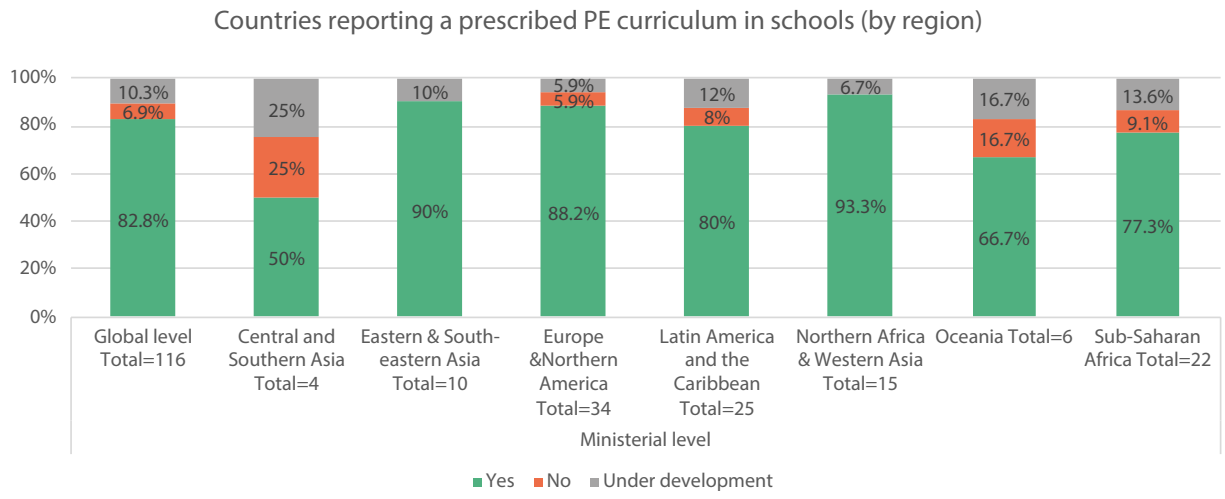


These discrepancies could perhaps be attributed to a disconnect between ministries at policy-level and actual practice in schools. It could also be due to school respondents looking to present their PE delivery in a more positive light (i.e. social desirability influence). Overall, these findings underscore the need for a closer examination of implementation processes, monitoring of PE minutes and improved communication channels between ministries and schools regarding PE curriculum standards.

Adherence to a prescribed curriculum

UNESCO data show that there is a high level of adherence to PE curricula worldwide. At the ministerial-level, 82.8% of respondents reported implementing a subject-specific PE curriculum, a percentage mirrored at the school-level (84%). This correlation is expected, considering that most schools are required to adhere to curricula determined by the government, thus necessitating compliance with statutory measures. However, notable regional differences emerge, particularly in Central and Southern Asia, and Oceania, where the reported rates of implementation of a mandated PE curriculum are lower at 50% and 66.7%, respectively (Figure 13).

Figure 13: Countries reporting a prescribed PE curriculum in school per region



Curriculum content

The presence of a prescribed PE curriculum does not guarantee an effective delivery of QPE. Even in cases where a PE curriculum was mandated, school-level respondents identified specific challenges such as 'crowded', 'narrow' or 'dated' curricula, along with unsuitable curriculum documents. This highlights the importance of not only noting the presence of a curriculum, but also considering factors influencing its implementation in practice, such as sufficient funding, a specialized workforce or a well-defined, flexible and varied curriculum.

PE is not given due importance... the programmes are not updated, and there is no proper updating for the school's teachers.

– PE teacher, Latin America & the Caribbean

School respondents highlighted a need for appropriate teaching materials that are up to date to help them deliver QPE in practice. This call for updated and research-informed teaching materials was particularly pronounced in contexts where there is no specific PE curriculum, and notably so in primary PE settings. In these circumstances, QPE is a consolidated initiative that can be leveraged to build the capacity of major national stakeholder groups to provide high-impact activities that enhance the physical and mental well-being of students.

There are no official texts to dictate sport and physical education programmes; there is no roadmap to dictate what SPE teachers should do in each lesson at each grade level.

–PE teacher, Sub-Saharan Africa

A key insight to spotlight is that when there was a well-defined PE curriculum for different school stages (i.e. primary and secondary levels), respondents were more likely to speak positively about PE delivery in their context. In some contexts (e.g. Latin America and the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa), there were suggestions that more digital resources (e.g. laptops, tablets and recording equipment) might be beneficial to aid the design and delivery of a broader range of experiences. In other instances, sharing knowledge, materials and equipment between schools was often cited as a means of enhancing practice in schools with limited resources.

Physical education curricula need to be well prepared and updated. We need modern educational materials for the success of school PE.

–PE teacher, Northen Africa and Western Asia

Box 8 – Spotlight- Trinidad and Tobago

Context

'Physical Education and Sport became an examinable subject at the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) Ordinary Level (O Level) for the first time in 2005 and at the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Education (CAPE)- A Level in 2015. This provided an opportunity for schools to implement syllabi developed by the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC). Within each syllabus, candidates are required to conduct a School Based Assessment (SBA) class project. This class project requires candidates to collaborate to plan and implement an intra-mural sporting event (Form 4–5) or an extra-mural sporting event (Form 6) based on concepts associated with the Sport Education Model.

Impact

The implementation of the class project has transformed PE at the upper school-level. Candidates assume roles and engage in authentic activities which allow them to display and develop life skills which equip them for transition to work. In addition, there are opportunities for the general school population, staff, community groups, business entities and members of the local community to be part of the project.

In 2019, the Rapid Assessment for Physical Activity Survey was conducted among 85% of secondary schools. The teachers who participated reported an increase in student interest in physical activity/ physical education, behaviour, overall attitude as well as support from teachers and administrators due to the student participation in the class project. Additionally, students' sense of personal/social responsibility and leadership qualities improved significantly. This may have contributed to steady increase in the number of candidates sitting the Physical Education and Sport CSEC examination as seen from 1115 in 2010 to 2741 in 2020. This class project, while not unique to Trinidad and Tobago, appears to have the desirous effect of facilitating students' holistic development utilizing a real world context.'

Takeaway

This example shows the benefits that have been accrued from the introduction of PE examinations at the secondary level. In addition to enhancing the status of PE within the school curriculum, the inclusion of a class project encouraged the development of key life skills and supported holistic, cross-school and cross-community impact. Supporting the development of examination PE in this way could also help to encourage the development of a new generation of PE specialists.

Theme 3: Facilities and resources

Box 9. Theme 3 - Facilities and resources highlights

- 63.8% of countries worldwide invest less than 2% of their national education budget on PE, evidencing the urgent need to prioritize and increase funding for PE programmes.
- Having good facilities, appropriate equipment, and adequate resources, facilitates a positive experience of QPE for students and teachers alike.
- While ministerial responses emphasize logistics, funding, and resource distribution, schools prioritize appropriate facilities and resources to address student safety, well-being, and hygiene concerns.
- High student-teacher ratios pose challenges for effective teaching and learning. Some regions average 15 to 25 students per class while others exceed 35 students per class.

This Theme was one of the most frequently cited in UNESCO's Global QPE surveys. Having adequate facilities, specialized equipment and trained staff were all identified as key requirements for delivering QPE. The lack of such resources was perceived to pose significant challenges. Research points to the need for schools to be adequately financed and resourced to deliver QPE, including with appropriate practical spaces and equipment, sufficient guidance materials, and trained practitioners (Alfrey & O'Connor, 2022; Quarmby et al., 2022). However, as outlined in Theme 1 of this report, it is also noted that core academic subjects (e.g., English, Mathematics and Science) are typically afforded more curriculum time, status and enhanced initial teacher training and professional development opportunities, as well as financial resourcing (Harris, 2018; Hooper et al., 2023).

Research has highlighted how broader financial pressures can result in the 'squeezing' of school budgets. This suggests that inadequate resourcing of PE can adversely affect key aspects of PE provision, including instructional time, equipment availability, class sizes, and assessment practices (e.g., Turner et al., 2017; Lindsay et al., 2021). Such issues are also reflected in the findings from UNESCO's QPE surveys outlined below, which are a reminder of the need for increased investment in PE budgets, to enable schools to deliver the subject effectively and inclusively.

PE budget

UNESCO's data reveal a persistent underinvestment of national education budgets in PE, underscoring the urgent need to prioritize and increase funding for PE programmes.

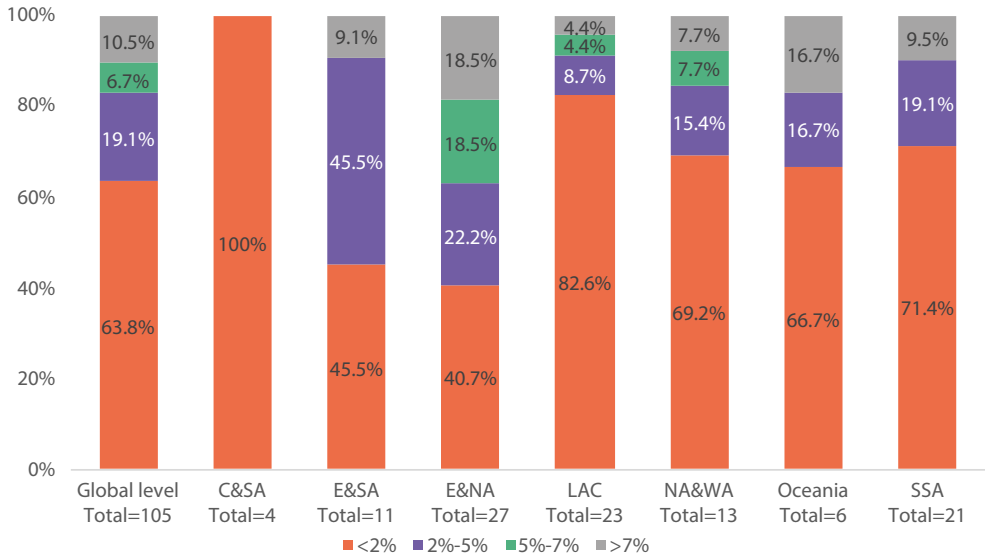
Indicator 10. Percentage of national education budget invested in PE

Data from the ministerial survey reveal that 63.8% of countries worldwide invest less than 2% of their national education budget in PE (Figure 14). At the regional level, all countries in Central and Southern Asia, 82.6% in Latin American and the Caribbean, 69.2% in Northern Africa and Western Asia, and 71.4% in Sub-Saharan Africa invest less than 2% of their education budget in PE.

19.1% of countries invest between 2% and 5% of their education budget in PE, with great regional disparities: 45.5% of countries in Eastern and South-eastern Asia, 22.2% in Europe and Northern America and 19.1% in Sub-Saharan Africa. Only 6.7% of countries invest between 5% and 7% of their education budget in PE. Finally, 10.5% of countries invest over than 7%, with most of these countries being in Europe and Northern America (18.5%) and Oceania (16.7%).

These findings highlight the necessity for increased investment in PE on a global scale, particularly in the most underfunded regions. This is of paramount importance to ensure equitable access to QPE and to enhance overall educational and health outcomes for all students.

Figure 14: Countries reporting budget allocation to PE



Central and Southern Asia (C&SA); Eastern and South-eastern Asia (E&SA); Europe & Northern America (E&NA); Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC); Northern Africa & Western Asia (NA&WA); Oceania; Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)

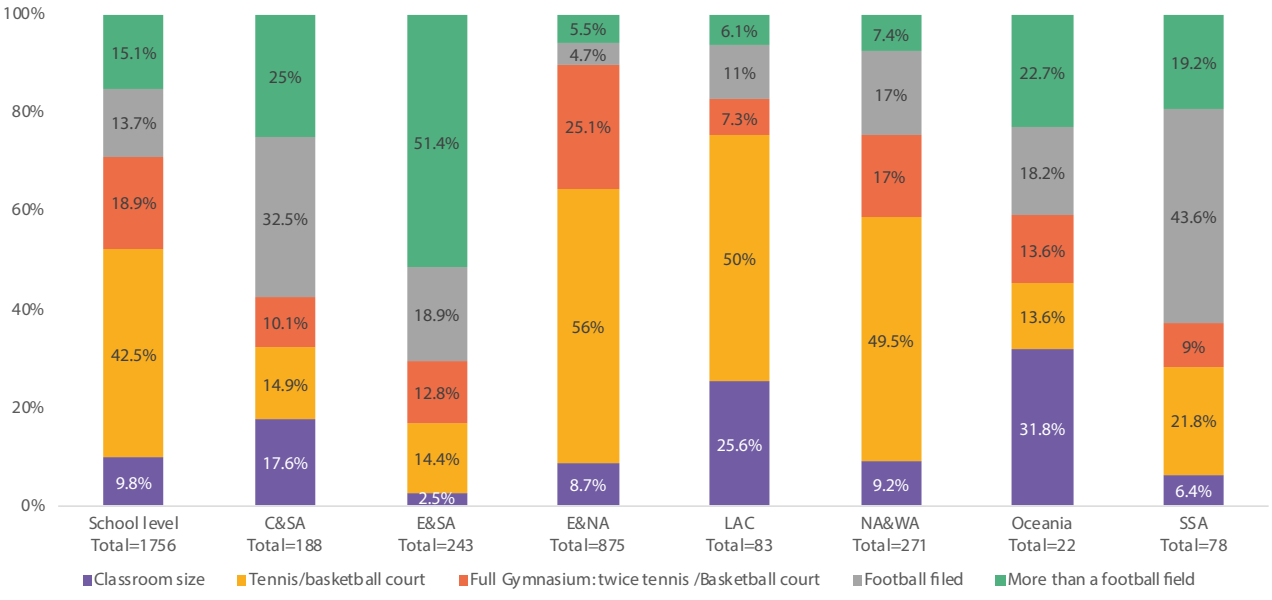
Equipment and infrastructure

UNESCO data reveal a strong focus from both the ministerial and school surveys on facilities, resources and equipment. This is not unexpected considering that these factors are crucial to the execution of practices and substantially affect the capacity of schools to deliver QPE.

Indicator 6. Percentage of schools reporting adequate, functioning and safe equipment to support quality and inclusive PE

Space allocated for PE instruction varied considerably across regions, though it is worth noting that the survey did not distinguish between indoor and outdoor spaces, which can vary widely by country and location (Figure 15). Most PE teachers reported delivering PE classes in spaces similar to a basketball/tennis court (42.5%), followed by a space double this size, similar to a gymnasium (18.9%).

Figure 15: PE teachers reporting space for PE



Central and Southern Asia (C&SA); Eastern and South-eastern Asia (E&SA); Europe & Northern America (E&NA); Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC); Northern Africa & Western Asia (NA&WA); Oceania; Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)

Contextual factors influencing the delivery of PE classes were mentioned by many participants. For example, challenges related to logistics and transportation were repeatedly reported, as were having insufficient facilities and spaces in which to deliver lessons. These two contextual aspects were the case in all regions but more so in Sub-Saharan Africa, Northern Africa and Western Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean, and particularly for more rural schools. This emphasizes the need to plan and distribute resources for the delivery of PE based on contextual factors to enable equality of opportunity for all students.

We note the absence of practice space in many schools, the lack of infrastructure and teaching materials.

– Ministerial respondent, Sub-Saharan Africa

School responses echoed ministerial replies but focused more on aspects related to the practical delivery of PE. They highlighted the need for appropriate facilities and resources to address issues of student safety, well-being, and hygiene, all of which are linked to healthy lifestyles. In some cases, having adequate changing spaces and running water were stressed as paramount to the delivery of good PE experiences for students.

We need a hall to teach PE at school especially when it is raining. Our field has holes and so this is a concern as the students, or anyone playing on the field, will get injured.

– PE teacher, Oceania

While the data perhaps emphasize the challenges of having a lack of facilities and resources for delivering QPE, it is important to note that several respondents, particularly in Europe and Northern America, acknowledged that having good facilities, relevant equipment, and adequate resources, facilitated a positive delivery experience. Some emphasized the importance of investing not only in facilities but also in personnel (see also Theme 4).

Our school has a very good sports base. The school is equipped with all required inventory and has created all conditions for compliance with personal hygiene after PE lessons.

– PE teacher, Europe and Northern America

Box 10. Spotlight- Europe and Northern America

PE Teacher Testimonial

"Students choose either single-sex or co-ed PE classes (and) they have access to a variety of facilities and equipment here. PE staff are consistently engaging in professional development activities and applying research-based best practices to their PE classes. PE staff take on action-research projects as their annual professional growth plans to further drive and improve practices."

Takeaway

The testimonial of this PE teacher demonstrates the value of having a well-organised PE structure, including opportunities for inclusion and student choice/voice. Moreover, the conscious effort to ensure a translation of research knowledge into practice helps to ensure that teachers remain up-to-date and can improve and enhance their physical education delivery. Undertaking action research projects as part of professional development helps to focus on contextual impact.

Class size

Responses from schools reported practical concerns related to class size. It was noted by respondents that the presence of high student-teacher ratios hinders the provision of inclusive and quality PE classes. Northern Africa and Western Asia, and Europe and Northern America have an average of 15 to 25 students per class. However, in other regions, class size exceeds 35 students, presenting further challenges for effective teaching and learning. The provision of adequate resources should account for optimal student-teacher ratios, thereby facilitating more opportunities for dialogue, instruction and learning.

Educators (PE) are not highly qualified, and a career path does not exist. However, compared to private schools, the educator/student ratio is 1:350, whereas in the state school it is 1:600.

- Ministerial respondent, Sub-Saharan Africa

Theme 4: Workforce

Box 11. Theme 4: Workforce highlights

- Having qualified, specialist PE teachers across educational levels is perceived to be of paramount importance for the effective delivery of QPE. This underscores the value of initial and ongoing teacher education and development.
- Significant differences exist in the recruitment and deployment of PE teachers across education levels, notably revealing a higher prevalence of specialist teachers within secondary schools (96%) compared to primary schools (44.7%), with variations evident across regions.
- 70.5% of countries report having in-service training and continuous professional development for PE teachers. However, only 35.6% of countries report annual training, while 33% report training to occur every five years.
- UNESCO findings indicate that a higher specialization of PE teachers is linked to lower school dropout rates, higher youth literacy rates and decreased rates of youth not in education, employment, or training (NEET) at both lower and upper secondary levels. This suggests that specialized PE teachers can play a critical role in keeping students engaged and improving their long-term educational and employment outcomes.

UNESCO findings indicate a consensus among both ministerial-level and school-level respondents on the critical importance of having qualified, specialist teachers for delivering QPE across educational levels. This aligns with research, which consistently identifies the practitioner workforce as playing a central role in the delivery of meaningful and relevant PE experiences (Scanlon et al., 2021). Delivering QPE can be challenging and requires teachers to be adequately prepared to read and implement PE curricula in a way that allows them to provide meaningful experiences (Lambert & Penney, 2019; Alfrey & O'Connor, 2022).

In-service training (INSET) and continuous professional development (CPD) within PE is a key strategy for improving the quality of teaching practices and the learning of students (Armour et al., 2017; Makopoulou, 2018). Despite that, UNESCO data show that only 35.6% of countries report annual training for PE teachers. This insight highlights the need to offer more learning opportunities for teachers to better support the learning outcomes of students (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

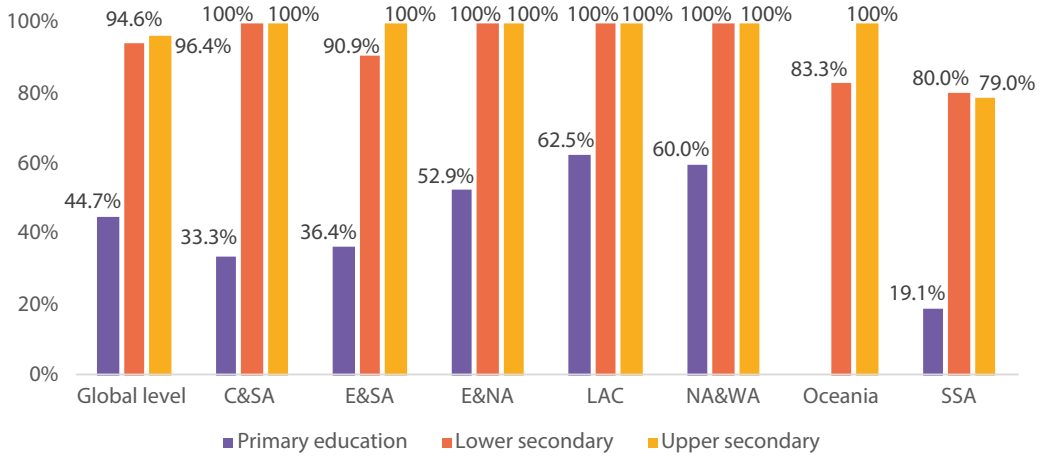
Recruitment and deployment of specialist PE teachers

Indicator 5. Percentage of countries reporting PE specialist teachers

The findings from UNESCO's ministerial survey highlights a marked difference in the recruitment and deployment of specialist PE teachers across education levels, notably revealing a higher prevalence within secondary schools compared to primary schools (see Figure 16). For example, 94.6% of lower secondary schools and 96.4% of upper secondary schools reported having specialist PE teachers, while only 44.7% of primary schools did. Notably, Sub-Saharan Africa reported the fewest specialized PE teachers at secondary level (79% on average).

By examining data across regions, significant differences can be noted. Regions such as Northern Africa and Western Asia (60%), Europe and Northern America (52.9%), and Latin America and the Caribbean (62.5%) reportedly have the highest presence of specialist PE teachers in primary schools. Whereas Oceania reports a complete absence of specialist PE teachers in primary schools.

Figure 16: PE provision by a specialist teacher, by educational level (ministerial-level)



Central and Southern Asia (C&SA); Eastern and South-eastern Asia (E&SA); Europe & Northern America (E&NA); Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC); Northern Africa & Western Asia (NA&WA); Oceania; Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)

The lack of specialist teachers to deliver PE is a significant challenge to the effective implementation of QPE. This issue needs to be addressed through both initial and ongoing teacher education and development.

In order to develop the practice of quality physical education in society and especially at school-level, we need to improve some basic aspects. In addition to improving the basic training for teachers and ensuring that they are better empowered to respond to the aims and objectives of QPE, the pre-school phase of basic teacher training must be given importance.

- Ministerial respondent, Northern Africa & Western Asia

Issues related to the PE workforce were identified in both UNESCO's ministerial and school surveys across all regions, albeit with some variations. For example, ministerial-level respondents reported challenges with the recruitment and training of specialist staff, as well as with the provision of ongoing training and development opportunities. School-level respondents echoed these concerns. Some regions (e.g. Sub-Saharan Africa and Northern African and Western Asia) noted specific issues regarding the recruitment and training of female teachers, which impacted the provision of girls' PE. Respondents in some regions also highlighted the challenges posed by an aging workforce and the difficulties in recruiting and retaining young teachers.

Box 12. Spotlight- Europe and Northern America

PE Teacher Testimonial

"PE teacher supports and offers CPD to class teachers on the teaching of PE. Class teachers are given lesson plans which support the learning that is being covered by PE teachers so that the learning is reinforced."

Takeaway

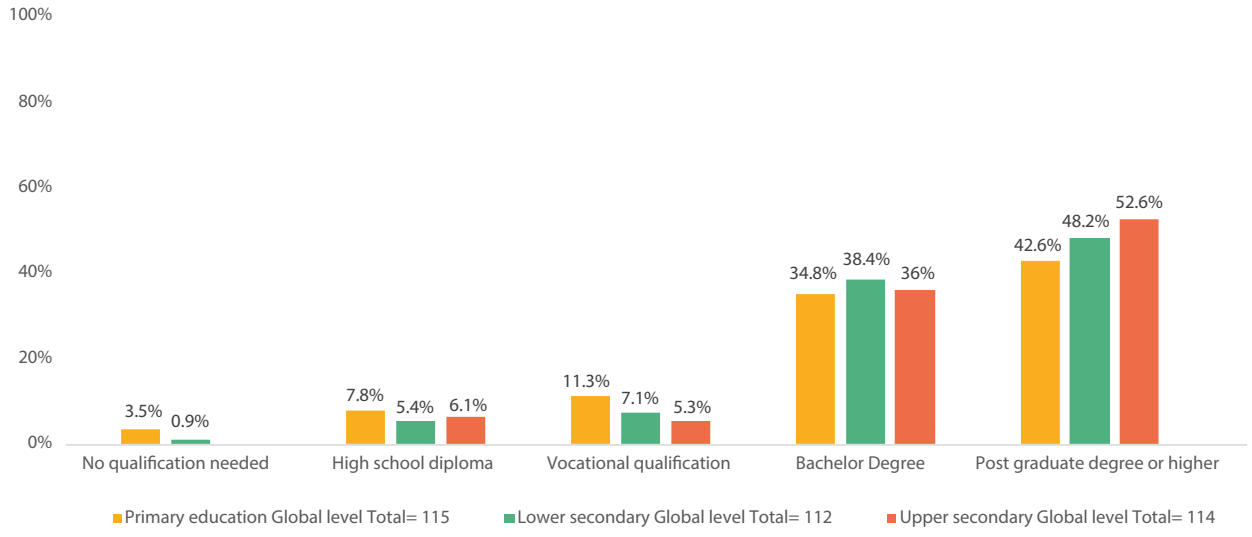
This example from a teacher in a primary school shows the value of CPD opportunities delivered by PE specialists for generalist teachers. These are further supported by the creation of lesson plans to help reinforce learning and provide a positive structure for the delivery of PE within primary schools.

These findings underscore the need for targeted efforts to address the recruitment, training, and retention of specialist teachers, especially in regions where specific challenges such as gender disparities or an aging workforce are prevalent. Due to the central role that PE teachers play in the provision of QPE, failure to address these issues could impact students' access to QPE, denying their rights to education and to all potential benefits associated with it, as stated in UNESCO's International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport.

Accreditation of PE teachers

An accreditation system for PE teachers refers to a formal process by which specialist PE teachers are certified or recognized as meeting certain standards or qualifications set by relevant educational authorities or professional bodies. UNESCO findings demonstrate that most countries have formal accreditation or certification requirements for PE, with most participants reporting having a graduate (bachelor's level) and post-graduate (master's level) qualifications. Specifically, 42.6% of primary PE school teachers, 48.2% of lower secondary PE school teachers, and 52.6% of upper secondary PE school teachers have a post-graduate level qualification.

Figure 17: Percentage of countries with accreditation requirements for PE teachers by level of education (ministerial-level)



UNESCO's ministerial-level data show that there are very few regions where no qualifications are required to teach PE (3.5% globally for primary education teachers). Generally, the higher the education level, the higher the qualification required for PE teachers in any given region. The only exception is Central and South-eastern Asia, where 33% of countries do not have qualifications requirements for PE teachers in primary schools.

There is a lack of PE teachers and institutes that train PE teachers.

– Ministerial respondent, Central & Southern Asia

Regarding the experience of PE teachers, the findings of UNESCO's school survey show that, across all regions, specialist PE teachers have on average more than 10 years of experience (59%). The average age of PE teachers is 40 years old, ranging from 20 years old in Northern Africa and Western Asia to 45 years old in Latin America and the Caribbean. These insights should serve to better understand potential challenges related to workforce development, recruitment and retention. Similarly, they should serve to ensure a diverse workforce to deliver QPE.

In-service training and continuous professional development of PE teachers

Global progress is being made regarding teacher professional development for PE. For instance, UNESCO findings show that policies mandating PE teachers (either specialists or generalist class teachers) to participate in INSET or CPD are in place in 70.5% of countries and are in the process of being developed in 7.1% of countries. This requirement applies to 100% of countries in regions such as Africa and Western Asia, Oceania, Europe and Northern America and in Eastern and South-eastern Asia. Exceptions to these insights are observed in Latin America and the Caribbean, and in Central and Southern Asia, with participation rates of 40% and 50%, respectively.

Our PE teachers are the most valuable asset. Therefore, our Ministry needs to provide more opportunities to them for further education and specialisation.

– Ministerial respondent, Europe and Northern America

Respondents recognized the value of professional development for facilitating the delivery of QPE. For example, it was noted that professional development allowed teachers to keep up to date with advances in knowledge, meet other practitioners in their region, reflect on issues or challenges within their own context, and share good practice. Some respondents also linked professional development with supporting creativity and innovation in PE practice, as well as informing processes of monitoring and evaluation.

Box 13. Spotlight- Europe and Northern America

Context

One response from the ministerial-level survey highlights good practice relating to a joined-up policy and practice approach (also related to Theme 5). It documents two best practices at a local level, each one showing a focus on enhancing PE practice via supporting schools and practitioners. One example specifically focuses on providing professional development opportunities for staff via a coordinated offer informed by different levels of policy and school structure. Another showcases how good working conditions are supported by a specialist PE department at local level.

Testimonial

"In one city, there is a good example of close cooperation between schools, the school board, physical education department, after school activities and the local government. Besides practising physical education lessons there is room and guidance for professional improvement, workshops, study and budget for innovation. Furthermore, all the physical education teachers have the same work/labour agreement… (In another city) there are excellent working conditions, everything is coordinated from a specific department for physical education, coordinated and supervised by the schoolboard and the local government (municipality)."

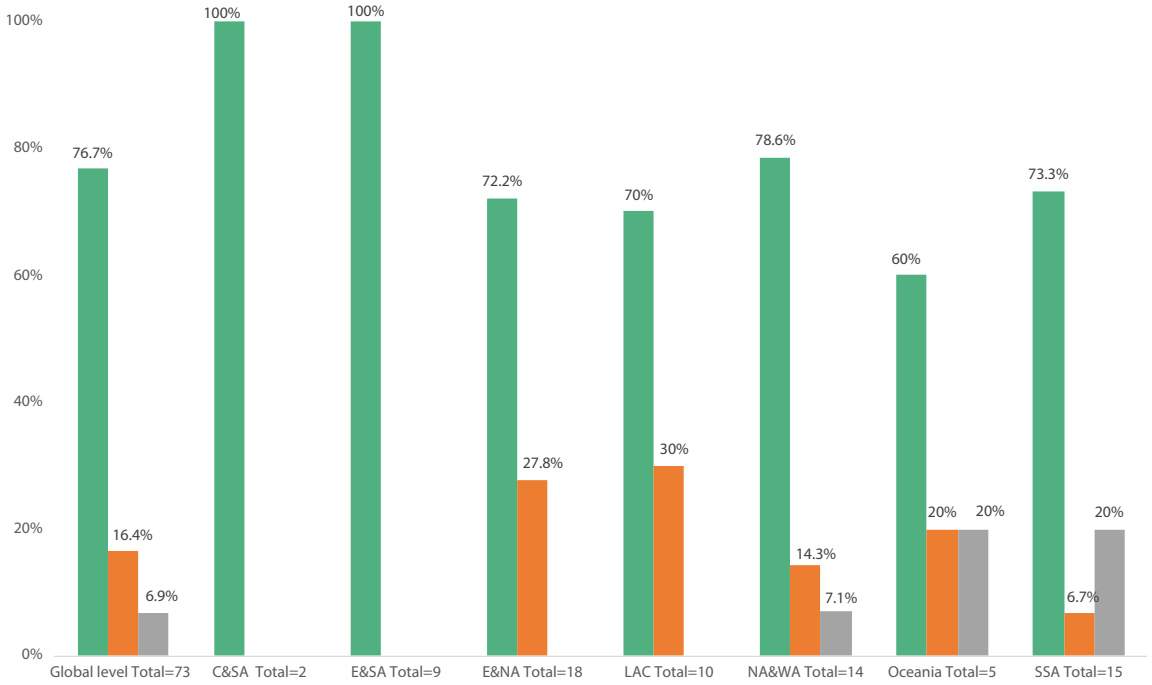
Takeaway

This example shows the importance of coordinated policy and practice efforts, exemplified by professional development opportunities and specialized PE departments, which foster collaboration and ensure excellent working conditions for physical education teachers.

According to UNESCO findings, 35.6% of countries have teachers who participate in PE INSET or CPD training annually, which aligns with UNESCO recommendations of training. However, 33% of countries reported training occurs every five years. This highlights the need for more frequent INSET/CPD training provision for PE teachers to ensure that PE delivery remains at its highest quality and in line with emerging pedagogies and approaches. When examining differences at a regional level, most regions were reported to have PE INSET or CPD, except for Central and Southern Asia, where 59% of teachers reported that they participate in training every six months.

It is worth highlighting the emphasis on safeguarding, of both students and teachers, within compulsory INSET and CPD. 76.7% of countries reported incorporating safeguarding into their training programmes (Figure 18). Nonetheless, safeguarding training is not uniformly provided across regions. For example, in Europe and Northern America, 27.8% of countries do not include any safeguarding training as part of their INSET/CPD provision. This is also the case in 30% of countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (30%) and in Oceania (40%). This important omission clearly requires attention, as safeguarding is essential for creating supportive environments that uphold the rights of both students and teachers within the education community.

Figure 18: If INSET or CPD is compulsory, does it include safeguarding of students and teachers? (ministerial-level)



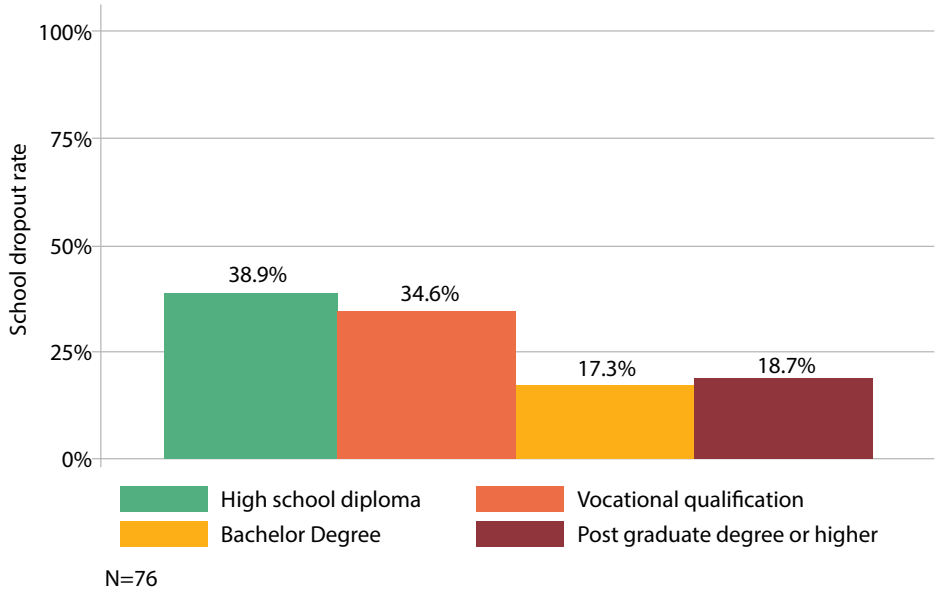
Central and Southern Asia (C&SA); Eastern and South-eastern Asia (E&SA); Europe & Northern America (E&NA); Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC); Northern Africa & Western Asia (NA&WA); Oceania; Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)

Teachers' specialization and social outcomes

Teacher education background plays a crucial role in QPE, as highlighted by UNESCO findings and other research evidence (Nilsen & Gustafsson, 2016). Pedagogical interventions and teacher-student interaction can impact both student health and academic achievement. Moreover, Bouchard, et al. (2012) emphasize the well-documented benefits of physical activities in promoting physical, mental, and psychosocial health in students. Therefore, the quality of teachers' training and professional development is essential for effective QPE delivery.

UNESCO findings show a significant negative association between school student dropout rates and teachers' educational background and specialization: the higher the specialization, the lower the school dropout rates. This relationship is valid for both lower and upper secondary levels (see Figure 19). This suggests that specialized PE teachers play a critical role in keeping students engaged and improving their long-term educational and employment outcomes.

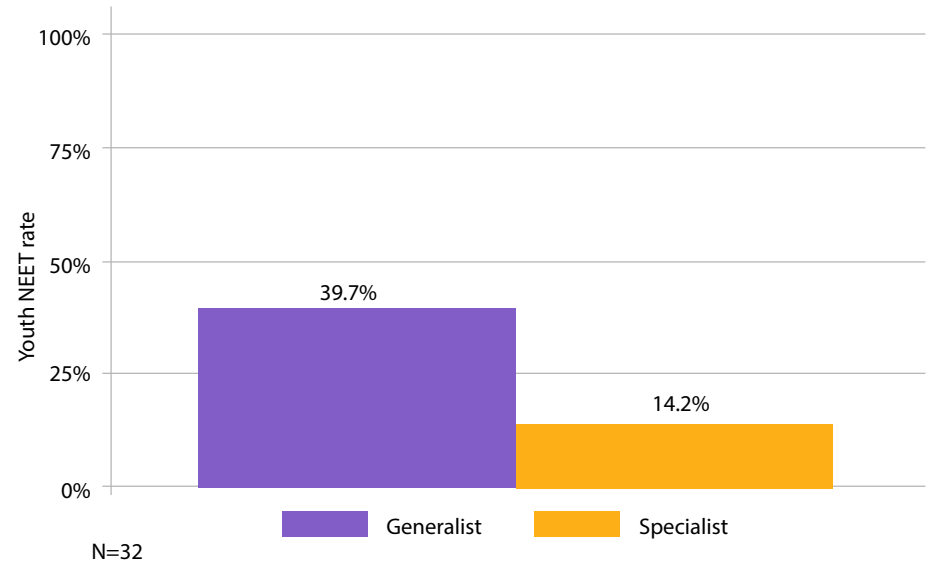
Figure 19. School dropout and teachers' qualifications in upper secondary



Similarly, teachers' specialization has the potential to positively influence the prospects of youth who are not in employment, education, or training (NEET). UNESCO findings reveal a significant and inverse correlation between the percentage of youth who are NEET and the degree of specialization of teachers in lower and upper secondary education. In other words, the more specialized PE teachers are, the lower the percentage of youth who are NEET (see Figure 20).

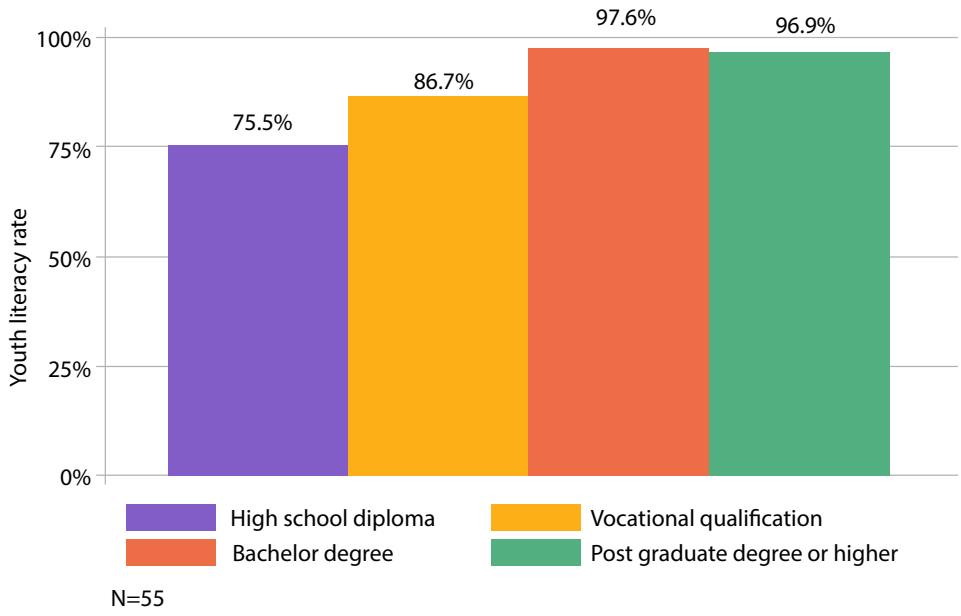
Research provides encouraging evidence regarding the efficacy of comprehensive interventions that encompass both classroom-based and work-based components in enhancing employment prospects for youth who are NEET (Mawn et al., 2017). In this regard, QPE stands out as a highly effective approach to bolstering the overall educational attainment of young people, thereby helping to mitigate the risk of them becoming NEET.

Figure 20. Youth NEET rate and teachers' specialization



In addition, UNESCO findings show that educational background and teachers' specialization are positively associated with youth literacy rates in both primary, lower, and upper secondary education. However, gender differences between girls and boys are not significant (Figure 21).

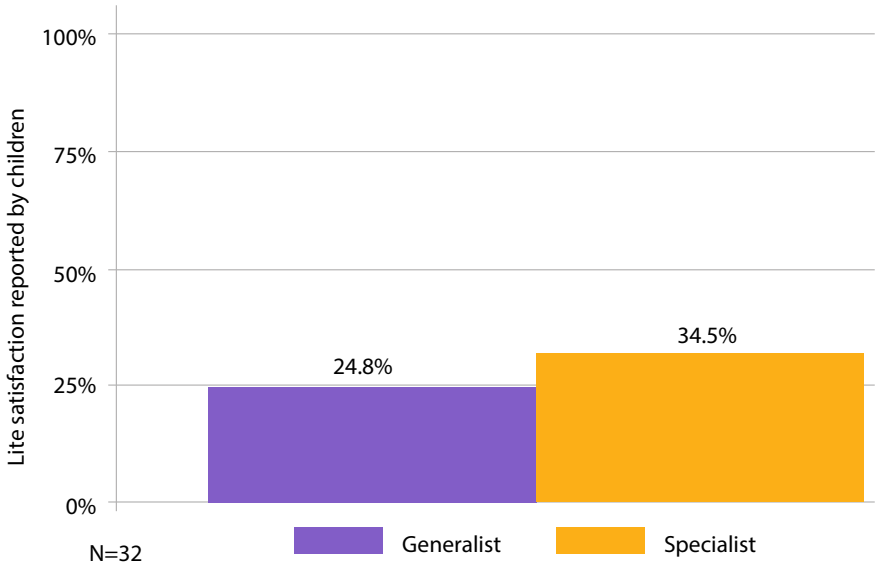
Figure 21. Youth literacy rate and teachers' educational background in primary education



Finally, UNESCO findings indicate a positive and significant correlation between students' reported satisfaction with life and the presence of specialized teachers in Physical Education (PE) (see Figure 22). PE fosters the development of five fundamental human freedoms: expression, exploration, discovery, invention, and creation. Moreover, physical activity can be enjoyable and personally meaningful, all of which contribute to overall life satisfaction (Kretchmar, 2006).

The impact of specialized PE teachers extends beyond physical well-being, influencing students' mental and emotional health. If PE teachers are equipped with the expertise to create engaging and inclusive PE classes that cater to diverse student needs, this can result in enhanced levels of achievement and belonging. Consequently, the benefits of specialized PE instruction are reflected in higher self-reported life satisfaction among students, underscoring the importance of investing in specialized training for teachers.

Figure 22. Students' self-reported life satisfaction teachers' specialization in primary schools



PE contextual challenges during COVID-19

Respondents of the UNESCO Global QPE COVID-19 survey reported adapting the content of PE lessons (44.2%) as the most prominent challenge experienced during COVID-19. This was followed by connectivity issues (18.1%), engagement of students (13.6%) and deterioration of physical and mental health (6.9% and 4.2%, respectively). These findings should inform the development of training opportunities for PE specialist teachers with a view to providing resources that enhance their delivery of QPE regardless of contextual circumstances.

During the pandemic, 29.3% of schools globally also reported reliance on external partners to deliver or complement PE classes. Europe and Northern America (44.4%), and Eastern and South-eastern Asia (26.3%) displayed the highest dependence on external partners. Latin America and the Caribbean (14.4%), Central and Southern Asia as well as Sub-Saharan Africa (6%) and Oceania (0.9%) relied less on external partners to deliver PE classes.

This practice during the COVID-19 pandemic shows disparities in the availability of external resources for PE delivery among different regions. However, when examining the data within each region, it is apparent that the reliance on external partners for PE delivery is relatively consistent across regions (Eastern and South-eastern Asia, 41.3%; Central and Southern Asia, 33.3%; Northern Africa and Western Asia, 31.3%; Europe and Northern America, 28.6%; Sub-Saharan Africa, 25%; Latin America and the Caribbean, 22.7%; and Oceania, 7.7%). Moreover, when examining the Global QPE COVID-19 data with respect to the schools' locations, it appears that urban schools (45.5%) relied on external partners more heavily than rural schools (40%) with peri-urban schools relying least (14.6%). However, a more comprehensive and granular analysis and examination of the data, including making regional, within-region and local comparisons is needed, to provide a fuller picture and enable any firm and contextually relevant conclusions to be drawn.

Theme 5: Policy matters

Box 14. Theme 5: Policy matters highlights

- Policy is essential in shaping the landscape of PE by establishing guidelines, standards, and frameworks that facilitate delivery. However, UNESCO findings and research indicate that policy is not always informed by those tasked with delivering it.
- There is a robust global commitment to monitoring PE classes, with 87.6% of countries reporting active monitoring and evaluating of their PE programmes. Nonetheless, UNESCO findings reveal that there is an implementation gap between policy and practice. Across regions, cross-ministerial and cross-curricular collaboration was ranked as a priority to be addressed.
- Despite a commitment to monitoring and evaluation, gaps between policy and practice remain. UNESCO data reveal that these gaps are due to a lack of participatory processes, disconnections between policy content and school-based needs, and inadequate Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) processes and mechanisms.
- Ministerial and school respondents acknowledged that monitoring and evaluation could help raise standards, encourage accountability, and support ongoing policy and curriculum development. Over half of countries (51.9%) monitor PE programmes annually, 17% do so twice a year, whereas 12.5% of countries only monitor PE programmes every 5 years or more.

UNESCO's data identified some significant challenges with respect to policy coherence and policy implementation. The findings related to these challenges are presented under Theme 5 (Policy matters) and are closely related to both Theme 2 (Curriculum) and Theme 4 (Workforce) in this report. Policy plays a crucial role in shaping the landscape of PE by providing guidelines, standards and frameworks that serve to facilitate the subject's enactment in practice (Penney, 2008; Alfrey & O'Connor, 2024). Policies are essential not only for establishing clear objectives and standards for the subject – for example, by outlining what should be covered within a curriculum – but also in ensuring that PE is equitable and inclusive and meets the needs of diverse learners, as recommended by UNESCO and academics alike (UNESCO, 2015; Gray et al., 2022). Policies can also be influential in shaping requirements around the subject such as curriculum time, monitoring and evaluation and teacher accreditation. However, as evidenced by UNESCO findings and research, policy is not always informed by those tasked with delivering it and, moreover, the translation of policy into practice is not always straightforward (Penney, 2008; Thorburn & Horrell, 2011).

Bridging the gap between policy and practice

In Theme 2, it was shown that policies outlining a mandated physical education curriculum are available in most regions. However, UNESCO findings reveal that there is a gap between policy and practice. This was evidenced by respondents in both UNESCO's ministerial and school surveys.

Physical education and sport being under the responsibility of the Ministry of Youth and Sport encounters many difficulties in its implementation policy. The Ministry of National Education often resists the application of acts, decisions and recommendations emanating from the Ministry of Youth and Sport.

– Ministerial respondent, Sub-Saharan Africa

In the ministerial data, this policy-practice gap was generally referenced in comments about ministries or departments working in isolation or, in some cases, at cross purposes. Some respondents suggested that this is due to the low status of PE within the educational landscape (see Theme 1). On the other hand, some respondents noted that the 'placing' of PE within the policy structure (i.e., within 'education', 'health' or 'sport') could influence how it was perceived, while others commented that the interchangeability of terms (particularly 'sport' and 'PE') often marginalized the subject, reinforcing the perception that it is less relevant in academic settings.

Similar concerns were evidenced in the school survey data. Respondents highlighted issues with the development of policies and inconsistencies in their implementation. One of the recommendations identified to bridge the policy practice gap was collaboration. Across regions, cross-ministerial and cross-curricular collaboration was ranked as a priority to be addressed. In this regard, some respondents suggested the absence of collaboration to be reflective of the low status of PE when compared with other subjects (see also Theme 1). However, in cases where cross-sectoral work was evident and where policy was informed by multiple stakeholder voices, it was frequently cited as an example of good practice.

There is no government organisation for physical education, and no public consultation on curriculum and policy making for physical education.

– PE teacher, Eastern and South-eastern Asia

Monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of PE

Linked with policy development was monitoring and evaluation, with both ministerial and school respondents noting that this could help to raise standards, encourage accountability and support ongoing policy and curriculum development. However, there were some notable differences in how ministries and schools viewed monitoring and evaluation, with the former more likely to focus on delivering policies/meeting indicators, and the latter more concerned with delivering PE in practice.

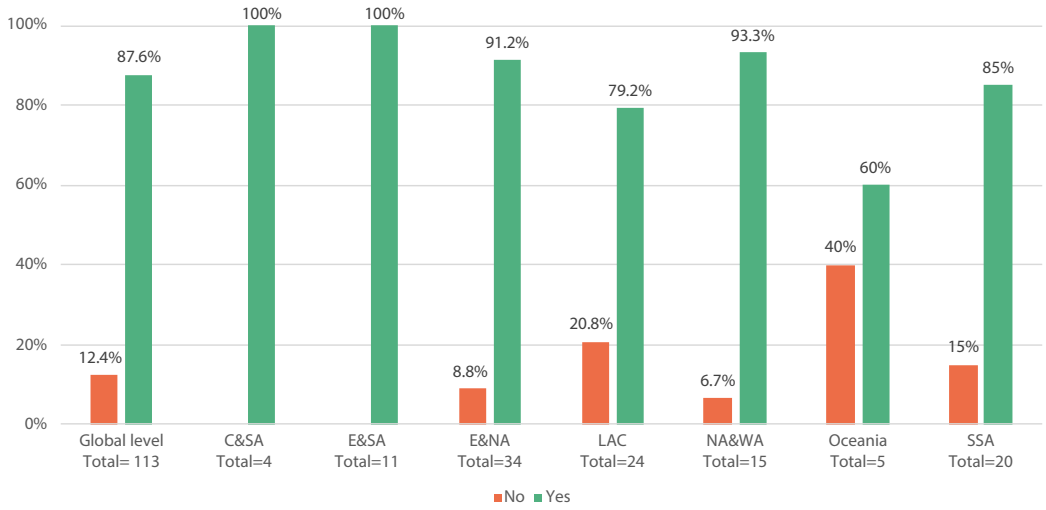
There is no monitoring and evaluation of physical education programme by National, Provincial and School-levels to encourage the importance of physical education programme.

– Ministerial respondent, Oceania

Indicator 8. Percentage of countries monitoring the implementation of PE policy instruments

UNESCO findings highlight a robust global commitment to the monitoring of PE classes, with 87.6% of countries reporting active monitoring and evaluation of national PE programmes (Figure 23). There are no instances where the implementation rate falls below 60%, indicating a consistent and widespread commitment to monitoring PE.

Figure 23: Countries reporting monitoring PE by region



The reasons for monitoring vary across both ministerial- and school-level, but the top three arguments remained consistent. These are: quality assurance, advisory and guidance, and teacher performance (see Table 1). This underscores a shared alignment in the key priorities, while also revealing subtle variations in emphasis. For instance, at the school-level, 77.7% of teachers reported to prioritize child protection, and 73.9% reported to emphasize student health, whereas, at the ministerial-level, these percentages are slightly lower, at 65.1% and 61.2%, respectively. In addition, school-level data reveal that a quarter of schools (26.2%) do not incorporate student health monitoring into their PE programmes.

These findings may reflect a greater awareness and experience of these issues among schools in practice, and therefore a greater recognition of their importance. This exemplifies why it is critical that school-based stakeholders are actively engaged through participatory processes across all phases of policy development and implementation, ensuring such engagement can improve coordination and communication between policymakers and schools. UNESCO's Quality Physical Education (QPE) tools, including our guidelines, methodology, and policy brief, provide comprehensive insights into the how and why of participatory policy development.

Table 1: Ministerial- vs school-level comparison of rationale for monitoring PE

Ministerial-level			School-level		
	Percentage of cases	N		Percentage of cases	N
Quality assurance	92.23	95	Teacher performance	89.67	1389
Advisory and guidance	85.44	88	Quality assurance	84.38	1258
Teacher performance	82.52	85	Advisory and guidance	81.21	1258
Quality of provision	69.9	72	Child protection/ safeguarding	77.66	1203
Academic achievement	65.05	67	Student health	73.85	1144
Child protection/ safeguarding	65.05	67	Academic achievement	69.34	1074
Student health	61.17	63	Quality of provision	69.08	1070

In relation to the frequency of monitoring, over half of countries (51.9%) monitor PE programmes annually and 17% do so twice a year. Nonetheless, of concern is that 12.5% of countries only monitor PE programmes every 5 years or more. This is the case in Central and Southern Asia (25%), Latin American and the Caribbean (20%), Sub-Saharan Africa (14%) and Europe and Northern America (13%). This fact reinforces the need to strengthen monitoring and evaluation frameworks to assess and maintain the quality of PE programmes, in line with QPE standards.

Theme 6: Culture, community and context

Box 15. Theme 6: Culture, community and context highlights

- The perceived challenges and needs of PE are highly influenced by culture and context. UNESCO data indicates that issues such as political instability, poverty, and/or corruption have a negative impact on the delivery of QPE.
- Shaping culturally relevant practices to maximize engagement, impact, and enjoyment of QPE and establishing links between schools and communities are of critical importance. These practices also align with global standards related to diversity, inclusion, and community engagement, ensuring that QPE is both relevant and effective in different cultural contexts.
- Involving students in co-creating PE programmes contributes to more engaging and authentic experiences, with UNESCO data revealing that 69% of schools provide students with opportunities to choose activities in PE classes, with significant regional variations noted.

Research has increasingly highlighted the important role that PE can play in promoting respect for culture and community, as well as challenging historical social injustices (Nyberg & Larsson, 2012; Schaefer et al., 2023). Despite this, it is argued that internationally there is a general lack of understanding concerning culturally responsive teaching in PE (Pill et al., 2021) and longstanding concerns over PE teachers' abilities to facilitate cultural diversity within the PE context (Barker, 2019; Whatman et al., 2017). PE teachers who understand how to implement culturally responsive pedagogy are more effective practitioners, for example, by having the potential to reduce educational gaps between students (Wrench & Garrett, 2021). Learning how to do so is not always easy and connects to previous recommendations in this report around the need for rounded and culturally appropriate teacher training (see Theme 4), as professional development supports the acquisition of the life skills necessary to deliver lessons to a broad cross section of students.

Qualitative data from UNESCO's QPE surveys – both ministerial-level and school-level – included frequent references to the relevance of culture and context in the design and delivery of QPE. While some respondents highlighted challenges about this, a number of respondents acknowledged the relevance of culturally relevant provision and the benefits of this for students, schools and communities. Indeed, advocates and academics have both called for PE to move towards a supportive, culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogy (Pill et al., 2021).

Challenges associated with the delivery of PE

When examining the perceived challenges and needs around PE delivery, specific issues were noted in particular regions or countries, demonstrating the highly contextualised and culturally influenced nature of the subject. Within the UNESCO QPE surveys, some respondents cited challenges related to political instability, violence, or conflict (Northern Africa and Western Asia, Europe and Northern America), while others expressed issues related to corruption or poverty (Sub-Saharan Africa, Oceania, and Latin America and the Caribbean). Such issues were observed to have a negative impact on the capacity of school teachers to deliver high quality lessons across all subject areas, including PE.

There are many difficulties for (PE's) good development: lack of adequate infrastructure, lack of pedagogical material (equipment), lack of school policies, interruption of classes during political events.

– PE teacher, Sub-Saharan Africa

Linkages between culture, communities and PE

UNESCO insights equally highlight a positive influence of culture and community on PE practice, both with regard to structural and practical elements. Within the ministerial data, several respondents noted the need to take cultural and regional issues into account when developing PE policy, to ensure relevance and appropriateness.

Within our context we seek the promotion of indigenous/local sports to children in PE.

– Ministerial respondent, Eastern & South-eastern Asia

Similarly, both ministerial and school respondents mentioned the importance of shaping culturally-relevant practice and establishing links between schools and communities. They acknowledged the value of offering PE activities that are relevant to local contexts and communities. Many also noted the value in making greater use of the local environment, such as skiing, hiking, swimming, or traditional customs (see also Theme 9) and mentioned connecting school activities with cultural events or activities, including local festivals, traditional dances, and indigenous games. This connection to local environments and ensuring culturally relevant curricula aligns with UNESCO recommendations in the QPE guidelines around the diversity and relevance of curricula. Furthermore, fostering school-community pathways is crucial; as highlighted in UNESCO's QPE policy brief, in that such connections enhance community engagement and support the holistic development of students by translating educational outcomes into "real world" settings.

We should be able at country and/or state level to offer varied alternatives respecting the interests and choices of the students and respecting the local culture and environment.

- Ministerial respondent, Latin America & the Caribbean

While these findings provide some evidence of culturally sensitive curricula and activities, there were notably fewer references to teachers adopting culturally sensitive pedagogies, suggesting this is an area for further attention moving forward (see also Theme 4).

We have the implementation of regional or folk dance in PE as a cultural and physical practice, for recreational purposes and for physical health habits.

- PE teacher, Latin America & the Caribbean

Box 16. Spotlight- Oceania

Context

A PE teacher describes how their school collaborates with community-based sports organizations to increase educational outcomes and promote a life-long participation in physical activity and sport.

Testimonial

"Our school has a partnership with a couple of community-based sports organizations and clubs – this is needed to provide wider educational outcomes, including health and well-being, as well as personal and social development. This is really awesome to see students joining the sports organizations and clubs and they bring the knowledge they have learnt and incorporate it into their physical activities at school. With the limited curriculum time allocation, physical education alone cannot fulfil the physical activity needs of young people or shortages, let alone achieve other important outcomes. However, physical education forms a foundation for positive patterns of behaviour and is the best way to access and engage students in a rounded and healthy lifestyle. The sports organisations and clubs are also accessible, including descriptions, guidelines, and recommendations on the key roles of a coach (referee, umpire, lines people and so on); qualifications, knowledge and areas needed for coaching effectively; and methods by which coaches are educated, developed and certified. In doing this the students become a coach, referee, umpire, lines person and so on while they are still young and at school."

Takeaway

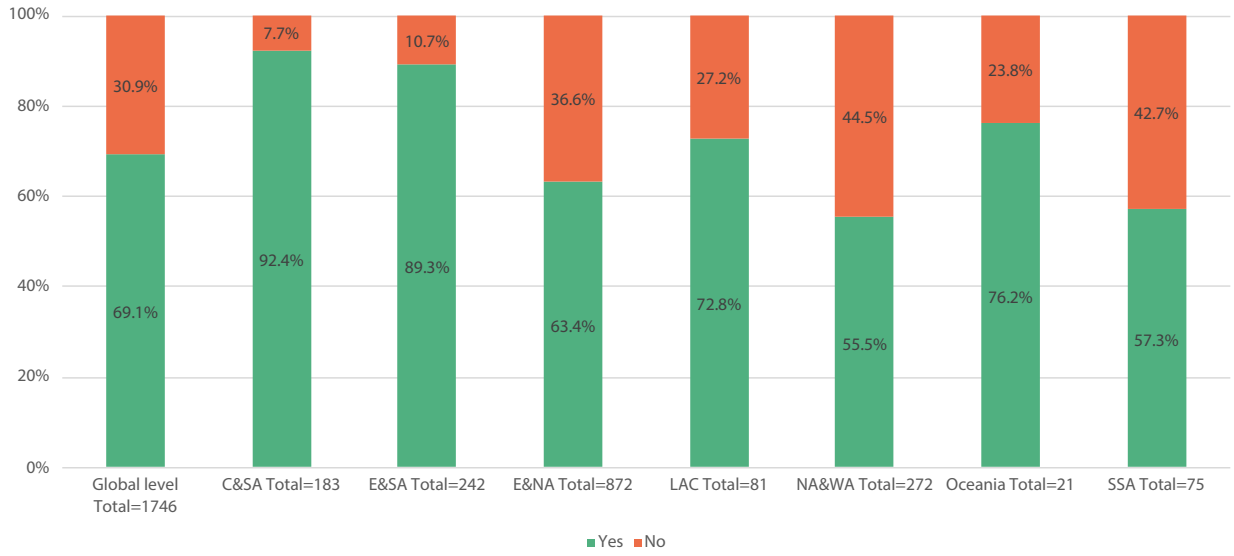
This is an example of an effective partnership between schools and local sports organisations. There is also recognition that students' holistic development in and through sport can happen both within school and outside of it. The opportunities for students to learn skills related to umpiring and coaching offer a means by which they can learn skills that could keep them connected with sport beyond school.

Student voice and choice

Findings from UNESCO's QPE dataset evidence the need for engagement with students as a requisite for shaping culturally relevant practices. In some cases, students actively participated in the co-creation of programmes with teachers, which was seen to help facilitate more engaging and authentic experiences. The notion of student voice and choice is often highlighted in research literature as a way to empower and involve students, as well as address key components of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (right to be heard - Article 12).

Globally, 69% of schools reported they provide students with opportunities to choose the type of activities they engage in during PE lessons (Figure 24). However, the data also show that student choice varies widely across regions, with schools in Northern Africa and Western Asia (55.5%) and Sub-Saharan Africa (57.3%) least likely to offer students choice over which activities they do. Conversely, countries in Central and Southern Asia (92.4%) and in Eastern and South-eastern Asia (89.3%) were more likely to provide students with such opportunities.

Figure 24: School- level: Do you provide students with opportunities to choose the types of activities they study in their PE curriculum at your school?



Box 17. Spotlight- Central and Southern Asia

Context

A PE teacher in upper secondary level in a school in Central and Southern Asia outlines a strategy to promote peer-learning. This approach aims to enhance student engagement and improve learning outcomes through mutual support among peers.

Testimonial

"Peer-learning is being initiated in the school. Senior players help the PE teacher to facilitate juniors in that particular game/event. As students are also coming from rural backgrounds, they like to play traditional games like kho kho, kabaddi, volleyball, judo and taekwondo etc. So school emphasises providing coaching for these games."

Takeaway

School is leveraging the experience of older students to help plan and deliver physical education opportunities for younger students. The focus on peer-learning here is a nice example of how schools can draw on their student body to help develop a more inter-connected community of learners.

Theme 7: Equity and inclusion

Box 18. Theme 7: Equity and inclusion highlights

- Equity and inclusion are human rights and core principles in educational provision, including QPE, as stipulated in UNESCO's International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport. UNESCO data indicates progress in school inclusion policies, enhanced student voice opportunities and improved teacher training. However, challenges persist and further progress in some contexts is required.
- While 53.7% of countries report the existence of policies/strategies/plans/guidelines related to similar activities in which girls and boys are eligible to participate during PE, only 6.5% of schools report offering the same.
- Globally, 58.3% of ministries mandate the inclusion of students with disabilities in PE alongside their peers without disabilities. However, notable variations are evident among schools across regions, with certain areas reporting only 30% of schools with mainstream participation of students with disabilities in PE.
- Countries with well-established gender equality in PE programmes see significantly lower primary education dropout rates and no gender disparity in dropout rates. This indicates that inclusive and appealing PE activities for girls can help to reduce dropout rates and promote gender equality in education.
- Schools offering mainstream PE classes that accommodate students with disabilities show lower dropout rates in primary education for both girls and boys. This reinforces the importance of QPE in promoting inclusive education and reducing dropout rates among students, regardless of their level of ability.

The provision of inclusive and equitable physical education and sport has been, and remains, central to UNESCO's vision of quality PE. The development of QPE policy, as well as any strategy for its provision, should be based on inclusive methodologies which secure, for all students, their entitlement to fully participate in the subject (UNESCO, 2015a). This vision is further reinforced by UNESCO's International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport, which emphasizes the right of everyone to access physical education and sport without discrimination, thereby promoting inclusivity and equity across all educational contexts.

There is evidence in both UNESCO's ministerial and school surveys of respondents recognising the need for PE practices to be equitable and inclusive. Inclusive education is typically enshrined in national and international legislation (Vickerman, 2012), meaning schools should have not only a moral and social obligation but also a legal one to promote inclusion, meet the needs of all students, remove barriers to learning and ensure an inclusive environment and curriculum (Harris & Cale, 2019). This applies to the context within which school PE is delivered, which should involve all children in physical activity through the provision of positive, inclusive, relevant, meaningful and rewarding physical activity experiences (Fitzgerald & Stride, 2012; Maher & Fitzgerald, 2020). For the most part, responses around equity and inclusion in UNESCO's QPE dataset focused on gender and disability. This may also have been influenced by the focus of several survey questions on these factors as critical markers of equity and inclusion within PE.

Within the ministerial data, reference was often made to efforts to ensure equitable access to PE for all students through educational policy, shared learning outcomes and teacher education. Moreover, some respondents spoke more broadly about inclusion being a human right and, therefore, a fundamental principle to underpin educational provision – including within PE. While there was a sense of some progress being made here (e.g. regarding specific school inclusion policies, enhanced student voice opportunities and improved teacher training), it was also recognised that facilitating inclusive practice could be challenging and there was still much work to do in some contexts.

The Ministry of Education believes in the right of children, adolescents and adults, both male and female, to play, learn and develop, through their practice of physical education and sports throughout the school year. This is an authentic human right that cannot be marginalized or underestimated.

– Ministerial respondent, Northern Africa and Western Asia

Concepts of holistic development, student voice/choice and culturally relevant practice were also linked with the theme of equity and inclusion within the school survey (see also Theme 6). Indeed, some school responses indicated that asking students, particularly girls, about what activities they would like to do within PE, getting students to work together to plan aspects of performance (e.g. a dance or gymnastics routine), or offering opportunities for students to take more responsibility (e.g., leading warm-ups or teaching younger students), could help to shape more engaging and inclusive lessons.

When I teach gymnastics to girls, we have 12 lessons of practising various skills and elements. At the end of the unit all girls design their own group of gymnastic elements they perform and are assessed for. Every girl designs this according to her skills and self-confidence. As such, they are not stressed, and they like it despite gymnastics not always being a very popular part of PE.

– PE Teacher, Europe and Northern America

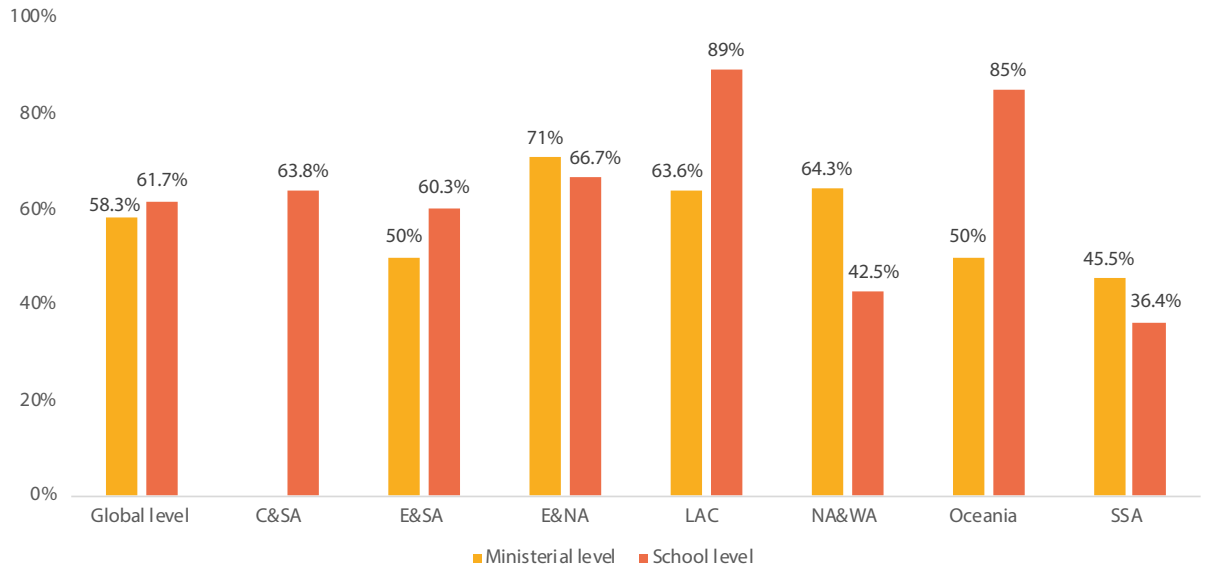
Gender equality

Across UNESCO's QPE survey findings, some socio-cultural issues were noted as a challenge for equality, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, Northern Africa and Western Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean. For example, the lack of female staff, limited changing spaces and/or showering facilities, and perceived low value of the subject were all cited as challenges to girls' participation in PE. Gender equality in physical education has been a topic of debate for many years, with gendered provision being a prominent and persistent feature of the subject arguably fuelling discussions and raising concerns over inequalities (Wilkinson & Penney, 2023). This has been discussed with respect to student groupings, sex-differentiated curricula, student access to curricula, and gendered patterns of staffing.

Indicator 3. Percentage of countries reporting compulsory participation of girls in PE

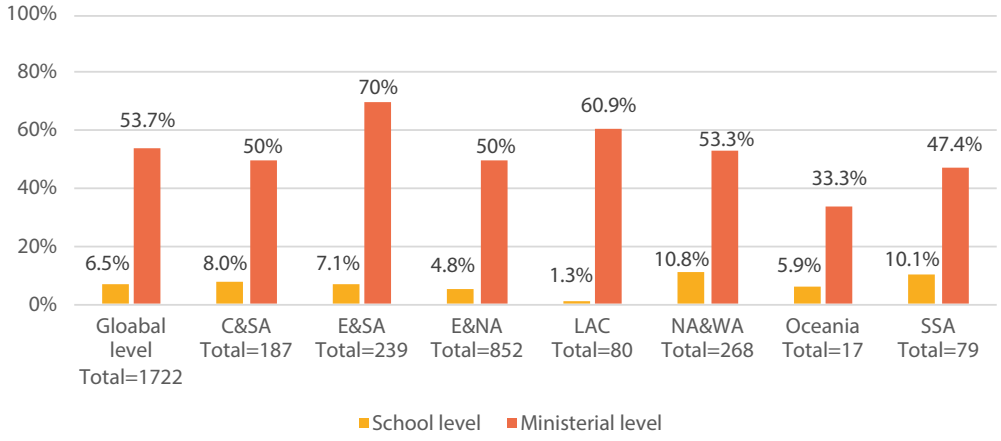
UNESCO's ministerial survey reveal that only 58.3% of countries make the participation of girls in PE compulsory (see Figure 21). Some clear discrepancies emerge when comparing ministerial- and school-level responses regarding the mandatory inclusion of girls in PE lessons. As illustrated in Figure 25, in Northern Africa and Western Asia, 64.3% of ministries confirmed that there is compulsory PE provision for girls, whereas only 42.5% of schools confirmed this is the case, resulting in a 21.8% discrepancy. Similarly, 45.5% of ministries in Sub-Saharan Africa reported compulsory PE for girls, while only 36.4% of schools did.

Figure 25: Ministerial- vs school-level comparison of reported compulsory participation of girls in PE education



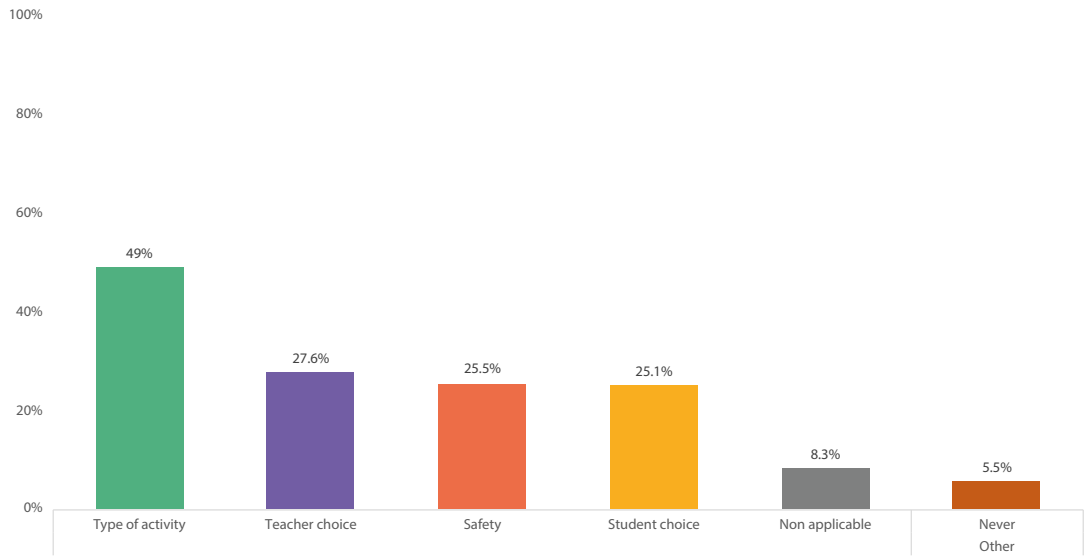
When asked about the activities boys and girls are able to take part in, the discrepancy between policy and practice is even more pronounced, as evidenced in the ministerial and school survey responses. While 53.7% of countries reported the existence of policies/strategies/plans/guidelines related to similar activities in which girls and boys are eligible to participate in during PE, only 6.5% of schools reported the same, resulting in a 47.2% difference. This finding is replicated across all regions (see Figure 26).

Figure 26: Girls and boys are eligible to participate in the same activities during PE classes



These differences suggest a disconnect between ministries and their intentions at policy-level, and actual practice in schools, as outlined in Theme 5 in relation to monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Separate and different curricula, with boys taught activities such as football, rugby and cricket and girls taught activities such as dance, gymnastics and netball in single sex-groups, have also been reported to be common in the literature (Stride et al., 2022; Wilkinson & Penney, 2023). In fact, UNESCO's data unpacked rationales for separating boys and girls in PE, including traditional practices (20.9%), student preference (16.2%) and safety concerns (16.1%) as the main arguments for single-sex groups in PE programmes (see Figure 27). UNESCO advocates for inclusive practices that promote equal access and participation for all students, regardless of gender. Therefore, understanding these reasons is essential for promoting inclusive and equitable PE curricula that prioritize student well-being, experience and participation, while respecting cultural and individual differences.

Figure 27: Reasons why boys and girls are separated in PE classes (School-level)



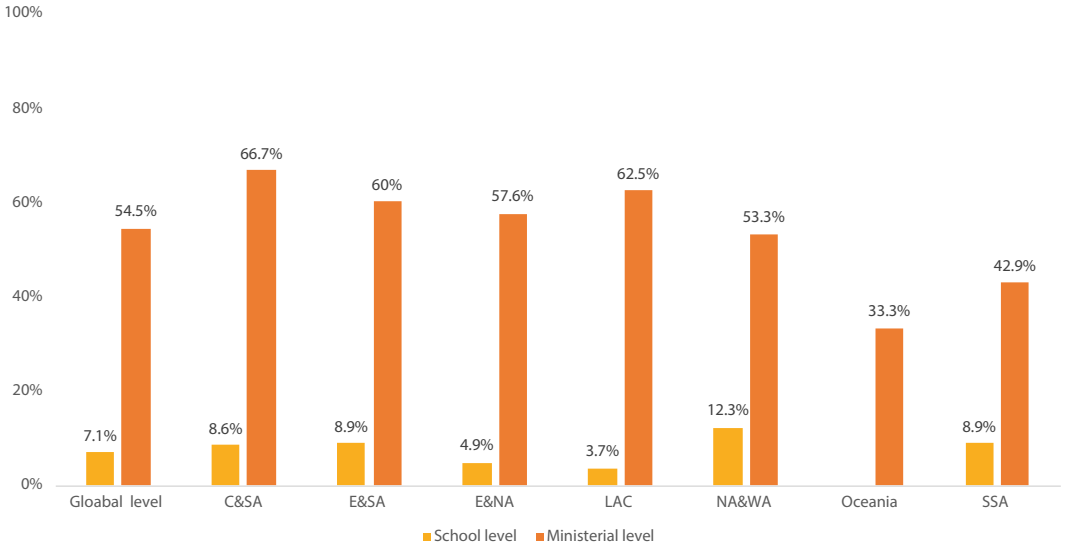
Note: The y axis indicates the number of time an option was selected. Respondents were allowed to choose more than one option.

Progress is being made on the issue of inclusion and on the issue of gender equality. Little by little we are taking steps with affirmative action on both issues, and this will undoubtedly change the reality little by little, making transformations that become chronic and sustainable over time.

– Ministerial respondent, Latin America and the Caribbean

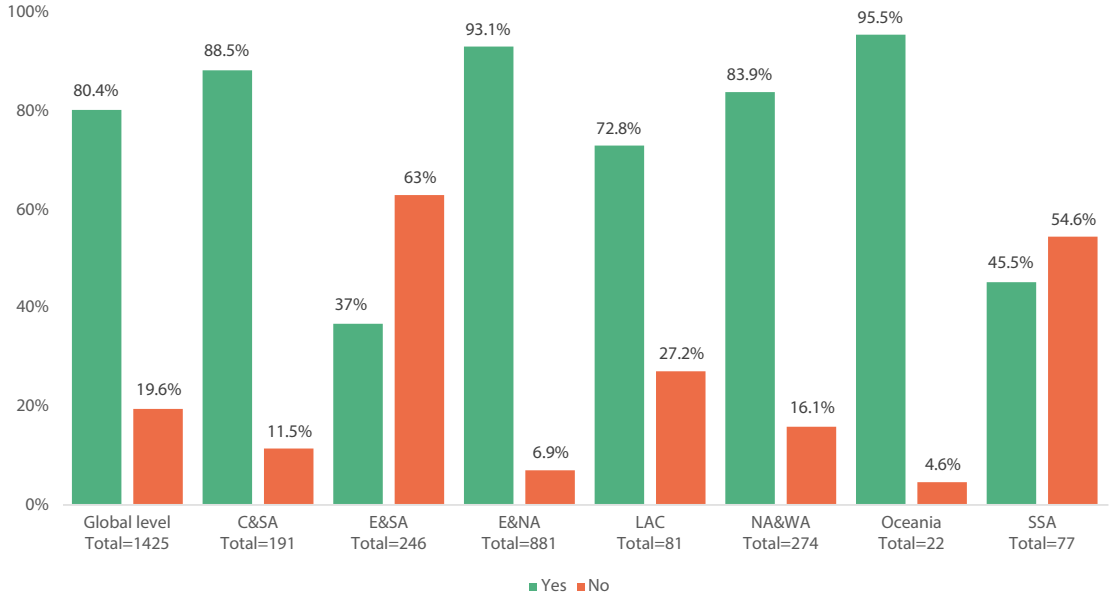
Regarding the amount of PE time allocated to boys and girls, the data also show large discrepancies between the ministerial- and school-level responses. Globally, while 54.5% of countries reported policies/strategies/guidelines/plans to provide equal amounts of PE time for boys and girls, in practice, only 7.1% of schools reported equal PE time to actually be given to boys and girls (see Figure 28). This represents to a 47.4% difference between policy and practice, a result that is observable across all regions.

Figure 28: Gender equality in school PE programmes in terms of the amount of PE girls and boys receive? (ministerial-level vs school-level)



For respondents of the school survey, the concepts of equity and inclusion were most often identified as aspects of 'good practice' (i.e. there were opportunities for all to be included). Despite this fact, achieving equity and inclusion was sometimes identified as a challenge – often linked to not having specific facilities to support girls' participation (e.g. changing spaces) and female staff connected to a role modelling effect. While, globally, 80.4% of schools provide separate changing rooms, bathrooms, and gender-specific PE/sport uniforms, there are regional disparities (see Figure 29). In Europe and Northern America, 93.1% of schools provide these, however, in Eastern and South-eastern Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, only 37% and 45.5% of schools do so respectively. These are pre-requisites for the provision of a safe and supportive learning environment, especially concerning gender inclusion during PE sessions. These findings underscore a need for schools, particularly in certain regions, to prioritize and invest in these important areas to enhance access and the full participation of all students.

Figure 29: Are boys and girls provided with: separate changing rooms, separate bathrooms, gender-specific PE/sport uniforms by region? (school-level)



Box 19. Spotlight- Europe and Northern America

Context

A PE teacher from secondary level emphasises the efforts made by the school to give equal opportunities to all students, with a particular focus on gender.

Testimonial

"We give both boys and girls the same opportunities to practise and participate in various learning exercises and scenarios, as well as in a vast variety of sports and activities because of our endeavour to give the students as broad a learning experience as possible. To do this we also keep ourselves and the school up to date with what equipment we need or want to invest in, as well as provide opportunities for out of school outings and other activities."

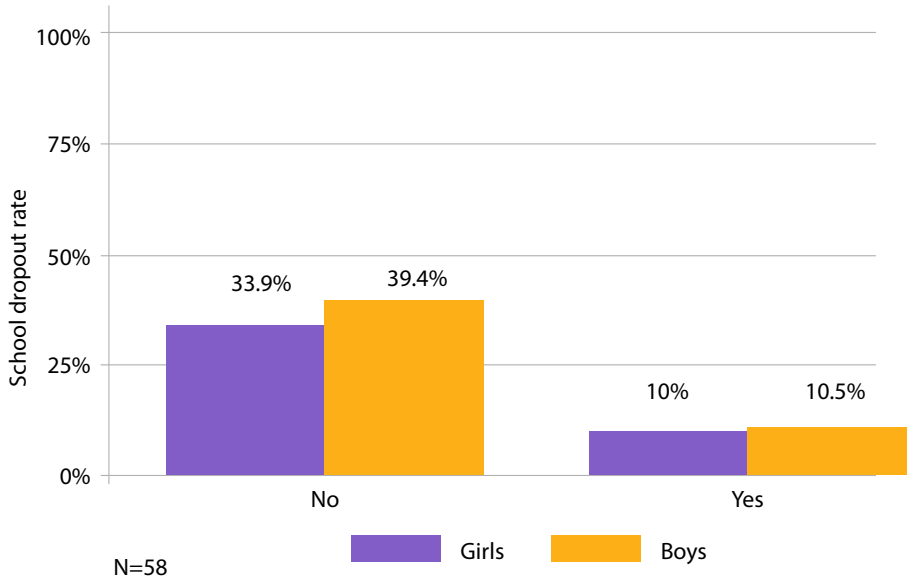
Takeaway

It is notable that the teacher refers not only to the types of activity on offer, but also the pedagogical strategies used to support students' learning. In addition, there is an acknowledgement that to support inclusive practice, there is a need to invest more broadly (both in resources and knowledge) and to consider how physical education may be supported outside of the school context.

UNESCO findings reveal that in countries with well-established gender equality PE programmes, the school dropout rate in primary education is statistically significantly lower (see Figure 30). Additionally, there is no gender disparity in school dropout, suggesting that PE programmes can play a role in reducing school dropout for both girls and boys in primary school and lower secondary school. However, no significant relation has been found in upper secondary education. This indicates that inclusive and appealing PE activities for students can help to enhance engagement, reduce drop out rates, and promote gender equality in education.

Research indicates that gendered differences with regard to sport participation are established from a young age and can result in inequalities that persist into adulthood (Trost et al., 2002; Batista et al., 2019). Moreover, despite progress being made towards more inclusive practices, PE remains one of the most gendered subjects in the curriculum and continues to reinforce and reproduce gender differences (Metcalfe, 2018; Clark et al., 2023). However, the use of critical pedagogical strategies and approaches has the potential to address such challenges and promote more meaningful and inclusive experiences for all students (Luguetti & Oliver, 2020; Stirrup & Hooper, 2021).

Figure 30. School dropout and compulsory PE programme for boys and girls in lower secondary education



Students with disabilities

It is well established that students with disabilities participate less frequently and in fewer lessons than peers without disabilities in PE (Jeanes et al., 2018; Jung et al., 2018; Maher, 2016). UNESCO QPE survey findings indicate that an overt focus on competition, skills development and standard forms of assessment in some contexts limit the participation of students with disabilities. There were also some notable links here to teacher training and development (See also Theme 4), with some contexts noting that a lack of specialist knowledge meant that some students with disabilities were excluded from PE. Many young people with disabilities experience a lack of belonging, acceptance, or value during PE classes (Maher and Haegele, 2022). When able to access activities within PE, they are often relegated to passive or tokenistic roles (Haegele et al, 2020). As such, PE is more often an excluding rather than an inclusive space for these young people.

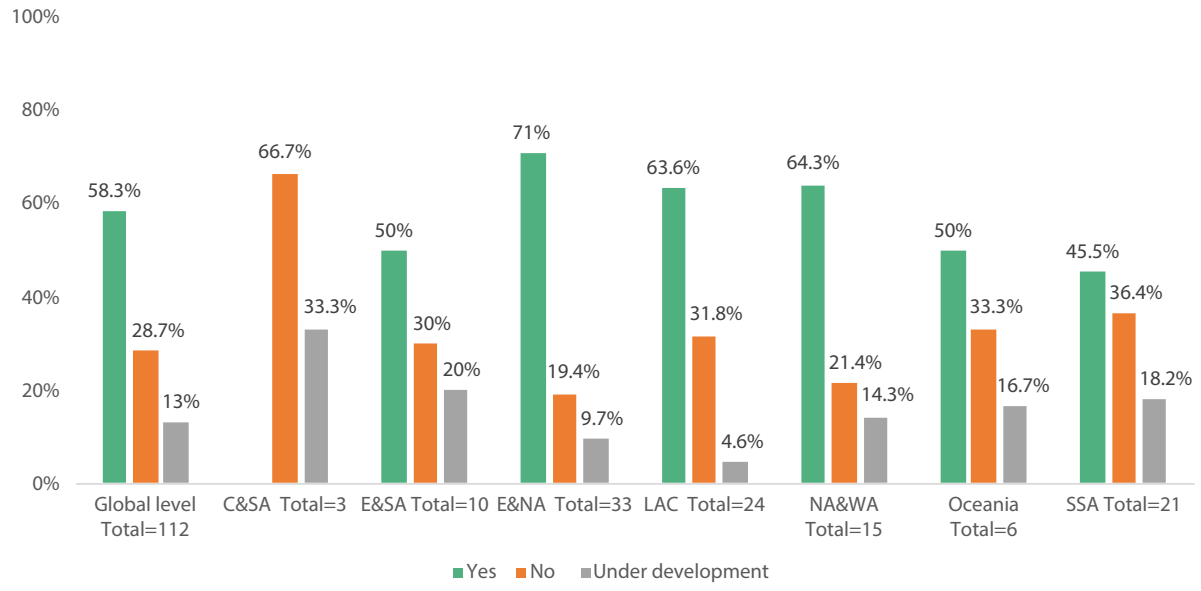
Our students with physical disabilities can sometimes participate in classes if there is an opportunity, but if they are severely impaired, they are excluded.

– School survey, Northern Africa and Western Asia

QPE Indicator 4: Percentage of countries reporting participation of persons with and without disabilities in the same PE classes

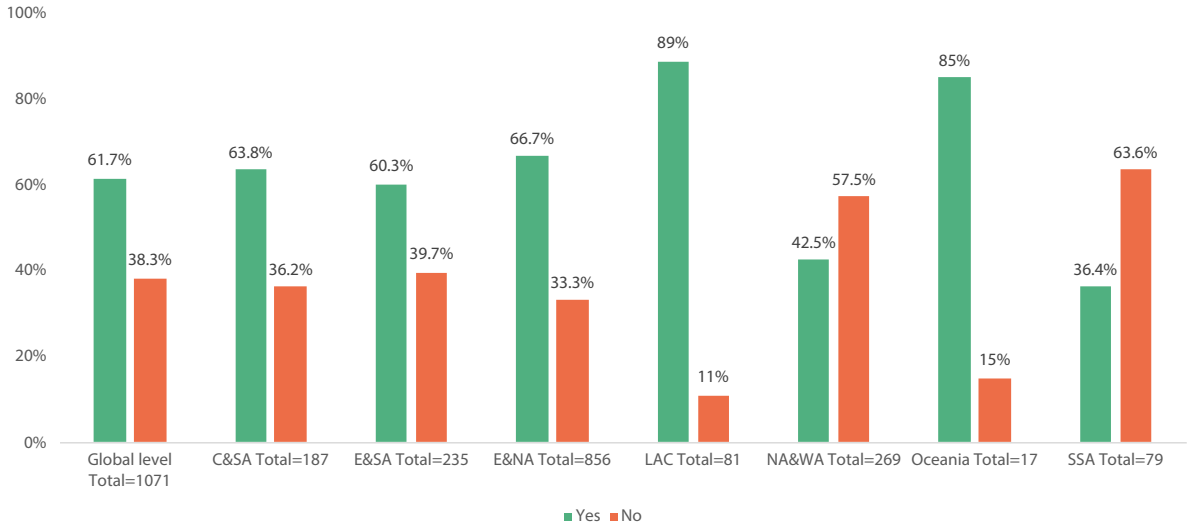
When examining the participation of students with disabilities in PE classes, there is a broad diversity of approaches. For instance, globally 58.3% of ministries require students with disabilities to participate in PE alongside peers without disabilities. However, significant differences are observed across regions. In Central and Southern Asia, Eastern and Southeastern Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Oceania, and Sub-Saharan Africa over 30% of countries do not have such policies, guidelines or plans in place (see Figure 31). The failure to address disability inclusion at policy-level perpetuates the systemic discrimination that students with disabilities experience in educational settings as well as in other social spheres. This issue underscores the importance of integrating disability inclusion into policy frameworks, as highlighted in the policy matters section (see Theme 5). Including diverse stakeholders and voices in the development, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of policies is essential to ensure that disability inclusion is prioritized and effectively implemented across educational systems.

Figure 31: Countries reporting a policy, guideline, strategy or plan requiring that student with disabilities be included in PE classes alongside peers without disabilities (ministerial-level)



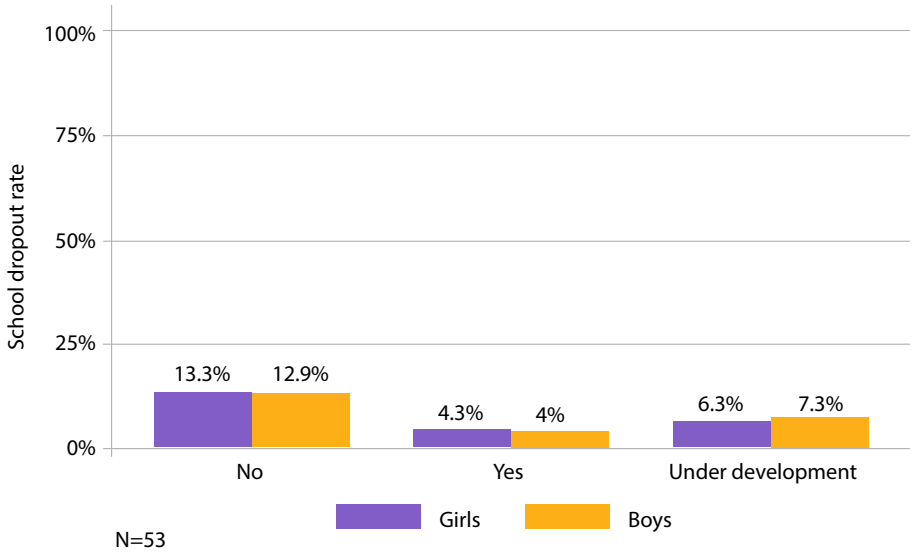
Similar results were found at school-level, with 61.7% of schools affirming that students with disabilities are fully included in PE classes alongside their peers without disabilities (Figure 32). Regions such as Northern Africa and Western Asia, and Sub-Saharan African are least likely to do so, with only 42.5% and 36.4% of schools indicating this to be the case.

Figure 32: Schools reporting that students with disabilities are included in PE classes alongside peers without disabilities (school-level)



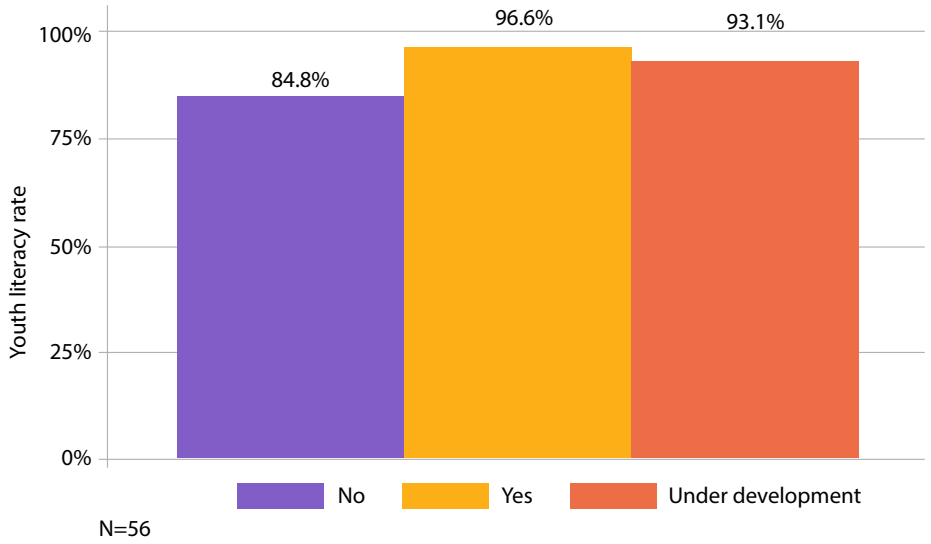
UNESCO findings from this report emphasize the importance of providing PE to students with and without disabilities in mainstream settings, where appropriate. As evidenced in Figure 33, having mixed classes with students with disabilities reduces the chances of school dropout in primary education for both girls and boys with disabilities. These results reinforce the importance of offering mainstream QPE classes for students with and without disabilities.

Figure 33: School dropout in primary education PE classes with students with and without disabilities



Furthermore, UNESCO findings reveal a significant and positive relation between youth literacy rate and the access students with disabilities have to PE (see Figure 34). These results highlight the potential of QPE to positively impact students with disabilities beyond PE classes.

Figure 34. Youth literacy rate and opportunities for students with disabilities to access PE



Finally, research findings by Holland and Haegele (2021) suggest that students with disabilities can have positive experiences in PE when appropriate modifications and accommodations are made, along with increased supportive interactions with both staff and peers. However, UNESCO data show that at the school-level, only 55.5% of respondents reported wheelchair accessibility, while only 34.3% offered adapted infrastructure and 34% adapted resources for students with disabilities.

QPE, inclusion and COVID-19

UNESCO's QPE Global COVID-19 survey assessed the specific impact of COVID-19 on the participation of all students in PE classes. Findings indicate that only 46.8% respondents declared that all students were equally likely to participate in PE classes during the pandemic. When asked which group of students were least likely to participate in PE during the COVID-19 pandemic, the participation of students with physical disabilities (26.4%), students with learning difficulties (21.4%), and girls (18.9%) were reported to be the demographic groups most affected in terms of participation in PE classes. Of particular concern was that 33% of respondents reported that students with disabilities were not fully integrated into PE classes alongside their peers without disabilities during COVID-19.

Theme 8: Public health

Box 20. Theme 8: Public health highlights

- There is a need for interconnected discussions and cohesive policy development aimed at enhancing health and well-being through QPE, which should involve cross-ministerial and multi-agency collaborations.
- Widespread concerns about sedentary lifestyles and poor nutrition emphasise the added value that QPE holds in promoting physical and health literacy.
- The COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted students' physical (78.3%) and mental well-being (75.9%).

Globally, there have been concerns raised about the health and well-being of children and young people (World Health Organization, 2013; 2022), with PE often seen as a means to tackle broader health issues such as sedentary behaviour and mental health. Indeed, the subject has long been seen to make a valuable contribution to public health and health promotion (Armour & Harris, 2013). Interest in PE's role, in this regard, has heightened in recent decades due to the increased prevalence of mental, as well as physical health issues amongst young people (Cale & Harris, 2023). The importance of QPE and supportive school environments in promoting 'physical and health literacy for long-lasting healthy, active lifestyles' is recognised in the World Health Organisation's Global Physical Activity Action Plan (WHO, 2018, p.7). UNESCO findings concur with this, with numerous references being made to PE being a useful vehicle for addressing wider public health concerns and laying the foundations for a healthy active lifestyle.

Anyone who does not get enough exercise as a child is at high risk of also remaining inactive as an adult. This in turn favours the development of civilisation diseases such as obesity, heart diseases or strokes.

– Ministerial respondent, Europe & Northern America

Respondents to UNESCO's ministerial survey made frequent references to the connection between PE and health education generally, and the need for interconnected discussions and joined-up policy in this respect. Relatedly, there were also some good practice examples that had a specific focus on enhancing health and well-being through PE and which referenced multi-agency collaborations.

Courses of physical education should be a complement of an active lifestyle already acquired. But in reality, children and youth show an increasing sedentary lifestyle, affecting their basic condition (with problems of obesity, etc).

– Ministerial respondent, Europe & Northern America

UNESCO school-level respondents recognised the potential of PE in enhancing students' health and well-being. Some respondents spoke about the role of PE in helping students to make 'healthy choices' or to develop skills and dispositions that would facilitate their ongoing engagement in physical activity. Moreover, some respondents noted the broader impact of such messages on students' families and communities.

As PE teachers, we are moulding their character towards the good life and healthy lifestyles. Moreover, the students are also carrying the awareness to the parents, so that parents also try to be healthy at home.

- PE Teacher, Central and Southern Asia

Some connections were made to COVID-19 here, but the main issues cited in UNESCO's QPE surveys related to sedentary behaviours, poor diet and student disengagement. Concerns about sedentary lifestyles and poor nutrition were widespread, but these were particularly evident in Europe and Northern America, and in Latin America and the Caribbean. Interestingly, with respect to the latter region, there were concerns about both obesity and malnutrition, depending on country context. It was also notable that some school responses reflected holistic understandings of health (i.e. which went beyond physical health), with many examples of good practice highlighted.

Ultimately, PE aims to train a flourishing, healthy, educated citizen, able to make informed choices to engage regularly and independently in an active and supportive lifestyle. The Physical and Sports Education programme helps students to lead healthy, active lives that will provide them with benefits not only on an individual level, but also on a socioeconomic level.

– PE teacher, Sub-Saharan Africa

QPE, health and COVID-19

UNESCO's QPE COVID-19 survey respondents reported that the COVID-19 pandemic had negatively impacted students' physical (78.3%) and mental well-being (75.9%). The negative impacts of COVID-19 on physical well-being included weight gain (74.8%), lower engagement in PE classes (58.4%), lower confidence (50.7%) and lower immunity (18.9%), while the negative impacts on mental well-being included stress (63.1%), anxiety (58.6%), loneliness (51.2%), depression (37.9%) and insomnia (16.3%).

Upon students' return to school, 28.9% of respondents noted students to be less interested in being active or participating in PE. In addition, over a third (32.9%) reported that students exhibited more anxiety in participating in group activities and team settings. PE teachers' main concerns when schools re-opened were the delivery of close contact activities (55.7%), followed by teaching indoor versus outdoor activities (16.8%), and the sharing of equipment (7.7%)

UNESCO's QPE COVID-19 survey respondents reported that the pandemic had negatively impacted teachers' physical (50.9%) and mental (55.1%) well-being. The predominant impacts of COVID-19 on teachers' mental well-being included increased stress (83.1%), anxiety (57.3%), depression (29.8%), insomnia (29.8%) and loneliness (24%). These findings highlight the lasting and profound repercussions of the pandemic on student and teacher well-being, with the impacts extending well beyond the periods of lockdown, and that the consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic has not yet been resolved everywhere.

Theme 9: Climate and environment

Box 21. Theme 9: Climate and environment highlights

- UNESCO findings highlight the value of incorporating the natural environment into PE practice, with school-level respondents documenting the rich opportunities it affords for students' experiential learning.
- The concept of environmental and climate-related issues was only evident within the UNESCO school-level survey responses.
- QPE can play a central role in educating students about sustainability and climate change, nurturing a sense of global citizenship.

While issues related to the need for appropriate facilities for the local environment were raised by some respondents in UNESCO's QPE ministerial survey, these were largely concerned with buildings and infrastructure. However, the concept of environmental and climate-related issues was frequently cited within the school-level survey responses. This is interesting, given that research within the field of PE is increasingly highlighting the role that PE can play in achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs), as well as the potential impacts on curriculum development and the need for additional teacher education with regards to supporting this in practice (Fröberg & Lundvall, 2021, 2022; Baena-Morales & Ferriz-Valero, 2023).

[We] lack multiple roofed courts to protect the children from the hot climate in my state. Because we have no indoor hall, the weather can affect physical education lessons.

– PE teacher, Latin America and the Caribbean

School-level respondents referred to the various challenges of adverse weather on ensuring student safety and the delivery of QPE. However, there were different challenges in different regions (e.g. extreme heat in Northern Africa & Western Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean and storms/heavy rain in Europe and Northern America), with these impacting practice in different ways. For example, some respondents noted changes in timetabling (e.g. scheduling PE lessons at the beginning of the day to avoid extreme heat), while others talked about restricted or even cancelled lessons (e.g. making lessons classroom-based to avoid severe storms).

The area of practicing physical education activities is not covered! So, on rainy days, we cancel the classes.

– PE teacher, Northern Africa & Western Asia

Linking with this report's discussion on culture and community contexts (see Theme 6), several respondents highlighted the importance of the natural environment in their practice and noted that they sought to provide opportunities for students to take part in activities in natural spaces (e.g. forests, lakes, mountains). This was seen to offer something different to a 'traditional' PE approach and to facilitate reflection and experiential learning that supports the development of a broader skill set – with a specific focus here on life skills (e.g. resilience, initiative, collaboration). It was also seen to foster a connection between students and the geography and culture of their region or country.

Every year we take the kids who do their exam in PE out to the woods in Holland to do a two-day survival trip... and they have to be fully equipped to survive 'the harsh nature' of Holland and function as a group with all kinds of challenges. It is every year's most enjoyable moment.

– PE teacher, Europe & Northern America

Some respondents also spoke about how such opportunities had an explicit focus on sustainability and were intended to promote respect for nature and the environment as well as encourage students to see how they might make use of outdoor spaces for their own physical activity and well-being.

We have seen the development of environmental projects where sports and physical activity are interconnected with the notions of sustainability and protection of the environment.

– PE teacher, Europe & Northern America

Students also linked issues of climate to the need for greater environmental awareness, by both schools and students, with several respondents noting the need for more teaching on sustainability and climate change within PE.

[We need] the development of environmental projects where sports and physical activity are interconnected with the notions of sustainability and protection of the environment.

– PE teacher, Europe & Northern America

Box 22. Spotlight- Europe & Northern America

Context

A Lithuanian PE teacher in UNESCO's QPE school survey spoke about a project that saw enhancements to the standard physical education offer, with the inclusion of more physical education experiences beyond traditional school spaces (e.g., sports halls or gymnasiums).

Testimonial

"We started a new project, which is physical education lessons with an experiential pedagogy methodology. For as much time as possible, lessons take place in the fresh air outdoors, in the woods, in the water with kayaks, orienteering games. We perform reflections regularly; we learn to work in a team. This lesson is different, and students like it."

Takeaway

This example focuses on making use of the natural environment for lessons and on encouraging experiential learning and holistic development. Encouraging students' reflections on learning was a central feature of practice.

Interestingly, school responses to UNESCO's QPE school-level survey highlighted the significance of climate and the environment for PE, which mirrors discussion within recent academic debates. Research certainly identifies education as key to the delivery of SDGs and highlights the important role that PE could play in relation to this (Fröberg & Lundvall, 2021, 2022; Baena-Morales & Ferriz-Valero, 2023). Similarly, there is increased consideration being given to the role of sport more broadly in responding to environmental crises (Giulianotti et al., 2019; Darnell & Millington, 2024). However, it is noted that such debates are at an early stage and that further work – and empirical research – is needed to advance understanding. The findings from the QPE study suggest that there is much to learn from what is already being done within schools, though the absence of this agenda from the ministerial responses highlights a need for a greater focus on issues of climate, environment and sustainability within PE policy.

Conclusion

The findings from UNESCO's QPE surveys offer a comprehensive overview of the status of Quality Physical Education (QPE) worldwide. The analysis reveals a strong global commitment to making PE a compulsory subject. Despite this commitment, there remains a significant gap between policy and practice. This discrepancy highlights the need for enhanced alignment and implementation strategies to guarantee the effective implementation of national policies at the school-level.

Throughout the findings section, a persistent lack of clarity regarding the role and significance of PE by policymakers has been highlighted across the different data themes. Investment in PE remains insufficient, with a significant majority of countries allocating less than 2% of their national education budget to PE. Such underfunding limits the quality of facilities, equipment, and resources, which are essential for delivering positive PE experiences. When adequate resources, a well-defined curriculum, and a specialized workforce are in place, QPE implementation is more successful and can connect to a broader range of social outcomes such as school engagement and life satisfaction. It is worth highlighting that PE provision was critically impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which highlights the necessity for resilient systems capable of adapting to such disruptions. The shift to remote learning due to the pandemic exposed significant challenges, particularly in technology access.

A critical area for improvement is the adherence to recommended PE curriculum standards. UNESCO findings show that only 32.2% of upper secondary school and 34.7% of lower secondary school students meet the minimum criteria of 180 minutes of PE per week; while 52.6% of primary school students meet the minimum requirement of 120 minutes of PE minutes per week. Many schools report higher PE minutes than those recorded by ministries, indicating a disconnect that requires improved monitoring and communication to ensure consistency. Additionally, while most countries are implementing a PE curriculum, issues such as overcrowded and outdated content persist, pointing to the need for ongoing curriculum evaluation and adaptation.

The presence of qualified, specialized PE teachers is of paramount importance for the effective delivery of QPE. However, there is a marked disparity in the availability of specialist PE teachers between primary and secondary schools, and considerable variation across regions. Continuous professional development is crucial, yet inconsistent, with many countries lacking regular, annual training for PE teachers. The inadequate attention given to QPE within educational systems, coupled with the absence of a coordinated and professional approach in its implementation, significantly weakens its overall effectiveness, thereby limiting students' opportunities to acquire essential motor skills, physical fitness, psycho-social learning, and knowledge related to health and well-being.

As evidenced in UNESCO's QPE surveys, variation exists both within regions and between regions, underscoring the importance of acknowledging the individualized nature of needs, challenges, and good practice in schools. PE is marked by significant heterogeneity in policies and practices worldwide. This report acknowledges the absence of a global shared vision for QPE due to diverse national priorities and regional agendas. In this regard, it is important to note that:

- Contextual variety can be a strength: The diversity in PE policies and practices is not inherently negative; rather, it can be viewed as a strength. Contextual variety allows for the incorporation of local practices that are culturally relevant and engaging for students. This approach has the potential to enhance student motivation and enjoyment in PE, thereby contributing to overall quality.
- Meeting minimum global standards is a priority: While contextual variety has its merits, there remains a pressing need for establishing minimum global standards and criteria for QPE. These standards ensure that fundamental aspects of PE, such as physical literacy, social and emotional learning (SEL) and motor skill development, are universally prioritized. By defining and adhering to these standards, countries and regions can maintain their individuality while achieving common objectives.

Despite data revealing various challenges and needs in this area, there is robust evidence of exemplary practices that showcase the substantial contributions QPE can make to school life, students' holistic development, and the support of local communities, traditions, and cultures. These findings resonate with broader conversations in the academic literature (e.g., Dyson, 2014; Larsson and Karlefors, 2015; Hooper et al., 2020; Wrench and Garrett, 2021) and reinforce the case for recognising and further elevating the status of PE. Similarly, UNESCO findings on the social outcomes of QPE show that higher specialization of PE teachers is associated with lower school dropout rates, higher youth literacy rates, and decreased rates of youth not in education, employment, or training (NEET) at both lower and upper secondary levels. In addition, countries with gender-equal PE programmes and schools that include students with disabilities in mainstream PE classes see lower dropout rates, highlighting the importance of specialized and inclusive PE in promoting educational engagement and equality.

Box 23. Why invest in QPE

Why invest in QPE?

- Implement effective PE policies: Investing in QPE is crucial to bridge the gap between policy and practice. Despite global commitments to compulsory PE, many schools struggle with implementation due to lack of alignment and effective strategies. Investing in QPE ensures that policies translate into meaningful action and positive outcomes in schools through enhanced alignment, implementation strategies, and robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.
- Increase investment in PE: Many schools face resource constraints that hinder PE implementation, resulting in underfunded facilities and limited resources. Adequate investment in QPE is essential to provide the necessary infrastructure, equipment, and resources, ensuring successful PE delivery and positive student experiences.
- Upskill PE teachers: Qualified and specialized PE teachers are essential for effective QPE delivery. Investing in continuous professional development and equitable deployment of specialized teachers enhances PE quality, improves student engagement, and contributes to better educational outcomes such as reduced school dropout rates and improved literacy rates.
- Promote equitable and inclusive PE: Investing in QPE supports gender equality and disability inclusion, fostering an inclusive educational environment. Schools that prioritize gender equality and accommodate students with disabilities promote lifelong engagement in physical activity and contribute to overall educational equality by reducing dropout rates and enhancing educational engagement.
- Enhance PE curricula: Investment in QPE includes developing clear guidelines and benchmarks for curriculum development. This ensures improved pedagogical practices, effective assessment strategies, and regular curriculum reviews to adapt to changing educational needs. Embedding equity and inclusion within curriculum development guarantees that all students receive equal educational opportunities through a responsive and relevant curriculum.

Section 3: Recommendations for policy and practice

Section 3: Recommendations for policy and practice

Based on the findings previously outlined, this section now presents seven evidence-informed recommendations aimed at policy makers, sports practitioners, and educators. Through a strategic focus on these pivotal areas, the intention is to spark significant enhancements in the quality of PE. The recommendations are wide-ranging, spanning aspects such as investments, curricular refinement, teacher training, and policy reforms. Collective effort to implement these recommendations would help to raise the status, extend the reach, and enhance the quality of PE, and in turn, students' overall health and well-being and development.

Policy recommendations

Recommendation 1:
Enhance the status of PE and increase investment in the subject

Action 1.1: Establish and enforce minimum requirements for key aspects of PE provision, including the time allocated, designated space, class sizes and minimum level of accreditation required by practitioners for teaching the subject.

Action 1.2: Promote and advocate for a holistic perspective of PE within policy. This would support greater recognition of the potential of the subject to enhance learning across the physical, social and emotional domains.

Action 1.3: Consider how PE might contribute to whole-school approaches to health and physical activity promotion and/or interventions. Interministerial collaboration (e.g., health, education, sport, culture, environment) could be utilized here to support and guide the curriculum.

Action 1.4: Consider offering qualifications for students in PE, where these are not already available. Doing so would not only enhance the perceived status of the subject within schools (and with parents and students) but also serve to develop the next generation of physical educators.

Action 1.5: Coordinate resource allocation across ministries to ensure sufficient funding for PE including infrastructure, equipment, and teacher training. Engage relevant stakeholders to enhance resource mobilisation for PE programmes.

Recommendation 2:
Foster and strive for curriculum excellence

Action 2.1: Standardise curriculum aims, goals, priorities and assessment and monitoring methods. While data indicate that many contexts have specific PE policies, it is evident that this is not consistent and there is much variation at a local level.

Action 2.2: Establish clear guidelines and benchmarks for curriculum development with respect to content, pedagogy, and assessment methods, with a view to ensuring breadth and balance in content, inclusive pedagogical approaches and practice, and appropriate methods of assessment.

Action 2.3: Regularly review and update the curriculum based on research evidence, best practice, input and feedback from staff and students, taking into account contextual and cultural factors and changing educational and learner needs.

Action 2.4: Maintain a focus on equity and inclusion in curriculum development. Ministries of Education/Government departments should outline the responsibilities of schools with respect to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in PE and provide clear guidance to schools and teachers on equitable and inclusive PE policy and practice.

Action 2.5: Establish a national framework for PE teacher training and CPD, outlining both practitioners' entitlement to appropriate training and support and the knowledge and skills they should possess.

Recommendation 3:
Adopt an integrated approach to national PE policy to drive priorities and strategies

Action 3.1: Develop a shared policy vision and set of goals that align with national educational priorities, emphasising the role of PE in promoting healthy and active lifestyles, and in fostering wider benefits (e.g., social and leadership skills) and supporting the academic achievement of all students. Establish consensus among participating ministries of the importance of QPE for promoting physical activity, health and well-being and overall student development.

Action 3.2: Ensure that policies related to PE, health, sport and education are aligned and integrated across ministries/government departments, creating a coherent and comprehensive approach to PE and its delivery. Establish mechanisms for clear communication and collaboration between relevant ministries/government departments to address any policy gaps or barriers that may be impeding the effective development and implementation of PE.

Action 3.3: Establish an inter-ministerial/government task force comprising representatives from the Ministries of Education, Sport, Health and Youth Affairs or country equivalents, among others. Designate a lead agency or department responsible for overseeing the task force's activities.

Action 3.4: Facilitate the sharing of resources, expertise and best practices among ministries to optimise the utilization of available resources and avoid duplication of efforts. Engage relevant stakeholders to enhance resource mobilisation for PE programmes.

Recommendation 4:
Foster active stakeholder engagement, support and collaboration

Action 4.1: Establish a framework for collaboration that involves all stakeholders, including policy makers, educators, practitioners and students to build support and momentum for driving QPE policy and practice. A collaborative framework can be used to agree an action plan which identifies and prioritizes key areas of focus, develops and implements strategies for achieving common goals, and monitors progress towards the desired outcomes.

Action 4.2: Engage parents, communities and other relevant stakeholders through awareness campaigns and advocacy work to encourage and scale up investments in the subject, highlighting the importance of QPE to students' health and well-being and overall development.

Action 4.3: Foster partnerships with sports organisations, health, fitness and leisure clubs, non-governmental organisations, and community groups to support the delivery of PE and expand the opportunities for students to participate in sports and physical activities beyond school.

Action 4.4: Promote collaboration and knowledge sharing between educational institutions (such as schools and universities), professional associations, and policy makers to share best and evidence-based practices and innovative approaches in PE and PE teacher training and development. Encourage the establishment of networks or communities of practice where ideas, resources, expertise and experiences can be exchanged and pooled.

Action 4.5: Facilitate the dissemination of research findings and evidence-based practices to inform PE and PE workforce policy decisions and initiatives and improve PE practice, teacher training and CPD.

Recommendation 5:
Conduct regular and robust PE monitoring and evaluation

Action 5.1: Participate actively in and provide support for global data collection initiatives in PE, physical activity and school sport, with the overarching goal of fostering evidence-based policies, practices and decision-making. Concurrently, support global advocacy efforts to scale-up investments in sport and PE, utilizing the insights gleaned from such data as a driving force for improvement.

Action 5.2: Establish a robust monitoring and evaluation framework to assess the quality and effectiveness of PE provision. This should involve all relevant participating ministries/governments and be used to drive positive change and continual improvement.

Action 5.3: Promote and support research collaborations to generate evidence on the impact of QPE on students' physical, mental and social well-being, and use this evidence to inform policy decisions, strategic initiatives and curriculum and pedagogical developments.

Action 5.4: Design a robust evaluation framework to assess the quality and effectiveness of PE teacher training and CPD, using this to identify future training needs and approaches to PE teacher development. Include measures to evaluate the impact of training on PE teachers' instructional/pedagogical practices, student learning and development outcomes, and overall PE provision and delivery. Collaborate with experts in the field of PE and assessment to design appropriate evaluation tools that align with national educational goals.

PE Delivery Recommendations

Recommendation 6:
Take positive action to promote equality, diversity and inclusion in PE

Action 6.1: Integrate equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) education and social justice into the PE teacher training curriculum and CPD offer, to ensure teachers are equipped with the knowledge and skills to meet the diverse needs of students, including those with disabilities and from different cultural backgrounds. Provide specific input on creating inclusive and equitable learning environments, promoting social inclusion, and adapting PE activities to meet individual student needs.

Action 6.2: Review and revise, as appropriate, school PE policies and provision to ensure these are conducive to providing a safe, secure and supportive learning environment and an equitable and broad and balanced curriculum for all students. This should include consideration of policies relating, for example, to PE kit, changing and grouping arrangements, and to the type and range of sports and physical activities offered to students within the curriculum.

Action 6.3: Commit to measures to improving and achieving diversity in the PE teaching workforce, actively encouraging the recruitment and retention of PE teachers from diverse backgrounds to foster representation and cultural responsiveness within the profession.

Action 6.4: Encourage a focus on equity and inclusion in curriculum development. When developing their PE curricula, a key factor informing schools' decision making should be the equality of access to sports and physical activities for all students.

Action 6.5: Create opportunities for students to inform and shape decision making around curriculum development. Facilitate and encourage student voice to help to inform/shape inclusive PE policies and curricula.

Recommendation 7:
Facilitate the provision of high-quality teacher education and CPD

Action 7.1: Support PE teachers' professional development by allocating adequate time and sufficient resources for CPD. Ensure that funding is allocated to allow schools to invest in ongoing professional development opportunities for teachers to enhance their knowledge and skills.

Action 7.2: Collaborate with relevant stakeholders to review, develop and implement a comprehensive PE CPD offer based on good practice and inclusive principles. Pool expertise across the Ministries/Government departments of Education and Sports and establish partnerships with educational institutions and other relevant organizations to provide quality development opportunities covering curriculum development, pedagogical approaches, inclusion, safeguarding, assessment practices and the promotion of health and wellness within PE.

Action 7.3: Develop a clear and progressive PE CPD framework to encourage and facilitate a lifelong engagement/commitment to professional learning in PE and thereby support teachers' career development and progression.

Action 7.4: Offer tailored PE CPD opportunities for teachers to support the interpretation and implementation of specific policy and/or curriculum developments relevant to their own contexts. This would seem to be particularly important for those countries and contexts where formal PE curricula and policy are relatively new.

Action 7.5: Create informal and formal PE CPD opportunities between schools and other relevant organisations in the local community. This could help to share knowledge and resources, identify good practice examples and support the growth of effective communities of practice.

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Annexes

Annex A: Methodology and Analytical Approach

UNESCO and partners collected and analysed data from national ministries and PE teachers to inform the QPE Global State of Play using three global surveys: a ministerial-level survey, a school-level survey and a COVID-19 survey.

Table 2: UNESCO's QPE Surveys	
UNESCO Global QPE ministerial-level survey[6]	Administered by UNESCO, the Global QPE ministerial-level survey captured data at the policy-level from respondents in 117 national ministries responsible for PE provision. Of these respondents, 65% belonged to the Ministry of Education, 18% to the Ministry of Sport, and 13% to the Ministry of Youth and Sport.
UNESCO Global QPE school-level survey	The Global QPE school-level survey collected data from teachers about PE provision and practice and was distributed in partnership with FIEPS to their school networks in 146 countries. School-level respondents represent teachers of PE in primary, lower secondary schools and upper secondary schools.
UNESCO Global QPE COVID-19 survey	Administered via FIEPS in September 2021, the survey focused on understanding the impacts of COVID-19 on PE practice and delivery. Responses from 453 PE teachers from 60 countries from all regions were collected. The survey was themed around the continuity of PE classes and delivery of lessons during COVID-19, inclusivity, teacher well-being, student well-being and changes in behaviour upon return to school. In particular, it was designed to evaluate PE delivery (home schooling models, distance learning, space constraints, equipment sharing) and the perceived impact on student and teacher health, both mental and physical.

The design of the three interlinked surveys was participatory and included inputs from more than 28 experts, including members of the QPE Steering Committee. Because survey questions are aligned with UNESCO's QPE model indicators, they focus on issues such as frequency of provision, variety of activities and notions of inclusivity (UNESCO, 2015a; UNESCO, 2015b).

Survey dissemination

In total, responses were received from 117 ministries[7] and 2,545 PE teachers,[8] with seven clustered regions represented[9]: Central and Southern Asia, Eastern and South-eastern Asia, Europe and Northern America, Latin America and the Caribbean, Northern Africa and Western Asia, Oceania, Sub-Saharan Africa (see Table 2 and Annex C).[10] We detail in Table 3, Table 4 and Table 5 the breakdown of respondents per region.

6. UNESCO disseminated the ministerial-level survey to all UNESCO Member States in the six official languages of the UN (EN, FR, ES, AR, CN, RU) and in two formats. 61% (117) of UNESCO's Member States responded.
7. Note that two responses for Belgium were received: Belgium (Flemish Community) and Belgium (French Community, also known as the Wallonia-Brussels Federation). In order to preserve information from both regions, both responses were considered for a total of 118 observations at country level.
8. 2101 entries were collected from PE teachers around the world but 13 entries from Kosovo have been removed from the analysis as defined by resolution 1244 (1999) of the United Nations Security Council (see memo on this subject of July 9, 2020, reference PAX/COR/20/4702).
9. This report presents its findings across the following seven clustered regions: Central and Southern Asia, Eastern and South-eastern Asia, Europe and Northern America, Latin America and the Caribbean, Northern Africa and Western Asia, Oceania, Sub-Saharan Africa (see Annex B for detail of countries within each region). By categorizing the results by these regions, the report aims to shed light on the specific challenges, trends, and disparities in physical education across regions, ultimately facilitating more targeted and contextually relevant recommendations and policies.
10. The World Health Organization provided support to clean data collected in the ministerial and school surveys.

Table 3 UNESCO QPE ministerial-level survey: Respondents per Region		
Survey Regions	Respondent distribution	Percentage
Central and Southern Asia	4	3.4
Eastern and South-eastern Asia	11	9.3
Europe and Northern America	33	28.8
Latin America and the Caribbean	25	21.2
Northern Africa and Western Asia	15	12.7
Oceania	7	5.9
Sub-Saharan Africa	22	18.6
TOTAL	**117**	**100**

Table 4 UNESCO QPE school-level survey: Respondents per Region		
Survey Regions	Respondent distribution	Percentage
Central and Southern Asia	191	10.8
Eastern and South-eastern Asia	246	13.9
Europe and Northern America	881	49.6
Latin America and the Caribbean	82	4.6
Northern Africa and Western Asia	274	15.4
Oceania	22	1.2
Sub-Saharan Africa	79	4.5
TOTAL	**1775**	**100**

Note: Kosovo and New Caledonia have been excluded

Table 5 UNESCO QPE COVID-19 survey: Respondents per Region		
Survey Regions	Respondent distribution	Percentage
Central and Southern Asia	21	5.2
Eastern and South-eastern Asia	75	18.5
Europe and Northern America	175	43.1
Latin America and the Caribbean	76	18.7
Northern Africa and Western Asia	18	4.4
Oceania	13	3.2
Sub-Saharan Africa	28	6.9
TOTAL	**406**	**100**

Data Processing and Analysis

Key findings from the surveys relating to core areas of QPE practice, including barriers to and facilitators of QPE in schools, were drawn out in this report using both quantitative and qualitative methods. UNESCO worked with a quantitative research team to complete the survey analysis. This work was informed by initial scoping work done by Loughborough University, who also carried out the qualitative analysis.

The quantitative analysis of both the ministerial and school surveys, generated descriptive statistics of the 10 QPE model indicators in relation to the seven UNESCO-defined regions. For example, the percentage of schools reporting implementation of minimum number of PE minutes per week or the percentage of schools reporting compulsory PE provision. Furthermore, the report also includes the analysis to contextual indicators which refers to both positive and negative outcomes. The approach adopted aimed at identifying significant associations between the QPE indicators and key contextual outcomes to better understand which indicators could be a better driver of positive social outcomes. For example, QPE indicators such as the availability of prescribed national physical educational curriculum, were tested against school dropout rate. For this purpose, the statistical technique of analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed.

For the qualitative analysis, data from the open-ended responses to three relevant questions in the ministerial- and school-level surveys were analysed thematically using an approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2016). In order to triangulate data and responses from different types of respondents, the surveys varied slightly in wording, but both asked respondents to:

- Indicate any specific issues, concerns or problems related to PE within their own context;
- List items which are considered essential basic needs for PE provision in their context (examples were given including human resourcing, facilities, equipment, etc.);
- Provide one illustrative example of good practice in a PE-related area in their context (examples given here included policies or pedagogical interventions).

This report offers a rigorous analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. Nonetheless, the following limitations have been identified in data collection and data quality:

- Sample size: The school survey received more responses from Europe and Northern America and fewer responses from the Latin America and the Caribbean Oceania and Sub-Saharan Africa. These constraints, including a small sample size and a non-random sampling method, can make it difficult to detect significant results. It is therefore imperative to avoid any potential over generalisation of the study's findings. Furthermore, a low sample size impacts on the analysis of specific variables as the number of observations would inevitably be reduced. This implies having an illustrative and not an inferential approach when the number of observations is particularly low.
- Response bias: Response bias is a common limitation of quantitative and qualitative research design, whereby the respondent's answers may not accurately reflect their true opinions or behaviours. Factors such as question order bias, acquiescence, neutral or dissent bias, social desirability, and fear of authority are among the principal causes of inaccurate or incomplete data. In addition, due to the multitude of languages considered and the heterogeneity of cultures and contexts considered, possible incorrect responses might reflect a lack of understanding of the survey questions.
- Data quality: The presence of missing variables and inconsistencies in the collected data, as mentioned previously, may have significantly influenced the findings and analysis of QPE social outcomes. As a result, the use of other variables in the analysis was not possible due to a limited number of observations.
- Indicators: Not all survey questions were adequately aligned with the indicators. Specifically, there were no questions directly pertaining to Indicator 6, resulting in a lack of clear data. Additionally, there were limited questions addressing Indicator 7. Nevertheless, some questions generated data on related issues, which contributed to the overall analysis.
- Practice and policy comparison: Some questions of survey at ministerial-level were not asked in the survey at school-level, which prevented comparison between the two levels.

Annex B: Regional grouping of surveyed countries

Central and Southern Asia
Bangladesh - India - Maldives - Sri Lanka
Eastern and South-eastern Asia
Cambodia - China - Japan - Lao PDR - Malaysia - Mongolia - Myanmar - Philippines - Republic of Korea - Thailand - Vietnam
Europe and Northern America
Albania - Andorra - Austria - Belgium - Bosnia and Herzegovina - Bulgaria - Canada - Czech Republic - Estonia - Finland - France - Germany - Iceland - Ireland - Italy - Latvia - Lithuania - Luxembourg - Netherlands - Norway - Poland - Portugal - Republic of North Macedonia - Romania - San Marino - Serbia - Slovakia - Slovenia - Spain - Sweden - Switzerland - The Russian Federation - United Kingdom
Latin America and the Caribbean
Argentina - Bahamas - Barbados - Belize - Brazil - Cayman Islands - Chile - Colombia - Dominica - Costa Rica - Cuba - Curaçao - Dominican Republic - Guatemala - Haiti - Honduras - Jamaica - Mexico - Nicaragua - Paraguay - Peru - St. Lucia - St. Kitts and Nevis - Suriname - Trinidad and Tobago
Northern Africa and Western Asia
Algeria - Armenia - Azerbaijan - Bahrain - Cyprus Republic - Georgia - Kuwait - Lebanon - Libya - Morocco - Palestine - Qatar - Oman - Tunisia - Turkey
Oceania
Australia - New Zealand - Niue - Papua New Guinea - Samoa - Solomon Islands - Tuvalu
Sub-Saharan Africa
Botswana - Burkina Faso - Burundi - Cameroon - Chad - Democratic Republic of Congo - Equatorial Guinea - Gabon - Ivory Coast (Côte d'Ivoire) - Kenya - Lesotho - Madagascar - Mauritania - Mauritius - Namibia - Rwanda - Senegal - Seychelles - Sierra Leone - South Africa - Uganda - Zimbabwe

Annex C: Indicators data

Indicator 1. Percentage of countries reporting compulsory PE provision

In your country, is PE a compulsory school curriculum subject in primary school?

	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
No	8	6.9	6.9
Yes	102	87.9	94.8
Under development	6	5.2	100
Total	**116**	**100.00**	

In your country, is PE a compulsory school curriculum subject in lower secondary school?

	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
No	8	7.0	7.0
Yes	99	86.8	93.9
Under development	7	6.1	100
Total	**114**	**100**	

In your country, is PE a compulsory school curriculum subject in upper secondary school?

	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
No	21	18.4	18.4
Yes	85	74.6	93
Under development	8	7	100
Total	**114**	**100**	

Indicator 2. Percentage of countries reporting implementation of minimum number of PE minutes

Within the policy framework of the compulsory school programme, how much time is allocated to the PE curriculum each week in PRIMARY SCHOOLS?

PE minutes reported in primary education	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Below 120 minutes	56	47.5	47.5
120 minutes	21	17.8	65.3
Above 120 minutes	41	34.8	100
Total	**118**	**100**	

Within the policy framework of the compulsory school programme, how much time is allocated to the PE curriculum each week in LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOLS ?

PE minutes reported in lower secondary education	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Below 180 minutes	77	65.3	65.3
180 minutes	8	6.8	72
Above 180 minutes	33	28	100
Total	**118**	**100**	

Within the policy framework of the compulsory school programme, how much time is allocated to the PE curriculum each week in UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOLS?

PE minutes reported in upper secondary education	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Below 180 minutes	80	67.8	67.8
180 minutes	3	2.5	70.3
Above 180 minutes	35	29.7	100
Total	**118**	**100**	

Indicator 3. Percentage of countries reporting compulsory participation of girls in PE

Compulsory participation of girls in PE

	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
No	8	7.3	7.3
Yes	182.7	90	
Under development	11	10	100
Total	**110**	**100**	

Indicator 4. Percentage of countries reporting participation of persons with and without disabilities in the same PE classes

Do you have a policy/guidelines requiring that students with disabilities be fully included in PE classes alongside peers without disabilities?

	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
No	31	28.7	28.7
Yes	63	58.3	87
Under development	14	13	100
Total	**108**	**100**	

Indicator 5. Percentage of countries reporting PE specialist teachers

Who generally teaches PE in public PRIMARY SCHOOLS?

	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Generalist Classroom Teacher	62	54.4	54.4
Specialist PE Trained Teacher	51	44.7	99.1
Other	1	0.9	100
Total	**114**	**100**	

Who generally teaches PE in public LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOLS?

	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Generalist Classroom Teacher	6	5.5	5.5
Specialist PE Trained Teacher	104	94.6	100
Total	**110**	**100**	

Who generally teaches PE in public UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOLS?

	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Generalist Classroom Teacher	4	3.6	3.6
Specialist PE Trained Teacher	106	96.4	100
Total	**110**	**100**	

Indicator 6. Percentage of schools reporting adequate, functioning and safe equipment to support quality and inclusive PE

What is the estimated space you have available to teach PE class?

	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
classroom size	173	9.8	9.8
tennis/basketball court size	748	42.5	52.4
2 x tennis/basketball court size (i.e. full gymnasium)	332	18.9	71.2
football field size	241	13.7	84.9
more than a football field size	265	15.1	100
Total	**1759**	**100**	

Indicator 7. Percentage of countries that have an accreditation system for PE teachers

What is the required educational background* (level of academic and professional training) of PE teachers in PRIMARY SCHOOLS?

	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
No qualification needed	4	3.5	3.5
High school diploma	9	7.8	11.3
Vocational qualification	13	11.3	22.6
Bachelor Degree	40	34.8	57.4
Post graduate degree or higher	49	42.6	100
Total	**115**	**100**	

What is the required educational background (level of academic and professional training) of PE teachers in LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOLS?

	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
No qualification needed	1	0.9	0.9
High school diploma	6	5.4	6.3
Vocational qualification	8	7.1	13.4
Bachelor Degree	43	38.4	51.8
Post graduate degree or higher	54	48.2	100
Total	**112**	**100**	

What is the required educational background (level of academic and professional training) of PE teachers in UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOLS?

	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
High school diploma	7	6.1	6.1
Vocational qualification	6	5.3	11.4
Bachelor Degree	41	36	47.4
Post graduate degree or higher	60	52.6	100
Total	**114**	**100**	

Indicator 8. Percentage of countries monitoring the implementation of PE policy instruments

Are PE programmes subject to monitoring (inspection/evaluation)* by educational authorities?

	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
No	14	12.4	12.4
Yes	99	87.6	100
Total	**113**	**100**	

How often does the monitoring of PE programmes take place?

	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Biannually	18	17.3	17.3
Annually	54	51.9	69.2
2 to 5 years	19	18.3	87.5
>5 years	13	12.5	100
Total	**104**	**100**	

Who carries out the monitoring of PE programmes? (e.g. school teachers, local/regional/national inspectors):

	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
National/Federal	58	53.7	53.7
State level	20	18.5	72.2
Regional	10	9.3	81.5
Local/ School	20	18.5	100
Total	**108**	**100**	

Is the monitor for:

Quantity of provision	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
No	17	19.1	19.1
Yes	72	80.9	100
Total	**89**	**100**	
Quality assurance*	Freq.	Percent	Cum.

No	2	2.1	2.1
Yes	95	97.9	100
Total	**97**	**100**	

Advisory and guidance	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
No	9	9.3	9.3
Yes	88	90.7	100
Total	**97**	**100**	

Teacher performance	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
No	10	10.5	10.5
Yes	85	89.5	100
Total	**95**	**100**	

Student health	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
No	20	24.1	24.1
Yes	63	75.9	100
Total	**83**	**100**	

Academic achievement	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
No	18	21.2	21.2
Yes	67	78.8	100
Total	**85**	**100**	

Child protection/ safeguarding	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
No	16	19.3	19.3
Yes	67	80.7	100
Total	**83**	**100**	

School-level

Have the PE classes that you teach been subjected to monitoring by educational authorities?

	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
No	400	24.2	24.2
Yes	1252	75.8	100
Total	**1652**	**100**	

How often has the monitoring of PE classes taken place at your school?

	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Every 6 months or more	572	38	38
Every year	505	33.6	71.6
Every 2 years	59	3.9	75.5
Every 2-5 years	149	9.9	85.4
More than 5 years	82	5.5	90.9
Never	137	9.1	100
Total	**1504**	**100**	

Who carries out the monitoring of PE programme at our school?

	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Local-level appointees	669	49.7	49.7
Regional-level appointees	321	23.9	73.6
State-level appointees	158	11.8	85.4
National/Federal -level appointees	197	14.7	100
Total	**1345**	**100**	

Is the monitoring for:

Quantity of provision	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
No	326	23.4	23.4
Yes	1070	76.7	100
Total	**1396**	**100**	

Quality assurance	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
No	178	12	12
Yes	1307	88	100
Total	**1485**	**100**	

Advisory and guidance	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
No	222	15	15
Yes	1258	85	100
Total	**1480**	**100**	

Teacher performance	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
No	144	9.4	9.4
Yes	1389	90.6	100
Total	**1533**	**100**	

Student health	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
No	344	23	23
Yes	1144	76.9	100
Total	**1488**	**100**	

Academic achievement	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
No	372	25.7	25.7
Yes	1074	74.3	100
Total	**1446**	**100**	

Child protection /Safeguarding	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
No	254	17.4	17.4
Yes	1203	82.6	100
Total	**1457**	**100**	

Other	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
No	612	63	63
Yes	358	36.9	100
Total	**970**	**100**	

Indicator 9. Percentage of schools reporting full and/or partial implementation of QPE as defined by UNESCO's QPE Policy Guidelines

Does your school implement any tracking of quality physical education provision?

	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
No	579	39.6	39.6
Yes	882	60.4	100
Total	**1461**	**100**	

How does it occurs?

In School Audits	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
0	627	56.8	56.8
In-school audits	476	43.2	100
Total	**1103**	**100**	

Remote Audits	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
0	1071	97.1	97.1
Remote audits	32	2.9	100
Total	**1103**	**100**	

School Self Report	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
0	743	67.4	67.4
School self-report	360	32.6	100
Total	**1103**	**100**	

Indicator 10. Proportion of national education budget invested in PE

Ministerial-level

What portion of total government education expenditure is committed to PE?

	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
<2%	67	63.8	63.8
2%-5%	20	19	82.9
5%-7%	7	6.7	89.5
>7%	11	10.5	100
Total	105	100	

Annex D: Statistical modelling

This annex outlines the statistical modelling used to calculate correlations between key findings of the report and contextual variables such as school dropout and youth literacy rate. Two-ways ANOVA outputs are included for each of the outputs outlined in the findings section.

School dropout and teacher's educational background and specialization

		Number of obs = 74		R-squared = 0.6178	
		Root MSE = 13.9126		Adj R-squared = 0.5018	
Source	**Partial SS**	**df**	**MS**	**F**	**Prob>F**
Model	17520.34	17	1030.6082	5.32	0.0000
Teachers' specialisation	2524.8185	3	841.60618	4.35	0.0080
Clustered regions	10122.61	6	1687.1017	8.72	0.00
Interaction	2294.9236	8	286.86545	1.48	0.1846
Residual	10839.31	56	193.55911		
Total	**28359.65**	**73**	**388.48835**		

Lower secondary education: school dropout and compulsory PE programme for both girls and boys

Female		Number of obs = 58		R-squared = 0.4977	
		Root MSE = 9.25233		Adj R-squared = 0.4274	
Source	**Partial SS**	**df**	**MS**	**F**	**Prob>F**
Model	4241.3822	7	605.91175	7.08	0.0000
Gender programme	51.686956	1	51.686956	0.60	0.4408
Clustered regions	3678.2836	6	613.04726	7.16	0.0000
Residual	4280.2802	50	85.605603		
Total	**8521.6624**	**57**	**149.50285**		

Male		Number of obs = 58		R-squared = 0.5511	
		Root MSE = 8.79714		Adj R-squared = 0.4883	
Source	**Partial SS**	**df**	**MS**	**F**	**Prob>F**
Model	4750.456	7	678.63657	8.77	0.0000
Gender programme	138.2024	1	138.2024	1.79	0.1875
Clustered regions	3927.1796	6	654.52993	8.46	0.0000
Residual	3869.4813	50	77.389626		
Total	**8619.9373**	**57**	**151.22697**		

Primary education: school dropout and mixed classes with/without disabilities

Female

Statistic	Value
Number of observations	53
R-squared	0.6596
Root MSE	5.34721
Adj R-squared	0.4943

Source	Partial SS	df	MS	F	Prob>F
Model	1939.1215	17	114.06597	3.99	0.0003
Mixed classes	318.89873	2	159.44936	5.58	0.0079
UNESCO regions	479.33811	6	79.889685	2.79	0.0251
Interaction	509.07356	9	56.563729	1.98	0.0723
Residual	1000.7424	35	28.592641		
Total	**2939.8639**	**52**	**56.535845**		

Male

Statistic	Value
Number of observations	53
R-squared	0.6616
Root MSE	4.97342
Adj R-squared	0.4972

Source	Partial SS	df	MS	F	Prob>F
Model	1692.5079	17	99.559286	4.03	0.0002
Mixed classes	288.70164	2	144.35082	5.84	0.0065
UNESCO regions	429.90858	6	71.651429	2.90	0.0212
Interaction	454.23511	9	50.470567	2.04	0.0638
Residual	865.72134	35	24.734896		
Total	**2558.2292**	**52**	**49.196715**		

Mixed model with fixed effects: male						
Fixed-effects (within) regression				Number of obs = 53		
Group variable: UNESCO_regions				Number of groups = 7		
R-sq:				Obs per group:		
within = 0.3009				min = 1		
between = 0.0012				avg = 7.6		
overall = 0.2959				max = 15		
			F(2.44) = 9.47			
corr(u_i, Xb) = 0.0852			Prob > F=		0.0004	
Male school dropout	Coef.	Std. Err.	t P>	t	[95% Conf.	Interval]
Mixed classes : no						
Yes	-8.327278	1.921632	-4.33	0.000	-12.20007	-4.454483
Under development	-5.042211	2.824912	-1.78	0.081	-10.73545	.6510258
_cons	12.47047	1.605215	7.77	0.000	9.235366	15.70556
sigma_u						4.0235843
sigma_e						5.4771352
rho					.35050546	(fraction of variance due to u_i)
F test that all u_i=0: F(6.44) = 2.67						Prob > F = 0.0268

Mixed model with fixed effects: female						
Fixed-effects (within) regression				Number of obs = 53		
Group variable: UNESCO_regions				Number of groups = 7		
R-sq:				Obs per group:		
within = 0.2642				min = 1		
between =				0.0316 avg = 7.6		
overall = 0.2558				max = 15		
			F(2.44) = 7.90			
corr(u_i, Xb) = 0.0909			Prob > F=		0.0012	
Female school dropout	Coef.	Std. Err.	t P>	t	[95% Conf.	Interval]
Mixed classes : no						
Yes	-8.14834	2.055192	-3.96	0.000	-12.29031	-4.006373
Under development	-6.650557	3.021254	-2.20	0.033	-12.73949	-.5616205
_cons	12.72371	1.716783	7.41	0.000	9.263761	16.18366
sigma_u						5.1404459
sigma_e						5.8578153
rho					.43505061	(fraction of variance due to u_i)
F test that all u_i=0: F(6.44) = 3.29						Prob > F = 0.0092

Lower secondary: Youth NEET rate and teachers specialization

		Number of obs = 32		R-squared = 0.7872	
		Root MSE = 3.79499		Adj R-squared = 0.7462	
Source	**Partial SS**	**df**	**MS**	**F**	**Prob>F**
Model	1384.9148	5	276.98296	19.23	0.0000
Teachers' specialization	755.24937	1	755.24937	52.44	0.0000
Clustered regions	753.21359	4	188.3034	13.07	0.0000
Residual	374.45057	26	14.401945		
Total	**1759.3654**	**31**	**56.753721**		

Primary education: Youth literacy rate and teachers educational background

		Number of obs = 55		R-squared = 0.6750	
		Root MSE = 7.91536		Adj R-squared = 0.5382	
Source	**Partial SS**	**df**	**MS**	**F**	**Prob>F**
Model	4945.5495	16	309.09684	4.93	0.0000
Teachers' background	608.75883	3	202.91961	3.24	0.0326
Clustered regions	1932.1644	6	322.02739	5.14	0.0006
Interaction	923.05046	7	131.86435	2.10	0.0666
Residual	2380.8097	38	62.652888		
Total	**7326.3592**	**54**	**135.67332**		

unesco Chair

Loughborough University

The Global State of Play

Report and recommendations on quality physical education

Quality Physical Education (QPE) is a UNESCO-developed concept that emphasizes frequency, variety, inclusivity, and value content in physical education. QPE aims to enhance the physical, mental, social, and emotional development of all students, equipping them with essential skills and values for lifelong active living.

This report presents insights drawn from data collected across 117 countries and 2,455 PE teachers via UNESCO's unique global QPE surveys. Its findings highlight key challenges and opportunities in the implementation of QPE, including insufficient funding, inadequate training for PE teachers, and lack of inclusive facilities. Actionable recommendations are provided to enhance PE programming through improvements in policy implementation, resource allocation, teacher training, inclusivity, and curriculum design.

Co-authored by UNESCO and Loughborough University, this report builds on UNESCO's commitment to QPE and serves as a vital resource for policymakers, PE practitioners, and academics to advance QPE policy and practice worldwide.

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