

## Article

# Schoolchildren's Thinking on the Subject and Teachers of Physical Education According to Gender and Educational Grade

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**Abstract:** The objective of this study was to understand the perceptions of Primary (PrE) and Secondary Education (SE) students in Cantabria about the subject of physical education (PE) and their teachers. A descriptive, comparative relational analytical cross-sectional design was used. A total of 1164 students (387 from PrE and 777 from SE) answered an ad hoc questionnaire on their satisfaction with their PE classes (eight items) and teachers (nine items). The results indicate that the PrE students were more satisfied than the SE students regarding the following statements about PE: more hours per week ( $p < 0.001$ ); classes and subjects that I like the most ( $p < 0.001$ ); I enjoy and have fun ( $p < 0.001$ ); interesting and motivating ( $p < 0.001$ ); and useful for life ( $p < 0.001$ ) and easy ( $p = 0.006$ ). The boys' responses reflected higher values than the girls' on all the previous items ( $p < 0.005$ ). Regarding their thinking about their PE teachers, statistically significant differences were found in the PrE students' responses compared with those of the SE students for the following: explains well and is easily understood ( $p = 0.006$ ); stimulates and encourages participation ( $p = 0.050$ ); cares and is interested in the students ( $p = 0.031$ ); treat boys and girls the same ( $p < 0.001$ ); and I prefer a woman because she understands me better ( $p = 0.021$ ). Therefore, the male and primary-stage students showed more positive attitudes towards PE. In general, there was a favorable disposition towards PE and towards teachers, which must be taken into account to achieve SDG 4.

**Keywords:** perception; attitude; physical education; primary education; secondary education



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## 1. Introduction

As a result of the global strategy proposed by the United Nations (UN) in establishing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) included in the agency's 2030 goals, among which educational quality and equity and gender equality stand out [1–3], in recent years, there has been interest in studying people's attitudes and thinking. In particular, currently, there are still gender stereotypes about the subject of physical education (PE) that occur at different educational stages [4]. In this way, this topic has become a relevant object of study for researchers in the scientific community [5–12], as the number of students in PE and the number of PE teachers have increased, suggesting that it is a fundamental axis for the achievement of the SDGs and teacher training itself [1–3,13]. This is especially true for those goals linked to gender equality (SDG 5) since socialization processes must be initiated from an early age for the construction of gender and the internalization of social norms of coexistence to promote co-educational learning [4].

In this sense, the current Organic Law 3/29 December 2020, which modifies Organic Law 2/3 May 2006 on education [14], maintains that one of the main objectives of PE during

the training stages of students is to contribute to acquiring the habit of practicing physical and sports activity within their daily routines with the intention of making them permanent over time [15]. The analysis of PE is a very relevant area of study [16] because knowing the perceptions that students have about the subject is necessary to increase their involvement in it, promote the practice of physical activity in their free time, [5,17], and select the best strategies with which to meet SDG 3, which is associated with health and well-being [18]. Thus, the promotion of positive attitudes towards physical activity, especially towards the area of PE, is one objective that can be achieved throughout different educational stages [5] to provide quality education, a milestone included in the 2030 Agenda [19]; to eradicate sexist stereotypes at all stages [4]; and to contribute to SDG 4 through greater educational quality and equity [20].

Along these lines, previous research has highlighted the close relationship between the enjoyment of PE classes and a student's commitment to practicing physical activity outside of class [21], since a positive attitude towards PE directly influences the intention to be physically active [22]. In this regard, Granero-Gallegos et al. [23] and Zueck et al. [21] indicated that students with a higher level of satisfaction with PE are those who show a greater daily practice of physical sports activity in their free time. Likewise, different studies have shown that PE classes that are positively valued by schoolchildren cause an increase in physical sports practice in their leisure time, being an excellent predictor of said practices [24]. Thus, the perception of students' experiences throughout their schooling regarding PE generates certain evaluations [21] such that, when the experiences are valued positively, schoolchildren tend to repeat and seek out those experiences. However, if they are negative, the probability that schoolchildren will try to avoid those activities increases significantly [25]. Likewise, as a general trend, the majority of schoolchildren value PE as very important and show positive attitudes towards it [6,26–30], justifying the study of this topic as an essential means to address the SDGs transversally [3,13].

Regarding student gender, some research has shown a tendency among boys to value the subject more and to have more positive attitudes towards PE classes than girls [31,32]. However, other studies have not found differences in attitudes towards PE classes based on gender, and some cases have even found that girls give slightly more positive evaluations than boys [33,34]. On the other hand, a gender gap has been observed in terms of the co-educational attitudes of teachers, with women showing more awareness than men [35,36]. It is necessary to acknowledge this reality to design efficient didactic proposals of a cooperative and co-educational nature that will motivate students in both educational stages [2,4], and that will address SDG 5 related to gender equality [4,37], in order to improve educational quality, which is implicit in SDG 5 [20].

Regarding age, positive evaluations of PE are high both in primary and secondary school, although as the ages and grades of the students increase, their evaluations progressively decline [27]. Therefore, in this aspect, the educational quality referred to in SDG 4 lies in implementing active and more participatory methodologies [38].

Another important factor in students' attitudes towards PE is the teachers and their attitudes [39] since they play a key role in promoting student satisfaction with their physical education classes [40]. In this sense, certain skills stand out, such as being attentive, affective or understanding [7], and empathetic [21]. However, when teaching behaviors linked to motivation are analyzed, regardless of student age or gender, teachers are usually valued positively, but not when regarding the development of autonomy and individualization among students [41] and, more specifically, in its concern for individual interests or the stimulation of active participation [21]. Regarding girls' perceptions of participation in Primary Education (PrE) and Secondary Education (SE), they perceive that PE teachers are less demanding with them than with boys, urging them to do what they can and showing a condescending attitude [42,43].

Therefore, based on everything mentioned above, the objective of the present study was to investigate the thinking on the subject and the teaching staff of physical education in educational centers of Cantabria (Spain) depending on gender and educational stage.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Study Design

This selective study was carried out from a descriptive, non-probabilistic, cross-sectional methodological perspective [44] using an Ad Hoc questionnaire to understand the thinking on physical education and teachers, depending on gender (boy vs. girl) and educational stage (Primary Education vs. Secondary Education).

### 2.2. Participants

The selection of the sample was non-probabilistic, according to the subjects accessed, from Primary Education (PrE) and Secondary Education (SE) centers in Cantabria (Spain).

Seventeen educational centers were invited to participate (ten from secondary, six from primary, and one from primary and secondary), with a total of 1212 schoolchildren invited. Forty-eight schoolchildren were excluded for not completing the questionnaire, so the final sample was made up of 1164 schoolchildren (387 from the 5th and 6th grades of PrE and 777 from SE).

The sample size was calculated using the finite population formula [45], which would require 1078 schoolchildren for a confidence level of 95% and a 3% margin of error.

### 2.3. Tools

To collect data for this research, an Ad Hoc questionnaire was used, composed of the Attitudes towards Physical Education Questionnaire (CAEF; [46] and the Importance and Usefulness of Physical Education Questionnaire [47]). This questionnaire is made up of 3 blocks as follows: block 1: general data; 3 items (gender, age, and grade and stage); block 2: reflections on physical education classes; 8 items; and block 3: thoughts and opinions about physical education teachers; 9 items. The responses are expressed on a Likert scale from 1 to 4, with 1 being completely disagreeing and 4 being completely agreeing.

### 2.4. Procedures

The management of the 17 educational centers in the autonomous community of Cantabria, which were invited to collaborate in this study, was contacted, and the characteristics and objectives of the research were explained to them. The information sheet and informed consent were sent to the parents or legal guardians of the students, explaining the purpose of this study, guaranteeing confidentiality, indicating voluntary participation, and indicating the possibility of withdrawing from this study at any time without the need for justification. Subsequently, dates and times were set to apply the questionnaires, causing the least possible impact on the development of the classes.

After obtaining informed consent signed by the parents or legal guardians of the students in the participating centers, the administration of the questionnaire was carried out, preferably in physical education sessions in the presence of the teachers responsible for the group. One session (50 min) was used to answer all questions and satisfactorily complete the questionnaire. The Declaration of Helsinki was followed in the study procedures, which were approved by the Ethics Committee of the Atlantic European University with code number CEI21\_2022.

### 2.5. Statistical Analysis

The SPSS statistical package (SPSS v.25, IBM Corporation, New York, NY, USA) was used for all analyses. The level of statistical significance was set at  $p < 0.05$ .

Quantitative data are expressed as measures of central tendency (mean; standard deviation) and qualitative data as frequencies. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov test was used to check the normal distribution of the data.

The internal consistency and reliability of the instrument scores were estimated with Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) for each factor [i.e., reflections on physical education classes (8 items); thoughts and opinions about physical education teachers (9 items)].

To determine the differences among all the variables in the questionnaire, the educational stage (primary vs. secondary), and gender (boys vs. girls), a MANOVA was performed with the Bonferroni statistic to determine the significance of the interaction among the variables, and the effect size was calculated in terms of eta squared ( $\eta^2$ ) considering the effect size as small (0.01), medium (0.06), or large (0.14 or higher).

### 3. Results

A total of 1164 Primary Education (PrE; 387) and Secondary Education (SE; 777) schoolchildren between 10 and 17 years old ( $M = 12.92$ ;  $SD = 1.92$ ) answered all the questions in the questionnaire. In total, 590 (50.7%) were girls and 574 (49.3%) were boys. The distribution by grades was fifth PrE (203; 17.4%); sixth PrE (183; 15.7%); first SE (205; 17.6%); second SE (216; 18.6%); third SE (184; 15.8%); and fourth SE (173; 14.9%).

The results of the reliability analysis of the two factors studied were adequate for reflections on physical education classes ( $\alpha = 0.732$ ) and thoughts and opinions on physical education teachers ( $\alpha = 0.792$ ).

The results of the MANOVA based on the educational stage factor (Table 1) indicate that there are statistically significant differences in “I would like to have more hours of PE class per week” [ $F(1, 1159) = 37.543, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.031$ ]; “PE subject is the one I like the most” [ $F(1, 1159) = 42.280, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.035$ ]; “PE classes are the ones I like the most” [ $F(1, 1159) = 24.411, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.021$ ]; “I enjoy and have fun in PE classes” [ $F(1, 1159) = 61.158, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.050$ ]; “I find PE classes interesting and motivating” [ $F(1, 1159) = 43.380, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.036$ ]; “PE classes are easy” [ $F(1, 1159) = 7.465, p = 0.006, \eta^2 = 0.006$ ]; and “PE classes are useful for life” [ $F(1, 1159) = 37.341, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.031$ ]. In all the variables studied, PrE students agree more with these statements about their thinking on the subject and PE classes than SE students.

The results of the MANOVA based on the gender factor (Table 1) indicate that there are statistically significant differences in “I would like to have more hours of PE class per week” [ $F(1, 1159) = 57.986, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.048$ ]; “PE subject is the one I like the most” [ $F(1, 1159) = 80.004, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.065$ ]; “PE subject is difficult” [ $F(1, 1159) = 8.406, p = 0.004, \eta^2 = 0.007$ ]; “PE classes are the ones I like the most” [ $F(1, 1159) = 11.296, p = 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.010$ ]; “I enjoy and have fun in PE classes” [ $F(1, 1159) = 10.211, p = 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.009$ ]; “I find PE classes interesting and motivating” [ $F(1, 1159) = 7.684, p = 0.006, \eta^2 = 0.007$ ]; and “PE classes are easy” [ $F(1, 1159) = 21.668, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.018$ ]. In all the variables studied, the boys agree more than the girls with these statements about their thinking on the subject and in physical education classes, except in the statement that the “PE subject is difficult”, where girls perceive it as more complicated.

Regarding the interaction of both factors (Table 1), there are statistically significant differences in “I would like to have more hours of PE class per week” [ $F(1, 1159) = 8.903, p = 0.003, \eta^2 = 0.008$ ], with both PrE ( $p = 0.005$ ) and SE ( $p < 0.001$ ) boys being those who agree most with this statement. Regarding “PE subject is the one I like the most” [ $F(1, 1159) = 5.864, p = 0.016, \eta^2 = 0.005$ ], as in the previous case, the boys, both PrE ( $p < 0.001$ ) and SE ( $p < 0.001$ ), are those who agree most with this statement. Regarding “I enjoy and have fun in PE classes” [ $F(1, 1159) = 6.031, p = 0.014, \eta^2 = 0.005$ ], the SE boys agree most with this statement ( $p < 0.001$ ). Finally, regarding “PE classes are useful for life” [ $F(1, 1159) = 10.592, p = 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.009$ ], the SE boys again agree most with this statement ( $p < 0.001$ ).

The results of the MANOVA based on the educational stage factor (Table 2) indicate that there are statistically significant differences in “Explains well and is easy to understand” [ $F(1, 1159) = 7.457, p = 0.006, \eta^2 = 0.006$ ]; “Stimulates and encourages student participation in class” [ $F(1, 1159) = 3.856, p = 0.050, \eta^2 = 0.003$ ]; “Cares and is interested in the students” [ $F(1, 1159) = 4.690, p = 0.031, \eta^2 = 0.004$ ]; “Treat boys the same as girls” [ $F(1, 1159) = 12.579, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.011$ ]; and “I prefer it to be a woman because she understands me better” [ $F(1, 1159) = 5.354, p = 0.021, \eta^2 = 0.005$ ]. In all the variables studied, PrE students agree

more with these statements about their thoughts on the physical education teacher than SE students, except for “I prefer it to be a woman because she understands me better”.

**Table 1.** Results for the thinking on PE according to gender and educational stage.

		Primary Education	Secondary Education
I would like to have more hours of PE class per week (1–4)	Boys	3.67 ± 0.58	3.51 ± 0.75
	Girls	3.43 ± 0.77 ***	2.96 ± 1.00 **
	Total	3.54 ± 0.70 *	3.24 ± 0.92
PE subject is the one I like the most (1–4)	Boys	3.46 ± 0.74	3.24 ± 0.84
	Girls	3.11 ± 0.88 ***	2.63 ± 0.90 **
	Total	3.27 ± 0.84 *	2.94 ± 0.92
PE subject is difficult (1–4)	Boys	1.58 ± 0.75	1.58 ± 0.68
	Girls	1.67 ± 0.71 ***	1.75 ± 0.73 **
	Total	1.63 ± 0.73	1.66 ± 0.71
I like the PE classes I take at school/institute (1–4)	Boys	3.53 ± 0.66	3.38 ± 0.69
	Girls	3.46 ± 0.71 ***	3.14 ± 0.82 **
	Total	3.49 ± 0.69 *	3.27 ± 0.77
I enjoy and have fun in PE classes (1–4)	Boys	3.68 ± 0.52	3.45 ± 0.66
	Girls	3.65 ± 0.56 ***	3.21 ± 0.80 **
	Total	3.66 ± 0.54 *	3.34 ± 0.74
I find PE classes interesting and motivating (1–4)	Boys	3.38 ± 0.69	3.14 ± 0.77
	Girls	3.32 ± 0.73 ***	2.93 ± 0.83 **
	Total	3.35 ± 0.71 *	3.04 ± 0.80
PE classes are easy (1–4)	Boys	3.24 ± 0.86	3.18 ± 0.77
	Girls	3.09 ± 0.78 ***	2.88 ± 0.75 **
	Total	3.16 ± 0.82 *	3.04 ± 0.77
PE classes are useful for life (1–4)	Boys	3.28 ± 0.72	3.14 ± 0.85
	Girls	3.40 ± 0.77 ***	2.92 ± 0.85 **
	Total	3.35 ± 0.75 *	3.03 ± 0.86

Note. Data are presented as mean ± standard deviation. \*  $p < 0.05$  different compared with Secondary Education; \*\*  $p < 0.05$  different compared with Secondary Education boys; \*\*\*  $p < 0.05$  different compared with Primary Education boys.

According to the results of the MANOVA, depending on the gender factor (Table 2), there are only statistically significant differences in “I prefer that it be a woman because she understands me better” [ $F(1, 1159) = 31.389, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.026$ ] in favor of girls.

Regarding the interaction of both factors (Table 2), there are statistically significant differences in “is a good professional and has good knowledge of the subject” [ $F(1, 1159) = 7.128, p = 0.003, \eta^2 = 0.006$ ], where the boys from SE agree more with this statement than girls. Significant differences were also found in “stimulates and encourages student participation in class” [ $F(1, 1159) = 9.098, p = 0.003, \eta^2 = 0.008$ ]. In this case, the PrE girls are the ones who agree the most with this statement compared with the boys ( $p = 0.022$ ). These results contrast with those of SE since it is the boys who agree the most with this statement.

**Table 2.** Results for the thinking on PE teachers according to gender and educational stage.

		Primary Education	Secondary Education
Is a good professional and has good knowledge of the subject (1–4)	Boys	3.29 ± 0.76	3.42 ± 0.78
	Girls	3.44 ± 0.69	3.31 ± 0.78 †
	Total	3.37 ± 0.72	3.37 ± 0.78
Explains well and is easy to understand (1–4)	Boys	3.43 ± 0.68	3.36 ± 0.74
	Girls	3.48 ± 0.68	3.29 ± 0.80
	Total	3.46 ± 0.68	3.33 ± 0.77 *
Is communicative with the students (1–4)	Boys	3.35 ± 0.76	3.36 ± 0.74
	Girls	3.38 ± 0.76	3.22 ± 0.81
	Total	3.36 ± 0.76	3.39 ± 0.78
Stimulates and encourages student participation in class (1–4)	Boys	3.16 ± 0.83	3.22 ± 0.84
	Girls	3.36 ± 0.78 ***	3.10 ± 0.87
	Total	3.27 ± 0.81	3.16 ± 0.85 *
Cares and is interested in the students (1–4)	Boys	3.33 ± 0.83	3.31 ± 0.77
	Girls	3.37 ± 0.80	3.17 ± 0.86
	Total	3.35 ± 0.81	3.24 ± 0.82 *
Treat boys the same as girls (1–4)	Boys	3.48 ± 0.82	3.28 ± 0.96
	Girls	3.55 ± 0.77	3.35 ± 0.90
	Total	3.51 ± 0.79	3.31 ± 0.93 *
Treat students fairly (1–4)	Boys	3.37 ± 0.76	3.33 ± 0.80
	Girls	3.39 ± 0.83	3.29 ± 0.87
	Total	3.38 ± 0.80	3.31 ± 0.83
I get along better than with the rest of the teachers (1–4)	Boys	2.46 ± 0.95	2.49 ± 0.91
	Girls	2.42 ± 0.99	2.47 ± 0.87
	Total	2.44 ± 0.97	2.48 ± 0.89
I prefer it to be a woman because she understands me better (1–4)	Boys	1.62 ± 0.84	1.75 ± 0.85
	Girls	1.94 ± 1.03 ***	2.07 ± 0.92 **
	Total	1.79 ± 0.96	1.91 ± 0.92 *

Note. Data are presented as mean ± standard deviation. \*  $p < 0.05$  different compared with Primary Education; \*\*  $p < 0.05$  different compared with Secondary Education boys; \*\*\*  $p < 0.05$  different compared with Primary Education boys; †  $p < 0.05$  different compared with Secondary Education girls.

#### 4. Discussion

The objective of this research was to identify the thinking on the subject and the teaching staff of physical education in educational centers of Cantabria (Spain) depending on gender and educational stage.

The results indicate that the students studied have a high perception of the PE subject, they like it, it motivates them, they find it useful, and they enjoy it, which corresponds with the results of previous works by Aznar-Ballesta and Vernetta [26] and Lago-Ballesteros et al. [28]. This positive value is due to the generation of more favorable, affective, and co-educational climates, which provide students with feelings of satisfaction within PE classes in relation to other areas or subjects [32]. It generates cooperation strategies to address gender equality (SDG5), where stereotypes do not exist [2] and where equal opportunities are promoted [48]. Another factor that is influenced by PE is mood, which increases after taking PE classes [21,27,40]. Taking advantage of these positive connotations intrinsic to PE

can be an essential pillar to achieving the social dimensions of the SDGs [2,3,13]. Likewise, the type of activities and contents that are developed in PE, as well as the methodologies applied by the teacher, can be factors to take into account when developing positive thinking towards the subject [6,49]. Enhancing educational quality by individualizing teaching from an early age and taking into account the motivations of the students [2,4] can contribute to the achievement of SDG 4 “Educational quality and equity” [20,38].

In general, PrE students show a better perception of the PE subject than SE students. These results agree with the findings of Carcamo-Oyarzun et al. [8], who revealed that as age increases, positive attitudes towards PE decrease. These data contrast with those of García-Pérez et al. [27], who found no significant differences in relation to the perception of PE depending on the course and educational stage of the students. Specifically, this trend is observed in relation to the enjoyment and fun of PE classes and the interest and motivation towards them [49–51]. This may be due to the fact that, as stated by Gómez Rijo et al. [52], students perceive that classes are less fun when moving from a more playful approach in the context of PrE to a more systematized, organized, and demanding subject in the field of SE. This denotes a negative correlation between age and perception towards the subject and classes [27], valuing them as more boring and demotivating [51,53]. According to Ortiz-García et al. [38], this last aspect must be counteracted with greater educational quality—SDG4—through the use of participatory methodologies [38], taking into account individual differences, motivations, and tastes of each stage as well as aspects related to co-education [2,4] through the use of participatory [38], quality [20], and egalitarian methodologies [48].

Regarding preference for the PE subject, significant differences are also found between PrE and SE students depending on whether they would like to have more hours of PE, if it is the area or subject that they like the most, and if they like PE classes. Once again, a decrease in preference towards PE with age is observed, and these results coincide with those proposed by Hernández et al. [54]. This could be due to the fact that as students advance in their courses, their levels of practicing physical activity in their free time and their perception of its importance decrease [27]. Such results may have a close relationship with the assessment that students give to the difficulty of the subject and the PE classes, which increases with age. This aspect may be due to the increase in demand and complexity in certain contents, such as sports initiation and physical condition, among others [28], to the normative system of evaluating with more standardized and qualifying tests [55], and, in the case of students with a low level of motor skill, to the stress, nervousness, and fear of failure that PE classes generate when they feel observed [56], thus reducing their participation [41].

Regarding student gender, girls show a less favorable perception towards the PE subject, suggesting that the older they are, the less they value PE. Thus, the results obtained in our research coincide with the previous studies by Baena-Extremuera et al. [57], Koca et al. [58], and Sánchez-Alcaraz et al. [16]. However, they are not related to the findings of Säfvenbom et al. [34], where girls gave a more positive evaluation than boys. The lower perception on the part of girls is due to the lack of a relationship between their motor level and the tasks set in class [59], as well as a lower appreciation of physical activity in general and their higher dropout rate [60]. Specifically, regarding the enjoyment and fun of PE classes and the interest and motivation towards them, the results are in line with those found in a study by Lago et al. [28], where the values in boys were higher than in girls. This situation is associated with the type of didactic content that is addressed in PE classes since, according to Mújica and Jiménez [61], the taste for one type or another of activity is associated with the emotions that students express and, therefore, with their interest in PE classes. Likewise, the methodology and teaching styles [62] applied by the teacher, as well as the feedback provided, are elements of special consideration when allowing students to value the enjoyment of the lessons positively and awakening their interest [6]. Jiménez-Lozano et al. [4] indicated that despite great educational and social advances,

stereotypes still exist in PE classes, and to achieve gender equality and thus comply with SDG 5, it is necessary to make innovative didactic proposals with co-educational content.

Considering preference for the PE subject, boys again show higher values than girls in relation to having more hours of PE, liking the subject, and liking PE classes. These results are in line with those established in the research by Gómez-López et al. [41] but not with those found by Castillo et al. [63]. These results may be related to the non-co-educational and divergent stereotypes of SDG 5 that have historically been attributed to PE classes [4]. For example, girls experience a greater number of non-positive experiences in PE [64], and disturbing behaviors are found by boys in classes [65,66]. In addition, the type of didactic units, learning situations, and activities that are developed and taught within teaching programs are more adapted to the tastes of boys, preferably orienting them towards physical fitness and sports [15]. Along these lines, girls tend to be interested in other types of activities, adhering to other social roles that associate them with activities of greater beauty and delicacy [67]. Taking into account the type of content proposed, we can also understand the results linked to the students' assessments of the difficulty of the subject and the PE classes, in which girls give greater complexity to the PE classes than boys [68].

Considering that it is essential to address individual differences based on gender and age [69], the results of this research show that children in PrE and SE agree more with the statement that PE is the subject than the majority enjoy, which is in line with previous studies [70–72]. This shows that gender directly influences the perception that students have about the PE subject [73]. This may be due to the fact that boys, regardless of their educational stage, present higher values of intrinsic motivation towards PE classes than girls [31,74]. Thus, boys tend to perceive and value PE better than girls [75]. Likewise, the contents that are usually addressed in teaching programs do not arouse the same interest in both genders [62], this being a key element in the perception and taste of the classes. Finally, these differences could also be associated with gender stereotypes on the part of teachers, in relation to the expectations and demands that girls perceive of them, which is a key factor in the findings [76,77].

Regarding the students' thoughts about the PE teacher in general, the results show a high value of the teachers, which agrees with previous studies by Gutiérrez and Pilsa [78] and Moreno et al. [10]. This positive value may be due to the existence of a favorable environment in class [32] as well as the quality of the teachers' interactions with the students [8]. Regarding the perception of students towards PE teachers according to the educational stage, we observed significant differences in favor of PrE students with respect to SE students, with a decrease in the favorable perception of students as they advance in the courses. This trend is also reflected in the research of Cea et al. [79]. On the one hand, this may be due to the type of methodologies used by the teacher in more open and game-based PrE, where a greater number of opportunities are provided to students to make decisions with more open methods and styles [78]. On the other hand, the ease of the content taught is aimed at the acquisition and development of basic motor skills in PrE, unlike SE, where the content is aimed at the development of specific skills and the increase in critical capacity of students as age increases [79].

Regarding professionalism and knowledge of the subject, students perceive their teachers as competent and with mastery of the content, in line with the results of Altenberger et al. [80]. However, SE boys agree most with this statement, which does not agree with the findings of Hernández et al. [81]. In this sense, it is important that students recognize their teachers' competencies and have a favorable perception of their teachers mastering the subject since it is considered an important factor in promoting an active and healthy lifestyle in their free time [5].

Finally, regarding the gender factor, there are significant differences in favor of girls in the preference for the teacher to be a woman, both in PrE and in SE. This fact agrees with the gender gap in the co-educational attitude of teachers mentioned by Piedra et al. [35] and Rebollo et al. [36], which shows that female teachers are more aware than male



teachers. This result may be due to the fact that girls consider PE teachers to be stricter than boys [8] and, therefore, they feel more comfortable having a woman as a teacher since they understand them better and have greater empathy with them than men. Likewise, male PE teachers are more oriented towards tasks, performance, and competitive activities in PE than female teachers, generating less motivation and interest in girls, making them feel more uncomfortable, and generating a greater fear of failure than when they carry out more cooperative activities or with a less demanding approach in terms of skill [82]. Therefore, PE teachers must promote co-educational values by implementing didactic interventions where students do not perceive sexist activities [4].

The application of this study entails certain limitations, such as the fact that it is limited to the autonomous community of Cantabria. Therefore, it would be interesting to incorporate educational centers from other provinces and also from foreign countries. The use of the questionnaire as a data collection instrument must also be included as a limitation since it can lead respondents to provide answers that are perceived to be socially expected.

## 5. Conclusions

The results obtained confirm those found in some previous studies, although, in our case, we found that students in general have a high perception of the PE subject regardless of sex and stage.

PrE students agree more than SE students that PE is the subject and class that they like the most and the one in which they enjoy and have the most fun, and they would not mind having more hours of this subject per week. Likewise, PrE students agree that PE classes are easier, and they find them more interesting and motivating, as well as useful for life. Therefore, it is evident that as age increases, attitudes and positive perceptions towards PE classes decrease.

Regarding their opinion about PE teachers, PrE students agree more that teachers care about students, stimulate and encourage participation, explain well, and make themselves understood easily, treating boys and girls equally. On the other hand, SE students are more in agreement that they prefer that a woman teacher teaches the PE subject. Thus, there is a high level of student satisfaction with PE teachers, which decreases as age advances.

Taking gender into account, boys agree more than girls that the subject of PE is the subject and class that they like the most and the one in which they enjoy and have the most fun, and they would not mind dedicating more hours a week to it. Boys also find it easier, more interesting, and more motivating. On the contrary, girls find PE classes more difficult. Finally, girls prefer PE classes to be taught by a woman teacher because they believe they will understand them better. Thus, boys have a more positive view of classes and the PE subject than girls, which must be taken into account by teachers when applying content and methodologies that allow them to work in favor of the key SDGs in the educational field, such as gender equality.

On the other hand, and as one of the main points to consider, both Secondary Education students and girls from both educational stages are more in agreement that they prefer PE classes to be taught by a female teacher since they think that they will be understood better. In line with the previous point, it is essential to address the thinking, expectations, and teaching style of teachers, address co-education, and promote positive experiences and perceptions of students and the secondary stage.

Therefore, we can point out that there is a favorable disposition towards PE and towards teachers, which must be taken into account to achieve SDG-4. Our results significantly highlight the male gender and the primary stage by showing more positive attitudes towards PE.

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C. and R.N.-P.; supervision, I.G.-G., S.L.-G., M.B.-F., M.M.-C. and R.N.-P.; project administration, I.G.-G., S.L.-G., M.B.-F., M.M.-C. and R.N.-P. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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