

# Examining Factors Contributing to Absenteeism in Physical Education Classes Among Final-Year Students at the Reconciliation high school, Brazzaville



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## ABSTRACT

**Context:** The irregularity of final-year students during Physical Education (PE) is a recurring phenomenon that worries the world of education. In Congo, it reveals several aspects sometimes unknown in other skies. **Objective:** This study highlights the different causes of student irregularity in PE practice at the Réconciliation High School in Brazzaville, Congo. **Methods:** A questionnaire survey was conducted among 194 students. A quantitative approach was carried out to analyze the questionnaire containing several items on the irregularity of learners in PE. **Results:** The results indicate that the reasons that cause the final year students of the Réconciliation High School not to attend practical PE lessons are mainly: illnesses, lack of sports clothing, distance from home, fatigue, and lack of punctuality. The other phenomena, on the other hand, are linked to teachers, notably the lack of commitment, or the injustice in the awarding of grades. **Conclusion:** It is appropriate to fight against this practice concerning Physical Education lessons and contribute to improving the climate in schools.

**Keywords:** *Irregularity, Physical and Sports Education, students, causes*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Student absenteeism, for many years, has worried many players in the educational field. Indeed, this phenomenon is one of the powerful predictors of school dropout [1,2]. It also deprives students of certain learning opportunities and has a negative impact on their academic results [3].

Educating a student means making him acquire certain principles and habits. It also means training your mind so that it is useful to society. In this regard, Nékpo (1999) [4] wrote "educating someone will mean shaping them on both physical, behavioral and intellectual levels in order to allow them to live a social life in accordance with the norms of the immediate environment and the various environments where they are expected to evolve subsequently. Therefore, to achieve this objective a certain number of teaching disciplines are used including Physical and Sports Education (PSE).

According to the UNESCO Charter (1978) [5] "The practice of Physical and Sport Education is a fundamental right for all. Every human being has the fundamental right to access Physical and Sports Activities (PSA) which are essential to the development of the personality. The right to develop physical, intellectual and moral skills through Physical Education (PE) must be guaranteed both within the framework of the education system and in other aspects of social life.

Empirical studies on the determinants of student irregularity during PE are few in number compared to those which focus on school dropout [6]. While published work provides valuable information, it often suffers from certain weaknesses. In general, they either relate to a limited number of students, or they use relatively summary statistical analyses. The procedure of comparing groups of regular students with groups of students frequently absent during PE leads to a loss of information on a whole range of "intermediate" students and on the processes implemented [7]. But above all, the majority of studies on absenteeism are based on very weak theoretical bases [1]. Indeed, they mainly aim to examine the impact of this or that variable on absenteeism or to identify the variables which discriminate between students who are absent from those who are not absent [8]. Despite the interest they arouse, the results of this research provide little information on the dynamics that lead to absenteeism [9].

No doubt because of theoretical poverty, existing studies highlight the very varied risk factors of irregularity, such as coming from a weakened socio-economic background [10] or ethnic minorities [11], having repeated a class [12], feeling little academically competent [10], having conflicting relationships with peers [13] or facing very controlling educational practices [14], for example, some of these risk factors relate to the sociodemographic characteristics of students and clearly constitute distal variables, over which teaching teams have relatively little control. Others relate more to the sporting experience of the students and constitute more proximal variables, over which these teams could have more control [15]. A central question is therefore to establish the respective weight of the socio-demographic characteristics of students and their school experience in the explanation of chronic irregularity in participation in PE lessons. Despite

the diversity of risk factors identified, voluntary absence from PE lessons is, for some authors, a withdrawal behavior which results from a feeling of non-integration of PE at school, of not take into account what happens during a PE lesson and decide on it, and the disinvestment that follows, in short what we could call a "negative internalization" in relation to the PE lesson [1,16,10].

In Congo, the interministerial decree for the application of the school law relating to the reorganization of the education system in the Republic of Congo, to promote certain measures for the promotion of PE. Indeed, the coefficient 2 is attributed to this discipline in state exams (second cycle certificate, baccalaureate) to raise its place in teaching compared to other disciplines considered more important (mathematics, physical sciences, science of life and the earth, French, English, etc.). PE had to reflect its educational scope in terms of value, socialization, personal development and be credible in the eyes of Congolese students and their parents.

According to the Decree (1984) [17] the purposes are classified into three categories: exercises aimed more particularly at improving psychological qualities and relationships with others. However, it emerges from teaching practices and observations that most Congolese PE teachers feel helpless in the face of the insufficient number of hours per class (2 hours per week), the overcrowded classes (between 70 and 100 students), the infrastructure inadequate, etc.

In passing classes, some students do not feel valued compared to their exam class classmates; they experience a feeling of rejection and/or failure which can go as far as seeking an exemption, because in PE failure is not "discreet" thus Verger thinks that: "the student is afraid of doing badly in front of others, feeling like a failure is often a factor of demotivation, of seeking avoidance and therefore of dispensing with complacency" [18]. In addition, the work consulted on student absenteeism during PE shows that the phenomenon of absenteeism affects girls more than boys and increases as students progress through the school curriculum [19, 20], particularly in third and final year classes, where students only come to PE classes in the third term with the arrival of gymnastics sequences. This observation led us to research on the theme: "The irregularity of final year students during PE classes at the Réconciliation high school".

### 1.1. Theoretical framework

In the organization and management of institutions and the world, researchers have developed theories and models with a view to controlling the organizations of the world of work, of which school structures are a part. Theories of administration relating to motivation and relationships between actors could provide support for our research and allow us to better understand our subject.

### 1.2. Organization theory

In organizational theories, motivation is the set of internal and external factors that induce positive behavior in the actor faced with a situation. Motivation then takes into account needs, work organization conditions, the content of activity programs, expected results, etc. Considering the importance of these factors in the literature reviewed, the theories of motivation seem to us to be very promising in understanding the irregularity of secondary school students during PE lessons. Thus, several authors have been interested in it, including [21, 22, 23].

### 1.3. Problematic

EP is also defined by its purposes and objectives. It is a discipline, taught in all classes from kindergarten to university according to official texts in Congo. Its teaching is compulsory and on a regular basis using Physical and Sports Activities (APS), to confront the individual with their physical and human environment in order to form a cultured, lucid, and autonomous citizen. Education in values, the acquisition of skills and knowledge, as well as personality development constitute the ambitions of the discipline [24].

As in other disciplines, there are a certain number of skills to be transmitted to students, the school is the identified learning place that all students must appropriate collectively to develop and access culture. The primary function of the school is undoubtedly instruction, teaching and learning with the help of qualified personnel: teachers. Student irregularity is seen by teachers as a questioning of their own role, which undoubtedly affects their professional commitment [25]. Based on the observation that Congolese students in their final year at the Réconciliation high school in Brazzaville are notorious for their irregularity in PE classes before the publication of the sequences and the day before the exam, the following question arises.

What are the reasons that push students in the final year of the Réconciliation high school not to attend PE classes regularly?

### Objective of the study

The objective of this study is to understand why final year students are absent from PE classes.

### The interest of the study

The interest of this study consists of advocating at the level of the educational and pedagogical community on the importance of PE lessons, the necessity and the obligation of students to participate in them.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Study Setting

This research was conducted at general high school of Réconciliation, located in the Brazzaville department, Republic of Congo. The study focused on final-year students who were regularly enrolled, had no medical conditions contraindicating participation in Physical and Sports Education (PSE), and showed a voluntary irregularity in their attendance at PSE classes.

### 2.2 Study Design

Our study follows a cross-sectional design based on a quantitative approach. This methodological choice provides a snapshot of the situation, facilitating the identification of factors associated with irregular participation in PSE classes.

### 2.3 Population and Sampling

#### 2.3.1 Reference Population

The reference population included 194 final-year students from general high school of Réconciliation.

#### 2.3.2 Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants from the target population, ensuring that the chosen individuals met specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. The inclusion criteria were: current enrollment in the final year of high school, active attendance at the General High School of Réconciliation, possession of a valid Certificate of First Cycle Studies, and complete response to all items in the administered questionnaire. This non-probability sampling approach allowed for the selection of informants most likely to provide relevant and comprehensive data pertaining to the research questions. While this method limits the generalizability of findings, it ensures that the data collected is directly applicable to the specific context and objectives of the study.

#### 2.3.3 Sample Size

The final sample consisted of 80 students (51 boys and 29 girls), representing 41.2% of the reference population. A post-hoc power calculation was performed to assess the representativeness of this sample.

### 2.4 Data Collection

#### 2.4.1 Data Collection Instrument

A self-administered written questionnaire with eight items was specifically developed for this study. The questionnaire was pre-tested on a sample of 10 students not included in the final study to evaluate its clarity and relevance.

#### 2.4.2 Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire was administered individually to each eligible participant. Participants were informed of the anonymous and confidential nature of their responses. The average completion time was 15 minutes.

#### 2.4.3 Variables Studied

The study examined several key variables related to students' participation in physical education (PE) classes. These included sociodemographic factors such as age, gender, and socioeconomic status, which provided context for understanding the student population. The research also investigated the frequency of students' participation in PE classes, shedding light on attendance patterns. To gain insight into potential barriers, the study explored students' perceived reasons for irregular attendance in PE classes. Additionally, the research assessed students' overall attitudes toward PE, offering a comprehensive view of their perceptions and engagement with the subject. By analyzing these interconnected variables, the study aimed to provide a holistic understanding of the factors influencing student participation and attitudes in PE classes.

### 2.5 Data Analysis

The collected data were entered and processed using SPSS Version 25.0. The following analyses were performed:

1. Descriptive analyses: calculation of frequencies, means, and standard deviations for quantitative variables.
2. Bivariate analyses: chi-square tests to examine associations between categorical variables, and Student's t-tests to compare means between groups.

3. Multivariate analysis: a logistic regression was conducted to identify predictive factors for irregular attendance in PE classes.

The level of statistical significance was set at  $p < 0.05$ .

### 2.6 Ethical Considerations

This study received approval from the ethics committee. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and from parents/guardians for minor students. Data confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process.

## 3. RESULTS

We specify here that we do not manipulate variables (as in psychology), but we analyze discourses in context with their effective conditions, conditions which allow the results to be interpreted with regard to their context. Indeed, our study is part of a phenomenological approach based on didactic realities whose challenge is a description and understanding of the discourse and behavior of students regarding the practice of PE. The numerical data are used as quantitative indicators allowing, through coordination with qualitative indicators, to analyze the debates of ideas and to get as close as possible to the motivations of the students [26].

**Table 1:** Classification of students by age group.

Variables	Boys		Girls		$\chi^2$
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
<b>15-20 years</b>	40	78.4	18	62.1	0.1 <sup>ns</sup>
<b>21-25 years</b>	11	21.6	11	37.9	

The result of the table above shows that 78.4% boys students plus 62.1% of girls are in the age group between 15-20 years, while 21.6% of boys more 37.9% girls are in the age group between 21-25 years old with a non-significant difference between the two groups ( $P > 0.05$ ).

**Table 2:** Classification of students by sections.

Variables	Boys		Girls		$\chi^2$
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
<b>Art Section A<sub>4</sub></b>	17	33.3	9	31	0.06 <sup>ns</sup>
<b>Section D</b>	26	51	9	31	
<b>Section C</b>	8	15.7	11	37.9	

Here, the results obtained show that 33.3% of the boys students plus 31% girls were in the Art section, while 51% of the boys more 31% of the girls were in the D section, moreover, 15.7% of the boys more 37.9% of girls were from section C. With a non-significant difference between the two groups ( $P > 0.05$ ).

**Table 3 :** Student response on the period of their start of participation in PE class in final year.

Variables	Boys		Girls		$\chi^2$
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
<b>In the first trimester</b>	48	94.1	29	100	0.04 <sup>s</sup>
<b>In the second trimester</b>	2	3.9	-	-	
<b>In the third trimester</b>	1	2	-	-	

The results of this table show that 94.1% boys more 100% girls started PE in the first trimester. While 3.9% boys started in the second trimester. With a non-significant difference between the two groups ( $P > 0.05$ ).

**Table 4:** The reasons given by the students for their irregularity during PE lessons.

Variables	Boys		Girls		$\chi^2$
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
<b>Always regular at PE</b>	18	35.3	11	37.9	0.08 <sup>ns</sup>
<b>Reason for illness/health problem</b>	4	7.8	10	34.5	
<b>Fatigue</b>	5	9.8	2	6.9	
<b>Distance (I live very far away)</b>	4	7.8	-	-	
<b>Wake-up time + delay</b>	8	15.7	3	10.3	
<b>Lack of motivation</b>	7	13.7	2	6.9	
<b>Lack of equipment</b>	2	3.9	-	-	
<b>Lack of encouragement from teacher</b>	3	5.9	1	3.4	

The results of this table show that 35% boys students plus 37% girls students were still regular in PE class, while 7.8% boys students more 34.5% girls students skipped classes for school reasons. Reasons of illness. Furthermore, 9.8% boys students plus 6.9% girls students were absent from PE class for reasons of fatigue, while 7.8% boys students were irregular in PE class for reasons of fatigue. Reasons for moving away from school; 15.7% of boys students more 10.3% of girl students gave the reason for being late to PE class, while 13.7% boys students more 6.9% girls students were absent during PE class. PE for reasons of lack of motivation on the part of the teacher. 3.9% boys students fled PE classes for reasons of lack of equipment; 5.9% boys students more 3.4% girls students missed PE class for reasons of lack of encouragement from the teacher. With a non-significant difference between the two groups ( $P>0.05$ ).

**Table 5:** The most important disciplines in final year cited by students.

Variables	Boys		Girls		$\chi^2$
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
All subjects are important	12	23.5	14	48.3	0.1 <sup>ns</sup>
Scientific subjects	19	37.3	6	20.7	
Literary subjects	19	37.3	8	27.6	
PE	1	2	1	3.4	

EP : Physical Education

Here, 37.3% boys students more 20.7% boys students say that science subjects are more important. While 37.3% more 27.6% of girls students say that literary subjects are more important. Furthermore, 23.5% more 48.3% say that all subjects are important. While 2% boys students more 3.4% girls students declare that PE is more important. The difference between the two groups is not significant ( $P>0.05$ ).

**Table 6:** Regular participation in PE classes

Variables	Boys		Girls		$\chi^2$
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
Yes	38	74.5	22	75.9	0.8 <sup>ns</sup>
No	13	25.5	7	24.1	

The results of this table show that 74.5% of boy's students plus 75.9% of the girl's students surveyed declare having participated regularly in PE lessons. While 25.5% of boy's students more 24.1% girl's students declare that they do not regularly participate in PE lessons. The difference is not significant between the two groups ( $P>0.05$ ).

**Table 7:** Subjects' response to motivation from PE teachers.

Variables	Boys		Girls		$\chi^2$
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
Yes	40	78.4	22	75.9	0.7 <sup>ns</sup>
No	11	21.6	7	24.1	

The analysis of this table 7 shows that 78.4% of boy's students more 75.9% girl's students declare that PE teachers are motivated. While 21.6% of boy's students 24.1% of girl's students declare that PE teachers are not motivated. The significance between the two groups is negative ( $P>0.05$ ).

**Table 8:** Subjects' response to the question of sanctions against students who do not regularly participate in PE lessons.

Variables	Boys		Girls		$\chi^2$
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
Yes	35	68.6	13	44.8	0.03 <sup>ns</sup>
No	16	31.4	16	55.2	

ns : No significant.

This table 8 shows us that 68.6% of boys students and 44.8% of girls students declare that students who do not regularly participate in PE lessons are punished. On the other hand, 31.4% of boys students more 55.2% girls students declare that the school does not sanction students who do not regularly participate in PE lessons. The difference is not significant between the two groups ( $P>0.05$ ).

## 4. DISCUSSION

This research work aimed to understand why final year students are absent from PE class despite the importance and necessity of this course on a moral, psychological and physical level. This type of study, which falls within the framework of phenomenology and educational sciences, is current and of crucial scientific significance because it deals with recurring problems in the field of PE teaching. At the beginning of the study we thought that: "Socio-economic,

emotional and health realities are among the reasons which push final year students of the Réconciliation high school to be irregular in practical PE lessons".

Verifying this hypothesis required a questionnaire survey. The quiz constitutes a means of investigation in Intervention Sciences in general and in PE Didactics in particular. Thus, the results obtained are not of less interest. The results in Table 3 reveal that 94.1% of boys and 100% of girls started PE in the first trimester while 3.9% of boys started PE classes in the second trimester. This attitude can be explained by the fact that these students do not have much interest in the PE discipline. Thus, if they start PE in the second trimester it is simply for the needs of the reasons (the state exams) and yet PE is a teaching discipline like so many others, and its teaching is governed by texts and is compulsory throughout the school period in the Republic of Congo. PE, in fact, has proven its legitimacy through institutionalization, methods, roles, axes, scholarly knowledge, curricula and social reference practices [27]. The institutionalization of PE is reflected in general and specific texts. They guide training action such as the United Nations Charter for Human Rights. This charter stipulates that every child has the right to education [28]. In addition, the teaching of PE is regulated by specific texts which specify the functioning of this discipline, including the [29].

Regarding the reasons for student absenteeism during PE class, the results in table 4 show that 35% of male students and 37% of girls students were always regular in PE class, while 7.8% of boys students plus 34.5% girls students were irregular in classes for reasons of illness. Furthermore, 9.8% of male students and more than 6.9% of female students are absent from PE class for reasons of weariness (monotony which, reasons, that they were tired to set in), while 7.8% of students boys were irregular in PE classes for reasons of distance from school. Boys students (15.7%) and 10.3% of girls students gave the reason of lack of punctuality, while 13.7% boys students more 6.9% girls students were absent during class. PE for reasons of lack of motivation on the part of teachers. And, 3.9% of boy students fled PE class for reasons of lack of equipment, while 5.9% of boy students and 3.4% of girl students missed PE class for reasons of lack of encouragement from teachers. No plausible explanation can be provided to justify this trend; However, one would be tempted to blame the search for motivation. In addition, the condition of the school's facilities and equipment; and the skills of teachers are elements that should not be neglected. During the pre-investigation we found that not all establishments had quality facilities and equipment for team sports. Our results are in line with the observations of Hagger et al., (2002) [30], suggesting that students are likely to become more positive towards physical activity if they are in a learning environment that makes them feel comfortable and confident [31]. According to Brazzaville sectoral sports inspectors, since 2012, PE sectoral inspections have provided a wide range of sports and physical activities for which students were likely to make choice, participate, and induce learning in an environment that can put learners at ease and make them confident. It is from this angle that [32,33], affirm that the student is present in the high school, outside the class, this form of absenteeism is linked to absenteeism due to lack of motivation. We also find in this category, late absenteeism: the fact of systematically arriving late for class, a sign of a certain demobilization, sometimes accepted by teachers.

Regarding table 5, the results indicate that 37.3% of male students, plus 20.7% of female students, declare that science subjects are more important. While 37.3% and over 27.6% girls students declare that literary subjects are more important. Furthermore, 23.5% and more than 48.3% say that all subjects are important. However, 2% boys students and more than 3.4% of girls students say that PE is more important. Final year students wrongly do not give importance to the PE discipline, since the [34] stipulates that PE plays a capital role in human beings: "The practice of Physical and Sport Education is a fundamental right for everyone. Every human being has the fundamental right to access PE which is essential to the development of the personality. The right to develop physical, intellectual and moral skills through PE must be guaranteed both within the framework of the education system and in other aspects of social life." Regarding the results in table 6, 74.5% boys students more 75.9% girls students declare having participated regularly in PE lessons. While 25.5% boys students and 24.1% girls students declare that they do not regularly participate in PE lessons. It occurs when the student misses a lesson here and there, at his convenience, it is an occasional and discontinuous absenteeism. We find in this category "zapping" or chosen absenteeism: for some students, absenteeism is not a rejection of school, but simply the result of preferences granted to other activities (rest, work); this is what [32] identifies as school consumerism absenteeism: students use à la carte teaching and options are particularly affected by absenteeism, with students often giving them less importance.

The analysis of table 7 shows that 78.4% boys students plus 75.9% girls students declare that PE teachers are motivated. However, 21.6% boys students more 24.1% girls students state that PE teachers are not motivated. For man, even if his growth and maturation come to an end at the end of adolescence, the development of all his faculties is never finished and continues until the end of his life. This legitimate definition of the teacher's actions to contribute to the development of his students, if he is powerless to interact with the "genetic determinants", one of the important dimensions of his expertise is embodied in the arrangement and control of "external stimulation" [35].

The results in Table 8 show that 68.6% boys students more than 44.8% girls students declare that the school sanctions students who do not regularly participate in PE lessons. On the other hand, 31.4% of boys students and more than 55.2% girls students declare that the school does not sanction students who do not regularly participate in PE lessons.

[19], on this subject, speaks of pathological absenteeism due to the integration and installation in daily habits of this lifestyle with several consequences. It results from a decision of the institution, temporary exclusion from the class, temporary or permanent exclusion from the establishment. This exclusion from class can be intentionally caused by students so as not to attend class. In these latter cases (true-false absenteeism, breathing absenteeism and forced absenteeism), the student is not entirely responsible for his absence, but that it is also the result of the functioning of the institution. Truancy cannot be isolated from the student's total situation. It is a symptom of a psycho-social maladaptation which can be of a family, personal, school and/or social nature.

Limitations of the study: This study has some weaknesses. Indeed, we wanted to look just at the context of the reconciliation high school; we could take the risk of generalizing the results to all the high schools in Brazzaville or even the Congo. In addition, we also had to question other actors (parents, etc.) and officials who may be affected by this phenomenon. In reality, an associated qualitative approach would be interesting. Also, the limitations of this study include its cross-sectional design, which does not allow for the establishment of causal relationships, and the possibility of social desirability bias in the questionnaire responses. These limitations will be considered when interpreting the results.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the intended objective of our study was achieved, because it allowed us to understand certain phenomena linked to the irregularity of final year students in Physical and Sports Education courses. Certain phenomena are linked to the students themselves and are the most cited. These mainly concern illnesses, lack of sports equipment, distance, fatigue and lateness. The other phenomena, on the other hand, are linked to teachers, notably the lack of commitment, or even injustice in the awarding of grades or evaluation. With this in mind, we suggest to the Ministry of Preschool, Primary, Secondary and Literacy Education and to the various PE component institutions to take severe measures for these students who flee classes. For example, a student who does not participate in PE class must not also participate in other classes. We think that this could reduce the rate of irregularity of final year students in this course.

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