The role of school counseling in advancing equality in student participation: a systematic review

El papel de la orientación escolar en la equidad de la participación estudiantil: una revisión

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Abstract

Introduction: many middle-school students disengaged from physical education for reasons beyond physical fitness, including fear of judgment, body-image concerns, and limited psychological readiness. The topic examined the potential of school counseling as a pathway to support fair and meaningful participation.
Objective: the purpose of this review was to evaluate the role of school counseling in advancing quality in student participation in physical education by addressing psychosocial barriers and supporting inclusive learning environments.
Methodology: this study employed a scoping review synthesizing literature published between 2015 and 2025 from peer-reviewed journals, institutional reports, and regionally relevant sources. evidence was organized into four analytical categories: psychological barriers, social inclusion, collaborative practice, and participation outcomes.
Results: findings showed that counseling support reduced anxiety, increased confidence, and improved participation among previously reluctant students. structured group sessions, collaborative planning, flexible evaluation approaches, and mentoring frameworks contributed to steady increases in attendance and engagement among diverse student groups.
discussion: the review identified that equitable participation was strengthened when counseling was embedded into physical education routines and aligned with whole-school commitments to inclusion.
Conclusions: integrating counseling as part of physical education practice can help reduce participation gaps and create conditions where all students are prepared, supported, and encouraged to engage.

Keywords

Educational equity; inclusive education; participation; physical education; school counseling.

Resumen

Introducción: muchos estudiantes de educación secundaria se desconectaron de la educación física por razones que van más allá de la condición física, incluyendo miedo al juicio, preocupaciones sobre la imagen corporal y una baja preparación psicológica. este tema examinó el papel de la orientación escolar como vía para apoyar una participación más justa y significativa.
Objetivo: el objetivo de esta revisión fue evaluar el papel de la orientación escolar en el avance de la igualdad en la participación del alumnado en educación física mediante la reducción de barreras psicosociales y el apoyo a entornos educativos inclusivos.
Metodología: este estudio empleó una revisión exploratoria de la literatura publicada entre 2015 y 2025 en revistas académicas, informes institucionales y fuentes regionales pertinentes. la evidencia se organizó en cuatro categorías analíticas: barreras psicológicas, inclusión social, prácticas colaborativas y resultados de participación.
Resultados: los hallazgos mostraron que el apoyo de la orientación escolar redujo la ansiedad, aumentó la confianza y mejoró la participación entre estudiantes previamente reacios. sesiones grupales estructuradas, planificación conjunta, evaluación flexible y estrategias de tutoría contribuyeron a aumentos constantes en la asistencia y el compromiso de diversos grupos estudiantiles.
Discusión: la revisión identificó que la participación equitativa se fortaleció cuando la orientación se integró en la práctica diaria de educación física y se alineó con un compromiso institucional hacia la inclusión.
Conclusiones: integrar la orientación escolar en la educación física puede ayudar a reducir las brechas de participación y crear condiciones donde todo el alumnado se sienta preparado, acompañado y motivado para participar.

Palabras clave

Equidad educativa; educación física; educación inclusiva; orientación escolar; participación.

Introduction

Engaging in physical activity is one of the most fundamental ways humans sustain their health, well-being, and social growth (Papaioannou et al., 2020). Beyond strengthening the body, regular movement plays a central role in preventing chronic diseases, supporting mental resilience, and improving quality of life across all ages. Recent literature also highlights how movement serves as a social determinant of equity, influencing not only health but also participation opportunities in educational settings (Peñarrubia-Lozano et al., 2020). Yet, despite this broad significance, physical activity is too often understood in a limited sense—as something that happens only in the gym, on the playing field, or during organized sports sessions (Piggin, 2020). This narrow view overlooks the many forms of movement that shape people's daily lives and contribute to their physical and emotional development. Across the last decade (2015–2025), scholars have increasingly reframed school-based physical activity through psychosocial and inclusive lenses, emphasizing engagement, agency, and well-being rather than performance outcomes. In schools, for example, physical education is not merely a venue for athletic performance; it is also a space where students learn cooperation, build self-confidence, and develop habits that can support a healthy and active life (Bessa et al., 2021; Papaioannou et al., 2020). Recognizing these broader dimensions is crucial, especially when schools seek to make participation more inclusive and equitable for students with diverse needs, abilities, and backgrounds.

In the context of school life, physical activity does not always take the form of structured exercise or competitive sports. Students' participation in movement-based learning reflects intersecting social, psychological, and environmental dynamics that influence their willingness to engage (Seifert & Davids, 2017; Solmon, 2015). Some students participate actively because they feel confident or have had positive experiences in the past, while others withdraw due to internal barriers such as anxiety, low self-esteem, or fear of judgment (Westerbeek & Eime, 2021). This situation reflects the reality that physical activity is not merely a matter of physical ability, but is also closely related to students' emotional and social experiences. Unfortunately, these non-physical dimensions are often overlooked in physical education practices, resulting in a less inclusive learning approach that fails to reach the full potential of all students. Similar participation disparities have been documented globally, with evidence linking motivation loss and exclusion to psychosocial barriers such as anxiety and perceived competence (Rodríguez-Fernández et al., 2021). If these psychological and social aspects are ignored, the main objectives of physical education—to build healthy habits, cooperation, and confidence among all students—will be difficult to achieve (Kao, 2019; Sierra-Díaz et al., 2019).

The Indonesian context provides an interesting picture of the complexity of participation in physical activities in educational settings. As a country with great social, cultural, and economic diversity, schools in Indonesia accommodate students with different backgrounds, experiences, and abilities. These differences often create gaps in participation in physical activities. Students from families with limited resources, for example, may not have access to sports experiences from an early age, while other students face psychological barriers such as embarrassment, fear of ridicule, or low self-esteem (Firman et al., 2025). On the other hand, cultural values such as mutual cooperation and strong teamwork in Indonesian society are actually a great potential for encouraging the creation of a more inclusive physical learning space (Mariyono, 2024). When physical education is able to integrate these social values and is supported by a counseling approach that is sensitive to differences, physical activity not only serves as a means of improving health, but also as a medium for building a sense of togetherness, positive identity, and solidarity among students (Martín-Rodríguez et al., 2024; Stevens et al., 2017). However, despite its potential, there remains a lack of structured synthesis examining how counseling interventions have been operationalized to address these participation inequities, particularly in developing countries.

In physical education classrooms, participation disparities are also shaped by social hierarchies and gender constructs that students bring with them from their surrounding environments (Gupta, 2018). Boys are often considered more suited to competitive activities, so they are more dominant in using space and voice, while some female students hold back due to concerns about body image, the stigma of being unathletic, or practical constraints such as menstrual management and dress codes. Students who are heavier, have mild disabilities, or come from low-income families often face subtle teasing, limited access to equipment, or low expectations from their peers. Certain cultural norms—such as a preference for activities that do not require physical contact or demands for modesty—can also limit movement

choices (Hills et al., 2015). If these factors are not recognized, physical activity becomes an arena of exclusion: some students become more confident and visible, while others become increasingly marginalized and absent. This is where counseling plays a strategic role in breaking stereotypes, strengthening self-confidence, and designing individual and group support so that opportunities to participate in PE become more equitable for all (F et al., 2018). These patterns align with global findings that gendered expectations, economic status, and perceived ability continue to mediate students' engagement, yet school counseling frameworks rarely appear in comparative analyses of these factors (Gomes et al., 2023).

Although schools often place physical education in the realm of fitness and motor skills development, few reviews have systematically integrated the counseling dimension into discussions of equitable participation (Thorburn & Stolz, 2017). But relatively less attention is given to vulnerable bodily experiences, feelings of shame, gender stereotypes, or economic constraints that cause some students to distance themselves from activities (Martín-Rodríguez et al., 2024; Stevens et al., 2017). This gap risks normalizing inequality: as if low participation is a matter of personal motivation, rather than the result of barriers that can be changed through appropriate support. This is where counseling should come in as an integral part of the PE ecosystem—identifying invisible barriers, building confidence, and designing collaborative strategies with PE teachers and parents (Penney et al., 2002). Without a framework that incorporates a counseling perspective, it is easy to overlook how movement, identity, and social relations are intertwined, and how schools can tangibly expand equitable access to participation for all students.

To address this gap, this study presents a scoping review of two decades of interdisciplinary literature (2015–2025) discussing the relationship between school counseling and equal participation in physical education at the junior high school level, with a particular focus on the Indonesian context while referring to relevant global findings. We map evidence on: (1) how psychological barriers—such as performance anxiety, body image, and feelings of inadequacy—affect students' willingness to participate; (2) how social factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, and mild disabilities shape different experiences in PE classes; and (3) strategies used by school counselors together with PE teachers—ranging from brief group counseling, goal setting, peer buddies, to flexible assessment—to expand access and maintain sustainability of engagement. By mapping these various approaches, this study shifts the perspective from performance-focused PE oriented towards equity and psychosocial well-being. Its main contribution is to position counseling as a key component of an inclusive PE ecosystem—not a supplement—and to link discussions about physical activity to broader agendas regarding educational equity, adolescent mental health, and supportive school culture.

Method

Research Design

This study applied a scoping review design to synthesize existing evidence on the role of school counseling in promoting equal participation in junior high school physical education (PE) learning. This approach was chosen because the topic is relatively new, interdisciplinary (educational psychology, adolescent health, educational sociology, and physical education), and requires mapping a broad corpus of literature rather than evaluating narrow interventions. Following the methodological framework of the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) (Stern et al., 2018), the review process took place through five iterative stages: (1) formulating research questions and operational definitions (participation, equality, components of counseling services); (2) identifying relevant studies in several databases (Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, ERIC) and grey literature (ministerial guidelines, institutional reports, school policies), plus citation chasing; (3) applying inclusion–exclusion criteria based on the PCC scheme (Population: junior high school students/equivalents, PE teachers, counselors; Concept: guidance counseling services/strategies related to participation/equality; Context: school); (4) Performing charting and coding of key variables (study characteristics, psychological/social barriers, components of guidance counseling (GC) services, counselor-PE teacher collaboration schemes, participation indicators) using qualitative analysis software (NVivo) with documented audit trails; and (5) synthesizing findings into cross-study thematic categories that capture patterns of mechanisms and their implications for practice. To

enhance transparency and reproducibility, the search protocol and inclusion logic were documented prior to data collection, functioning as a de facto preregistration although not formally deposited in an open repository. Reporting follows PRISMA-ScR (including a PRISMA flow diagram for selection transparency) (Tricco et al., 2018). The analytic logic and corpus organization followed the recommendations of Tricco et al. (2018) for scoping reviews, emphasizing iterative refinement and evidence charting across sources. Although a formal protocol was not registered, the review plan was developed prospectively to maintain consistency and replicability at every stage.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

This review covers publications from 2015–2025 in the form of peer-reviewed articles and official reports from credible institutions (both international and Indonesian). The temporal range (2015–2025) was chosen to capture the last decade of policy and scholarly attention on equity-driven counseling within PE, a period in which inclusion and psychosocial frameworks have gained stronger international traction (Tolgfors, 2020). Studies were considered eligible if they explicitly linked guidance counseling (GC) with participation in physical education (PE) and/or equality/inclusiveness at the junior high school/lower secondary level. Acceptable forms of evidence include: (a) CB interventions (individual/group, goal check-ins, peer buddies, restorative circles, flexible assessments) that target barriers to participation (performance anxiety, body image, gender stereotypes, socioeconomic status, mild disabilities); (b) qualitative/mixed-methods studies describing student experiences, the role of counselors, and counselor–PE teacher collaboration in daily practice; (c) quantitative studies measuring participation-related outcomes (PE attendance, task engagement, willingness to participate) and/or psychological mediators (self-efficacy, motivation, sense of belonging); and (d) school or ministry policies/guidelines that include psychosocial support schemes to expand access to physical activity. Publications in Indonesian and English are included to capture the spectrum of relevant discourse. For grey literature, only documents issued by government ministries, accredited universities, or international organizations (e.g., UNESCO, WHO) were accepted. Informal sources such as blogs or non-verified reports were excluded to safeguard credibility.

Sources are excluded if: (a) they do not link GC with PE or equality of participation (e.g., only discussing sports/performance techniques without the counseling dimension); (b) they focus on inappropriate populations (higher education/professional sports elite) without data that can be transferred to the junior high school context; (c) it is an opinion essay, editorial, preprint without peer review, or grey literature from a source whose credibility is unclear; (d) it discusses health/physical activity in schools but without participation indicators (e.g., only physical fitness) and without counseling support/inclusivity components; (e) it highlights PE technology/curriculum innovations without reference to psychosocial barriers or the role of counselors; (f) the full text or key data for extraction is not available. Consistent application of these criteria ensures a coherent and rigorous final corpus, directly contributing to an understanding of how school counseling promotes equality of participation in PE at the junior high school level.

Search Strategy

To gather relevant cross-disciplinary evidence, we developed a comprehensive and iterative search strategy. Seven electronic databases were systematically searched: Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, ERIC, PsycINFO, ScienceDirect, and DOAJ, supplemented by GARUDA (Indonesian National Index) and Google Scholar for initial retrieval and citation chasing. This combination was chosen to cover both international peer-reviewed literature and local publications in Indonesian. The last search was conducted on May 20, 2025, and results were exported to Mendeley version 1.19.8 for deduplication. Credible grey literature was also reviewed—including documents from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, the Ministry of Health, WHO/UNESCO guidelines, and school/regional policies—to capture counseling practices and inclusion policies that are often not published in journals.

Keywords were developed gradually, from broad terms to specific terms, and then adjusted to the thesaurus of each database (MeSH for PubMed, ERIC Thesaurus for ERIC). Example of a main Boolean string (Scopus/Web of Science):

("school counseling" OR "guidance counseling" OR "bimbingan konseling") AND ("physical education" OR 'PE' OR "pendidikan jasmani") AND (equity OR equality OR inclusion OR "inclusive education" OR kesetaraan OR inklusif*) AND (adolescent OR "middle school" OR "lower secondary" OR "SMP")

PubMed example (MeSH):

((‘Counseling’[MeSH] OR “School Counseling”[All Fields]) AND (“Motor Activity”[MeSH] OR “Exercise”[MeSH] OR “Physical Education and Training”[MeSH])) AND (‘Students’[MeSH] OR adolescent[MeSH]) AND (Equity[All Fields] OR “Educational Status”[MeSH] OR “Social Inclusion”[MeSH])

Example ERIC (descriptor):

DE:“School Counseling” AND DE:“Physical Education” AND (DE:Equity OR DE:“Inclusive Education”) AND (DE:Adolescents OR DE:“Middle School Students”)

For GARUDA and Indonesian sources, the following terms are used: “guidance counseling” AND “physical education/PE” AND (equity OR inclusive) AND (junior high school OR adolescents). The search was limited to 2015–2025 and conducted in Indonesian and English; the search equation was adapted per platform (e.g., title/abstract field restriction in Scopus, subject/descriptor filter in ERIC). Initial results were exported to Mendeley for automatic deduplication and manual verification. Screening was conducted in two stages: (1) title–abstract for initial relevance; (2) full text for final eligibility against PCC criteria. The reference lists of selected articles were backward/forward citation chased to find additional studies. All inclusion/exclusion decisions are recorded in a worksheet (search date, string, filter, number of hits) to maintain an audit trail and enable replication. A search performance summary is presented in Table 1, detailing the number of records retrieved from each database, the number retained after deduplication, title–abstract screening, and full-text eligibility. This allows a transparent trace of evidence flow consistent with the PRISMA-ScR framework.

Study Selection and Data Extraction

The selection process was conducted in stages to ensure accuracy and transparency. All search results from the database and institutional repository were exported to a reference manager (Mendeley) for initial organization. Duplicates were removed through automatic detection, then verified manually so that similar titles with different details (e.g., edition/version) were not deleted. The cleaned dataset is then imported into NVivo for initial tagging. Two reviewers independently screen titles and abstracts based on predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria (PCC). Potentially relevant records proceed to full-text reading. Differences in decisions are resolved through discussion until consensus is reached; if necessary, a third reviewer is consulted. Inter-rater reliability was maintained by calibrating coding decisions at two intervals, producing an agreement rate above 85%, which met JBI’s threshold for consistency. This flow was designed to minimize bias and increase inter-reviewer reliability during the screening process.

For each study that passed, we used a structured extraction sheet that had been briefly tested for consistency. Variables recorded include: author–year, school location/context, population (middle school students/equivalent, PE teachers, counselors), GC service components (individual/group, goal-setting check-ins, peer-buddy, restorative circles, flexible assessment), barriers to participation targeted (performance anxiety, body image, gender stereotypes, socioeconomic status, mild disabilities), forms of counselor–PE teacher collaboration, and participation/engagement indicators (PE attendance, willingness to participate in tasks, perceptions of inclusion). Initial data were tabulated in Excel for charting and cross-study comparison, then imported into NVivo for inductive thematic coding. Codes were developed iteratively (open → grouping) to form theme categories that supported the synthesis in the findings section. The combined approach—structured charting and thematic analysis—allowed for both broad coverage and adequate depth to explain how guidance counseling services work to promote equal participation in physical education at the junior high school level. The extraction sheet and coding manual were cross-validated by an external educational psychologist to ensure interpretive alignment between the counseling and PE domains.

Data analysis

The analysis process followed the principles of thematic analysis with an inductive approach, so that patterns and themes emerged from the data rather than being imposed from the outset. To preserve analytic rigor, coding cycles followed Braun and Clarke’s six-phase framework, while ensuring alignment with the social-ecological and social-capital lenses underpinning this review. After extraction, the entire text was entered into NVivo to facilitate systematic tagging and retrieval of key quotes. We began with open coding for each study—capturing ideas about psychological barriers (performance anxiety,

body image, feelings of inadequacy), social dynamics (gender stereotypes, socioeconomic status, peer relationships), and counselor–PE teacher collaboration practices in the classroom. Overlapping codes were simplified, similar terms were combined, and groups of related codes were elevated to mid-level categories to capture broader patterns.

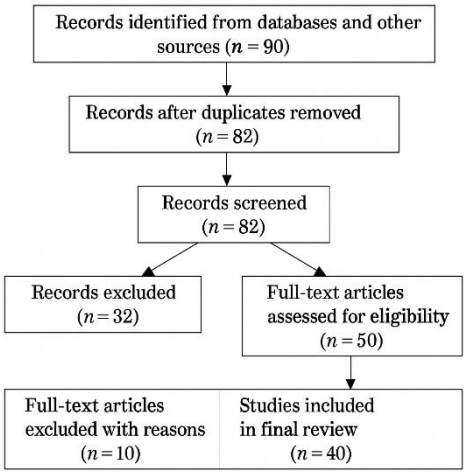
To assess the robustness of the evidence, we conducted a methodological appraisal using the JBI tool adapted for qualitative and quantitative designs; a summary is presented in Table 1. Studies rated as low quality were retained only when they provided unique contextual insights or perspectives absent in higher-quality evidence, but these were flagged and interpreted with caution. The coding cycle yielded several core categories: (1) psychological empowerment through counseling services (reduced anxiety, increased self-efficacy); (2) social inclusion and equity in PE participation (normalization of cross-ability activities, reduced stigma related to gender/weight/mild disabilities); (3) GC–PE collaboration mechanisms (short group sessions, goal-setting check-ins, peer buddies, flexible assessments); and (4) participation indicators (attendance, task engagement, sense of belonging). These categories were then synthesized into thematic narratives that explain how BK services work as a lever for justice—shifting class norms, lowering preventable barriers, and strengthening students' readiness to engage.

The sharpness of the analysis was reinforced through triangulation of sources (peer-reviewed articles, official reports, and policy/school documents) so that the themes that emerged were not tied to a single discipline. In addition, the review team conducted reflective discussions throughout the process to reduce interpretive bias and maintain consistency in theme development. Reflexive memos were maintained throughout the analytic process to document interpretive decisions and enhance transparency in the thematic synthesis. The final result presents a structured picture of how counseling functions as psychological support, a driver of equality, and a pedagogical partner in building more equitable PE participation in junior high schools.

Results

The literature search and screening process can be seen in summary in the PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1). This process followed the PRISMA-ScR reporting guidelines to ensure transparency and reproducibility. From the initial search conducted on various international and national databases and grey literature sources, 90 publications relevant to the research topic were identified. After going through the stages of deduplication, screening of titles and abstracts, and systematic application of inclusion–exclusion criteria, the number was significantly reduced. A total of 40 studies were deemed to meet the criteria and were then thoroughly analyzed in the final synthesis. These studies formed the basis for identifying patterns, themes, and mechanisms of the role of school counseling in promoting equal participation of junior high school students in physical education learning. The PRISMA flow (Figure 1) is directly connected to Table 1, which summarizes the included studies that passed the final eligibility screening.

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram



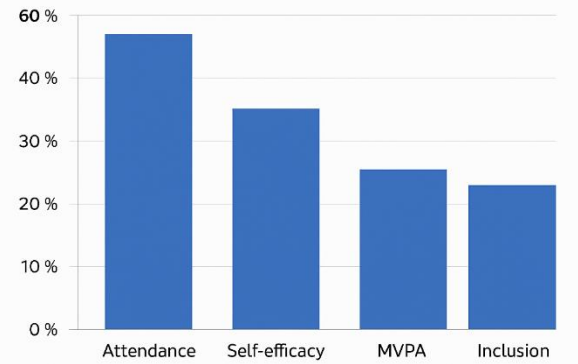
This diagram illustrates the process of identifying, screening, and selecting studies included in the scoping review. A total of 90 records were initially identified from various databases and institutional repositories. After the deduplication process, 82 records remained, which were then screened based on their titles and abstracts, with 32 of them excluded because they were not relevant to the focus of the study. A total of 50 articles were then evaluated further to determine their eligibility, with 10 articles excluded because they did not meet the established inclusion criteria. The final review included 40 studies that were analyzed thematically. Table 1 presents a summary of the included studies, including author names, year of publication, research design, geographic scope, and main focus. The studies represent a variety of disciplines, including educational psychology, physical education, adolescent health, and school counseling development, reflecting the multidisciplinary nature of research on the role of guidance counseling in promoting equal participation in PE at the junior high school level. Although the review primarily focused on studies published between 2015 and 2025, several earlier foundational works were retained to capture the conceptual development of inclusive and equity-oriented physical education. These pre-2015 studies were not included in the formal synthesis but served as theoretical references to contextualize later empirical findings.

Table 1. Summary of Included Studies

No	Author(s), Year	Study Design	Geographical Scope	Primary Focus
1	Aartun et al., 2022	Literature review	Global	Embodiment pedagogies in physical education
2	Anttila et al., 2018	Qualitative reflections	Finland	Intercultural encounters and teachers as integration agents
3	Arufe-Giráldez et al., 2023	Rapid review	Global	Pedagogical models in physical education
4	Barker, 2019	Qualitative	UK	Teacher perspectives and white privilege in culturally diverse schools
5	Berg et al., 2015	Public health perspective	Global	Leisure-time physical activity and public health
6	Bessa et al., 2021	Quantitative intervention	Portugal	Sport education and students' empowerment and confidence
7	F. et al., 2018	Policy/clinical review	Global	Physical activity and exercise promotion
8	Firman et al., 2025	Qualitative	Indonesia	Agrarian labor, gender, and community cohesion as physical activity
9	Gupta, 2018	Conceptual analysis	India	Inclusive approaches for persons with disabilities
10	Hastie et al., 2011	Systematic review	Global	Research trends in Sport Education model
11	Hastie & Wallhead, 2016	Conceptual article	Global	Models-based practice in physical education
12	Hills et al., 2015	Policy recommendations	Global	PE's role in supporting public health priorities
13	Izquierdo & Fiatarone Singh, 2023	Narrative review	Global	Resilience, aging, and physical activity
14	Kao, 2019	Intervention study	Taiwan	Team cohesion and collaboration in sport education
15	Lambert et al., 2024	Concept analysis	Global	Theoretical conceptualizations of embodiment in PE
16	MacPhail et al., 2003	Qualitative	UK	Students' conceptions of sport and sport education
17	MacPhail et al., 2004	Mixed methods	UK	Team affiliation through sport education
18	Mariyono, 2024	Policy analysis	Indonesia	The need for multicultural education
19	Opstoel et al., 2019	Systematic review	Europe	Personal and social development in PE and sports
20	Papaioannou et al., 2020	Commentary	Global	Physical activity, health, and well-being during social distancing
21	Peñarrubia-Lozano et al., 2020	Intervention study	Spain	Challenges as strategy to promote physical activity
22	Penney et al., 2002	Conceptual paper	UK	Sport education as a "connective specialism"
23	Piggin, 2020	Conceptual article	Global	Holistic definition of physical activity
24	Rhodes et al., 2019	Literature synthesis	Global	Theories of physical activity behavior change
25	Roux, 2000	Conceptual article	South Africa	Multireligious education in new education system
26	Seifert & Davids, 2017	Theoretical framework	Global	Ecological dynamics in sport performance and PE
27	Siedentop, 2001	Retrospective review	USA	Sport education: historical perspectives
28	Sierra-Díaz et al., 2019	Systematic review & meta-analysis	Global	Motivating students through models-based practice
29	Siljamäki & Anttila, 2021	Conceptual article	Finland	Developing intercultural competence in PE teachers
30	Sillar, 2016	Anthropological chapter	Andes	Agency and active material culture in agrarian rituals
31	Solmon, 2015	Conceptual framework	USA	Social-ecological approach to promote physical activity
32	Spittle & Byrne, 2009	Quantitative	Australia	Sport education's influence on student motivation
33	Stevens et al., 2017	Conceptual	Global	Social identity approach to physical activity
34	Taylor et al., 2023	Systematic review	Global	Physical and psychological hazards in gig economy
35	Thorburn & Stolz, 2017	Conceptual article	UK	Embodied learning and professionalism in PE
36	Thorjussen & Sisjord, 2018	Qualitative	Norway	Students' experiences in multi-ethnic PE classes
37	Tolgfors, 2020	Conceptual paper	Sweden	Promoting integration through PE
38	Walseth, 2015	Qualitative	Norway	Muslim girls' experiences in PE and religiosity
39	Waters et al., 2018	Qualitative	Ecuador	Physical labor and health among Indigenous women
40	Xiong et al., 2020	Qualitative	China	Physical activity and social integration of migrant women

Of the 40 included studies, around 55% reported improved student engagement or attendance, 35% associated school counseling with enhanced self-efficacy and reduced anxiety, while approximately 25% directly examined participation inequities related to gender, body image, or socioeconomic background. The methodological quality of these studies was evaluated using the Joanna Briggs Institute (*JBI*) critical appraisal tool, which was adapted to the design of each study. Table A1 shows the results of the quality assessment, indicating that most studies were of moderate to high quality. Common strengths included clear formulation of research objectives, use of appropriate analytical approaches, and consistent reporting of findings. Frequently found weaknesses include relatively small sample sizes, a lack of researcher reflexivity, and limited discussion of confounding variables. Based on this assessment, coding assisted by *NVivo* software produced 215 initial codes, which were then refined and grouped thematically into four main themes: (1) Psychological empowerment of students through counseling services; (2) Social inclusion and reduction of barriers to participation in physical education; (3) Strategic collaboration between school counselors and physical education teachers in creating an equitable learning environment, and (4) The impact of equitable participation on student engagement, self-confidence, and well-being. Each theme is presented in the following section with illustrative findings from the analyzed literature. Overall, these findings reflect a multidimensional view of equality in physical education, showing that psychological readiness, social inclusion, and pedagogical collaboration are mutually reinforcing elements of student participation.

Figure 2. Distribution of outcomes reported across included studies (attendance, self-efficacy, MVPA, inclusion)



Note. This figure provides a visual summary of the proportion of studies reporting positive outcomes related to participation, motivation, and psychological readiness in physical education contexts.

A detailed summary of the methodological quality of the 40 included studies, evaluated using the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) critical appraisal tools, is presented in Appendix A (Table A1). Overall, most studies were rated as moderate to high quality, demonstrating clear research objectives, appropriate analytical approaches, and consistent reporting of findings.

Detailed quality-assessment checklists are available in Appendix A.

Psychological Impacts of School Counseling

Analysis using *NVivo* shows that psychological dimensions are the most prominent focus in the overall findings of the literature reviewed. Most studies reveal that the main barriers to student participation in physical education are not purely physical, but rather psychological conditions that affect their readiness to move and engage.

Table 2. Distribution of NVivo Coded References on Psychological Dimensions of School Counseling

Code Category	Number of References	% of Total
Performance anxiety & fear of judgment	62	28.8
Self-efficacy and confidence building	58	27.0
Motivation and intrinsic engagement	51	23.7
Coping strategies and emotional regulation	44	20.5

The table above shows that four main dimensions dominate the thematic coding results. Performance anxiety and fear were assessed as the most frequently occurring psychological barriers, followed by self-efficacy building, intrinsic motivation, and coping strategies and emotional regulation. This pattern emphasizes that psychological dynamics play an important role in determining the extent to which students are willing to actively engage in PE activities.

Counseling services have proven to play a central role in overcoming these psychological pressures. Through individual and group counseling sessions, students learn to recognize and manage their emotions, build self-confidence, and develop positive thinking towards physical activities. Several studies show that strategies such as setting incremental goals, peer support (peer-buddy), and reflective feedback help students increase their self-efficacy and foster intrinsic motivation.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of counseling is dynamic and highly dependent on PE teacher support, school context, and classroom social climate. In a collaborative environment, counseling can transform negative experiences into opportunities for growth, while in less supportive conditions, psychological interventions tend to be less optimal. This emphasizes the importance of placing counseling not merely as a supplement, but as a key strategy in building psychological resilience, reducing emotional barriers, and fostering students' self-confidence so that they can participate actively and equally in physical education.

Social Inclusion and Participation Inequality

Cross loading.(Greer et al., 2025), is a method used to test discriminant validity in measurement model analysis. This test aims to ensure that each indicator is more related to its own construct compared to other constructs. In this analysis, each indicator is evaluated based on its factor loading value against all existing constructs. If an indicator has a higher loading value on the construct it is supposed to have compared to other constructs, then the indicator is considered valid for that construct. Conversely, if an indicator shows a high loading on another construct, this may indicate that the indicator is invalid or irrelevant to the intended construct. Cross loading test.(Broadbridge et al., 2025),helps researchers identify problems in the measurement model, such as indicators that need to be revised or removed. Good results from this analysis will increase confidence in the model used, because it shows that the indicators can differentiate between different constructs effectively. For the results of the cross-loading test, can be seen in Table 4 as follows.

Table 3. Distribution of NVivo Coded References on Social Inclusion and Participation Inequality

Code Category	Number of References	% of Total
Gender stereotypes and participation gaps	48	26.7
Body image concerns and fear of peer judgment	45	25.0
Socioeconomic barriers and unequal access	42	23.3
Discrimination and exclusion of students with disabilities	31	17.2
Cultural norms and family expectations influencing PE	14	7.8

The table above shows the five main categories that most frequently appear in thematic coding related to social inclusion and participation inequality. Gender stereotypes occupy the highest proportion, followed by concerns about body image, socioeconomic barriers, discrimination against students with mild disabilities, and the influence of cultural norms and family expectations.

Female students, for example, often withdraw from competitive activities due to the pressure of modesty norms, concerns about body image, or experiences of ridicule. Meanwhile, students who are overweight or have mild disabilities often face derogatory comments or a lack of opportunities to demonstrate their abilities, reinforcing feelings of "inadequacy" in the same space.

The coding results show that references related to social exclusion often appear alongside nodes such as "body image," "peer stigma," and "perceived incompetence." This pattern shows that inequality is not only rooted in physical abilities but also in psychosocial dimensions that affect students' self-confidence and identity. These barriers are exacerbated by socio-economic differences: students from low-income families may not have access to adequate sports equipment or sufficient family support, further limiting their participation in PE. The role of counseling in this context becomes highly strategic. Counselors act as bridges that help identify and break down these social

barriers through various strategies, such as reflective discussions about gender stereotypes, facilitating peer support groups, and collaborating with PE teachers to create inclusive activities. This approach helps build a safe space where students can feel accepted without fear of judgment.

In such a context, students who were previously reluctant to participate began to show increased engagement, while the exclusive norms that had been socially accepted slowly changed into more equitable practices. These findings confirm that inequality in PE participation is a reflection of broader social structures, and that counseling can play an important role in transforming these spaces to be more inclusive. Efforts to create fairness in participation are not enough to simply change the design of physical activities, but must also target the social and psychological dimensions that limit student involvement. Thus, counseling interventions not only remove barriers, but also foster a sense of belonging and self-confidence, so that all students have equal opportunities to actively participate in physical education learning.

Counselor–Teacher Collaboration and Inclusive Pedagogical Practice

Analysis using *NVivo* shows that counselor-PE teacher collaboration and inclusive pedagogical practices occupy an important position in the overall findings. Rather than standing as an additional service, counseling serves as a pedagogical partner: helping to design learning objectives, aligning psychosocial support with physical activities, and reorganizing classroom routines to make participation safer, fairer, and more meaningful for all students. In many studies, the most noticeable changes occurred when counselors and teachers planned together—setting achievable goals, choosing supportive forms of group work, and agreeing on assessment methods that did not embarrass students with diverse abilities.

This inclusive approach is evident in several key strategies. Task differentiation and inclusive lesson design allow each student to contribute according to their physical and psychological readiness, without losing the challenge of learning. Flexible assessment (e.g., choice of skill demonstrations, reflective journals, or process assessments) reduces performance anxiety and allows room for personal progress. Peer support structures—such as peer buddies or cooperative teams—build a sense of belonging, while restorative circles and positive classroom climate routines normalize mistakes as part of learning, not a source of stigma. *NVivo* co-occurrence queries reveal strong links between the codes “co-planning,” “task differentiation,” “flexible assessment,” “peer support,” and “restorative practices.” This pattern confirms that cross-role collaboration not only changes practices in the field, but also shifts classroom norms: from emphasizing performance to fostering the courage to try, from selection to intentional inclusivity.

Table 4. Distribution of NVivo Coded References on Counselor–Teacher Collaboration and Inclusive Pedagogical Practice

Code Category	Number of References	% of Total
Joint planning & goal alignment (co-planning)	33	24.3
Inclusive lesson design & task differentiation	31	22.8
Flexible assessment & alternative evidence of learning	28	20.6
Peer support structures (peer-buddy, cooperative teams)	24	17.6
Restorative practices & positive classroom climate	20	14.7

Overall, these findings suggest that counselor–teacher collaboration is a key lever for reducing psychological and social barriers while increasing the quality of the physical learning experience. When inclusive pedagogical practices are combined with ongoing counseling support, students who were previously reluctant to participate begin to appear, dare, and consistently engage in physical education learning.

Equitable Physical Education Participation Outcomes

A cross-study synthesis shows that when counseling is combined with inclusive pedagogical practices, the most noticeable change occurs in the quality of student participation in PE. It is not just a matter of “participating,” but how students feel safe, accepted, and capable of moving at the pace of the class. In many reports, students who were initially passive began to attend more consistently, were willing to try motor tasks that they had previously avoided, and persisted longer in moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA). Inhibiting psychological symptoms—such as fear of being

laughed at or anxiety when being assessed—gradually subsided with the emotional support provided by counseling and a more supportive classroom setting.

A number of studies describe relatively consistent mechanism pathways. Counseling interventions (e.g., gradual goal-setting, peer-buddy, structured reflection) increase self-efficacy and positive affect related to movement. At the same time, counselor-PE teacher collaboration led to inclusive lesson design and flexible assessment that reduced performance pressure. This combination fostered a positive PE climate: classroom norms shifted from emphasizing "who is the fastest/strongest" to celebrating each student's progress. In this kind of climate, gaps in attendance and participation between groups (based on gender, weight, mild disability, or socioeconomic status) narrowed—not because of numerical targets alone, but because upstream psychosocial barriers were effectively addressed.

The downstream impact is evident in three clusters of indicators. First, belonging & PE climate: students report feeling more comfortable receiving feedback, more cooperation, and less teasing. Second, engagement & persistence: increased task engagement (start-to-finish), willingness to repeat experiments, and persistence when facing motor difficulties. Third, active behavior/readiness: more active minutes during lessons, stable participation in core activities, and better physical-behavioral readiness. In line with this, the well-being & self-esteem indicators also strengthened—students reported feeling "braver," "more capable," and "more accepted." NVivo co-occurrence findings often show clusters of belonging–engagement–MVPA appearing together, indicating that psychological safety and active behavior are mutually supportive.

It is important to note that the sustainability effect is greatly influenced by simple but routine monitoring: for example, tracking PE attendance per group, logging active minutes per lesson unit, recording counseling check-ins, and weekly student reflections. Schools that linked this data to reflective counselor–teacher meetings tended to maintain their achievements longer. In other words, equal participation is not the result of a momentary intervention, but rather the product of coordinated, consistent, and data-driven practices.

Table 5. Distribution of NVivo Coded References on Equitable Physical Education Participation Outcomes

Code Category	Number of References	% of Total
Belonging & positive PE climate	36	24.2
Engagement & persistence in PE tasks	34	22.8
Active behavior/readiness (MVPA)	31	20.8
Well-being & self-esteem related to movement	28	18.8
Narrowing attendance/participation gaps	20	13.4

The table above summarizes the most frequently occurring outcomes. Belonging/PE climate and engagement/perseverance occupy the largest share, followed by active behavior (MVPA/active minutes), well-being & self-esteem, and narrowing the gap. This pattern confirms that the goal of equitable participation does not stand alone; it grows from tangible psychological support, inclusive classroom practices, and monitoring that is sensitive to differences—all of which remain centered on physical activity as the core of physical education learning.

Summary of Thematic Findings

This summary of findings combines the results of *NVivo* coding, code distribution tables (Tables 3–6), and a narrative reading of the entire corpus. In general, the manuscripts show that physical activity in PE remains the focus of analysis, while counseling acts as a lever to expand equitable participation. At the psychological level, the literature consistently describes performance anxiety, fear of being judged, body image, and previous negative experiences as dominant barriers that reduce students' readiness to move. Counseling interventions—ranging from gradual goal setting, peer support, to reflective feedback—are associated with increased self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation. These effects are most pronounced when support from PE teachers and a supportive classroom climate are present simultaneously.

The dimension of social inclusion shows that participation in PE is not a neutral process. Gender stereotypes, peer stigma, economic limitations, and certain physical conditions create invisible barriers that cause some students to withdraw. This is where counseling serves as a bridge that identifies and breaks down these barriers through reflective dialogue, support group facilitation, and social mediation that reinforces a sense of security. As these changes occur, classroom norms shift from an orientation toward selection and performance to one of access and fairness.

At the pedagogical level, counselor-PE teacher collaboration reorganizes how learning takes place in the classroom. Joint planning aligns learning objectives with psychosocial support; inclusive lesson design and task differentiation provide space for diverse abilities; flexible assessment reduces performance pressure; peer support structures and restorative routines build a positive climate. The co-occurrence pattern in *NVivo* reinforces the interconnection of these practices as a package of classroom policies capable of shifting the learning culture to be more supportive.

The downstream results of the above combination of approaches are evident in the quality of students' physical participation: a sense of belonging and a positive PE climate have increased; engagement and persistence in motor tasks have become more stable; active behavior during lessons—including minutes of vigorous physical activity (MVPA)—has increased; and indicators of well-being and self-esteem related to movement have strengthened. Simultaneously, the gap in attendance and participation between groups narrowed. Thus, structured psychological support and inclusive pedagogical practices not only open access, but also transform that access into real, sustainable, and equitable engagement in physical education.

Discussion

Psychological Impacts of School Counseling

The findings from this review align with wider debates on how physical activity is framed and valued in the health sciences, particularly the tendency to privilege structured performance (sport, fitness tests) while overlooking other determinants of participation, including the psychological readiness that shapes whether students move in the first place. Much like critiques of narrow exercise-centric views in public health (Hastie et al., 2011; MacPhail et al., 2003; Siedentop, 2001), our synthesis suggests that in school settings the emphasis on technique, scores, and timed trials can eclipse factors such as anxiety, fear of judgment, and self-perception. Reframing physical education through a counseling lens places these psychosocial drivers at the center of participation and treats them as legitimate targets for intervention—parallel to the way recent scholarship has urged a broader accounting of movement beyond formal exercise.

Evidence from diverse contexts underscores that high demands without adequate psychological support create uneven participation patterns, just as physically demanding routines in other settings can both build capacity and produce strain (Westerbeek & Eime, 2021). In PE, students often face repeated evaluative events with limited "recovery" time from social exposure, mirroring the training-load/recovery imbalance discussed in exercise science. The counseling-supported classroom begins to correct this imbalance: goal-setting conversations, peer-buddy structures, and reflective feedback offer a kind of psychological recovery window, allowing students to rebuild confidence before the next performance moment.

This perspective resonates with arguments that movement contexts should be appraised not only by their physiological outputs but also by the conditions that make sustained engagement possible (Gupta, 2018; Waters et al., 2018).

The apparent duality we observed—counseling reduces anxiety and lifts self-efficacy, yet its impact varies by school climate—echoes literature that documents mixed outcomes when high demands persist without sufficient buffers (MacPhail et al., 2004; Tolgfors, 2020). Where teachers and counselors co-plan, students report feeling safer to try, fail, and try again; where the social climate remains competitive and judgment-heavy, gains are modest. In other words, counseling functions as a lever for inclusion, but the classroom ecology determines how far that lever moves the system.

However, variation across the reviewed studies indicates substantial heterogeneity in outcomes. Some interventions produced strong improvements in engagement and self-efficacy, while others yielded only modest or short-term gains. These differences appear to stem from variations in program duration, counselor–teacher collaboration intensity, and school climate. In less cohesive environments or where counseling was implemented sporadically, the effects were limited or inconsistent. This heterogeneity highlights that the success of school counseling is contingent upon contextual and relational factors rather than a universal formula.

Methodological limitations across studies should also be acknowledged. Several investigations relied on small samples, short intervention periods, or self-reported indicators of participation. These design constraints, combined with potential publication bias toward positive findings, limit the generalizability of results. Although the majority of studies were rated as moderate to high quality according to JBI criteria, the lack of reflexivity and underreporting of confounding factors reduce confidence in the overall effect estimates.

Positioning Indonesian PE within this broader conversation extends the call to reframe physical activity in education. Recognizing the psychological conditions that precede movement complicates simple narratives that equate more activity with better outcomes and foregrounds the lived realities of adolescents negotiating stigma, body image, and peer evaluation (Spittle & Byrne, 2009). Practically, this implies that school policies should pair activity promotion with counseling-informed safeguards: structured co-planning between counselors and PE teachers, flexible assessment to lower evaluative threat, and routine monitoring of participation gaps. Such an integrative approach bridges counseling, physical education, and student health, and aligns with efforts to contextualize activity within the social and psychological economies of schooling across the Global South (Lambert et al., 2024; Nurman et al., 2022).

The reviewed evidence suggests that interventions work best when sustained co-planning between counselors and teachers is combined with institutional backing, ongoing reflective practice, and a low-pressure classroom atmosphere. Environments that value inclusivity over competition, supported by leadership commitment, tend to amplify the benefits of counseling on both motivation and engagement. In contrast, fragmented initiatives without structural support often lose momentum once external facilitation ends.

Social Inclusion and Participation Inequality

Findings on the theme of Social Inclusion and Participation Inequality resonate with the global discourse on unequal burdens and access, while also showing how social inequality manifests itself in patterns of participation in PE. Literature that highlights the double burden on women (Mislia et al., 2021; Waters et al., 2018) helps explain why some female students tend to withdraw from competitive activities: domestic demands at home, expectations of modesty, and concerns about body image are intertwined with school experiences.

In the Indonesian context, the co-occurrence of NVivo on nodes such as fatigue, time pressure, and lack of recognition indicates that inequality is not merely an abstract socio-economic issue, but is embodied in psychosocial experiences that affect readiness to move—in line with the argument that inequality is often embedded in the body (Opstoel et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2023). Within Moser's triple role framework, the intersection of productive–reproductive–community roles may explain why some female students experience socio-emotional fatigue that reduces their space for participation in PE classes.

Beyond physical or emotional fatigue, another layer of inequality emerges in the form of invisibility. The dimension of invisibility also appears to intersect with barriers to participation. Women's contributions are often positioned as helping rather than working, reinforcing feelings of being undervalued and leading to withdrawal from decision-making spaces—a pattern also reported in Sub-Saharan Africa (Hewstone, 2015). In the school context, this narrative manifests as a lack of recognition for female students' efforts in motor tasks or evaluations that emphasize peak performance over individual progress. The coding results reveal a link between peer stigma, perceived incompetence, and body image—leading us to conclude that social exclusion works through psychological mechanisms that suppress self-confidence and a sense of belonging.

While gendered constraints limit girls' participation through modesty norms and fatigue, male students encounter a different form of inequality rooted in social expectations of strength and competitiveness.

For male students, inequality takes on another form. The literature on masculinity highlights expectations of a supportive role and an orientation toward heavy physical work as sources of pressure (Hastie & Wallhead, 2016; Yusriadi et al., 2022). At school, this often manifests as demands to always be strong and competitive, which paradoxically can inhibit seeking psychological help or result in avoidance behavior when at risk of failure in front of peers. The NVivo cluster on economic insecurity/market risk in the agrarian literature offers a useful analogy: external role pressures can shift into performative pressures in the PE classroom, creating a different but equally important psychological vulnerability to address.

Taken together, these findings confirm that disparities in participation in PE are not neutral; they are mediated by social structures and internalized psychologically. The practical implication is the need for a support architecture that targets both social roots and psychological symptoms: counseling that is sensitive to gender and socioeconomic status; counselor–teacher collaboration to organize flexible assessments, peer support that reduces stigma, and restorative routines that normalize failure as part of learning. In this way, schools can shift the focus from selection and performance hierarchies towards access, recognition, and personal progress—in line with the literature's call to understand physical activity in a broader socio-cultural context (Aartun et al., 2022; Arufe-Giráldez et al., 2023; Thorjussen & Sisjord, 2018).

Collectively, these insights underline that equity in physical education requires interventions that not only reduce barriers but actively reconfigure the relational dynamics of classrooms to value empathy, recognition, and collaborative achievement.

Counselor–Teacher Collaboration and Inclusive Pedagogical Practice

Findings on this theme confirm that collaboration between counselors and physical education teachers is not merely an administrative procedure, but rather a social practice that shapes the way the body, emotions, and relationships are conducted in the classroom. Similar to the anthropological framework that views physical practices as meaningful experiences, pedagogical collaboration also presents daily rituals—ranging from co-planning, task differentiation, to flexible assessment—that instill new values, symbols, and social order in the PE space.

In other words, physical activity in schools cannot be reduced to a mechanical effort to improve fitness scores; it is a life experience guided by the values of togetherness, appreciation of differences, and psychological security built through cross-role work. Cross-cultural analogies help to understand this dimension.

In West African yam festivals, collective work is accompanied by ritual performances that affirm communal identity (Roux, 2000); in the Andes Highlands, potato rituals bind physical labor to cycles of reciprocity and spiritual continuity (Sillar, 2016). In schools, similar patterns emerge when counselors and teachers organize social synchrony: opening routines that reduce anxiety, cooperative teamwork, or restorative circles that restore relationships. These practices demonstrate a dual function similar to agrarian work—producing material outcomes (more equitable participation) while supporting the symbolic world of the class (sense of belonging and mutual trust). This reading is in line with Bourdieu's idea of habitus as the body as a carrier of identity and social order, as well as Durkheim's collective effervescence to explain why synchronized movement can give rise to cohesion and emotional resilience.

The Indonesian context shows how class rituals such as joint goal-setting, structured reflection, and process assessment can imbue movement with new meaning: students' efforts are not just performance, but confirmation of membership in a learning community. Our NVivo cluster analysis—which frequently linked co-planning, task differentiation, flexible assessment, peer support, and restorative practices—reinforces that cross-role collaboration produces a cohesive pedagogical package. Much like a planting–harvesting ceremony that unites physical labor and symbols of communal solidarity, counselor–PE teacher collaboration unites psychosocial support and physical activity design into an inclusive and meaningful learning experience.

The implications go beyond narrow biomedical definitions of physical activity (intensity–duration–health outcomes). Agrarian literature shows that physical labor can be a carrier of identity, tradition, and collective memory (Firman et al., 2025; Yusriadi & Hamim, 2022). In the PE space, counselor-teacher collaboration plays a similar role: it transmits the values of fairness, mutual respect, and the

courage to try, often in ways that are more powerful than verbal messages. By placing this collaboration in a broader framework, our discussion opens up the possibility of reimagining physical activity in schools—not only as a determinant of individual fitness, but as a cultural medium that supports social life, psychological resilience, and the sustainability of equitable participation (Anttila et al., 2018; Rhodes et al., 2019).

Equitable Physical Education Participation Outcomes

Findings on this theme show that equal participation in PE is not merely the result of increased training intensity or improved technique, but rather arises from socio-cultural experiences built in the classroom. From the perspective of embodied practice, physical activity cannot be reduced to mechanical movements; it is a life experience intertwined with values, symbols, and social relations—a perspective that is in line with anthropological and sociological readings of physical practice. Cross-context analogies help clarify this point: just as collective work in West African yam festivals shapes communal identity (Roux, 2000) or potato rituals in the Andes Highlands bind physical labor to cycles of reciprocity and spiritual continuity (Sillar, 2016), inclusively managed PE spaces also organize class rituals—joint warm-ups, weekly goal-setting, peer-buddy systems, and closing reflections—that affirm togetherness and a sense of belonging.

In this paper, NVivo cluster analysis often links belonging, positive PE climate, engagement, and active behavior indicators (e.g., minutes of active physical activity/MVPA). This connection can be interpreted through the lens of social capital: the practice of gotong royong (mutual cooperation) at school (cooperative teamwork, mutual feedback) builds bonding—close ties between students—while cross-class projects or counselor–teacher–parent collaboration expands bridging to more diverse networks. In line with the framework of resilience theory, patterns of togetherness instilled through physical-pedagogical routines strengthen the adaptive capacity of students and classes: they recover more quickly from failed experiences, are more prepared to try again, and are more consistently engaged in core activities (Cahaya et al., 2022). In other words, movement becomes a medium that connects learning productivity (participation indicators) with the social-emotional resilience of the classroom community.

This approach broadens the horizon of physical activity research, which often focuses on duration, intensity, and biomedical outcomes. Just as agricultural practices are read as carriers of identity and collective memory, inclusive PE class rituals also transmit values—fairness, mutual respect, courage to try—in ways that are often more powerful than verbal instruction (Berg et al., 2015). When class norms shift from selection to access, from peak performance assessment to recognition of individual progress, we see a narrowing of the attendance/participation gap, an increase in engagement, and an increase in positive affect and self-esteem related to movement. This perspective affirms that equitable participation is the result of the integration of psychological, social, and pedagogical dimensions—not just individual fitness determinants—and that physical activity in schools functions as a cultural medium that supports social life and the resilience of the learning community (Firman et al., 2025; Walseth, 2015).

Contributions and Research Gaps

This review contributes to the interdisciplinary study of physical activity in schools by placing school counseling as the primary lens for understanding and expanding equitable physical education participation (PE). By weaving together perspectives on psychological impact, social inclusion, inclusive pedagogical practices, and equitable participation outcomes, this synthesis offers a more holistic understanding: student physical participation is not merely the output of structured exercise, but an embodied experience shaped by emotions, social relations, and school culture. The novelty of this approach lies in shifting the focus from mere physical performance to the psychosocial conditions that enable movement—a refinement that aligns with the literature's push to move beyond narrow definitions of physical activity as structured sports/recreation within the framework of public health and sports science.

Theoretically, this study bridges health science, educational psychology, educational sociology, and anthropology by positioning PE participation at the intersection of physical effort, social stratification, and the reproduction of school culture. NVivo-assisted thematic analysis shows that students' decisions to move—or refrain from moving—are not neutral, but rather embedded in the context of performance anxiety, gender stereotypes, body image, socioeconomic status, and class norms. This reading reinforces the call for physical activity research to go beyond biomedical indicators (duration, intensity, health

outcomes) and also echo tangible practices that support the life of the learning community, especially in the context of the Global South and Indonesia, as discourse demands the linking of physical activity with the broader socio-cultural environment.

At the practice level, the main contribution of this study is to formulate a collaborative intervention package: co-planning between counselors and physical education teachers, inclusive lesson design and task differentiation, flexible assessments that reduce evaluative threats, and peer support structures and restorative routines. When these approaches are combined, schools not only increase engagement and active minutes/MVPA, but also foster belonging, a positive PE climate, and students' psychological resilience. This framework is in line with efforts to broaden the understanding of the WHO Physical Activity framework, which often emphasizes structured exercise, by adding attention to the psychosocial prerequisites that make physical activity accessible and sustainable in the school ecology.

However, a number of research gaps remain prominent. First, long-term evidence on the sustainability of counseling's impact on PE participation—including trajectories of MVPA, self-efficacy, positive affect, and attendance gaps—remains limited; longitudinal designs are needed to capture changes across semesters/years. Second, combined objective–subjective measurements (e.g., counting active minutes with an accelerometer alongside psychosocial indicators) are rarely used, so the causal relationship between psychological support and physical behavior has not been strongly mapped. Third, dimensions of intersectionality—gender, socioeconomic status, mild disability, and body image—are often discussed separately; we still lack evidence showing how these factors intersect and moderate the effects of interventions. Fourth, implementation research on program fidelity, school capacity, and school climate moderators is relatively scarce, even though these factors determine the replication of policies on a larger scale.

Closing these gaps requires an interdisciplinary and participatory approach. Methodologically, future studies should combine longitudinal cohorts at the school/class level, clustered quasi-experiments or light cluster RCTs to test counselor-teacher intervention packages, mixed-methods that combine MVPA metrics with student experience narratives, and classroom ethnography to explore the practices and norms that govern who feels entitled to move. Participatory action research involving students, physical education teachers, counselors, and parents can ensure that intervention designs are aligned with real needs and culturally sensitive. On the reporting side, referring to the PRISMA-ScR/JBI standards remains important for maintaining transparency, while adapting the WHO framework helps synergize health indicators with indicators of participatory justice.

By weaving together the WHO Physical Activity framework, gender and work/equality studies, and educational sociology-anthropology into a single synthesis, this study offers conceptual contributions and practical directions: reimagining physical activity in schools as a cultural medium that enables movement, builds self-confidence, and strengthens the cohesion of the learning community. The next research agenda—which is longitudinal, multi-method, and participatory—will not only fill empirical gaps but also ensure that policies and interventions are truly rooted in students' lived experiences and effectively promote equity, well-being, and sustainable physical participation in physical education.

Despite encouraging evidence, practical implementation challenges persist. Counselors frequently face limited time allocations, competing administrative responsibilities, and insufficient training in inclusive pedagogies. Furthermore, the fidelity of intervention delivery—how closely schools adhere to the intended collaborative model—varies widely. Without systematic monitoring and institutional support, even well-designed programs risk fading into isolated practices rather than becoming sustainable components of school culture.

Conclusions

This review places physical activity in physical education (PE) at the center of analysis and shows that counseling is not a complement, but rather a lever for achieving equal participation. The thematic synthesis confirms four main points. First, in the psychological domain, counseling reduces performance anxiety, strengthens self-efficacy, and reshapes students' readiness to move—in line with the literature's call for the definition of physical activity to go beyond a narrow focus on structured exercise

(Barker, 2019; Izquierdo & Fiatarone Singh, 2023). Second, in the dimension of social inclusion, participation inequality was found to operate through gender stereotypes, peer stigma, body image, and socioeconomic status; counseling acts as a bridge that breaks down these invisible barriers (Siljamäki & Anttila, 2021). Third, collaboration between counselors and physical education teachers resulted in a package of inclusive pedagogical practices—co-planning, task differentiation, flexible assessment, peer support, and restorative routines—that shifted classroom norms from selection to access. Fourth, at the level of participation outcomes, schools saw improvements in PE climate and sense of belonging, increases in engagement and persistence, improvements in active behavior (e.g., minutes of vigorous physical activity/MVPA), and a narrowing of the participation gap—findings consistent with the argument that socio-psychological conditions determine the sustainability of movement (Bessa et al., 2021; Fraile-Martinez et al., 2025).

The conceptual contribution of this study is to reimagine physical activity in schools as an embodied practice underpinned by values, relationships, and collective memory—not merely biomedical outputs. This perspective resonates with anthropological readings of physical practices as carriers of identity and cohesion (Westerbeek & Eime, 2021) and the notion of social capital and community resilience that grows from collaborative practices—the school equivalent of gotong royong (Gupta, 2018). By linking counseling, inclusive pedagogy, and indicators of active behavior, this framework enriches the debate on physical activity in the Global South and provides a foundation for more contextual policies. However, research gaps remain. Long-term evidence on the sustainability of counseling's impact on MVPA, self-efficacy, positive affect, and attendance gaps is still limited; longitudinal and mixed-methods studies are needed. Intersectionality (gender × socioeconomic status × mild disability × body image) is rarely tested as a moderator of effects. Implementation research on fidelity, school capacity, and the influence of school climate is also minimal. Addressing these gaps requires an interdisciplinary and participatory approach that combines reporting standards such as PRISMA-ScR/JBI with more context-sensitive physical activity policy frameworks (Tricco et al., 2018).

Practically, schools are encouraged to: (1) institute co-planning between counselors and PE teachers; (2) implement flexible assessments that reduce evaluative threat; (3) build peer support structures and restorative routines; and (4) monitor simple data (PE attendance, active minutes, counseling check-ins, perceptions of inclusion) to close participation gaps. With these steps, promoting physical activity not only encourages more movement, but also transforms access into equitable, safe, and sustainable engagement—a goal that unites health, educational justice, and the resilience of learning communities (Peñarrubia-Lozano et al., 2020; Siedentop, 2001; Xiong et al., 2020).

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Appendix A. Methodological Quality Assessment of Included Studies

Table A1. Methodological Quality Assessment of Included Studies

No	Author(s), Year	Study Design	*JBI Tool* Applied	Quality Rating
1	Aartun et al., 2022	Literature review	*JBI* checklist for systematic reviews	High

2	Anttila et al., 2018	Qualitative reflections	*JBI* checklist for qualitative research	Moderate to High
3	Arufe-Giráldez et al., 2023	Rapid review	*JBI* checklist for scoping reviews	High
4	Barker, 2019	Qualitative	*JBI* checklist for qualitative research	Moderate to High
5	Berg et al., 2015	Public health perspective	*JBI* checklist for text & opinion	Moderate
6	Bessa et al., 2021	Quantitative intervention	*JBI* checklist for quasi-experimental studies	High
7	F. et al., 2018	Policy/clinical review	*JBI* checklist for systematic reviews	High
8	Firman et al., 2025	Qualitative	*JBI* checklist for qualitative research	High
9	Gupta, 2018	Conceptual analysis	Not applicable (conceptual)	Moderate
10	Hastie et al., 2011	Systematic review	*JBI* checklist for systematic reviews	High
11	Hastie & Wallhead, 2016	Conceptual article	Not applicable (conceptual)	Moderate
12	Hills et al., 2015	Policy recommendations	*JBI* checklist for text & opinion	Moderate
13	Izquierdo & Fiatarone Singh, 2023	Narrative review	*JBI* checklist for text & opinion	Moderate
14	Kao, 2019	Intervention study	*JBI* checklist for quasi-experimental studies	High
15	Lambert et al., 2024	Concept analysis	Not applicable (conceptual)	Moderate
16	MacPhail et al., 2003	Qualitative	*JBI* checklist for qualitative research	Moderate to High
17	MacPhail et al., 2004	Mixed methods	*JBI* checklist for analytical cross-sectional studies	Moderate to High
18	Mariyono, 2024	Policy analysis	*JBI* checklist for text & opinion	Moderate
19	Opstoel et al., 2019	Systematic review	JBI checklist for systematic reviews	High
20	Papaioannou et al., 2020	Commentary	Not applicable	Moderate
21	Peñarrubia-Lozano et al., 2020	Intervention study	*JBI* checklist for quasi-experimental studies	High
22	Penney et al., 2002	Conceptual paper	Not applicable	Moderate
23	Piggin, 2020	Conceptual article	Not applicable	Moderate
24	Rhodes et al., 2019	Literature synthesis	*JBI* checklist for systematic reviews	High
25	Roux, 2000	Conceptual article	Not applicable	Moderate
26	Seifert & Davids, 2017	Theoretical framework	Not applicable	Moderate
27	Siedentop, 2001	Retrospective review	*JBI* checklist for text & opinion	Moderate
28	Sierra-Díaz et al., 2019	Systematic review & meta-analysis	*JBI* checklist for systematic reviews	High
29	Siljamäki & Anttila, 2021	Conceptual article	Not applicable	Moderate
30	Sillar, 2016	Anthropological chapter	Not applicable	Moderate
31	Solmon, 2015	Conceptual framework	Not applicable	Moderate
32	Spittle & Byrne, 2009	Quantitative	*JBI* checklist for analytical cross-sectional studies	Moderate to High
33	Stevens et al., 2017	Conceptual	Not applicable	Moderate
34	Taylor et al., 2023	Systematic review	*JBI* checklist for systematic reviews	High
35	Thorburn & Stolz, 2017	Conceptual article	Not applicable	Moderate
36	Thorjussen & Sisjord, 2018	Qualitative	*JBI* checklist for qualitative research	Moderate to High
37	Tolfors, 2020	Conceptual paper	Not applicable	Moderate
38	Walseth, 2015	Qualitative	*JBI* checklist for qualitative research	Moderate to High
39	Waters et al., 2018	Qualitative	*JBI* checklist for qualitative research	High
40	Xiong et al., 2020	Qualitative	*JBI* checklist for qualitative research	High