

## Parents' Perceptions of Secondary Physical Education

Lauren Earley<sup>1</sup>, Matthew Fleet<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Worcester

<sup>2</sup>Solent University, UK

Correspondence: Matthew Fleet, Solent University, UK.

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### Abstract

There is a large quantity of research (Alguacil, 2018; Ciotto & Gagnon, 2018; McKenzie and Lounsbery, 2014) which states the importance Physical Education (PE) has in pupils' lives. However, there is a state of decline for the status of the subject (Harris, 2018; Kirk et al., 2013). Parents perception is an under-researched area (Na, 2015; Yilmaz, 2018), especially in the UK, therefore, it is important parents' beliefs are explored to understand an important stakeholder's viewpoint. **Purpose:** To explore and gain an understanding of the perception's parents have of Secondary PE, investigating what the perceptions are and why they have them. **Methodology:** This study uses a mixed-methods exploratory design to discover, the perceptions parents have on Secondary school PE, using a quantitative online survey and qualitative semi-structured interviews. 263 parents/guardians completed the survey, which was then followed by 8 parents taking part in the interviews. **Results:** From the data sets collected 5 themes were identified: Importance of PE; Teacher-Pupil relationship; PE in relation to other subjects; competitive nature of PE and impact PE has on confidence. 50% percent of parents did believe that PE is as important as subjects such Maths, English and Science, but, in comparison to other subjects 61% of parents do not favour PE overall. With results demonstrating the growing awareness parents have of the crucial role PE plays in health and wellbeing for pupils. **Conclusion:** Although parents understand the importance of PE, parents perceptions differ on some aspects of the subject. This study is a starting point for other researchers and should be continued to be researched to support PE in the curriculum.

**Keywords:** parents, perceptions, secondary, physical, education

### 1. Introduction

Children are shaped through their experiences at home and school. Therefore, parents and teachers, acting as key role models in a young person's life, are extremely important when it comes to these experiences (Raudsepp, 2006). Various academics (Bartram, 2006; Davis-Kean, 2005; Desimone, 1999; Erdener and Knoepfel, 2018; Erola et al., 2016; Feinstein and Sabates, 2006) have undertaken research on the influence a parent can have on a child's education. However, there are limited studies into parental influence and their perception of Physical Education (PE) (Na, 2015; Yilmaz, 2018). Research has indicated that if a child is supported and persuaded by their parents to be active physically, they are more likely to continue to be so later in life (Beets et al., 2010; Thompson et al., 2010; Wright et al., 1997). Individual engagement (or) interest in Physical Activity (PA), PE or sport is also understood to be heavily influenced by school experiences, (Capel & Whitehead, 2015; Green, 2008; Kirk et al., 2013; Randall & Fleet, 2020), and shaped by parental influence (Beets et al., 2010; Davison, 2004; Thompson *et al.*, 2010) therefore positive influences can encourage lifelong participation. In the UK PE is a compulsory element of the national curriculum (Capel & Whitehead, 2015). Yet in spite of this formal status, since the early 1970s, PE '*has been in a state of decline and marginalization*' (Kirk, p45, Cited in Green 2008). Numerous academics have noted the need to improve the subject's status (Bailey, 2010; Blair & Capel, 2011; Capel & Whitehead, 2015; Green, 2008; Green and Hardman, 2011; Harris, 2018; Kirk et al., 2013; Randall et al., 2016; Stidder and Hayes, 2010).

There are many conflicting views on the value and purpose of PE; sampling a variety of activities, to get fit, improve mental health, or to be physically active have been proposed (Andrew *et al.*, 2017; Bailey et al., 2009; Green, 2003; Green and Hardman, 2005; Hastie, 2016; Stolz, 2014). There is some consensus over the purpose of education which is the acquisition of valuable knowledge and according to White (2006), this is made up of two clear distinct forms Propositional (or sometimes called theoretical) which comprises of information and judgement; and Practical which consists of skills or abilities. Practical knowledge is the most significant form of knowledge in relation to the subject of PE. However, it is

theoretical knowledge relating to Science, Technology English and Maths (STEM) subjects which are frequently viewed as more valuable and have the capability to change viewpoints, generate balanced logical thinking and independence (Brown et al., 2011; Griggs, 2007, 2010; Oxley, 1998). Consequently, this assumption underpins an academic curriculum focusing on intellectual taxonomies, centering on approximately seven or eight academic subjects. As PE is not focused on the attainment and mastery of theoretical knowledge, some argue that it is non-academic and thus non-educational (McNamee, 2005; Reid, 1996). This in part instigated recent changes to make the subject more academic the recent changes were in part an attempt to prevent its status being marginalised and improve the educational worth, whilst being in a heavily contested period for curriculum space (Fleet, 2020; Reid, 1996). In recent years those working in PE have endeavoured to justify the educational value of PE by acknowledging the contribution it makes to character development, moral education, health education and aesthetic education (Corredor, 2015; Evans, 1986). Contemporary PE curriculums (DfE, 1989, 2013, 2014), have veered towards a dynamic hybrid, recognising the cultural value in sport and the educational nature and worth of the activities that make up PE.

### **Importance of PE**

Statistics have shown that 20% of girls and 23% of boys aged 5–15 years are performing the advised amount of PA per day in England (Health Survey for England, 2018). The recommended time for 5–18-year-olds is 60 minutes a day (NHS, 2018; Trigwell *et al.*, 2015). Alguacil (2018) highlighted the importance PE has on influencing lifelong participation in PA. Currie *et al.* (2011) found there to be an increased risk in pupils developing unhealthy behaviours such as physical inactivity, because of sedentary habits developed at a young age. Therefore, it is vital that pupils have opportunities and positive experiences of PA in school so they are able to continue these into adult life.

Pupils are able to develop and transfer skills they learn throughout experiences of quality PE after their statutory school education (McKenzie and Lounsbury, 2014; Trost *et al.*, 1997). There is evidence to suggest PE supports the development of collaborative and interpersonal skills, such as communication, responsibility, and decision-making (Houston and Kulinna, 2014). Furthermore, Na (2015) reported PE develops social behaviours such as etiquette, ethical behaviour, positive interaction, teamwork and cooperation. It could be argued this is why PE is a unique subject (Ciotto & Gagnon, 2018), as it supports and develops vital 'life' skills. Additionally many academics (Bailey *et al.*, 2009; Inchley *et al.*, 2011; Morgan *et al.*, 2012; Perlman, 2014; Welk and Eklund, 2005) suggest that the subject improves pupils' self-esteem and regular PA has been recognised to decrease stress, anxiety and depression (Hassmén *et al.*, 2000). Hence, PE lessons which are well planned and delivered will be able to support and contribute to the improvement of pupils' psychological health (Bailey, 2006). In addition, pupils who perform well academically, achieving high grades, have been found to be physically active and many practitioners have found a positive correlation between academic achievement and physical fitness (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Chomitz *et al.*, 2009; Erwin *et al.*, 2012; Green *et al.*, 2007; Haapala, 2013; Miller *et al.*, 2005; Shephard, 1996; Singh *et al.*, 2012; Wittberg *et al.*, 2010).

However, it is important to recognise that there is evidence to suggest that PE in its current form is not liked by all and has a limited impact on encouraging PA in later life, therefore positive change is clearly necessary (Strean, 2009; Cardinal *et al.*, 2013). It is evident that there is dissidence over the true value and purpose of the subject (Green and Hardman., 2005; Green 2003; Stotlz, 2014; Hastie, 2016; Bailey., et al 2009; Lopes., et al, 2017) with the subject needing to become more inclusive and genuinely provide the opportunity to form lasting, positive memories and to encourage lifelong participation (OECD, 2019; Cardinal *et al.*, 2013).

The National Curriculum for PE (NCPE) has encountered condemnation for being elitist, white, upper-middle class and male dominated (Kirk and Tinning., 1990). This suggests that the curricular was not appropriate for all where the political ideology of elite success was pursued rather than the interests of all (Whitehead, 2010). Creating an interesting paradoxical situation where the NCPE proposes a comprehensive and balanced curriculum for all and increasing mass participation and PA, while also endeavouring to accomplish the government's objectives of being a platform for elite sport (Piotrowski, 2000; Capel & Whitehead., 2015; Kirk and Gorely., 2000; Bailey., et al., 2009; Houlihan and Green., 2006). This ambiguity of aims is not faced within any other secondary subject. The customary teaching approach for PE focussing on talent development is inharmonious with promoting inclusion and equity for all (Penney, 2002).

### **Parental Influences**

An individual's engagement in PA, PE or sport is believed to be heavily influenced by their school experiences, (Capel & Whitehead, 2015; Green, 2008; Kirk *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, their experiences develop their PA and dependent on the experiences lead to the amount of PA they do as an adult (Mulvihill *et al.*, 2000; Ornelas *et al.*, 2007; Telama *et al.*, 1997; Thompson *et al.*, 2010). However, many academics (Brustad, 1996; Clement, Brooks, and Wilmoth, 2009; Li *et al.*, 2007), have found children's perceptions are impacted by their parents' beliefs regarding PA. Furthermore, academics (Campbell *et al.*, 2007; Dwyer *et al.*, 2008; Woods *et al.*, 2012) have also stated parents are more likely to transport, facilitate and encourage their children to have active routines. However, Trigwell *et al.* (2015), found parents lacked awareness of the

PA recommendations and assumed school would be their child's main provider for PA. This suggests not all parents are completely aware of what PE entails and proposes parents need to be educated on PE.

Jin *et al.* (2011) found that when pupils make their Key Stage 4 option choices over 80% sought advice from parents and over 90% of those who did found it useful. However, it should be noted that parental involvement in the pupil's academic self-efficacy is under-researched (Fan and Williams, 2010). In relation to PE, Olivares *et al.* (2015) state that parent influence on PE is greater than the influence of the PE teacher. To encourage positive parental involvement first their perceptions and beliefs need to be understood about school subjects and educational topics (Na, 2015; Sheehy, 2006). Studies on parental perception have been conducted globally in countries such as Ireland (Coulter *et al.*, 2019), USA (Na, 2015; Sheehy, 2006) and Turkey (Yilmaz, 2018). With limited studies in UK relating to PE, focusing on pupil perception there is rationale to further understand parent perception (Alguacil, 2018; Bebetos & Antoniou, 2008; Carlson, 1995; Hodge and Jansma, 1999; Koca *et al.*, 2005; Subramaniam and Silverman, 2007; Ünlü, 2012).

## 2. Methods

### *Design*

A mixed-methods explanatory approach was used to fulfil the aims of this study and take into account the strengths and minimise the weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative methods (Cohen *et al.*, 2018; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). Qualitative data facilitated further explanation and built upon the initial quantitative results (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). The research started with the use of an online survey (quantitative). The survey informed the choice of questions for the semi-structured interviews (qualitative) and helped explain the initial quantitative data.

### *Participants*

Participants were selected through purposeful sampling and were parents who have a child in Secondary Education (11-16 years old) in the UK (Cohen *et al.*, 2018). A total of 263 parents/guardians responded to the online survey: 21 Fathers, 234 Mothers and 8 others (guardians). Of parents/guardians who completed the survey, 8 were interviewed after showing interest in wanting to continue to participate in the research. Social media was used to find participants with a pre-determined selection criteria of having a child in secondary education. It is recognised that there is a disproportion of males to females. Van Holland De Graaf (2018) states mothers still spend considerably more time with their children than fathers.

### *Data collection*

#### *Survey*

An adapted version of Öncü and Güven's (2011) 'Parents attitude scale towards physical education class' was utilised incorporating features of the work from Yilmaz (2018). This survey has 21 statements using a 4-point Likert scaled answer format, this produced an ipsative measure where no indifferent option is available (Cohen *et al.*, 2018). The aim was to explore 4 factors; perceptual, functional, importance, and support Öncü and Güven (2011). Some of the statements were negative, however, the majority of the statements were positive (Yilmaz, 2018). The survey data was collected first with the use of SurveyMonkey®. Statements were randomised, utilising the features of the available computer software.

#### *Interviews*

Semi-structured interviews allowed the gathering of rich data which help to build a holistic picture of why parents had their perception of PE. The face-to-face interviews, lasting approximately 40 minutes, at mutually agreeable location, they focused on the key findings from the quantitative data collected with the online survey. Semi-structured interviews (Flick, 2014; Jones *et al.*, 2013; Silverman, 2016) were used as they allow a researcher to explore and develop an understanding of the perceptions the participants have when talking about what they know and how they feel. This approach allowed flexibility to probe the parental perception where required (Silverman, 2016).

### *Data Availability Statement*

Data available on request from the authors.

### *Data analysis*

The online quantitative survey was analysed using descriptive statistics and to express the data, means and standard deviation were used. Furthermore, the qualitative semi-structured interviews were transcribed verbatim from the voice recorded file, to maintain confidentiality all identifying information was removed. Transcripts were then coded using thematic analysis (Cohen *et al.*, 2018; Roulston, 2001).

### *Ethical Considerations and Acknowledgements*

Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the

research process, ensuring the identification of participants was disguised. Furthermore, small parts of the transcripts were removed to protect anonymity and retain validity. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the process at any time (Bryman, 2008) and were asked to confirm if the transcripts were accurate of the interviews.

### Results

There were 4 factors explored in the quantitative online survey perceptual; functional; importance; and support with the option of Strongly Agree (1) to Strongly Disagree (4).

Table 1. Scoring Distributions of online survey

Factor	Items	Mean	SD	Outcome
Perceptual	8	3.62	0.14	Disagree
Functional	5	2.39	0.09	Inconclusive
Support	4	1.87	0.2	Agree
Importance	4	2	0.34	Agree

Table 1 shows the collective results of the survey. These findings suggest parents' perceptions are positive as they tend to disagree with the negative statements relating to PE. In addition, the results of the survey suggest parents agree that PE is an important subject. However, when comparing PE to other subjects' 61% of parents do not favour PE. Therefore, this was an area that was further explored through interview.

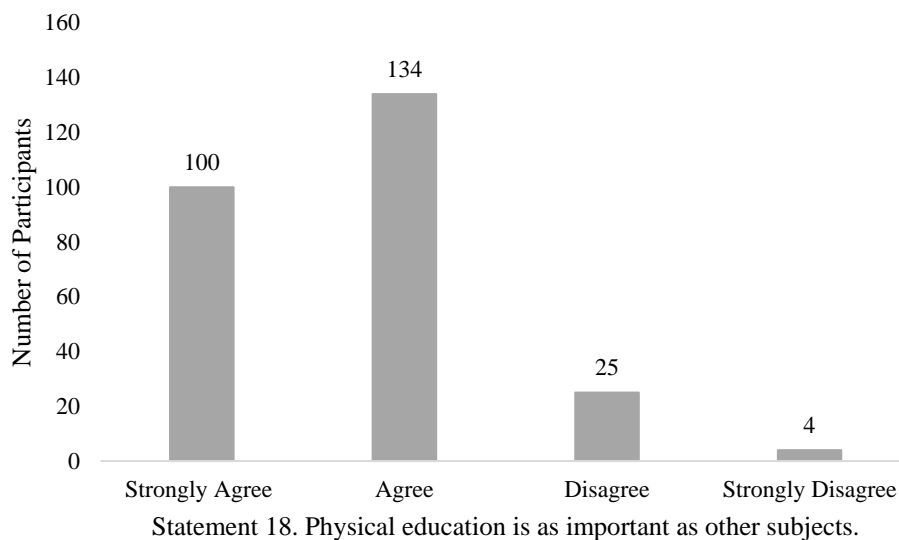


Figure 1. Survey results of statement 18

Figure 1. suggests the vast major of parents think PE is an important subject and has a place in the curriculum. However, the survey also explored the perceptions parents have of PE in regard to other curriculum subjects.

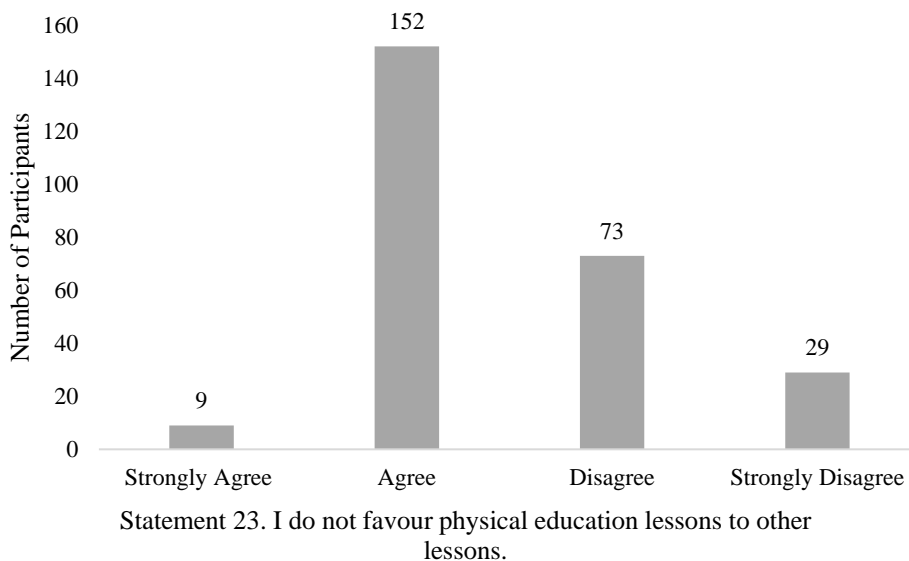


Figure 2. Survey results of statement 23

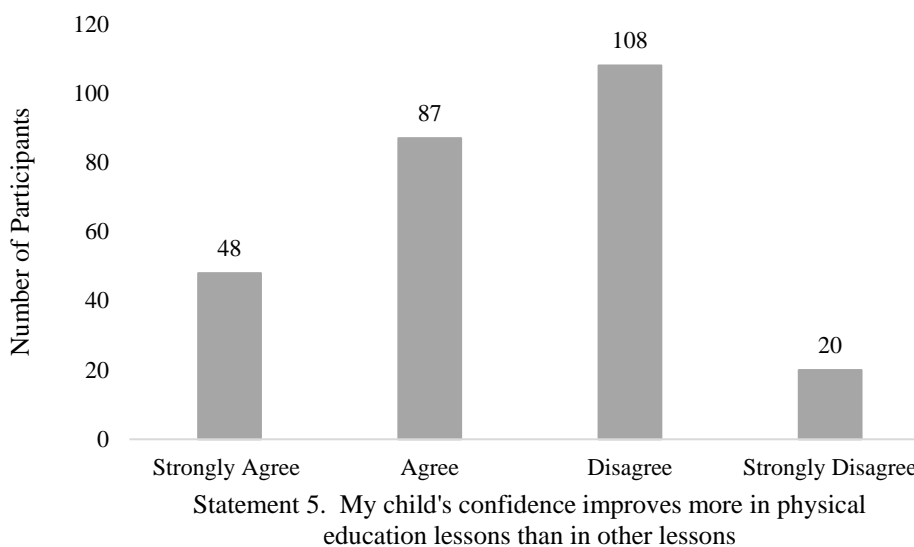


Figure 3. Survey results of statement 5

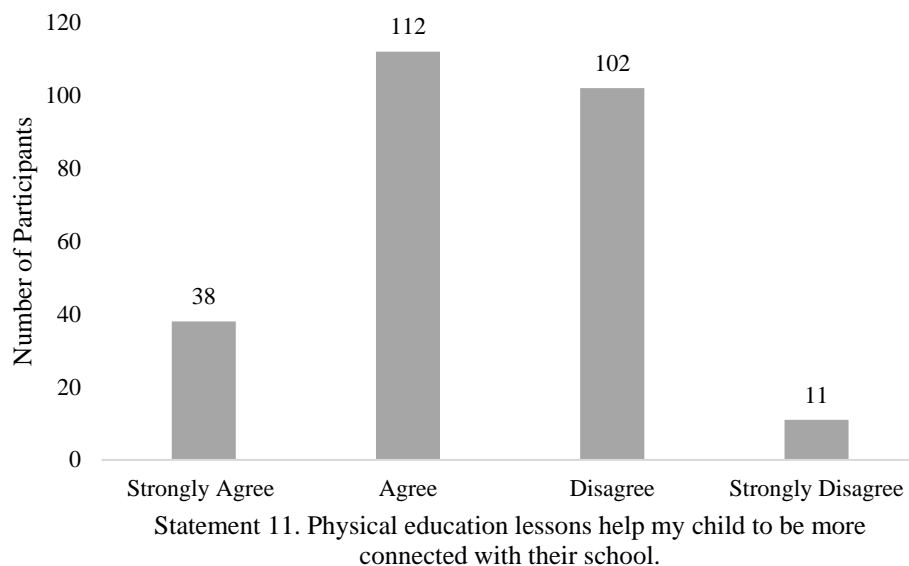


Figure 4. Survey results of statement 11

Some areas of the survey were divided in opinion. The results from the functional statements were inconclusive (Table 1) as there was not a concluding perception (Figure 3 and 4). It was important to address these differences in perception, an in-depth understanding of why parents have a split perception on the functional aspect of PE was explored through interview.

4 themes were identified from the online survey and interviews, which were: Importance of PE; Teacher-Pupil relationship; PE in relation to other subjects; and the competitive nature of PE. Each theme will be discussed in turn, with illustrative quotes to support the narrative. Interestingly, it is important to note that parents' own experiences did not seem to affect the perceptions they currently have on PE. Some parents explained they 'understand PE has come a long way since they were at school'.

### **Importance of PE**

From both qualitative and quantitative findings, it is apparent that parents understand the importance of PE as a subject in secondary schools. Furthermore, with the increasing concerns of the younger generation's health (Harris, 2018), it is evident that some parents acknowledge the physical benefits PE provides. All parents mentioned the PA opportunities PE provides to pupils.

*Yeah, of course, It is important to encourage children to not be couch potatoes and to get up and move their bodies a bit. We all know that. (Parent, 7)*

Some parents considered the mental health benefits PE can have on their child.

*I think it's vital that we encourage them to.. to be active, even if it's not a sport, but to be active. Otherwise, I think you know we're gonna have a nation that really struggles with confidence, self-esteem, health, you know, mental health (Parent, 6)*

Although emphasis has been placed on parents having an understanding of the social and psychological benefits of PE, it has been identified by numerous academics for teachers to explicitly plan and teach lessons which place importance on a positive experience of PA (Harris, 2018). Furthermore, some parents were able to highlight social skills which they perceived PE to develop, alongside leadership skills, teamwork, and communication:

*I think it's probably the only subject that teaches them teamwork, with resilience, with erm you know...determination, courage, there's just so many different aspects to PE and it's not just about the physical side, teaching them the social side, erm, how to interact with each other (Parent, 6)*

All parents were informed that '2 in 5 secondary schools are cutting PE time' (YST, 2018) and asked their thoughts. Many did not realise PE was being cut by some schools in the UK and most were not happy:

*That's not right. ... They shouldn't because it does help the kids. It makes their mind active. It makes their body active, the mind active and I'm sure that they'll get on with their lessons better than were they're not active.*

(Parent, 4)

However, some parents did understand why a school might cut PE as there is so much pressure on the schools to ensure they achieve results for league tables, the influence of performativity and accountability are frequently cited as pressures on schools and can explain their focus when choosing curriculum (Perryman, & Calvert 2019).

### **Teacher-Pupil relationship**

The findings indicated parents recognised the social skills children develop through PE lessons. However, this was only acknowledged by some of the parents in the interviews. Most parents placed great emphasis on PE teachers. Some parents appreciated the PE teachers influence on their child taking up physical activity and the parents then supported this through external activities.

*My oldest son, he's in year seven, has recently taken on doing street dance out of school, which was a result of loving it in school. And it's being good at it and encouraged by his teacher and said, you know, you should take this up. (Parent, 7)*

In this case, the child has blossomed in the activity because of the encouragement from the teacher. Had the teacher not encouraged the child to continue participating in the activity they may have not been as physically active. Therefore, it is vital to recognise the rapport a teacher has with a pupil and how this can affect the parent's perceptions of PE.

*She's very fond of him. She always says... oh what's his name again... Mr... Mr... Mr... \*\*\*\*\*. She always says Mr \*\*\*\*\* is always so funny. They really really get them... get the kids going. Thanks to them that I'm honest I'm so happy about it, gives them confidence and makes them a better person. (Parent, 4)*

However, it should be noted that not all parents have such a positive view, one parent explained their child had little relationship with their PE teacher as their child was not a 'sporty child'. Furthermore, some parents explained the PE teacher was more valuable to their child's PA level than themselves.

*'I wouldn't say a parent has an awful lot of influence personally' (Parent, 8)*

### **PE in relation to other subjects**

It was important to evaluate parents perception of PE in comparison to other subjects. As shown from the results of the survey, the interview findings found there to be a divided opinion on where PE should sit in the curriculum hierarchy. Half of the parents suggested for PE to sit alongside English and Maths, and intriguingly above science. However, the other half of parents, felt more significance towards English, Maths, Science and other subjects. Although this was down to the child in question. Therefore, it is also noteworthy to acknowledge that children enjoy different subjects. A theme throughout all interviews, parents acknowledged not all children will like PE but it is important for them to find a physically engaging activity to be a part of.

### **Competitive nature of PE**

Although this was not a topic in the online survey this theme came to light throughout the interviews. Parents had mixed views on the competitive nature of PE. Firstly, most parents acknowledged Secondary school PE to be more competitive than Primary school PE as they explained it was more team sports which were delivered in secondary PE lessons. It was found that parents thought PE does not suit the needs of all pupils when competing is involved. This competitive nature meant some parents had given up on encouraging their child to participate in afterschool extracurricular activities. Although this is not PE, parents tended to associate PE with extracurricular activities.

*I think if my children who are relatively fit get put off sport because it's competitive at school then goodness knows what happens to the people who aren't very fit, it's a doss which I know sometimes... (Parent, 3)*

On the other hand, parents reported not being entirely happy with PE as they felt their child was 'frustrated' with their PE lessons challenge:

*She comes home quite frustrated with her PE lessons, and I think it's because she's been coached she plays a sport herself and when she goes to her PE lessons she doesn't really feel she's getting a great deal out of the lesson itself. (Parent, 6)*

When further exploring why parents in the survey felt PE did not connect their child to their school, similar results emerged in the interviews. Some parents felt a lack of connection because their child was not able to participate in the clubs due to the competitive nature of the clubs:

## **4. Discussion**

Four themes in relation to parental perception on secondary school PE were identified and demonstrated understanding of the importance of PE in the education system, however, there is recognition of flaws in the subject. The perceptions

and perspectives of parents can help schools to understand how they may be able to better support pupils and families in PE. The quantitative data collected provides an insight into what parents' perceptions are. Similar to previous investigations conducted in other countries worldwide (Na, 2015; Yilmaz, 2018), parents in this study have mainly positive perceptions of the importance of PE and consequently, understand the necessity for the subject in the curriculum. YouGov found 42% of British adults ranked PE as very important and more important than other subjects on the curriculum such as citizenship, design and technology, geography, history and religious studies (The Telegraph, 2018). Similar was found in this study with half of the survey respondent parents identifying in PE in the top three subjects when ranking subject importance, alongside English and Maths.

The findings from both the survey and the interviews have shown parents acknowledgement to the benefits PE has on physical and mental wellbeing. With the rise of obesity, it is increasingly essential for parents to be aware of the importance of PA as a preventive strategy. These findings demonstrate the growing awareness parents have of the crucial role PE plays in health and wellbeing for pupils. The results from this study where parents understood the positives of being physically active through PE supports the Thompson *et al.* (2010) study, where the majority of parents regarded family engagement in PA as significant, what is more recognised advantages including improved mental health, physical fitness and weight control. Furthermore, parents from the study recognised that's PE is a unique subject that teaches them teamwork, resilience, determination, courage, and other wide skills (Corredor, 2015). With Cale and Harris (2018) stated high-quality PE can support the development of pupils self-esteem and self-worth; confidence; reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression; heighten social development by aiding pupils to cooperate, compete and to develop a sense of respect fairness, and justice; benefit cognitive function and academic achievement; and encourage school attendance. It is important for parents to be aware of this and support this matter.

A study conducted by Youth Employment UK (2017) reported teamwork, communication, self-management, problem-solving and self-belief as the core skills most valued by employers. In support of this, Harris (2018) states high-quality PE enhances pupils employability by significantly contributing to their development of these skills. However, the social skills developed in PE was not acknowledged by all parents. Therefore, some parents may not understand the social skills which can be developed through quality PE lessons or they feel their child does not get these type of PE lessons. Future researchers may consider investigating this further, to develop greater understanding. Furthermore, Coulter *et al.* (2019) reported parents valued 'sportsmanship', therefore it is evident that parents in that study acknowledge the social skills developed when a child attends PE lessons.

The PE environment is unique compared to other subjects in the curriculum, the physical, mental and social benefits are reasons why it has such a unique nature (Koekoek & Knoppers 2015; Ciotto & Gagnon 2018). Several of the parents in the present study also labelled PE as a unique subject because of all the previously mentioned ways it developed pupils. It remains a concern, despite the recognised benefits, that within schools there are increasing pressures to improve academic scores will often lead to additional time for subjects such as Maths and English at the cost of time for pupils to be physically active (Singh *et al.*, 2012). When the YST (2018) statistic of 2 in 5 secondary schools cutting PE time was shared with parents, two thirds of parents were not aware that this was happening and all eight parents were not happy with this, maybe this is though is to be an expected outcome as this is seldom discussed with parents (Mkandawire, *et al.* 2018). However, two parents expressed they would want this to happen if they're child was struggling in '*more important subjects*'. Coulter *et al.* (2019) recent study found 61% of parents felt that schools allocation time for PE should be increased and suggested they would like to see PE increasing from 2 hours a week to scheduling daily PE. These findings are similar to the current findings in this study.

The results suggest parents identify the role of the PE teacher as being very important in supporting a child's PA engagement, however Olivares *et al.* (2015) findings indicated parents' influence is more significant than the influence a PE teachers' regardless of age, sex and physical condition. Therefore, it is fundamental parents play a part in their child's physical activity engagement. This is also apparent in the research conducted by Jin *et al.* (2011), who found when pupils are making their Key Stage 4 options they took advice mostly from their parents. Parents do not have access to PE lessons and have limited access to the participation their child does in extracurricular activities for various different reasons. However, due to the lack of access to observe first-hand PE apart from extracurricular activities, this can hinder support and feedback (Na, 2015).

The parents in this study expressed both positive and concerning thoughts on the supposed competitive nature PE lessons have. Although there are claimed benefits to having competition in PE lessons, which were acknowledged by some parents, such as developmental effects for a healthy lifestyle, where pupils learn about physical, social and cognitive skills (Choi *et al.*, 2014; Ramey and Rose-Krasnor, 2012). Similar concerns have been echoed in a study conducted in Ireland by Coulter *et al.* (2019, 9), where 95.7% of parents reported competition to be the least important outcome for their child when participating in PE based on the options available to them, '41.4% of parents reported that their child felt 'bad if I lose at PE or games'. It has also been stated by Wintle (2018) pupils could be at risk of possible negative impact on their



self-esteem and comparing oneself to others is not always healthy (Merkel, 2013). In addition, it has been reported by Ennis (1996) that many pupils may experience alienation while participating in competitive sport in PE lessons. Stolz (2014) also deemed it to be a harrowing experience for some pupils and therefore, parents who showed concerns about the level of competitiveness in PE have evidently understandable concerns which should be addressed.

Furthermore, the concerns regarding PE lessons are similar to the concerns parents had with extracurricular activities. Although, extracurricular is not a part of the curriculum, from the findings it should be acknowledged the vast amount of opinion parents had on this matter. It was evident that some parents felt extra-curricular activities delivered by the PE department were only for the 'sporty' and 'competitive pupils' in a school. Consequently, a couple of parents perceived their child had no place going to the activities, as they believed their child was fit and healthy but not competitive. There are many benefits to pupils participating in extracurricular activities (Martinez *et al.*, 2016), as it can increase a child's PA levels. As mentioned above, there are numerous positive outcomes from being physically active such as physical and mental health, social wellbeing, academic and cognitive performance (Bailey *et al.*, 2013; Public Health England, 2014). Furthermore, Lleras (2008) found that participation in sports activities was associated with higher educational attainment and job earnings. Despite this, in a recent case study Stirrup (2018) highlighted that coaches, who were involved in delivering extracurricular clubs, fostered a competitive environment to ensure the school was able to perform to a high standard at school fixtures and competitions. This meant pupils were purposefully selected for the clubs and pupils who wanted to attend but did not perform to the desired standard were rejected.

Sprake and Temple (2016) stated the approach PE has with competition reflects the Government's view of PE as a way of continuing to legitimise traditional games and specific forms of sport. However, currently, the government are encouraging the support PA has on mental and physical health. Research from the YST (2018) has stated teachers should be careful using approaches that match pupils' motivations which will aim to avoid alienating those who lack in ability or interest of the competitive standard (Sprake and Temple, 2016). Therefore, from the findings, it is apparent that this has not met parents' perceptions and the competitive element of PE is an issue which should be addressed. In addition, Choi *et al.* (2014) also recognised how pupils experience, in terms of child development, competition was very dependable on how the competitions were designed and how the experiences were perceived. Therefore, it is vital schools and PE teachers get the right balance of competition in PE lessons and extracurricular activities. Therefore, it is evident from a range of studies that not all parents agree that PE suits their child, whether this is because the lesson is too competitive or is not challenging enough. However, it should be considered that most secondary schools have a large number of pupils in PE lessons making it hard to cater to every pupil's needs in one lesson.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The status of PE declining when compared with other subjects in the curriculum, there are numerous academics who have recognised the need to improve the status (Capel & Whitehead, 2015; Green, 2008; Green and Hardman, 2011; Harris, 2018; Kirk *et al.*, 2013; Randall *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, parents are a significant part of a child's life and can an impact on the experiences a child goes through (Erdener and Knoeppel, 2018).

It is evident the majority of parents understand the importance of the subject but have differing views. Some parents have concerns regarding their child's PE being too competitive, which has led to some pupils feeling a lack of confidence and feeling like they are unable to participate in extracurricular activities, there is recognition from parents that the subject has developed from parents interviewed. Furthermore, when relating PE to other subjects there was also a divide on perceptions, with some parents stating they understand why PE would be cut. Importantly 50% percent of parents did believe that PE is as important as subjects such Maths, English and Science, but, in comparison to other subjects 61% of parents do not favour PE overall. The findings demonstrate that parents have an awareness of the role PE plays in improving health and wellbeing for pupils. Parents recognise the role of the PE teacher as being significant in supporting a children's PA levels, but previous research indicates parents' influence is more important (Olivares *et al.*, 2015).

Further research is required however this study could be a catalyst for greater exploration. It is evident there is an importance to educate parents on the role they have in terms of their child's PA and PE engagement and participation. Future research should continue to explore parents' perceptions of PE in the UK and how parents can be supported and educated.

## 6. Limitations

It is important to recognise that challenges to mixed methods research researcher due to difficulties in blending both data sets and with the survey only having close-ended questions, therefore participants were not able to develop their responses and the first stage of data collection did not allow depth or much flexibility ((Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Cohen *et al.*, 2018). Also a relatively small sample of qualitative data was collected.

## Acknowledgements

Ethical approval was given before collection of all data.

## Data Availability Statement

Data available on request from the authors.

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