

## Why Do Physical Education Teachers Give High Grades?\*

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### Abstract

In this study, it is aimed to reveal the reasons of high grades in physical education and sports classes of physical education teachers and to determine the factors that cause this situation. Phenomological study was used in qualitative research methods. The study group of the study was qualitative participants of 10 physical education teachers working in the central districts of Malatya in the 2017-2018 academic year and whose average grade is 100 in the E-school system. In the research, semi-structured interview form prepared by the researchers was used as data collection tool. Descriptive and content analysis was used for the analysis of raw data. After qualitative interviews with physical education teachers, it was concluded that in the themes that emerge after the qualitative interviews, teachers dominated the idea that they should not be graded in physical education class. When it is added that the measurement and evaluation literacy is not sufficient in addition to the reasons such as giving high marks in private schools, it leads them to give high marks.

**Keywords:** Measurement and assessment, Giving high grades, Physical education class.

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## Introduction

Although there are different classifications in the literature about the elements of the curriculum, there are 4 elements in general. These are target, content, educational situations and test situations. Target; these characteristics are desired to be found in individuals who can be gained through education (Ertürk, 1994). Content; in accordance with the determined objectives, facts, concepts and principles are combined in a systematic way to collect information (Demirel, 2008). Educational conditions; external conditions affecting the individual in a certain period of time and learning and teaching process is called (Ertürk, 1994). The test item which is the last element of the training program, namely measurement and evaluation, is called to reach the conclusion that shows the extent to which the objectives determined at the beginning of the process are reached. It is the part where the quality of education is controlled (Demirel, 2008). There is quite a strict one relationship between these four items.

A problem or deficiency in any of these may prevent the training program from taking place. In an educational environment where the teacher is in the center, the task of the student is to remember the information presented to him / her correctly but for his / her permanent and effective learning they should actively participate in the process (Köksal, 2007). Since 2004, the Ministry of National Education has adopted the constructivist approach as a basis in order to make students more prominent and effective rather than teachers in schools (Baş, 2011). This change is very difficult in physical education and sports classes, which is a skill-based rather practice-oriented course. The studies show that the course is tried to be taught with a traditional understanding (Cengiz and Serbes, 2014; Güllü, Güllü and Güllü, 2009a; Güllü, Güçlü, Güllü, Güllü and Tekin, 2009b; Demirhan, Bulca, Saçlı and Kangalgil, 2014; Munusturlar, Mirzeoğlu and Mirzeoğlu, 2014; İnce and Hünük, 2010) and this situation brings many problems. It has been stated in the studies that traditional understanding is also in evaluation methods (Carroll, 1994; Hopple and Graham, 1995). The aim of the course is explained in MEB Physical Education and Sports Course Curriculum (2018) as follows; " to prepare students for the next level of education by developing movement skills, active and healthy life skills, concepts and strategies as well as self-management skills, social skills and thinking skills that will be used throughout their lives. " It is an important process to measure and evaluate the success of the students in order to understand whether these goals are achieved at the end of the course (Özgül & Kangalgil, 2018).

Evaluation in physical education is an important part of the teaching and learning process (Frapwell, 2010; Siedentop & Tannehill, 2000). While selecting the assessment method, one should be aware of the weaknesses and strengths of the method and appropriate formats should be chosen to evaluate the objectives of the activity (Stiggins, 1992). In the context of physical education, the evaluation process, which is accepted as an important part of the teaching and learning cycle, cannot

be expected to be subjected to uniform assessment in all courses where individual skills are in the foreground. In order to transfer the gains of physical education to the students, a model, strategy and method suitable for that acquisition must be selected. Since the physical education curriculum includes high-level psychomotor, affective and cognitive gains, the measurement tools should also reflect the degree to which these gains have been achieved. A unique assessment process must be provided for each student (MoNE, 2018), but it can be difficult to meet this expectation by physical education teachers. Because the issue of assessment has been one of the most problematic and troublesome issues for many years for those interested in physical education (Chróinín & Cosgrave, 2013; Gillespie, 2013; Lo'pez-Pastor et al. 2013; Tolgfors & Öhman, 2016). In physical education, the subject of evaluation is an area where validity, openness to change and consensus are not enough (Annerstedt and Larsson, 2010). At the same time, evaluation in physical education was neglected by academics (Hay, 2006). In many countries, physical education teachers often use physical fitness tests and similar psychomotor skills as assessment methods (Carroll, 1994; Hopple & Graham, 1995). Physical fitness tests give feedback about students' physical performance only. In the studies, it was concluded that physical fitness tests had minimal effect on students' performance and knowledge level (Keating et al. 2009; Placek et al. 2001).

In order to measure the motor skills learning and physical activity in physical education, the teacher should have a good level of assessment methods (Locke & Graber, 2008) and physical education teachers should use alternative assessment methods in order to evaluate the cognitive and affective characteristics of the students as well as their psychomotor skills. The assessment methods used should be more fun and motivating for students to learn (Brooks & Brooks, 1993; Hopple, 2005), but when the researches are examined, it is seen that physical education teachers do not have enough knowledge about alternative measurement and assessment methods (Avşar, 2009; Kangalgil, 2018; Yılmaz & Gündüz, 2008). In the studies, it was determined that physical education teachers had difficulty in the assessment point, preferred the easiest and least time measurement tools, and the curriculum density, crowded classes, inadequate course hours, negative view of the students, lack of sufficient knowledge about the measurement tools. (Asma, Çamlıyer, Soytürk & Balcı, 2018; Yılmaz and Gündüz, 2008; Lo'pez-Pastor et al. 2013; Özgül & Kangalgil, 2018). At the same time, physical education teachers did not give any grade to students or ignored them (James, Griffin & Dodds, 2009; James, Griffin & France, 2005), and chose methods that were easy to use and time-consuming (Özgül & Kangalgil, 2018). The discrepancy between the notes given (Redelius & Hay, 2012) has been revealed in the research.

Asma et al. (2018) concluded that physical education teachers do assessment and evaluation based on their own observations rather than assessment tools. In addition to all these problems, physical education teachers have some problems in giving student grades and student grades can be very high in physical education and sports lessons compared to other branch courses due to different

reasons. The perception of “no low grades in physical education course” among the other branch teachers, parents and students has occurred over the years and this is a known but not discussed expression in the society. In this context, it raises the questions of how much it is necessary for physical education teachers to grade in physical education course and how proper the assessment is.

The aim of this study is to determine the reasons for high grades in physical education and sports classes of physical education teachers and to determine the factors that cause this situation.

### Method

Phenomenological study, one of the qualitative research methods, was used to investigate the reasons for high grades in physical education and physical education classes of physical education and sports teachers. Philosophy of phenomenological studies emphasizes the experience itself and how something is transformed into experience (Meriam, 2013). In this study, “interpretive phenomenology” was used to examine the reasons for high grades of physical education and sports teachers (Cresswell, 2016). The aim of using interpretive phenomenology is to understand and understand the experiences of physical education teachers and to explore their relationship with certain events or processes (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

### Study Group

Criterion sampling, one of the purposeful sampling methods, was used in order to examine the reasons for high grades of physical education teachers. In many cases, purposeful sampling can be used to discover and explain events and phenomena (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). In order to analyze in depth the reasons for high grades of physical education teachers, the participants were identified by means of criteria sampling. Criteria sampling can use criteria that meet specific predetermined criteria and that can be created by the researcher or prepared in advance (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). One of the advantages of criterion sampling is that it can be used to uncover the major weaknesses of the system by understanding situations that are likely to be rich in information (Patton, 2014). For this purpose, 24 physical education teachers working in the central districts of Malatya in the 2017-2018 academic year and whose average grade is 100 in the E-school system were determined. 10 physical education teachers who accepted the interview were the qualitative participants of the study. Table 1 presents the selection criteria and shape of the participants in the E-okul system. Participants were given pseudonyms in the transfer of the direct quotations.

**Table 1.** Qualifications of Teachers Participating in Qualitative Part of the Research

Participant	Gender	Year of Service	Professional seniority (year)
Ali	M	4	Middle School
Akif	M	11	Anatolian High School
Gül	F	15	Middle School
Alper	M	15	Religion Middle School
Ayşe	F	17	Anatolian High School

Taylan	M	16	Middle School
Hatice	F	17	Vocational High School
Mesut	M	9	Middle School
Orhan	M	6	Science High School
Zeynep	F	21	Middle School

### **Data Collection Tools and Data Collection**

In the study, semi-structured interview form was used in order to determine the reasons for high grades of physical education teachers. Semi-structured interview form was used in this study because the arrangement of the interview form according to a specific protocol and at the same time it was flexible and allowed the research to be conducted in more depth (Merriam, 2013; Glesne, 2013). It was tried to ask questions that the participants would focus on why they gave high marks to their speeches (Saban & Ersoy, 2016). After the questionnaire was sent to 2 different fields and one language specialist, necessary arrangements were made and pilot interviews were conducted with 2 participants. After the pilot interviews, the final form of the questionnaire was decided and interviews with the participants were started. The interviews with the participants were recorded with the voice recorder and then transferred to the word document. Interviews lasted between 24 and 36 minutes.

### **Analysis of Data**

Descriptive analysis was used in the analysis of raw data obtained from interviews with physical education teachers. The reasons for high grades of physical education teachers are described in themes and arranged in a way that the reader can understand. In descriptive analysis, a framework is first formed. Afterwards, the data is processed according to the thematic framework, the findings are defined and the latest findings are interpreted (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). In order to increase the credibility of the research, the data of the research was presented to the approval of the participants as confirmation of the participants. In order to ensure validity and reliability, the data obtained from observation notes and voice recorder were compared and compared in the analysis of the data. After the data were coded by two researchers, common themes were included. In addition, the views of the participants were directly quoted. One of the most important criteria in qualitative research is the credibility of the study. For this purpose, the interviews were kept long enough in line with the content of the study. After the data were recorded, they were transferred to the written environment and presented to the participants for approval. In this way, the credibility, transferability, consistency and confirmability of the research was tried to be ensured. Internal validity (credibility) was provided by long-term interaction, deep-focused data collection, expert review and participant confirmation, while detailed descriptive confirmation review, participatory expressions, and purposeful sample selection. was used for external validity.

## Results

In this part of the research, themes are presented as a result of interviews with physical education teachers. As a result of the interviews with physical education teachers, 6 themes were determined. These 6 themes; “No grade in physical education course ”, “Pressure of school administration”, “High grades in private schools ”, “Not to affect students' exams”, “Donot confront parents ” and “Feel comfortable with conscience”.

### **Theme 1.** No grade in physical education

As a result of the interviews conducted with the participants, teachers stated that as a reason for giving high marks, measurement and evaluation cannot be done in physical education classes like other courses. In other courses, they said that subjects and achievements were clearly defined and assessment criteria were easier. The teachers stated that they had problems in determining assessment criteria due to the fact that physical education course is a skill based course and each student has different skill levels. Akif said: “While some students can understand and apply the subject very easily in one lesson, it is impossible for another student to do the desired technique because his mobility is very low. “For this reason, more than half of the students should fail the course if we grade it according to that skill according to that technique.” as stated. Another teacher Hatice: “Some students, for example, begin to do finger pass very well in 1-2 weeks, while it takes a long time or not at all for some students to learn finger rust. Hatice said that “I give a high grade so that they have a high level of motivation towards the lesson and to increase their interest in sports.” According to the statements of the participants, if they score according to the skill level of the students in grading, they think that students' interest towards the lesson will decrease. The teachers stated that it is necessary to take longer time to learn the subjects in physical education course in full meaning and that they introduce only the branches in the course and therefore it is not possible to evaluate with notes. Zeynep: “There should be an evaluation in physical education course but I do not think that grade evaluation has a contribution to the student and she thinks that grade does not have a positive and negative effect on students in physical education class. Similarly, Alper “... a class in my school (Religion secondary school) has 35 hours of physical education per year. Suppose that I never missed a lesson. Also Alper states that “How much can I change and improve the skill levels of children in these 35 hours and how can I evaluate them with grades?” They stated that the physical activity levels, physical fitness, interest and motivation of the students should be evaluated but this should be done without being reflected in the grade. The main reason for the participants' opinion is that physical education is a talent course and that each student is at a different skill level is not appropriate for grading.

### **Theme 2.** Pressure of School Administration

Participants stated that in some cases, the school administration was successful in other courses while some students were requesting to increase the grade for physical education. Physical

education teacher Ali: “The school administration said that the overall success of the student is good and that it would be good if he could give a high score to not affect the grade point average. “Since then, if I give that student a high grade, I've been giving it a high rating to all of them since it would be unfair to the other students.” as he stated. With this rhetoric, it is understood that the school administration increased his / her score voluntarily, but he acted with the idea of ensuring justice and gave high marks to all of the students. Another teacher Akif said: “The school principal held a meeting one day. Physical education, music and art teachers should note the success of students when giving grades according to him, they are already talent courses, these courses should not be given a low grade, he said. While some teacher friends opposed this, some of the teachers followed the decision. In this way, I chose the easy way I started to give high marks to everyone and my head is more comfortable, he said. Ayşe said “... believe that National Education does not say anything or can the administration raise the student's grade (talking about physical education course) from the system unaware of the teacher?”. As it can be understood from the teachers' statements, it is understood that some school administrations should not give low grades in physical education class or they make demands for some students when grading. The participants also chose to give high grades to students in order to avoid problems with the school administration and to relieve them consciously.

### **Theme 3.** High grades in private schools

The participants think that the grading standards of schools and teachers differ when giving grades to students in physical education classes, and this situation creates inequality of opportunity among students. The participants think that physical education teachers working in private schools give high marks according to the demands of parents and employers. Ayşe: “My son is in private school. I haven't heard any students who get below 95 points in school. Everybody gets a very high score and they do not even take the exam. In this case, I think there will be an inequality if we give the students a low grade or a deserved grade. Alper said, “Some of the students in the private school get high grades without even participating in the lesson, let alone taking high grades. My friends at the private school told me it was impossible for them to give a low grade. In this case, it would be unfair for me to give low marks to my own students. At least our students attend the class.” ”Mesut says: In the middle of the city there are 4-storey private schools that derive from the classroom. I also have to protect the disadvantaged child in the public school. As it can be understood from the teachers' statements, the participants think that there is a systemic deficit and they give high marks for the balance.

### **Theme 4.** Not to affect students' exams

In the interviews conducted with the participants, especially the teachers working in the middle school stated that the school success average had an effect on the students' transition to high school. Teachers think that if students get lower grades from physical education course, they will

directly affect the grade point average. For this reason, they stated that the students gave high scores in order not to affect the schools that students will gain through LGS (high school transition exam, TYT (basic proficiency exam) and other similar exams. Physical education teacher Taylan expressed this situation as follows, when we give low grades to students, it directly affects students' GPA. Sometimes, students cannot earn the desired school with thousandths points. Therefore, I do not want to adversely affect their future by giving a high grade from physical education course. It makes no sense for me to give a low grade when they are very successful in other courses. Orhan explained the reason for his high marks as follows: "In the end, I have a conscientious responsibility. I'm giving everyone a high grade because of the idea that I'm rating it, which affects the child's future."

In addition Zeynep said: "Already, the child starts to strain from the 5th grade and prepares for the exam after 4 years. At least in this lesson, they will enjoy the lesson without note anxiety. It is understood that teachers give high marks to their students in order not to affect the school they will win and to reduce the stresses of the students.

**Theme 5.** Do not confront parents

Some of the participants stated that they gave high scores in order not to have problems with parents when they gave grades to students. The teachers stated that some parents immediately came to school when they gave the students the grade they deserved and they had experienced negative dialogues in the past because of the grades given to parents and students. Teachers claim that parents have a low perception of non-grades from physical education classes and therefore they have some problems especially in the first years of the profession. Physical education teachers stated that they gave high scores in order not to have problems with the parents due to the grade. Zeynep expressed this as follows. "At the beginning of the profession, I gave only 75 to a student who did not attend the course and did not bring their materials. The student's mother came to school immediately the next day. Why did you give my daughter a low grade? He said he would complain about me. He did not even ask why you took this note. Parents see 75 points as low. The idea that parents cannot be lower than physical education is settled. It is understood that almost all of the teachers participating in the qualitative interview are confronted with their parents in terms of grades in their professional life. Mesut expresses this view as After I started to give high marks to the students, my head is more comfortable, neither an administrator nor a parent comes to address me. While Akif, "I have no problems since I started to give high grades," he expressed. Although there was positive support from parents about participation in physical education course, it was stated by teachers that there was an established perception about grade.

**Theme 6.** Feel comfortable with conscience

The participants stated that they could not fulfill the requirements of physical education course due to different reasons. They stated that they could not gain the objectives and the achievements of



the syllabus at a sufficient level. Hatice expressed her opinion in fulfilling the requirements of the lesson as follows: “I do not think I taught a lot to the students in the lessons. So it is unreasonable to give the student a low score just because he did not bring his clothes. I really need the student to learn something to grade. Some teacher friends do not teach also give low grades to students. I cannot give low grades, owing to my conscience. I am not doing my job properly so that I cannot ask from the student” and Gül said, “We cannot process the lesson properly since the schoolyard is small and does not have much material. How can i give low grade to students?” as she stated. Teachers made self-criticism in this situation and tried to comfort themselves conscientiously by giving high marks. As in other themes, participants can be said that they try to avoid some responsibilities and problems that may be experienced by giving high marks.

### **Conclusion and Discussion**

After qualitative interviews with physical education teachers, it was concluded that in the themes that emerged, teachers dominated the notion that they should not be graded in physical education class. It can be said that physical education teachers give high grades to students because they have the idea that they should not be graded. In some studies, physical education teachers do not believe evaluation (Kneer, 1986) or do not evaluate in physical education (Hensley, 1990; James, Griffin & Dodds, 2009; James, Griffin & France, 2005; Kneer, 1986; Matanin & Tannehill, 1994; Veal, 1988). In some studies, it is stated that there is a discrepancy between the grades given to students and the evaluation criteria (Redellius & Hay, 2012; Redelius, Fagrell and Larsson, 2009). In addition to these discrepancies, it is observed that physical education teachers generally take into consideration the criteria such as student participation, attire, effort and attitude while grading (Hensley, Lambert, Baumgartner & Stillwell, 1987; Matanin & Tannehill, 1994; Morrow, 1978). Avşar (2009) found in his study that cognitive and affective gains, which physical education teachers evaluate only psychomotor gains, do not evaluate students. Asma et al. (2018) stated that physical education teachers graded according to their personal criteria instead of measurement and evaluation tools. In support of these findings, physical education teachers do not use alternative measurement and assessment tools more traditional methods (Arslan et al, 2013; Avşar, 2009; Lo’Pez-Pastor, Kirk, Lorente, Macphail & Macdonald 2013; Hay & Penney, 2013; Redelius & Hay, 2012) or do not have sufficient information about measurement and evaluation (Genç, 2008; Şirin, Çağlayan & İnce, 2009; Redellius & Hay, 2012). It can be said that physical education teachers' level of knowledge about measurement and evaluation is inadequate, due to the structure of the course, learning is difficult to evaluate (Chróinín ve Cosgrave, 2013), crowded classes, facilities, lack of tools and equipment (Demirhan vd. 2014; Özgül ve Kangalgil, 2018; Uğraş, Güllü ve Yücekaya, 2019) can be said to avoid high responsibility for students. In addition to all these reasons, it can be stated that physical education teachers consider giving high marks as a method of avoiding problems that may occur when reasons

such as not affecting students' exams, not having problems with parents, giving high grades in private schools, and feeling conscientiously comfortable.

It can be said that the professional experience they have had in the past had an impact on the decision making process. Asma et al. (2018), according to the results of their research, it is concluded that teachers who work in both public and private schools give high grades, in which parents expect high grades. In addition, physical education teachers stated that grades were given more than normal in private schools and that they pushed themselves to give higher grades psychologically. It can be said that this statement is in line with the theme of giving high marks in private schools in this research, and therefore, teachers working in public schools give high marks for the purpose of ensuring justice. Aka, Arı, Can and Kale, (2011) stated that in their research on the grades given by physical education teachers, teachers had the high grade of habit of giving high grades, and as reasons for high grade, they showed the reasons such as the effect of average achievement, emotionality, enthusiasm of the student, school administration and parents' pressure and found that 80.9% of physical education teachers gave more than the grade students deserved. It can be said that these findings have similar results with this research. Toraman (2013) stated that music teachers experienced high note pressure and were considered insignificant by parents, administration and students. It can be said that these results apply not only to physical education course but also to another skill course, music and painting course. The reason for this is the perception that physical education, music and painting courses should be given high grades in the society. This perception, negative experiences about the grade and the insufficiency of the importance of measurement and evaluation may have led physical education teachers to give high grades.

According to the results of this research, physical education teachers think that not to be graded in physical education class, parents' pressure, pressure of school administration, not to affect their exams, feeling conscientiously and giving high grades in private schools, as well as lack of measurement and evaluation literacy directs them to give high grades was reached. In the light of these results, the following suggestions can be listed;

-It may be suggested that a workshop with wide participation including academics, teachers, parents and students should be held on whether or not to take grades in physical education course.

-In the physical education course, instead of grading the students, it may be suggested to make assessment and evaluation with individual report cards where the psychomotor, cognitive and affective characteristics of the students can be followed.

-In-service seminars on alternative measurement and assessment methods and techniques of physical education teachers can be provided.

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