THE COMMITMENT OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHERS TO CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN TUNISIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS: BETWEEN OFFICIAL PRESCRIPTIONS AND REAL PRACTICES.

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Abstract

In contemporary Tunisia, amid a protracted crisis of civic disengagement and weakened trust in public institutions, the educational system faces renewed demands to fulfill its mission as a space for democratic socialization. Within this framework, the subject of Physical Education and Sports (PES), though often overlooked, possesses significant latent potential for cultivating citizenship through embodied learning, social interaction, and regulated conflict. This article critically examines the extent to which PES teachers in Tunisian public primary schools contribute to citizenship education, either intentionally or implicitly, in their pedagogical practice. Grounded in a curriculum sociology framework and informed by the work of Perrenoud, Bourdieu, and Galichet, the study employs a qualitative, ethnographic methodology involving participant observation and semi-structured interviews with ten PES teachers operating in socially diverse schools across the Gabès region. The findings reveal a marked disjunction between the formal curriculum largely obsolete and technocentric and the real curriculum enacted in classrooms, which is shaped by institutional constraints, fragmented professional identities, and underdeveloped pedagogical intentionality. Teachers generally demonstrate a limited, often juridical or behavioral, conception of citizenship, coupled with a reluctance to engage with its more participatory and ethical dimensions. Observed practices frequently failed to challenge exclusionary peer dynamics or gendered segregation, and rarely fostered empathy, cooperation, or democratic rule-building. This reflects both a lack of civic-oriented training and the marginalization of PES within educational policy discourse.

The article argues for a fundamental reconceptualization of PES as a civically fertile pedagogical space. This would require structural reforms in curriculum design, initial and continuing teacher education, and the valorization of PES teachers as agents of democratic socialization. By activating the civic potential embedded in bodily and social learning, PES can move beyond its traditional confines and contribute meaningfully to the formation of active, responsible, and inclusive citizens.

Keywords: *Citizenship education; Primary education; Physical education; Teacher commitment; Hidden curriculum; Civic values*

INTRODUCTION

Since the 19th century, schooling has been widely regarded as a cornerstone of civic formation. It serves not only to transmit knowledge but also to cultivate the norms, values, and dispositions necessary for democratic life (Durkheim; Dewey). In modern democratic societies, this dual function is more relevant than ever, particularly in contexts undergoing rapid sociopolitical transformation. Tunisia, in the wake of the 2011 revolution, provides a compelling case in point. Amid the hopeful aspirations of democratization, the country continues to grapple with widespread civic disaffection, especially among youth, who increasingly view public institutions with skepticism and disengagement (Elloumi; Memni). These realities have reignited debates over the mission of public education and its capacity to restore civic trust and participation (Dubet; Touraine). In this transitional landscape, the role of schools as spaces of socialization and democratic apprenticeship has become central once again. Yet despite official rhetoric promoting civic values, citizenship education in Tunisia remains poorly institutionalized, fragmented, and often confined to a singular subject or occasional moral lesson (Galichet; Leleux). Empirical studies suggest that civic instruction is commonly reduced to normative discourse about obedience, patriotism, or institutional procedures an approach insufficient for nurturing critical, participatory citizenship (Westheimer and Kahne; Biesta). Such limitations are

symptomatic of a broader tension between the formal educational goals outlined in curricula and the real pedagogical practices enacted in classrooms (Forquin; Perrenoud).

This gap is particularly salient when considering the latent civic potential of disciplines traditionally marginalized in the school hierarchy among them, Physical Education and Sports (PES). Historically viewed as peripheral or recreational, PES is often excluded from debates about moral or civic education (Parlebas; Elloumi). However, the subject's emphasis on social interaction, bodily engagement, and rule-governed activity makes it a uniquely fertile ground for the cultivation of democratic competencies such as cooperation, mutual respect, emotional regulation, and shared responsibility (Delignières; Metoudi; Gibbons).

Numerous scholars have advocated for a reconceptualization of PES as an ethical and relational discipline rather than a merely technical or performative one (Ennis; Glover and Ward). Through cooperative games, team sports, and conflict resolution, students can acquire experiential knowledge of fairness, solidarity, and pluralism (Galichet; Delignières). As Gert Biesta argues, citizenship must be learned through lived experience, not abstract prescription a vision that aligns well with the embodied, experiential learning that PES can offer (Biesta).

Yet, in the Tunisian educational system, PES continues to be shaped by a technocentric curriculum developed in the 1994s, which prioritizes performance metrics, biomechanical precision, and disciplinary control (Ministry of Education; Memni). Initial teacher training reinforces this orientation, placing strong emphasis on anatomical, physiological, and sports-based expertise, while largely neglecting the socio-relational and civic dimensions of physical activity (Metoudi; Delignières; Elloumi). As a result, PES is rarely integrated into broader pedagogical efforts to promote democratic citizenship, and its civic affordances remain largely underexplored in both policy and practice.

Compounding this issue is the lack of continuing education for in-service PES teachers. Available training programs are overwhelmingly technical, offering little to no guidance on managing diversity, promoting inclusion, or navigating ethical dilemmas in the classroom (Delignières; Memni). Teachers are therefore left to improvise or retreat into minimalist practices focused solely on safety and discipline. As Jackson reminds us, the "hidden curriculum" the unspoken lessons conveyed through daily routines and teacher behavior, plays a profound role in shaping students' social learning (Jackson). When civic issues are absent or mishandled, students internalize norms of exclusion, hierarchy, and competition rather than equity and dialogue (Bourdieu; Perrenoud).

This article aims to interrogate this pedagogical blind spot by investigating how PES teachers in Tunisian primary schools engage whether consciously or not in the formation of civic competencies. Drawing on curriculum sociology, particularly the work of Perrenoud and Forquin, it examines the interplay between the formal curriculum (what is prescribed), the real curriculum (what is practiced), and the hidden curriculum (what is implicitly conveyed). In doing so, it contributes to the growing body of research that explores how non-traditional subjects can serve as vectors of democratic education when pedagogically reimagined and institutionally supported (McAndrew et al.; Touraine).

Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions:

- To what extent are PES teachers aware of their civic educational mission?
- How do they conceptualize citizenship and enact it through their pedagogical practices?
- What institutional, cultural, and professional constraints influence their engagement with civic education?

Through a qualitative, ethnographic approach involving classroom observation and in-depth interviews with teachers from ten primary schools in the Gabès region, this research seeks to uncover both the visible and invisible dynamics that shape civic education through PES. By shedding light on these dynamics, the study calls for a renewed vision of PES one that embraces its full educational

potential and situates it as a central pillar in the formation of active, responsible, and inclusive citizens.

1. Formal Curriculum and Real Practices

Understanding the role of physical education in citizenship formation requires moving beyond normative curricular declarations to examine the actual pedagogical practices implemented by teachers. This distinction is central to curriculum sociology, which differentiates between the formal curriculum (the content and objectives prescribed by official documents), the real curriculum (what is actually taught and experienced in classrooms), and the hidden curriculum (the implicit values and norms transmitted through school routines and structures) (Perrenoud; Forquin).

In the Tunisian context, the formal PES curriculum remains rooted in a technocratic vision inherited from the 1990s. It prioritizes objectives such as motor skill acquisition, sports performance, physical conditioning, and discipline management (Ministry of Education). Civic objectives such as promoting inclusion, cooperation, empathy, or ethical reasoning are virtually absent from official programmatic texts (Memni; Metoudi and Delignières). This static and outdated curriculum fails to respond to the evolving societal needs of post-2011 Tunisia, where issues of democratic participation and social cohesion have become educational imperatives (Dubet; Elloumi).

Faced with this gap, teachers are left with significant interpretive freedom yet often without the necessary training or conceptual tools to exercise it constructively. As Perrenoud (1995) emphasizes, the real curriculum is shaped not only by policy but also by the teacher's professional habitus, school culture, and institutional constraints. In practice, this leads to considerable variation: while some teachers may incorporate values such as fairness or group responsibility into their sessions, others remain strictly focused on physical performance and classroom control (Delignières; Jackson).

Furthermore, the hidden curriculum those unspoken lessons conveyed through teacher behavior, organizational routines, and peer dynamics plays a powerful role in shaping civic dispositions. For example, when a teacher ignores exclusionary behavior among students, fails to encourage teamwork, or rewards only athletic excellence, students internalize competitive, hierarchical, and individualistic values (Bourdieu; Biesta). Conversely, structuring group activities to emphasize collective responsibility and inclusive participation can foster democratic norms, even if not explicitly labeled as "citizenship education" (Galichet; Ennis).

The result is a structural mismatch between institutional rhetoric and pedagogical reality. Official documents may reference the social mission of schools, but they fail to articulate how PES rich in social interactions and moral dilemmas can serve as a site of civic learning. Teachers, meanwhile, operate in a vacuum: lacking both the mandate and support to make citizenship a pedagogical priority. This disconnect highlights a key insight from curriculum sociology: that the implementation of educational objectives is not linear but contingent, negotiated, and deeply embedded in social and professional logics (Forquin; Perrenoud; Dubet).

Without intentional curricular redesign and teacher empowerment, the civic potential of PES will remain unrealized. As Biesta (2010) argues, education must not only be about "qualification" and "socialization," but also about "subjectification," helping students become autonomous, ethical agents capable of democratic action. PES, when framed within this triadic model, could be a powerful site for such transformation, but only if systemic changes bridge the current gap between formal intentions and real classroom practices.

2. Implicit Socialization and School-Based Citizenship

While the formal curriculum defines intended learning outcomes and the real curriculum reflects enacted practices, a third, often overlooked dimension the hidden curriculum shapes much of the implicit learning that occurs in school settings. This concept, introduced by Philip Jackson and further developed by sociologists such as Bourdieu and Perrenoud, refers to the tacit norms, social

expectations, and cultural codes that are transmitted through daily school life, often without being formally articulated (Jackson; Perrenoud; Bourdieu).

In the context of Physical Education and Sports (PES), this hidden curriculum is especially powerful. Because PES is organized around social interactions, body-based engagement, and group dynamics, it becomes a prime site for informal civic learning. Students are not merely learning to throw a ball or run laps they are negotiating rules, cooperating (or refusing to), managing conflict, experiencing inclusion or exclusion, and learning to respond to authority. These interactions often emotionally charged create what Galichet calls “situations formatrices”, moments rich in ethical and civic potential (Galichet).

For example, when a student mocks a teammate who fails during a game, or when others exclude a peer from a team based on gender or skill level, the way the teacher responds or does not respond communicates powerful lessons about acceptable social behavior. Ignoring exclusionary dynamics can reinforce individualism, gender bias, and social stratification (Delignières; Bourdieu). Conversely, intentionally fostering cooperation, equity, and mutual respect during activities helps students internalize democratic values (Gibbons; Ennis).

The problem, however, is that most PES teachers are neither trained nor institutionally supported to recognize or harness the civic dimensions of these interactions. They tend to focus on physical technique, discipline, and performance metrics, often leaving the social-emotional terrain of the classroom unaddressed (Memni; Metoudi and Delignières). As Biesta warns, this neglect results in an impoverished conception of education, one that emphasizes qualification at the expense of subjectification the development of moral autonomy and civic agency (Biesta).

Moreover, the school itself functions as a civic microcosm, where students learn through lived experience what it means to be part of a community. Yet, if school culture is hierarchical, disciplinary, and exclusionary as is often the case in under-resourced or overcrowded systems students internalize authoritarian and competitive logics, rather than participatory or democratic ones (Dubet; McAndrew et al.). This contradiction is particularly evident in PES, where the rules of play can either reinforce or challenge broader social inequalities.

Research has shown that inclusive pedagogies such as co-constructing rules with students, reflecting on group behavior, or rotating leadership roles can transform routine physical activities into opportunities for civic formation (Galichet; Glover and Ward). These strategies move PES beyond physical literacy to encompass ethical literacy and civic engagement. However, such practices remain rare in Tunisian schools, primarily due to the absence of pedagogical training in social-emotional or ethical instruction (Elloumi; Ministry of Education).

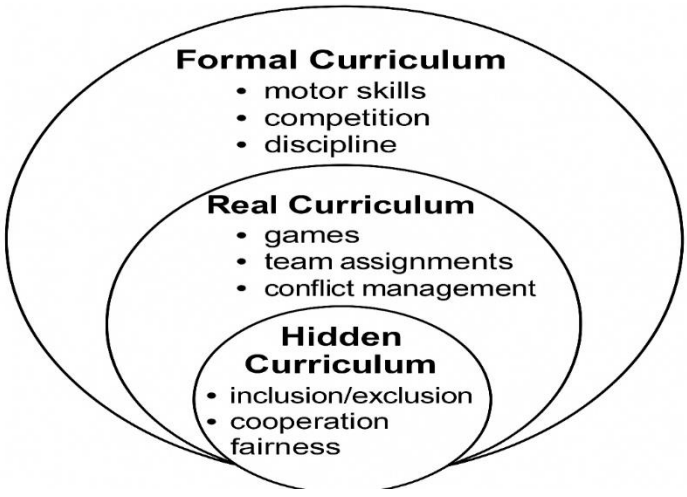

Figure 1. Layers of the Curriculum in Physical Education: From Formal Objectives to Implicit Socialization

Ultimately, implicit socialization in PES is not neutral: it either fosters or hinders civic learning depending on how it is managed. Teachers, whether they intend to or not, transmit civic messages through their daily actions how they resolve disputes, allocate roles, enforce rules, and respond to difference. Recognizing this civic function requires a paradigm shift: from seeing PES as a marginal, technical discipline to embracing it as a vital space for democratic apprenticeship..

3. Social Interactions in PES and Their Civic Potential

Physical Education and Sports (PES) is a unique curricular domain in which social interaction is not incidental but constitutive. Unlike solitary academic tasks, PES inherently involves group participation, competition, cooperation, and regulated physical contact. These interactions, often emotionally charged and highly visible, represent a rich terrain for the development or erosion of civic competencies such as empathy, self-regulation, fairness, and collective responsibility (Delignières; Galichet; Gibbons). As sociomotor activity, PES requires students to navigate structured interdependence. Whether cooperating with teammates, negotiating shared rules, or confronting opponents, students are placed in situations that mirror the tensions and opportunities of democratic life. According to Parlebas, the relational complexity embedded in physical games provides a pedagogical space for ethical reasoning, recognition of others, and social coordination (Parlebas). Yet, the extent to which these interactions become civic learning moments depends on teacher mediation and pedagogical framing (Metoudi; Delignières). Observational studies and field interviews suggest that, in the absence of deliberate guidance, these interactions often default to exclusionary or hyper-competitive logics. Students may isolate peers perceived as physically weak, reject mixed-gender collaboration, or seek to dominate rather than cooperate behaviors that reflect broader social hierarchies and are rarely corrected unless directly challenged (Memni; Bourdieu). As Biesta asserts, democratic education requires structuring environments that encourage shared agency and interdependence, not merely freedom or control (Biesta). The civic potential of PES thus lies not in the physical activity per se, but in how it is organized, debriefed, and valued. Cooperative games, role rotation, team-based problem-solving, and inclusive scoring systems can be designed to encourage empathy, reciprocity, and shared leadership (Glover and Ward; Ennis). Teachers who facilitate reflective discussions after gameplay about fairness, conflict resolution, or emotional regulation help students internalize civic norms beyond the moment of play (Galichet; Jackson).

However, this potential remains largely underutilized in the Tunisian context. Most teachers interviewed in this study acknowledge interpersonal conflict and peer exclusion during PES sessions, yet few employ strategies to transform them into learning opportunities. Instead, social interactions are often seen as peripheral distractions rather than integral educational content. This reflects a narrow conception of PES as a technical discipline and a missed opportunity for moral and civic formation (Dubet; Elloumi). Moreover, without targeted training in group dynamics, affective pedagogy, or restorative practices, teachers lack the tools to leverage social interactions for civic ends (Delignières; McAndrew et al.). In this context, the hidden curriculum embodied in who gets to lead, who is marginalized, and how conflict is managed becomes a powerful force in shaping students' understanding of justice, inclusion, and participation (Perrenoud; Bourdieu).

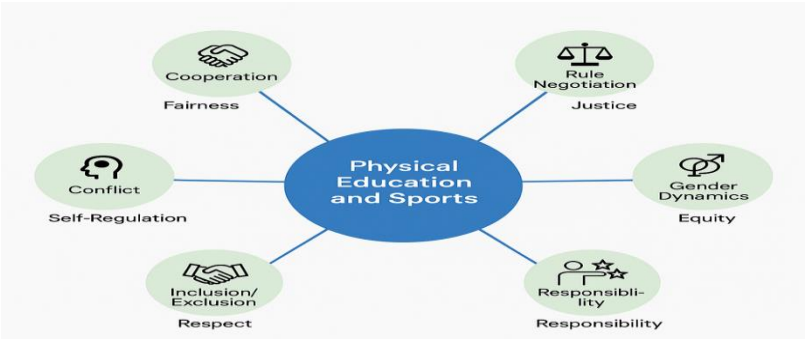

Figure 2. Social Interactions in Physical Education and Their Civic Learning Outcomes

If PES is to serve as a laboratory for democratic practice, its pedagogical design must foreground the ethical dimension of social interaction, not merely its logistical or disciplinary function. Doing so requires a cultural shift in how we conceive of physical education not as a break from learning, but as a space where embodied experience becomes a source of civic knowledge.

4. Institutional Constraints and Pedagogical Realities in Tunisia

The civic potential of Physical Education and Sports (PES) in Tunisia remains largely unrealized not only due to curricular neglect or pedagogical oversight but also because of deeper institutional constraints and structural limitations within the educational system. These constraints operate across multiple levels from curriculum design and teacher training to school infrastructure and cultural expectations thereby shaping, and often inhibiting, the capacity of PES teachers to engage meaningfully with citizenship education. At the curricular level, the official PES program issued by the Ministry of Education continues to reflect an outdated framework developed in the early 1990s. It is anchored in a technocratic logic that privileges athletic performance, motor development, and competitive preparation (Ministry of Education, 2002). Civic competencies such as inclusion, cooperation, or conflict mediation are either absent or ambiguously framed, leaving teachers with little formal mandate to address them (Memni; Metoudi and Delignières). This omission constitutes a form of symbolic marginalization, where PES is relegated to the periphery of the school's civic mission (Bourdieu). Teacher training further compounds this issue. Initial education for PES teachers in Tunisia is heavily skewed toward biomechanical, physiological, and technical expertise, with minimal emphasis on ethical, social, or civic dimensions (Elloumi; Memni). As a result, most educators enter the profession ill-equipped to manage the complex social dynamics that emerge in PES sessions whether related to gender, peer exclusion, or emotional regulation. Few have received any preparation in restorative practices, inclusive pedagogy, or education for democratic citizenship (Delignières; Galichet).

In-service training does little to close this gap. Professional development workshops when offered tend to focus on skill refinement, injury prevention, or organizing school competitions. Civic education remains a blind spot in these programs, reflecting the broader systemic depoliticization of teacher development (Forquin; Dubet). Teachers interviewed for this study repeatedly noted the absence of support for dealing with behavioral issues, social conflict, or cultural diversity in the classroom. As one remarked, "We are taught how to correct a running posture, but not how to respond when a student is excluded by his peers."

The institutional culture of schools also discourages innovation in civic pedagogy. Teachers often face high workloads, limited autonomy, and rigid administrative expectations, which prioritize discipline and compliance over student agency and reflection (Perrenoud). In under-resourced settings, where facilities are inadequate and class sizes large, PES sessions are frequently reduced to crowd management. In this context, teachers understandably resort to routines focused on control and execution, rather than moral or civic engagement (Darmon; McAndrew et al.).

Moreover, social norms and cultural taboos especially around gender further constrain PES teachers. Mixed-gender activities, for instance, are often avoided due to fears of conflict, parental disapproval, or personal discomfort. Teachers report lacking the institutional backing to address gender-based exclusion or to promote equity through sport. As a result, PES frequently reproduces rather than challenges existing gender hierarchies, despite its potential to model egalitarian relationships (Parlebas; Biesta).

This environment fosters a narrow professional identity, where many PES teachers see themselves primarily as technicians or physical trainers rather than educators with a broader social mission. As Delignières and Metoudi point out, the failure to redefine the role of PES in civic terms leads to a reproduction of traditional hierarchies, authority patterns, and forms of symbolic violence (Delignières and Metoudi; Bourdieu). In the absence of supportive policies, collaborative professional

cultures, or reflective training, many teachers either withdraw from civic engagement or confine it to isolated moments lacking coherence or evaluation.

In sum, the institutional landscape of Tunisian schools provides few structural incentives and multiple disincentives for PES teachers to assume a civic educational role. Without systemic reform in teacher education, curricular design, and school governance, the transformative potential of PES for democratic learning will remain largely theoretical. As Biesta contends, the democratization of education requires not only new goals but new professional cultures and institutional architectures capable of supporting them.

5. Methodology

To investigate how physical education teachers engage with citizenship education in practice, this study employed a qualitative, interpretive methodology rooted in ethnographic fieldwork. The overall research design is summarized in Figure 3 below, which outlines the methodological components, data sources, and analytic approach. This structure allowed the study to combine observation, discourse, and contextual analysis coherently and rigorously.

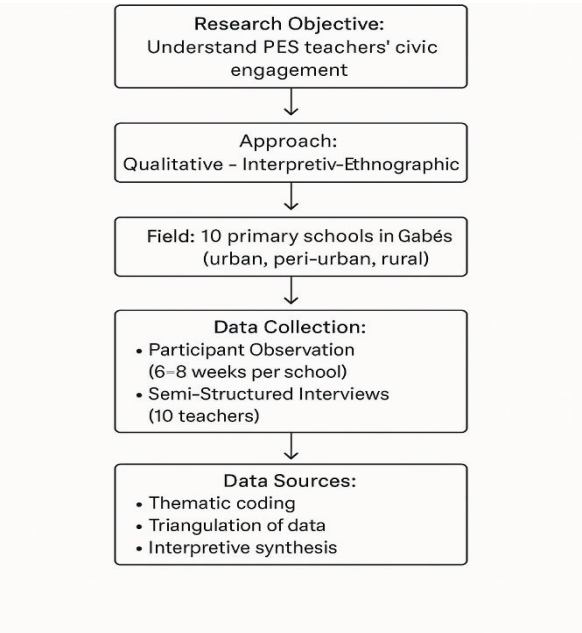

Figure 3. Overview of Methodological Design for the Study of Citizenship Education in PES

5.1. Methodological Approach

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive methodology grounded in the principles of ethnographic research. Rather than seeking to quantify teacher behaviors or outcomes, the inquiry is oriented toward understanding the subjective meanings, situated logics, and implicit pedagogical frameworks that inform how physical education teachers perceive and enact their civic role in Tunisian primary schools. The approach is particularly suited to exploring complex and context-sensitive phenomena, such as teacher engagement, classroom interaction, and citizenship formation domains that resist standardization and require deep immersion for meaningful analysis (Jackson; Forquin). As such, the study is anchored in a constructivist epistemology, privileging the co-construction of knowledge through sustained fieldwork and dialogic interaction with practitioners. In line with ethnographic traditions, the researcher sought to capture not only what teachers do, but also why they do it: how their actions are shaped by institutional constraints, cultural norms, personal beliefs, and professional socialization. This orientation allows for an interpretive reading of practice that transcends surface-level description and probes the deeper dynamics of curriculum enactment, role negotiation, and civic intentionality (Perrenoud; Dubet).

5.2. Research Field and Sample

Fieldwork was conducted in ten public primary schools located in the Gabès region of southeastern Tunisia. The region was selected for its socio-spatial diversity, encompassing urban, peri-urban, and rural environments. This heterogeneity allowed for the comparison of educational contexts that vary in terms of infrastructure, student demographics, resource availability, and school culture. The study focused specifically on physical education teachers responsible for sixth-grade classes the final year of Tunisian primary education. This grade level was strategically chosen because it represents a critical transitional phase in students' social and civic development. Furthermore, sixth-grade schedules tend to offer greater temporal stability, which facilitated longitudinal observation and more consistent teacher engagement.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on:

- Accessibility and logistical feasibility;
- Willingness to participate in extended observation and interviews;
- Diversity in teaching experience, gender, and professional background (initial training, career trajectory, etc.).

This selection strategy aimed to ensure representativeness within the qualitative paradigm and to capture variation in pedagogical perspectives and practices..

5.3. Data Collection Techniques

The research design incorporated two complementary data collection methods: participant observation and semi-structured interviews. This triangulated approach enhanced the depth and reliability of findings and allowed for the convergence of experiential, discursive, and behavioral data.

5.3.1. Participant Observations

Over a period of six to eight weeks per school, the researcher conducted weekly in-situ observations of physical education sessions. The goal was to analyze how civic values were expressed, suppressed, or negotiated through the spontaneous dynamics of classroom interaction.

Observation focused on four primary dimensions:

Session structure and organization: including role distribution, time/space management, and sequencing of activities;

- Activity typology: competitive vs. cooperative games, individual vs. team-based formats;
- Teacher interventions: verbal corrections, disciplinary strategies, motivational techniques, and moments of ethical framing;
- Peer dynamics: such as inclusion/exclusion, conflict resolution, expressions of solidarity, or verbal micro-interactions.

Detailed field notes were recorded after each session, combining descriptive narrative, direct quotations, and analytical commentary. The notes served as a key corpus for later thematic coding and interpretation.

5.3.2. Semi-Structured Interviews

Following classroom observations, individual interviews were conducted with all ten participating teachers. The aim was to capture teachers' cognitive schemas regarding citizenship, their perceived responsibilities in promoting it, and the strategies or absences thereof reflected in their classroom practice.

The interviews followed a semi-structured guide organized around four thematic domains:

- Personal and professional definitions of citizenship;

- Prior experiences with civic or ethical instruction;
- Pedagogical practices with potential civic dimensions in PES sessions;
- Exposure to initial and continuing training related to citizenship or ethics.

Each interview lasted 45 to 60 minutes, was audio-recorded with informed consent, and subsequently fully transcribed for analysis. Transcripts were cross-referenced with observation notes to identify consistencies, contradictions, and emergent themes.

6. Data Analysis Strategy

The collected data observation notes and interview transcripts underwent a thematic content analysis combining inductive coding and theoretical interpretation. Themes were derived from the empirical material while also being informed by the theoretical concepts presented earlier, such as real curriculum, habitus, implicit socialization, and experiential learning.

Six dominant thematic axes emerged from this process:

1. Anti-civic practices in PES sessions;

2. Vague and reductive representations of citizenship;

3. Fragmented awareness of the teacher's educational role;

4. Inadequacy of continuing training;

5. Reduction of PES to technical performance;

6. Weak teacher motivation regarding civic engagement.

These axes are explored in the next section. The triangulation of observational data, discourse analysis, and theoretical concepts allowed for a rich, contextualized interpretation of teacher engagement in citizenship education through PES.

6.1. Analysis of Empirical Findings

6.1.1. Anti-Civic Practices Observed During PES Sessions

Observational data from sixth-grade classes revealed that many PES sessions fail to promote civic learning and, in some cases, actively hinder it. Students often exhibit individualistic and exclusionary behaviors during team games: monopolizing the ball, refusing to cooperate, excluding peers who are perceived as weak, and displaying gender-based discrimination. In one instance, a student said, "I play to win alone, not to pass the ball," while the teacher remained passive.

These dynamics reflect an absence of educational intervention aimed at promoting cooperation or inclusive behavior. From a curricular sociology perspective, this situation illustrates the gap between the formal curriculum and the real curriculum described by Perrenoud: while official texts may include civic objectives, these are not reflected in daily practices. Moreover, the hidden curriculum the values implicitly conveyed by the teacher's silence or tolerance can reinforce antisocial norms.

The absence of mixed-gender activities in many sessions, often justified by fears of conflict or lack of training, further illustrates missed opportunities for inclusive civic engagement. As Delignières and Metoudi argue, PES can be a rich space for ethical and civic learning but only when pedagogically structured. Without intentional guidance, it can just as easily reproduce domination, rivalry, and exclusion.

6.2. Vague and Reductive Representations of Citizenship

Interviews with teachers revealed widespread confusion or reductionism in their understanding of "citizenship." Most defined it narrowly, associating it with formal legal rights or adult behavior: voting, obeying the law, or respecting authority. Several teachers expressed the view that "citizenship

comes later, when students are older," effectively excluding it from primary education and from PES in particular.

This conception reflects a formalist and externalized view of citizenship, disconnected from school life and classroom interactions. Galichet critiques such an approach, advocating instead for a "practical citizenship" learned through active participation, cooperation, and responsibility.

None of the teachers reported having received training or pedagogical guidance on how to integrate citizenship into PES. The concept was often seen as abstract, vague, or irrelevant. As a result, teachers neither incorporate civic objectives into their session planning nor evaluate student progress in this area. This absence of intentionality mirrors Perrenoud's concern: without explicit educational aims, the real curriculum is shaped by chance rather than by conscious design.

6.3. Fragmented Awareness of the Teacher's Educational Role

Although several teachers shared classroom anecdotes where they promoted respect, inclusion, or participation, these actions appeared to be isolated and not part of a cohesive pedagogical approach. One teacher explained that he "makes sure everyone gets a turn," while another emphasized fairness when forming teams. However, such practices were presented as personal choices rather than reflections of an overarching educational strategy.

This fragmentation highlights the lack of institutional and professional frameworks to support citizenship education. As Perrenoud notes, teachers need structured, reflective engagement to transform scattered practices into a coherent professional stance. In the absence of such structuring, civic intentions remain intuitive and inconsistent.

Teachers often perceive themselves as technicians of movement rather than moral educators. Many expressed reluctance to intervene in social or behavioral conflicts, believing these fall outside their domain of responsibility. This reflects a deeper issue: the professional identity of PES teachers in Tunisia remains narrowly defined, leaving little room for civic or ethical engagement, as also noted by Delignières in his work on the social dimensions of PES.

6.4. Inadequacy of Continuing Education on Civic Dimensions

A recurrent theme across interviews was the lack of continuing education focused on citizenship or civic pedagogy in PES. When training was available, it was overwhelmingly technical covering skills improvement, sports organization, or student safety. No teacher reported being exposed to content on conflict resolution, diversity management, or ethical reflection in class.

One teacher summarized the problem: "They teach us how to improve a jump or a throw, but not how to manage a team fight or verbal insult." This gap contributes to a technocentric vision of PES, reinforcing the idea that the subject is about physical training rather than social learning.

This lack of targeted training also blocks professional evolution. According to Delignières and Metoudi, civic learning through PES requires specific tools and pedagogies, such as cooperative structures, democratic rule-setting, and reflective debriefing. Without institutional support for these practices, teachers are left to improvise or avoid civic engagement altogether.

In this sense, the real curriculum remains thin and reactive, shaped more by risk avoidance than by transformative ambition.

6.5. A Role Reduced to Technical and Athletic Performance

Observations show that the majority of teachers focus their instruction on technical correction, physical execution, and behavioral control. Teacher interventions revolve around performance metrics, gesture precision, and discipline management. Very little attention is paid to emotional regulation, cooperation, or the moral aspects of gameplay.

Teachers' discourse confirms this orientation. Many described their role as "making students move," "preparing them for sport," or "identifying the talented ones." This reflects a narrow, technocratic view of PES one that prioritizes bodily mastery over social development.

This mindset aligns with Bourdieu's notion of reproductive habitus, whereby schools transmit norms that validate physical performance and discipline, but marginalize alternative expressions of citizenship or social inclusion. In the absence of a broader educational framework, teachers tend to reproduce traditional models of authority, competition, and hierarchy.

Delignières emphasizes that PES has the potential to form the whole person including ethical, emotional, and relational dimensions but this requires a deliberate shift in teaching posture. Without such a shift, the discipline risks remaining a purely instrumental activity, disconnected from the goals of citizenship education.

6.6. Weak Motivation and Latent Professional Disengagement

Finally, interviews revealed a worrying lack of motivation among teachers to engage in citizenship education. Some explicitly stated that "changing students' mindset is not my job" or "I do what's in the program, nothing more." Such statements reflect a latent professional disengagement that is not necessarily rooted in apathy, but rather in institutional neglect and lack of support.

Teachers often feel ill-equipped, unsupported, and unsure of how far their responsibilities extend. They fear missteps or criticism, especially when addressing sensitive issues like gender, exclusion, or student conflict. In the absence of training, resources, or recognition, many retreat into a minimalist interpretation of their duties.

Perrenoud warns that teaching is never neutral: even passive or minimalist approaches transmit implicit norms and values. By choosing not to intervene, teachers may inadvertently reinforce exclusionary or anti-democratic behaviors. The hidden curriculum here becomes a silent vector of social reproduction rather than transformation.

In light of these findings, citizenship education in PES appears largely underdeveloped, fragmented, and contingent upon individual initiative. Without structural change, the discipline risks reinforcing the very social inequalities it could otherwise help to overcome.

Synthesis of the Findings

This study reveals a profound disconnect between the civic potential of PES and its actual pedagogical implementation in Tunisian primary schools. While the discipline is rich in opportunities for experiential learning, teamwork, and ethical reflection, these dimensions remain largely unexploited.

The real curriculum is dominated by technical objectives, while the civic dimension is either marginalized or left to chance. Teachers' representations of citizenship are vague, their educational posture is fragmented, and their professional training is inadequate to meet the ethical and social challenges of contemporary classrooms.

Importantly, the disengagement observed is not the product of teacher apathy, but rather a reflection of institutional inertia: outdated curricula, poor initial preparation, and nonexistent continuing education all contribute to a system where civic learning is peripheral. Yet, some isolated practices and individual initiatives suggest that change is possible.

To activate the civic potential of PES, teachers must be equipped, recognized, and supported not only in mastering physical instruction, but in managing group dynamics, fostering cooperation, and creating inclusive pedagogical environments. Only then can PES fulfill its full mission as a lever for democratic socialization.

CONCLUSION

This research highlights the limited and fragmented engagement of Tunisian primary school PES teachers in citizenship education. Although the discipline offers rich possibilities for promoting civic values such as respect, cooperation, inclusion, and collective responsibility these dimensions are rarely translated into structured pedagogical practices.

The formal curriculum remains outdated, with little reference to citizenship education, and the real curriculum is marked by a dominance of technical, disciplinary, and performance-based objectives. Teachers' perceptions of their professional role are often reduced to physical training, and their interventions focus more on control and correction than on ethical or democratic development.

These constraints are amplified by a glaring lack of professional training both initial and ongoing focused on civic competencies, group dynamics, or inclusive pedagogy. Teachers are left to navigate complex classroom realities without the tools or institutional support required to embrace a broader educational mission.

To address these challenges, several structural reforms are necessary:

Updating the official curriculum to explicitly include citizenship goals in PES;

Rethinking teacher education programs to incorporate civic, social, and ethical dimensions;

Creating professional development modules that offer tools for managing diversity, conflict, and cooperative learning;

Providing institutional recognition and support for the civic engagement of PES teachers.

In short, reinvesting PES with its full educational potential requires a systemic shift from a logic of performance to a logic of social formation. Only then can PES contribute meaningfully to the democratic mission of the school and to the formation of active, responsible, and inclusive citizens.

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