

Physical Education and Sport in Romania: Between Ideal, Reality, and Prospects for Reform

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ABSTRACT. Physical Education and Sport (PES) represent a foundational pillar in contemporary educational architecture, supporting the holistic development of individuals. This study provides an integrative analysis of the educational ideal in this field, the systemic realities in Romania, and potential directions for reform, benchmarked against European best practices. Through a comparative approach, it highlights the convergences and divergences between Romania and other countries in Central, Southeastern, and Baltic Europe, offering a reflective framework for developing a sustainable, inclusive, and student-centered physical education.

Keywords: *physical education, curricular reform, international comparison, educational policies, public health.*

REZUMAT. *Educația fizică și sportul în România: între ideal, realitate și perspective de reformă.* Educația fizică și sportul (EFS) constituie un pilon fundamental în arhitectura educațională contemporană, susținând dezvoltarea integrală a individului. Studiul de față oferă o analiză integrativă a idealului educațional în domeniu, a realităților sistemice din România și a direcțiilor posibile de reformă, raportate la bune practici europene. Printr-o abordare comparativă, sunt evidențiate convergențele și diferențele dintre România și alte state din Europa Centrală, de Sud-Est și din regiunea baltică, oferindu-se

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un cadru de reflecție asupra dezvoltării unei educații fizice sustenabile, incluzive și centrate pe elev.

Cuvinte-cheie: *educație fizică, reformă curriculară, comparație internațională, politici educaționale, sănătate publică.*

INTRODUCTION

Physical education has undergone significant transformation over the past decades, reflecting broader global shifts in social, cultural, and educational paradigms. Whereas earlier approaches prioritized performance, competition, and athletic selection, the contemporary discourse increasingly frames physical education as a vehicle for promoting health, social inclusion, and personal development (Marín-Suelves & Ramón-Llin, 2021; Marques, 2021). This conceptual reorientation underscores the role of physical education not merely as a school subject, but as a multifaceted educational instrument contributing to the development of active, autonomous, and socially responsible individuals (Berki & Tarjányi, 2022; Habyarimana, Tugurumukiza & Zhou, 2022).

In Romania, this transition has occurred in a discontinuous and fragmented manner, hindered by the absence of a coherent strategic vision and the implementation of sporadic reforms. Although national education policies have gradually aligned with European principles emphasizing inclusive, learner-centered physical education, actual practices at the school level often remain anchored in traditional models that prioritize standardized assessments, hierarchical ranking, and quantitative evaluation. These efforts have further been constrained by inadequate infrastructure, limited opportunities for continuous professional development among teaching staff, and a lack of modern educational resources.

This article examines these dynamics through a thematic and comparative analysis situated within the broader European context, identifying both the strengths and challenges specific to the Romanian educational landscape. By drawing on successful models from other European countries, the study proposes strategic directions for the reconfiguration of physical education in Romania, aiming to better align it with the actual needs of students and the evolving demands of contemporary society.

1. The ideal of physical education and sport

The educational ideal of physical education and sport (PES) is grounded in a holistic vision of human development, encompassing not only the traditional goals of motor performance and athletic competition, but also the comprehensive formation of the individual across physical, mental, emotional, and social dimensions (Bălăceanu & Popescu, 2019; Ionescu, 2020).

The promotion of physical and mental health represents a core component of this vision, aiming not only to prevent sedentary behavior and associated health conditions, but also to support psychological well-being, stress reduction, and the enhancement of self-esteem through movement-based activities (Furrer, 2023; Haegele et al., 2021).

The development of social and ethical competencies within physical activities facilitates the internalization of values such as respect, responsibility, teamwork, and fair play, thereby contributing to the cultivation of a strong moral character (Furrer et al., 2020, Ștefănescu, 2023).

Encouraging cooperation, trust, and self-improvement reflects the orientation of physical education toward creating an environment in which each student is supported in overcoming personal limits, building self-confidence and mutual trust, and experiencing individual growth within a collective context (Bailey et al., 2009, Ionescu, 2020).

Fostering social inclusion through shared motor activities highlights the potential of physical education to reduce social, cultural, or ability-based barriers, promoting the active participation of all students regardless of their physical aptitude or socio-economic background (Furrer, 2023; Haegele et al., 2021).

Thus, the ideal of PES entails a deeply humanistic educational approach that integrates movement and sport into the broader process of shaping active, empathetic, and healthy citizens.

2. European Approaches to Physical Education and Sport

At the European level, physical education and sport are recognized as essential components of education for active citizenship, health, and social cohesion (UNESCO, 2015). In recent decades, European education policies have increasingly steered physical education towards an integrative model, emphasizing inclusion, transversal competencies, and the quality of motor experience, rather than standardized athletic performance (UNESCO, 2021).

Among the key strategic directions promoted across Europe are:

- **Physical education for all** – a universal approach that ensures equal access and active participation regardless of gender, ability level, cultural background, or disability. This principle is supported by

foundational documents such as the *International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport* (UNESCO, 2015), as well as recent initiatives for inclusive physical education (UNESCO, 2021);

- **A focus on health and well-being** – physical activity is increasingly integrated into public health strategies, serving as a key tool in preventing chronic diseases, combating sedentary lifestyles, and promoting mental health among children and adolescents (UNESCO, 2021);
- **Formative and progress-centered assessment** – a shift away from rigid evaluations based on quantifiable physical performance, towards individualized methods that value student progress, engagement, and personal development (UNESCO, 2021);
- **Ongoing professional development for teachers** – investments in teacher training aim to equip physical education professionals with modern competencies, particularly in inclusive pedagogy, educational technology, educational leadership, and health education (UNESCO, 2021);
- **Interdisciplinarity and the integration of European values** – physical education is increasingly seen as a platform for intercultural, ethical, environmental, and civic education, fostered through international projects and partnerships that promote cooperation, mobility, and the exchange of best practices (UNESCO, 2021).

These strategic directions provide a coherent framework for the reform of physical education, aligned with the challenges of contemporary society and with the ideal of an education focused on the holistic development of the learner (UNESCO, 2015; UNESCO, 2021).

3. The Issue of Physical Education in Romania

Romanian physical education reflects a complex historical trajectory, shaped by profound transformations in response to shifting political and social contexts. During the communist era, physical education held a pronounced ideological function, serving as a tool for collective discipline, propaganda, and elite sports selection. The communist regime sought to exert total control over Romanian society between 1948 and 1989, viewing higher education and sport as crucial domains for constructing the so-called “new man” (Constantin & Maier, 2014). The instrumentalization of sports heroes was already a practice in Soviet Russia, and Romania adopted this model. As a result, physical education and sport were closely monitored by the political regime, which aimed to expand the number of specialists in the field (Hațegan, 2018).

Following 1990, the transition to a democratic system prompted a reconfiguration of values and objectives (Zanca, 2024). However, this process often unfolded in a fragmented, inconsistent, and incoherent manner. Today, the Romanian physical education system faces a range of systemic challenges that hinder both the effectiveness of educational activities and their formative impact on students:

- Uneven curriculum implementation leads to significant disparities between schools, depending on available resources, institutional profiles, or individual teacher initiative. This lack of uniformity undermines the coherence of the educational process at the national level.
- Infrastructure deficits in rural areas remain a critical issue, as many schools lack access to gymnasiums, appropriate equipment, or properly arranged outdoor spaces for motor activities. This inequity significantly limits the chances of students from disadvantaged environments to benefit from high-quality physical education (World Vision Romania, 2024).
- A dominant summative assessment model focuses on measuring standardized physical performance, to the detriment of formative assessment approaches that emphasize individual progress, active participation, and the development of motor and social competencies.
- A pronounced disconnection from competitive sport has resulted in a gap between the educational system and sports institutions, which undermines the early identification and guidance of students with athletic potential, as well as the promotion of a culture of physical activity across the entire school population.
- Outdated professional training limits the ability of physical education teachers to respond to contemporary educational challenges. The absence of coherent and ongoing professional development programs focused on modern methodologies, inclusive education, and interdisciplinarity perpetuates rigid and outdated teaching practices (Miron & Petrovici, 2019).

These factors contribute to a diminished perception of the value of physical education among students, parents, and even policymakers, highlighting the urgent need for systemic interventions aimed at repositioning physical education at the core of a balanced and holistic educational experience for contemporary learners.

4. International Comparative Analysis

The comparative analysis (Prodea, 2025) focused on physical education models from Central Europe (Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary), Southeastern Europe (Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece), and the Baltic region (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania). These models were assessed based on six key criteria: curriculum model, pedagogical paradigm, assessment, infrastructure, teacher training, and the connection to performance sports.

Central European countries demonstrate significant progress in modernizing physical education, emphasizing student-centered approaches, autonomy, and formative assessment, while implementing coherent reforms tailored to current educational contexts.

Southeastern Europe retains a more traditional approach, characterized by limited resources and a weak integration of performance sports into the educational system.

The Baltic countries present examples of best practices, distinguished by coherent educational policies, modernized infrastructure supported by European funding, and an integrative vision of student development.

Central Europe: Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary

This region is distinguished by coherent initiatives aimed at modernizing physical education, influenced by contemporary European trends and adapted to national contexts. Emphasis is placed on student-centered approaches, curricular autonomy, and formative assessment, within a framework supported by clear educational policies (OECD, 2025, Ministry of Education Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic, 2020, Ministry of Education of Hungary, 2022, Ministry of Education of Poland, 2021).

- *Curricular model:* Curricular reforms have aimed to shift from rigid, uniform content to flexible structures aligned with 21st-century competencies. For example, Poland and the Czech Republic emphasize students' holistic development by integrating physical education into broader goals of personality formation and civic values.
- *Pedagogical paradigm:* Constructivist, learner-centered pedagogy is promoted, highlighting autonomy, initiative, and cooperative learning. Teachers are encouraged to adopt active and differentiated teaching methods.
- *Assessment:* Formative assessment prevails, aiming to support individual progress, self-reflection, and student engagement in their own development. Standardized testing has been replaced with portfolios and guided self-evaluation.

- *Infrastructure*: Countries in the region benefit from well-maintained or modernized sports infrastructure, particularly in urban areas, often supported by European Union funding.
- *Teacher training*: Initial and continuing teacher education programs are aligned with European standards, with a strong focus on interdisciplinarity, psycho-pedagogical competencies, and the continual updating of instructional methodologies.
- *Connection to competitive sports*: Hungary, in particular, has implemented integrated policies between schools and sports clubs, supporting talented youth through “sports school” structures.
- *Notable example*: Hungary allocates five hours of physical education per week in the primary cycle, reflecting a strong institutional commitment to children's health and development.

Southeastern Europe: Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece

Countries in this region generally maintain a traditional approach to physical education, characterized by systemic continuity but limited by resource constraints, fragmented reforms, and a weak integration of competitive sport within the school system (Tismăneanu, 2014, TIMSS Bulgaria, 2019, UNESCO, 2015, Youth Wiki Serbia, 2022).

- *Curricular model*: Curricula are typically oriented toward standardized physical activities and quantifiable performance objectives, with insufficient emphasis on students' psychosocial dimensions or creativity.
- *Pedagogical paradigm*: Pedagogy is often teacher-centered and frontal. Active participation and individualized approaches are rarely employed due to a lack of modern methodological resources.
- *Assessment*: Summative assessment dominates, focusing on standardized physical testing with little adaptation to students' developmental levels or interests.
- *Infrastructure*: Many schools operate with outdated sports facilities, and in rural areas, appropriate infrastructure is often nonexistent. Funding is insufficient, and European investments are not fully utilized.
- *Teacher training*: Initial training programs are often theoretical and weakly connected to modern teaching practice. The lack of continuous professional development limits teachers' adaptability.
- *Connection to competitive sports*: There is a marked separation between school-based physical education and competitive sports, with few institutional bridges or mechanisms for talent identification and support.

- *Notable example:* In Serbia and Bulgaria, the school curriculum includes only two hours of physical education per week, with no effective extracurricular programs to support youth sports.

The Baltic Region: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania

The Baltic countries present models of good practice, distinguished by coherent educational policies, EU-supported modern infrastructure, and an integrative vision of student development (The Times, 2025, Sport Factsheet Estonia, 2018, Sport Factsheet Letonia, 2021, Sport Factsheet Lituania, 2021).

- *Curricular model:* The curriculum is flexible, competence-based, and adaptable to the specific needs of each school. Emphasis is placed on diverse physical activities, the integration of traditional sports, and the promotion of movement beyond formal lesson time.
- *Pedagogical paradigm:* A student-centered approach is promoted, wherein physical education contributes to holistic development—physical, mental, and social. Participatory, interdisciplinary methods and outdoor activities are commonly used.
- *Assessment:* A complex assessment system is employed, combining self-evaluation, individual progress tracking, and age- and developmentally-appropriate performance criteria.
- *Infrastructure:* Educational infrastructure modernization programs, supported by the European Union, have resulted in modern, digital, and environmentally sustainable facilities, including in rural areas.
- *Teacher training:* Training systems emphasize continuous professional development, international collaboration, and the integration of digital technologies in education.
- *Connection to competitive sports:* Student participation in local clubs is encouraged through partnerships between schools and municipal sports structures. Early selection strategies and individualized support systems are in place.
- *Notable example:* Estonia stands out for its digitized system of monitoring students' physical activity, integrated into their general educational record.

The comparative tables below synthesize the main positive European trends in physical and sports education in contrast to the current situation in Romania. The analysis is structured around six core criteria, offering a clear picture of the gap between international best practices and the realities of the Romanian educational system.

Results of the Comparative Analysis

Available data on physical education in secondary education were analyzed for the following countries: Romania, Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Serbia, and Greece. The information is structured according to six key criteria: curricular model, pedagogical paradigm, assessment, connection with competitive sports, infrastructure, and teacher training.

Regarding a comparative analysis between the orientations of the studied European countries and Romania, from the perspective of physical education and sports, the following table (Table 1) presents several summarized coordinates.

Table 1. Comparative Thematic Analysis of European Trends and Romania

Criterion	European Trends	Romania – Current Situation
Curricular Model	3–5 hours/week (Hungary, Latvia, Poland)	2 hours/week, uneven implementation between urban and rural areas
Pedagogical Paradigm	Student-centered, autonomy, well-being (Czech Republic, Estonia, Poland)	Slow transition from traditional model to student-centered approach
Assessment	Formative assessment, self-reflection, progress (Poland, Estonia, Czech Republic)	Predominantly summative assessment, limited formative initiatives
Infrastructure	Strategic investments, urban-rural equity (Poland, Latvia, Estonia)	Significant rural-urban disparities, lack of modern facilities
Teacher Training	Initial + continuous, integrated training (Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania)	Bologna system, lack of practical training and continuous professional development
Connection with Competitive Sports	Stable institutional partnerships (Hungary, Poland)	Post-2000 disconnection between schools and sports clubs

On the other hand, regarding the criteria for comparative analysis between the orientations of the studied European countries from the perspective of physical education and sports, the following table (Table 2) presents several summarized coordinates.

Table 2. Analysis Criteria for the Studied Countries

Country	Curriculum Model	Pedagogical Paradigm	Assessment	Link to Performance	Infra-structure	Teacher Training
Romania	2 hours/week, health focus	Transition towards student-centered model	Summative + initiatives	Disruption after 2000	Rural inequality	Bologna system, no coaching
Hungary	5 hours/week in primary	Integrated curriculum	Continuous assessment	School-club collaboration	Modernized	Teacher + coach
Czechia	Flexible, holistic curriculum	Reflective, well-being focused	Portfolios, self-assessment	Mass sport	Standardized post-2000	Integrated pedagogy
Poland	Health emphasis, 3 hours	Global development	Competency-based + feedback	Stable linkage	Major investments	Initial + ongoing training
Bulgaria	2 hours/week	Slow/Traditional transition	Predominantly summative	Weak linkages	Unequal infrastructure	University-level training
Estonia	2-3 hours/week	Innovation and student autonomy	Personal progress	Separate from clubs	Very good	Modern university education
Lithuania	2-3 hours/week	Daily physical activity	Individual feedback	Mass sport	Under modernization	Bologna + workshops
Latvia	3 hours/week	Mixed (rural/traditional)	Practical + summative	Moderate linkage	Good urban, moderate rural	Specialized university training
Serbia	2 hours/week	Traditional	Physical assessment	Poor integration	Variable	Faculties of sport education
Greece	1-2 hours/week	Recreation, urban health	Participation, attendance	Private clubs, not school-based	Deficient rural areas	Specialized university training

5. Thematic Analysis: Convergences and Differences in European Physical Education Models

To more clearly capture European trends and to propose a vision applicable to the modernization of physical education in Romania, a thematic approach organized around transversal analytical criteria is useful.

a. *Curriculum Models: Between the Minimum Requirement and the Expansion of Health Education*

Most of the analyzed countries allocate 2–3 hours per week for physical education (Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Lithuania, Estonia), with the notable exception of Hungary, where physical education is compulsory for 5 hours per week at the primary level. This extension is correlated with national policies aimed at preventing chronic diseases and promoting an active lifestyle as a major educational objective (Bailey et al., 2009; Dumitru & Pantea, 2018).

b. *Pedagogical Paradigms: Transitioning from Traditional to Student-Centered Approaches*

In Central Europe (Czechia, Poland, Hungary) and the Baltic countries (Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia), the pedagogical paradigm of physical education has evolved toward student-centered models emphasizing personal development and well-being (Dyson, 2015; Popescu, 2020). In contrast, Romania, Bulgaria, and Serbia continue to exhibit traditional paradigms focused predominantly on immediate physical performance and standardized assessment (Răduță & Ionescu, 2017).

c. *Student Assessment: From Grading to Competency-Based Evaluation*

In new educational models, assessment increasingly relies on competencies and individualized feedback (Poland, Estonia, Czechia), emphasizing student progress and active involvement in self-assessment (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Stoica et al., 2019). Romania and Greece, however, predominantly use summative final grading, which limits the formative potential of physical education lessons (Marinescu, 2016).

d. *Infrastructure: A Factor of Educational Equity*

Countries with strategic investments in school infrastructure (Poland, Estonia, Latvia) manage to ensure equitable conditions for practicing physical education (UNESCO, 2015; Petrescu & Vlad, 2021). In Romania, Bulgaria, and Serbia, a significant gap persists between urban and rural areas, affecting the quality of the educational process and limiting children's access to adequate facilities (Dumitru & Pantea, 2018).

e. Teacher Training: A Pillar of Reform

Successful models in Czechia, Poland, and Estonia include both initial and continuous teacher training adapted to new pedagogical and public health requirements (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Răduță & Ionescu, 2017). In Romania, although the Bologna system has been implemented, the lack of modern practical modules and the absence of specialized continuous training maintain a professional competence gap (Popescu, 2020).

Thematic analysis clearly demonstrates that the success of reforms in physical education depends not solely on the number of physical education lessons or curriculum modernization but on a coherent set of factors: infrastructure, ongoing professional development, formative assessment, and paradigms focused on the holistic development of the student, as is evident in the following comparative chart (Figure 1).

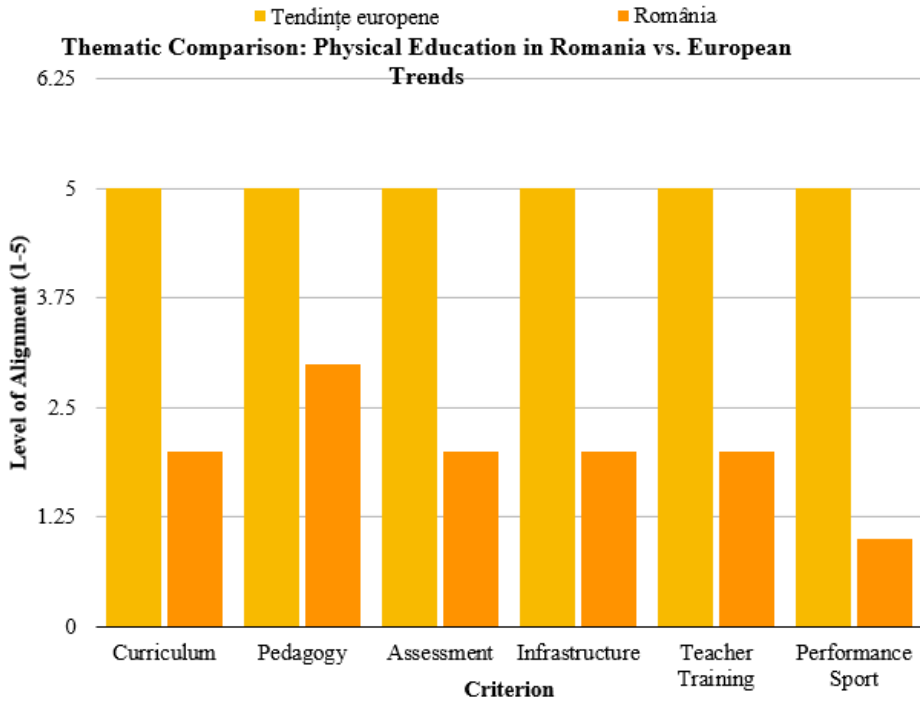


Fig. 1. Thematic Comparison of Physical Education and Sport in Romania vs. European Trends

6. Strategic Reform Directions: Recommendations for Sustainable Educational Policies

Based on comparative analyses and the realities identified within the Romanian education system, a clear orientation of educational policies toward strengthening the role of physical education as a major public interest domain is necessary. To this end, the following action directions are proposed:

Increasing the Number of Physical Education Hours

Expanding physical education to at least 3 hours per week during lower and upper secondary education would significantly contribute to achieving public health and personal development objectives. Examples from Hungary, Latvia, and Poland demonstrate that allocating increased time for physical activity within the student schedule does not negatively impact academic performance; rather, it enhances it by improving concentration and psychological balance (Bailey et al., 2013; Popescu, 2020; Schmidt et al., 2017).

Reforming Assessment Toward a Formative Approach

Shifting from predominantly summative assessment (standardized grades) to one centered on competencies, self-reflection, and individual progress is essential. This requires revising assessment descriptors and training teachers in the use of formative tools such as portfolios, progress sheets, and individualized feedback (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Răduță & Ionescu, 2017; Stoica et al., 2019).

Reconnecting Physical Education with Performance Sport

School physical education can once again become a platform for selection and guidance toward performance sport by fostering partnerships between schools and local sports clubs. A functional model can be inspired by Hungary, where such collaboration is institutionally integrated (Dumitru & Pantea, 2018; Weiss & Smith, 2002).

Investing in School Sports Infrastructure

Modernizing school infrastructure - especially in rural areas - is a fundamental condition for educational equity. A phased national strategy is required to prioritize access to gymnasiums, multifunctional sports fields, and minimum equipment for motor activities (Petrescu & Vlad, 2021; UNESCO, 2015).

Strengthening Initial and Continuous Teacher Training

Physical education teacher training must be adapted to the current context, including inclusion, technology, and health education. The introduction

of applied modules, experiential learning, and mandatory continuous professional development is recommended, as practiced in Estonia and Poland (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Răduță & Ionescu, 2017; Popescu, 2020).

7. Students' Perception: Between Relaxation, Obligation, and Perceived Uselessness

In the context of a coherent reform of physical education, integrating the student perspective —being the direct beneficiary of the educational process - is essential. Without understanding how students perceive, experience, and value physical education and sport (PES) lessons, any change risks being merely structural, without producing real impact on motivation and participation (Bailey, 2006; Marinescu, 2016).

Recent surveys reveal an ambivalent relationship with PES. Students' perceptions of physical education and sport reflect an increasingly nuanced relationship, marked by evolving expectations and a high degree of self-awareness regarding their own needs. Surveys conducted across diverse European educational contexts indicate a mixed attitude toward this discipline: on one hand, students recognize the importance of physical activity for health and personal balance; on the other hand, they express reservations about how PES lessons are currently organized and delivered (Kirk, 2010; Stoica et al., 2019; Popescu, 2020).

Gender and physical status are influential factors and represent disparities in participation between girls and boys remain visible at lower and upper secondary levels. Girls are more likely to avoid physical education classes, citing discomfort, body exposure, or the irrelevance of activities to their interests. Additionally, overweight students or those with disabilities may experience indirect exclusion or social anxiety during lessons (Smith & Wrynn, 2013; Dumitru & Pantea, 2018).

Among the main requests formulated by students are:

- ***The necessity for a wide variety of activities:*** students experience monotony generated by the repetition of the same games or exercises and express a desire to participate in diverse physical activities - from alternative sports (parkour, urban dance, yoga) to unconventional movement forms (hiking, outdoor games, functional training) (Lundvall & Meckbach, 2017; Marinescu, 2016).
- ***The right to choose:*** a clear need for personalization of the educational experience emerges. Students want the possibility to select activities based on their interests, skill levels, or mood, suggesting a trend toward autonomy and active involvement in their own educational journey (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Popescu, 2020).

- ***Integration of technology and music:*** young populations perceive technology as a medium for expression and motivation. The use of physical activity monitoring apps, music in coordination exercises, or multimedia resources in teaching is seen as a natural necessity (Casey et al., 2017; Răduță & Ionescu, 2017).
- ***Assessment focused on general physical development rather than performance:*** students express discomfort with standardized evaluation criteria, which they perceive as outdated and demotivating. They call for an approach that privileges individual progress, well-being, engagement, and collaboration - elements that support the development of a positive long-term relationship with movement (Bailey et al., 2009; Stoica et al., 2019).

Overall, these perspectives suggest a clear desideratum: the reconfiguration of physical education lessons into a space for expression, inclusion, and personal development capable of responding not only to curricular requirements but also to the psychosocial realities of contemporary generations (Dyson, 2015; Dumitru & Pantea, 2018).

Student participation in the design of physical education lessons it appears to be becoming an indispensable component of the current approach, thus a modern educational model cannot be constructed without student involvement in co-designing lessons. This entails regular consultation, adjusting content to their interests, and encouraging self-assessment and reflection on their own physical and psychological development (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Marinescu, 2016).

Transforming physical education in Romania requires a shift in focus from "what is taught" to "what the student experiences in physical education lessons." Integrating the student perspective is not a decorative element but an essential condition for the success of any authentic educational reform (Kirk, 2010; Popescu, 2020).

8. The Future of Physical Education and Sport (PES): Reform Directions

In the context of rapidly accelerating social, cultural, and technological changes, physical education and sport (PES) face a necessary and profound reconfiguration. To maintain its relevance and effectively contribute to the development of the younger generation, PES must transcend the traditional model and transform into a dynamic educational space centered on the student and the needs of contemporary society. Thus, the following essential reform directions emerge:

Curriculum Reorganization Around Educational and Health Themes

It is imperative that PES is no longer viewed solely through the lens of physical performance but as a strategic component of education for health, emotional balance, and an active lifestyle. The curriculum should incorporate topics such as postural education, prevention of chronic diseases, effort hygiene, nutrition, and stress management alongside physical motor activities (Bailey et al., 2009; Ministry of Education Romania, 2020).

Diversification of Physical Activities to Meet Student Interests

The future of the discipline involves shifting from a uniform and prescribed model to an adaptable one where students can experience a wide range of activities: conventional and alternative sports, recreational activities, motor mindfulness exercises, dance, hiking, or functional training. This diversification aims to stimulate active participation and reduce the phenomenon of movement rejection during adolescence (Stirling & Kerr, 2013; European Commission, 2018).

Integration of Technology and Digital Tools in Teaching and Assessment

New generations are deeply embedded in the digital environment. Integrating effort-monitoring applications, interactive platforms, augmented reality, and multimedia resources can make the learning process more engaging and personalized. Furthermore, technology can support the evaluation of individual progress in an objective and motivating way (Casey et al., 2017; UNESCO, 2021).

Creation of an Inclusive, Equitable, and Non-Competitive Environment

Future physical education must address all students, regardless of aptitude level, socioeconomic status, or individual particularities. Promoting inclusion, acceptance of bodily diversity, and cooperation over excessive competition is essential for a discipline aspiring to contribute to students' psychosocial balance and school community cohesion (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Council of Europe, 2019, Marín-Suelves & Ramón - Llin, 2021).

These directions involve not merely content updates but an educational paradigm shift, one in which PES becomes a fundamental formative tool resonant with the ideals of humanistic, sustainable, and equitable education (Penney & Chandler, 2000).

CONCLUSIONS

To better understand Romania's position within the European physical education landscape (EUPEA 2021), it is essential to expand the comparative analysis to countries with similar challenges and resources. Studying models implemented in Bulgaria, Serbia, and Greece in Southeastern Europe, as well as in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in the Baltic region, provides a relevant framework for potential development directions. The results of thematic and comparative analysis indicate that physical education in Romania is at an inflection point, oscillating between stagnation due to structural constraints and the potential for alignment with innovative European models. The overall picture reveals the following key aspects:

Underdeveloped Curriculum and Unequal Implementation: Allocating only two hours per week and major discrepancies between urban and rural areas limit the formative and integrative function of physical education. A study by Georgescu et al. (2022) highlights that insufficient physical education hours and inadequate infrastructure in schools contribute to these disparities (Rus et al., 2019)

Fragmented Pedagogical Paradigm: Despite modernization initiatives, many schools persist with traditional methods, focusing on physical execution rather than the holistic development of students. Olănescu (2024) emphasizes the importance of assessment for learning in physical education to support student progress (Stănescu, 2015)

Summative and Student-Irrelevant Assessment: Assessment based almost exclusively on grades reduces the motivational and formative potential of lessons, failing to adapt to the diverse needs and profiles of students. Cârstea et al. (1995) discuss the need for assessment systems that consider individual progress and development (Rus et al., 2019)

Deficient Infrastructure, a Major Equity Factor: Limited access to sports halls, equipment, or fields in rural areas affects students' perception of the relevance of physical education. A survey by World Vision Romania (2024) found that 81% of children in rural areas do not participate in sports outside school hours due to infrastructure and financial constraints (Stănescu, 2015).

Professional Training Insufficiently Adapted to Current Realities: Although Romania has adopted the Bologna system, the lack of applied training, modules on public health, inclusion, or digitalization limits the impact of teachers in the field. Cojocarui et al. (2016) analyze the impact of the Bologna process on physical education and sport higher education in Romania, highlighting areas for improvement (Ștefănescu, 2024).

Disconnection from Performance Sports: The institutional rupture between schools and performance sports structures has led to the erosion of physical education's role as a form of selection, orientation, and promotion of sports talent. The "Sustainable Integration Through Sport" project (2023) emphasizes the importance of integrating sports activities to enhance educational inclusion and reduce early school leaving (www.integraresustenabilaprinsport.ro).

To ensure a sustainable future for physical education, it is imperative to formulate a coherent and long-term national strategic vision that integrates the following directions:

- Expanding the curriculum to 3–4 hours/ week.
- Orienting physical education lessons towards physical well-being, autonomy, and cooperation.
- Implementing formative assessment centered on individual progress.
- Systematic investments in school infrastructure, especially in rural areas.
- Continuous and specialized teacher training in accordance with European standards.
- Developing sustainable partnerships between schools and sports clubs.

Transforming physical education cannot be achieved through isolated measures but through a systemic effort that recognizes its essential role in promoting health, equity, and sustainable development. Physical education can become a strategic pillar of contemporary education, provided that integrated, sustainable, and student-centered educational policies are adopted. Reforms should not be fragmented or opportunistic, but part of a long-term vision anchored in European best practices.

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