

Nur Istiqamah¹, Alif Kurniawan², Muh. Adnan Hudain³, Alimin Alwi⁴, Fahrizal⁵^{1,2,3,5}Program of Physical Education and Sports, Universitas Negeri Makassar⁴Faculty of Social Sciences and Law, Universitas Negeri Makassar**Article History**

Received : October-2025

Revised : October-2025

Accepted : November-2025

Published : November-2025

Corresponding author*:

Nur Istiqamah

Contact:istiqamatiti240603@gmail.com**Cite This Article:**

Istiqamah, N., Kurniawan, A., Hudain, M. A., & Alwi, A. (2025). Physical Education, Sports, and Health as a Social Space: A Sociological Study of Participation and Social Cohesion in the Learning Process. *Jurnal Ilmiah Multidisiplin*, 4(6), 12–22.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.56127/jukim.v4i6.2317>

Abstract: This study aims to analyze the role of physical education as a social space that fosters student participation and social cohesion in elementary schools. The research was conducted at UPT SD Negeri 179 Inpres Balang using a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were collected through observation, interviews, documentation, and Focus Group Discussion (FGD), and then analyzed through the stages of data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that student participation in physical education is not only limited to physical involvement but also includes social interactions, teamwork, decision-making, and peer support. Supporting factors of participation include students' internal motivation, the role of PE teachers, adequate facilities, and a supportive social environment, while inhibiting factors consist of limited facilities, differences in physical ability, less supportive learning climate, external factors, and lack of parental support. Furthermore, physical education significantly contributes to building social cohesion by enhancing social interactions, fostering solidarity, reducing discrimination, shaping sportive and democratic character, and serving as a medium for conflict resolution. Thus, physical education functions as a strategic instrument to strengthen values of equality, togetherness, and social integration in elementary schools.

Keywords: Physical Education, Social Space, Participation, Social Cohesion, Elementary School

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis peran pendidikan jasmani sebagai ruang sosial yang mendorong partisipasi dan kohesi sosial siswa di sekolah dasar. Penelitian dilaksanakan di UPT SD Negeri 179 Inpres Balang dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara, dokumentasi, dan Focus Group Discussion (FGD), kemudian dianalisis melalui tahapan pengumpulan data, reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa partisipasi siswa dalam pembelajaran pendidikan jasmani tidak hanya terbatas pada keterlibatan fisik, tetapi juga mencakup interaksi sosial, kerja sama tim, pengambilan keputusan, dan dukungan sosial antarsiswa. Faktor pendukung partisipasi meliputi motivasi internal siswa, peran guru PJOK, sarana prasarana yang memadai, serta lingkungan sosial yang kondusif, sedangkan faktor penghambat di antaranya keterbatasan fasilitas, perbedaan kemampuan fisik, iklim pembelajaran yang kurang mendukung, faktor eksternal, dan kurangnya dukungan orang tua. Selain itu, pendidikan jasmani terbukti memiliki kontribusi penting dalam membangun kohesi sosial melalui peningkatan interaksi sosial, penguatan solidaritas, pengurangan diskriminasi, pembentukan karakter sportif dan ruang sosial, serta sebagai sarana resolusi konflik. Dengan demikian, pendidikan jasmani berfungsi sebagai instrumen strategis dalam memperkuat nilai kesetaraan, kebersamaan, dan integrasi sosial di UPT SD Negeri 179 Inpres Balang.

Kata Kunci: Pendidikan Jasmani, Ruang Sosial, Partisipasi, Kohesi Sosial, Sekolah Dasar

INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental aspect in shaping individuals who are physically, mentally, and socially healthy. Physical education in Indonesia has undergone a significant paradigm shift—from being merely skill-based physical training to becoming a medium for character formation and the development of comprehensive social values. According to the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of the Republic of Indonesia No. 22 of 2006, physical education is an integral part of overall education aimed at

developing physical fitness, motor skills, critical thinking abilities, social skills, reasoning, emotional stability, moral actions, healthy lifestyle patterns, and awareness of a clean environment through systematically planned physical activities (Hartati et al., 2020).

Physical education has often been understood merely as the development of motor skills and the improvement of students' fitness levels (Yoga, Purbodjati, & Kumaat, 2023). However, from a sociological perspective, physical education has a much broader dimension as a space for social interaction, character building, and internalization of social values (Sihaloho & Wildani, 2023). Through physical activities, games, and sports, students not only train their bodies but also learn to respect rules, uphold sportsmanship, cooperate, and accept differences. In this context, physical education can be viewed as a *social space* within schools. A social space is not only related to practices but also to daily ways of living that emphasize participation, equality, and appreciation of diversity. Through learning in physical education, sports, and health, students are given opportunities to participate actively without discrimination, allowing them to internalize these values in their everyday activities.

From a sociological standpoint, students' participation in physical education reflects the dynamics of social engagement within schools. Genuine participation is not limited to attendance but involves active engagement in learning processes, interactions, and even decision-making. Low participation often indicates the presence of social barriers, discrimination, or inequitable educational structures.

The sociology of physical education and sports seeks to examine human social behavior, both individually and collectively, within sporting contexts. In other words, during sports activities, humans engage in social actions manifested through interaction with others (Giulianotti & Theil, 2023). In such interactions, individuals are bound by the values or norms prevailing in their community and the institutional structures within specific sports disciplines (Adi & Mu'arifin, 2001). Social cohesion refers to the unification of similar elements within a society (Alwi et al., 2022; Alwi, Ram, & Dinda, 2024). In this context, social cohesion among students refers to a condition in which every student receives equal rights and opportunities in the educational process without discrimination based on gender, social background, economic status, religion, or physical ability. Moreover, social cohesion has become a crucial issue in physical education, particularly regarding the distribution of sports facilities and equal opportunities for participation regardless of gender or physical ability (Dayanti & Nanda, 2021).

At the elementary level, various important aspects of physical education have been demonstrated by previous researchers. For instance, Aldiansah et al. (2025) proved that physical education plays a strategic role in shaping students' character and developing their social skills. Through physical activities involving movement, games, and sports, students not only gain physical fitness but also undergo a process of moral and social value internalization. Furthermore, Yusuf and Wicaksana (2025) found that game-based approaches in Physical Education, Sports, and Health (PJOK) effectively enhance students' motivation, engagement, and learning quality. Similarly, Aan Wasan (2023) emphasized that one of the major challenges in social life is the ability to interact and build relationships. Physical education and sports serve as important educational media to foster human understanding of how to live properly and maintain both physical and mental health within society.

These studies highlight how physical education, sports, and health learning in schools can serve as a medium for realizing social values, strengthening student participation, and supporting social cohesion. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the role of physical education, sports, and health teachers in fostering participation and social cohesion within the school environment as a *social space*.

RESEARCHMETHOD

The stages undertaken in this research, including concept development and case resolution, are described in the methodology section. This study employed a qualitative research design with a descriptive method (Creswell, 2007; Upé, 2022), conducted at UPT SD Negeri 179 Inpres Balang. Data collection techniques included observation, interviews, and documentation, supported by focus group discussions (FGDs). The data analysis procedure followed several stages: data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Forms of Student Participation in Physical Education Activities as a Social Space

The results of the study indicate that students' participation in school sports activities is not limited to physical involvement alone. Their participation also encompasses social activities, cooperation with others, and the reinforcement of existing social values within the school environment. Physical education enables students to interact, learn to respect others, and become part of a community. Several key forms of participation that reflect the social functions of physical education activities were identified through observation, documentation, and interviews.

Active Participation in Physical Activities

One of the primary ways students engage in physical education lessons is through participation in physical activities. In these activities, students not only follow the teacher's instructions but also demonstrate enthusiasm and a desire to achieve. Activities such as relay running, soccer, volleyball, badminton, and others provide opportunities for students to express themselves, enhance motor skills, and strengthen both physical and mental endurance. Regular attendance, sustained interest in each activity, and a willingness to comply with rules and respect teachers' decisions are all indicators of active participation (Yoga, Purbodjati, & Kumaat, 2023).

This physical engagement also fosters discipline and responsibility. Students learn how to manage their time, maintain their health, and adopt a healthy lifestyle. Participating in physical activities with peers strengthens social relationships, encourages healthy competition, and teaches students important sporting values such as humility in victory and graciousness in defeat. Teachers play a vital role in motivating students to participate actively by creating an enjoyable, inclusive learning environment that accommodates individual abilities.

Active participation in physical activities not only improves students' physical fitness but also builds character traits such as honesty, diligence, and responsibility—qualities that are essential for students' social development within the school environment (Nuraini et al., 2024).

Teamwork in Games and Group Activities

In physical education, social participation is largely built upon teamwork. Team-based games such as soccer, volleyball, basketball, and traditional games teach students to collaborate in order to achieve shared goals. During these activities, they support one another, distribute roles, and develop strategies together. Through this process, students gain an understanding that group success depends not only on individual abilities but also on commitment, communication, and mutual trust (Agustina, 2021).

Furthermore, teamwork fosters values of empathy and solidarity. Students with higher skill levels learn to assist peers who are less skilled, while others learn to accept feedback and appreciate every member's contribution. This creates a harmonious and inclusive learning environment in which each student feels valued and recognized as an important part of the group.

Teamwork in games also cultivates leadership and social responsibility. Students learn to become fair and wise leaders, make balanced decisions, and provide moral support to their teammates. Teachers act as facilitators who emphasize cooperation over competition. Therefore, teamwork in physical education is not merely about playing games—it serves as a form of social learning that nurtures the values of mutual support (gotong royong), respect, and togetherness, which extend beyond the classroom into community life.

Involvement in Decision-Making

Within physical education settings, students' involvement in decision-making processes is an important component for enhancing social participation. Teachers often give students opportunities to choose the type of game, select team members, or design game strategies (Yusuf & Lusiana, 2022). Through these activities, students learn to express opinions, listen to others, and reach consensus. This process develops their critical thinking, communication, and democratic skills, enabling them to appreciate differences in perspective.

Participation in decision-making also instills a sense of responsibility, as students understand that every decision has consequences and requires commitment. Having the opportunity to take part in these

processes makes students feel more accountable for the activities they engage in, thereby increasing their emotional involvement and motivation in sports.

Teachers play a crucial role as facilitators to ensure that decision-making occurs objectively and fairly. Through group discussions and reflections, students learn to assess situations, consider alternatives, and make decisions that prioritize the collective good. Thus, physical education functions as a social space that supports democratic learning, where students develop into critical, independent, and responsible individuals capable of making thoughtful decisions in their social lives (Muhtar, Supriyadi, & Lengkana, 2020).

Participation in Social Support

Students' participation in providing social support reflects the empathetic dimension of physical education as a social space. Not all students possess the same physical abilities in sports activities (Mariam & Kusmaedi, 2020). However, research shows that students with higher abilities often support their peers who face difficulties by offering verbal encouragement or physical assistance. For example, they may help maintain team balance, demonstrate movements, or provide reassurance when a peer makes a mistake.

Such social support demonstrates social cohesion—a sense of belonging and solidarity that grows through positive interaction. Students learn that success in sports depends on mutual support, allowing everyone to participate confidently rather than focusing solely on individual victory. In this context, physical education serves as an effective medium for fostering empathy, care, and inclusiveness.

By recognizing and appreciating students who exhibit supportive behaviors, teachers contribute to the development of a classroom culture grounded in mutual assistance. When social support becomes an integral part of class culture, students feel more accepted and motivated to participate. Through physical activities, they learn the importance of togetherness, respect for diversity, and helping one another—core values that underpin social character formation. Therefore, social support becomes a vital foundation for creating healthy and harmonious social interactions in schools.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors of Student Participation in Physical Education, Sports, and Health (PJOK) Learning

Based on data obtained through interviews, observations, and documentation, several factors were identified that both support and hinder students' participation in physical education learning activities at the elementary school level. These factors include internal, social, environmental, and facility-related aspects.

Supporting Factors

Students' Internal Motivation

Internal motivation refers to the inner drive that encourages students to participate actively in sports activities (Annida, Salamah, & Dzikru, 2022). Students generally enjoy physical education classes because they are fun, liberating, and challenging. Physical activities provide opportunities for movement, communication, and interaction with peers—contrasting with theoretical lessons that require intense concentration in the classroom.

This intrinsic motivation is further strengthened by students' awareness of the health and fitness benefits of exercise, as well as by the resulting increase in self-confidence. Curiosity and the desire to learn new skills also foster internal motivation. When students successfully perform movements they previously found difficult—such as a volleyball serve or a dribbling technique in soccer—they feel proud of their progress.

Teachers can strengthen this motivation by appreciating students' efforts rather than focusing solely on test outcomes. Varied, competitive, and enjoyable learning activities also help maintain enthusiasm. Therefore, internal motivation plays a vital role in enhancing discipline, active participation, and students' commitment to physical education as part of their overall personal development.

The Role of PJOK Teachers

The PJOK teacher plays a crucial role in creating a positive and conducive learning environment. Effective classroom management, clear instruction, and the use of innovative teaching methods are key characteristics of competent teachers. For example, game-based learning approaches make sports lessons enjoyable and engaging, while project-based learning allows students to design group activities that promote cooperation and social responsibility (Fariza & Kusuma, 2024).

Teachers who are able to motivate and personally connect with students are essential for encouraging active participation. When students feel appreciated and treated fairly, they are more inclined to attend and engage in class. Friendly, patient, and sportsmanlike teachers serve as positive role models for behavior and interaction during physical activities.

Additionally, when teachers adapt lessons to students' physical and emotional conditions, learning becomes more inclusive. Creative teachers can overcome limited resources by modifying games and using simple tools. As facilitators and motivators, teachers help students feel comfortable, confident, and inspired to participate actively in physical education.

Facilities and Infrastructure Support

Facilities and infrastructure are critical to the success of physical education. Schools equipped with adequate sports fields and equipment—such as balls, nets, rackets, and fitness tools—enable students to participate fully (Rahayu, 2022). Sufficient equipment allows all students to engage in activities without having to wait or compete for resources.

Good accessibility encourages teachers to apply more varied and engaging learning approaches. The quality of facilities also affects students' comfort and safety during activities. Well-maintained fields and functional equipment enhance students' sense of security while exercising.

To ensure continuous physical education activities, schools must provide support for facility maintenance and the procurement of new equipment. Moreover, a supportive school environment—such as open spaces, shade trees, and storage areas for sports equipment—contributes to a positive learning atmosphere. Diverse activities, such as team games, gymnastics, and fitness exercises, are easier to conduct when facilities are sufficient. Therefore, adequate facilities not only facilitate learning but also increase students' interest and motivation to participate in school sports activities.

Social Environment and Peer Influence

The level of student participation in physical activities is strongly influenced by social factors. Peer groups play a major role in shaping students' interest in participation. When students' friends are active and engaged in sports, they are more likely to follow similar behavior patterns. This suggests that peer support has a positive impact on learning.

Sports activities also provide opportunities for students to build positive social relationships (Zhang & Zhang, 2022). By working together in teams, students learn to appreciate others' opinions, develop empathy, and strengthen social skills such as communication and leadership. These experiences foster social solidarity, where each student feels part of a supportive and cohesive group.

Teachers can help cultivate a healthy social atmosphere by forming mixed teams that encourage students from different backgrounds to learn from and assist one another. When the classroom environment is socially positive, students feel comfortable, accepted, and motivated to participate actively in PJOK lessons. Thus, peer relationships and the broader social environment play an essential role in shaping students' enthusiasm, confidence, and social attitudes through physical activities.

Inhibiting Factors

Lack of Facilities and Infrastructure

One of the main obstacles to increasing students' participation in physical education is the limited availability of facilities and infrastructure. Many elementary schools face challenges such as small sports fields, damaged equipment, or an insufficient number of tools compared to the number of students. As a result, students must take turns or wait too long to participate, which decreases their interest in physical education classes.

Beyond quantity, poor-quality facilities also create barriers. Uneven fields or unsafe equipment increase the risk of injury. When students have negative experiences during sports activities, they are less likely to participate in the future (Dayanti & Nanda, 2021). Teachers also face additional challenges in managing large classes with limited facilities. Lessons that should be active and enjoyable become less effective.

Short-term solutions include modifying games or using simple tools such as ropes, bottles, or other objects found around the school. However, in the long term, support from schools and local governments is essential to provide adequate facilities so that students can participate safely, comfortably, and optimally.

Differences in Physical Ability

Another major challenge in physical education is the natural variation in students' physical abilities. Within a single class, students exhibit diverse conditions—some may experience fatigue, obesity, or motor limitations, while others possess exceptional strength, speed, and endurance (Suguis & Belleza, 2022).

These disparities often affect students' self-confidence. Those with lower physical ability may feel inferior or avoid participation out of fear of ridicule or failure. Conversely, overly strenuous activities can lead to excessive fatigue or injury for some students, discouraging future participation.

To address this, PJOK teachers must adapt lessons by adjusting the intensity and type of activities according to each student's ability. For instance, exercises can be modified by difficulty level, or groups can be formed based on physical capability so that every student feels capable and included. Teachers should also provide emotional support to ensure that students with lower ability remain motivated and valued.

Unsupportive Learning Climate

A learning climate that focuses too heavily on competition without considering differences in students' abilities can make some feel uncomfortable. This creates fear of failure or embarrassment when making mistakes.

An overly competitive classroom environment—where teachers prioritize achievement and victory—can discourage students who lack athletic ability. When teachers emphasize outcomes rather than the learning process, students may lose motivation to participate due to fear of mistakes, shame, or peer ridicule. Monotonous teaching methods, such as lecturing without engaging activities, also cause boredom (Yulianingsih & Swadesi, 2022).

PJOK classes should be spaces for expression and interaction rather than tension. Therefore, teachers must cultivate a positive, supportive, and safe learning environment. In addition to being evaluators, teachers should act as facilitators and motivators. Recognizing students' efforts—not only their results—can build confidence and enthusiasm. A positive learning climate fosters enjoyment, strengthens social interaction, and encourages all students to participate actively in sports activities.

External Factors: Environment and Weather

Extreme weather conditions such as heat or heavy rain can interrupt outdoor learning, causing students to lose concentration and motivation. Since most physical education activities are conducted outdoors, these environmental factors—beyond teachers' control—significantly affect PJOK learning continuity.

During hot or rainy conditions, field activities often need to be canceled or moved indoors to smaller spaces (Fadila et al., 2022). This reduces enthusiasm and limits the effectiveness of learning. Additional environmental challenges, such as noise, uneven surfaces, or dust, may also affect students' comfort and safety.

Not all schools have adequate open spaces for sports. To mitigate these challenges, PJOK teachers can develop alternative approaches such as indoor learning plans or the use of digital media to teach fitness and basic movement concepts. Adjusting schedules, intensity, or activity duration can also help maintain student safety. Innovative and flexible planning allows teachers to overcome environmental limitations without diminishing students' enthusiasm or engagement.

Lack of Parental Support

Some parents do not encourage their children to participate in sports because they prioritize academic subjects over physical education. This lack of support reduces students' motivation to engage in PJOK activities. Parental support plays a crucial role in shaping children's attitudes and willingness to learn sports (Rohins, Gunawan, & Kadiyono, 2021).

Many parents still view PJOK as a supplementary subject—less important than academic subjects like Indonesian language or mathematics. This perception leads children to undervalue physical education. In some cases, parents discourage their children from participating in sports, believing it to be a waste of time or a potential source of injury.

This lack of support is also evident in minimal parental involvement in school activities such as sports days or competitions. As a result, students receive little appreciation or encouragement from home. Conversely, when parents show interest and provide emotional reinforcement, children's confidence and participation levels increase.

To address this, teachers should maintain effective communication with parents, providing information about the physical, mental, and social benefits of physical education. By involving parents through progress reports and school activities, they can better understand the importance of PJOK and become more supportive of their children's participation.

The Role of Physical Education in Building Social Cohesion in Schools

Based on findings from observations, interviews, and documentation, physical education was found to make a significant contribution to fostering social cohesion within the school environment. This role is evident in several aspects:

Enhancing Social Interaction Among Students

Physical education helps students engage more actively in social interactions through various physical activities that require collaboration. Team games, sports competitions, and project-based physical tasks encourage direct verbal and nonverbal communication. In this context, physical education functions as a medium of social communication through which students learn self-expression, empathy, and peer relationships.

These interactions foster closer interpersonal bonds and positive social connections. Activities such as volleyball require teamwork and communication to develop strategies, creating an atmosphere of mutual respect and support. Passive students become more open, while dominant students learn self-control and inclusivity (Zuhara, 2020).

Thus, physical education not only promotes physical growth but also strengthens social relationships, interaction, and solidarity among students.

Fostering Cooperation and Solidarity

Cooperation and solidarity can be understood as collective efforts toward shared goals. Solidarity implies mutual support and collaboration (Alwi, 2020). The study's findings indicate that sports activities effectively cultivate these values among students.

In team sports such as soccer, volleyball, or relay races, students must work together to achieve success. They learn to understand their roles, appreciate contributions, and support one another in both victory and defeat. Through these experiences, students realize that group success depends more on cooperation than on individual ability.

Physical activities encourage students to prioritize group interests over personal gain. For example, skilled students are encouraged to help peers who struggle, naturally fostering empathy and solidarity. Teachers play a key role in reinforcing social values such as helpfulness, responsibility, and respect in every lesson. Consequently, physical education serves as a form of social learning that builds community-oriented character and strengthens social cohesion in schools (Yulianingsih & Swadesi, 2022).

Reducing Social Barriers and Discrimination

Differences in academic, economic, and gender backgrounds tend to diminish during physical education classes, where all students have equal opportunities to participate and demonstrate their abilities (Isikgoz & Sahbudak, 2025).

The findings reveal that physical education promotes inclusivity by enabling all students—regardless of social, economic, academic, or gender status—to engage equally. Success in sports depends not on social standing or academic performance but on participation, teamwork, and enthusiasm. Students learn to appreciate diversity and recognize its value in achieving common goals.

Furthermore, physical education supports gender equality, as boys and girls collaborate on equal terms, breaking down stereotypes about physical strength. Teachers who manage activities fairly and equitably contribute to an inclusive environment where every student feels accepted and valued. This inclusivity forms a crucial foundation for building social cohesion in schools.

Developing Sportsmanship and Democratic Character

Physical education instills honesty, fairness, and sportsmanship—values essential for social cohesion (Mariam & Kusmaedi, 2020). Through sports, students learn to accept victory with humility and defeat with grace. They develop respect for rules, fairness, and opponents.

Interviews with PJOK teachers revealed that physical education serves as a tool for character development. Students are often involved in decision-making processes—such as setting game rules or forming teams—which nurtures a democratic spirit. These experiences teach deliberation, respect for differing opinions, and constructive self-expression.

As a result, students develop responsibility, justice, and conflict-resolution skills. Those with strong sportsmanship and democratic character contribute to a harmonious, respectful, and socially cohesive school environment.

A Medium for Conflict Resolution

Students who experience interpersonal conflicts outside the classroom can often reconcile through physical activities. Team-based exercises require cooperation, reducing the likelihood of disputes and positioning PJOK as a space for social mediation.

Findings indicate that sports help students resolve conflicts. Disagreements or tension among peers can be mitigated as students must collaborate to achieve shared objectives. This interaction encourages communication, empathy, and adaptation (Araújo-Simões & Guedes-Gondim, 2016).

Physical activities channel emotional energy positively, teaching patience, discipline, and acceptance of differences—key elements in reducing social tension. Teachers act as mediators, promoting inclusion and emphasizing cooperation over competition.

Over time, these experiences enhance students' social competence and emotional regulation, preparing them for real-life social challenges. Thus, physical education is not merely about physical training—it serves as an instrument for social character development, capable of fostering harmony and social cohesion within the school environment (Tobi, Priambodo, & Prasetya, 2023).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that physical education plays a vital role not only in enhancing students' motor skills and physical fitness but also in functioning as a social space that promotes active participation, collaboration, and social cohesion within schools. Students' engagement in physical activities, teamwork, decision-making, and peer support reflects their level of social participation.

Several supporting factors influence students' participation, including internal motivation, the role of teachers, adequate facilities and infrastructure, and social support from peers. Conversely, inhibiting factors include limited facilities, differences in physical ability, external conditions such as environment and weather, and lack of parental support.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that physical education fosters social cohesion in schools by enhancing social interaction, reducing discrimination, strengthening solidarity, providing inclusive social spaces, and instilling values of sportsmanship and fairness. Therefore, PJOK serves not merely as a platform for learning movement skills but also as an essential instrument for reinforcing equality and social integration among students.

To ensure all students can participate actively, PJOK teachers must continue to develop inclusive and interactive teaching strategies. Schools should provide sufficient sports spaces and involve parents in supporting their children's participation in physical activities. Hence, physical education can truly function as a social space that enhances both social cohesion and student participation within the school environment.

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