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## **Absence of Changing Rooms and Its Implications on Practical Physical Education Lessons in Senior High Schools in Ghana**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This qualitative study examines how the lack of changing rooms affects the practical physical education classes in senior high schools in Ghana. This study was conducted in the Eastern region of Ghana, involving 26 students and 10 physical education teachers who participated in semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and observations. The results show that, while PE teachers struggle with teaching, student engagement and safety issues, students suffer from major discomfort, embarrassment and reduced participation due to the lack of changing facilities. Psychosocial disorders such as anxiety, low self-esteem and bullying were also identified in the study. The solutions suggested by participants were gender neutral facilities, training of staff, awareness campaigns and inclusive policy changes. The results highlight the urgent need for policymakers to prioritise investment in physical education facilities and infrastructure to promote student participation, well-being, and holistic development. The study adds to the debate on educational infrastructure and on participation in physical education by stressing the value of a safe, welcoming and stimulating learning environment. The study concludes that adequate changing facilities should be provided in Ghanaian secondary schools as a fundamental issue of equity, dignity and quality of education.

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## **1. Introduction**

Physical education is an essential part of the curriculum of senior high schools and promotes students' physical health, mental health and social development (Hardman & Green, 2011). Globally, PE is recognised not only for improving fitness but also for strengthening skills such as teamwork, discipline and self-confidence (Bailey et al., 2009). In Ghana, the Ministry of Education stresses the need for practical PE lessons that involve pupils in an active way and contribute to holistic learning and lifelong healthy behaviours (Ministry of Education, Ghana, 2021). Despite the political support, infrastructure problems remain a major obstacle to effective, practical PE provision in many secondary schools.

The lack of adequate changing facilities is more than an infrastructure problem; it has a direct impact on the participation and comfort of pupils during PE lessons (Wright & Palmer, 2022). Changing rooms provide privacy and dignity, which are essential, particularly for women students and for those with cultural or religious backgrounds (Thomas et al., 2023). Empirical studies carried out in various African contexts have highlighted the correlation between a lack of PE facilities and reduced student participation and negative attitudes towards PE (Agyemang & Boateng, 2021; Nkansah & Ofori, 2020). In addition, recent research highlights that physical environments which do

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not promote students' privacy and security contribute to psychosocial stress and discourage continued PE participation (Lee et al., 2021).

The focus of this study on the lack of changing rooms in senior high schools in Ghana and its impact on the practical PE lessons is directly related to several UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It specifically addresses SDG 3 by highlighting how inadequate facilities discourage physical activity, which is essential to prevent non-communicable diseases and assist youth in maintaining their mental health (Singh Thakur, Nangia & Singh, 2021). The research also aligns with SDG 4 by emphasising equal access and quality in all aspects of education, including work-based learning. The study also addresses the gender gap in education (SDG 5) by highlighting the disproportionate impact of equipment shortages on the participation of female students in physical education (Rad et al., 2022). It also addresses SDG 10 by identifying infrastructure bottlenecks in schools that impede inclusive learning, and SDG 11 by promoting safe and inclusive schools as critical community spaces (Zorde & Lapidot-Lefler, 2025). This research also contributes to Ghana's commitment to these interlinked global development goals.

Theoretically, the social ecological model by Bronfenbrenner in 1979 explains how environmental factors, including school infrastructure, shape individual behaviour and social interaction. In line with this approach, the absence of changing rooms can be considered as an environmental constraint which impairs the autonomy and motivation of students to undertake PE activities (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Moreover, the principles of the theory of self-determination emphasise the need for supportive environments to enable students to fulfil their psychological needs for competence, autonomy and belonging, which are undermined by inadequate facilities (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

In many Ghanaian senior high schools, practical PE lessons are hampered by the lack of designated changing rooms (Adu, 2022). This infrastructure gap creates discomfort, reduces student participation, particularly of women, and puts teachers of PE at risk of failing to teach effectively. Despite the acknowledged importance of PE practice, there is limited qualitative research examining how the lack of changing rooms in Ghana has a specific impact on students' experience and learning outcomes. Without understanding these consequences, efforts to improve PE infrastructure and policies may be ineffective.

This study contributes to the development of PE and educational infrastructure by providing contextually relevant insights on how the lack of changing rooms affects the practical PE lessons in Ghanaian secondary schools. It highlights the experience of students and teachers and fills a critical research gap that cannot be solved by quantitative audits alone. The findings are important for policymakers, school administrators and curriculum designers who are working to promote inclusive, safe and effective PE environments in line with Ghana's educational objectives and global best practice. The study promotes focused investment and policy changes that could improve student engagement, well-being, and learning outcomes in physical education by identifying infrastructure and psychosocial bottlenecks.

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences and perceptions of senior high school students and PE teachers about the lack of changing rooms and their impact on PE practice in Ghana. The study aims to reveal how this infrastructure gap affects participation, learning practices and psychosocial well-being during PE sessions.

### ***1.1 Objectives of the Study***

1. To assess students' experiences and challenges linked to the absence of changing rooms during practical PE lessons.
2. To examine PE teachers' perspectives on how the lack of changing facilities affects lesson delivery and student participation.
3. To identify psychosocial implications for students participating in practical PE without access to changing rooms.
4. To provide recommendations for policymakers and school administrators on addressing infrastructural deficits to improve PE participation and effectiveness.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

### ***2.1 Research Design***

This study is grounded in the social constructivist paradigm, which holds that people's experiences and environments shape reality, which is subjective and socially constructed (Creswell and Poth, 2018). The relativistic ontology

underlying this study proposes that, in the absence of a changing room during physical education, several realities depend on the individual viewpoints of the participants. From an epistemological point of view, the study is a subjective one, emphasising that knowledge is generated by the interaction between researchers and participants and that it is captured by their lived experience and their sense of purpose (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This paradigm and philosophical approach are appropriate, as the study is about exploring perceptions and experiences that cannot be quantified and require a rich, contextual understanding. The study used a phenomenological approach to examine the common experience of teachers and students in the absence of a changing room. Understanding human lived experiences and the meaning they give rise to is a key part of research design (Amoah-Oppong, 2024).

## ***2.2 Study Setting***

This study was carried out in senior high schools in the Eastern region of Ghana, a location chosen on the basis of reports and previous observations showing significant infrastructure deficiencies in the school facilities, including PE equipment. Focusing on this area allows a more in-depth examination in a context known to reflect problems common to many Ghanaian senior high schools, and ensures that the findings are relevant to similar educational environments at the national level (Ministry of Education, Ghana, 2021). With Koforidua as its capital, the Eastern Region of Ghana is rich in culture, history, and scenic beauty. It is also the site of the Akosombo Dam and the beginning of Ghana's cocoa industry. It shares borders with the Central and Greater Accra Regions to the south, the Volta, Bono East, and Ashanti Regions to the north, and the Ashanti Region to the west. The area is also well-known for its tropical forests, the Aburi Botanical Gardens, which provide tourists with a tranquil haven, and waterfalls like Boti and Begoro Falls (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021).

## ***2.3 Population, Sampling and Participants***

The participants included PE teachers and students from senior high schools actively involved in practical PE lessons. Participants who could offer rich and pertinent information based on their firsthand knowledge of the dearth of changing facilities were chosen through a targeted selection process. Specifically, 10 PE teachers with at least one year of teaching experience and 26 students (balanced by gender to represent a variety of viewpoints) were involved. This sampling strategy was chosen because qualitative research favours depth over breadth and seeks insights from a richly informed case rather than from the statistical generality (Amoah-Oppong, Bio & Appiah, 2025).

## ***2.4 Data Collection Instruments and Procedures***

The main tools for data collection were semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. In-depth individual viewpoints on teaching difficulties and student conduct were obtained through interviews with PE teachers. The focus group discussions with students encouraged them to share, reflect and reveal the social dynamics that are influencing them. These tools allow flexibility to explore emerging topics while maintaining the focus on research objectives (Karunarathna et al., 2024). In addition, non-participant observations of PE facilities and classrooms were carried out to capture contextual details of physical environments and behaviour to complement the self-reported data. The richness and validity of the data were enhanced by combining interviews, focus groups and observations. Data collection took place on secure and suitable school premises, and audio recordings were collected after consent had been given. The interview guides were piloted with a small group before their full implementation to ensure clarity and relevance.

## ***2.5 Data Processing and Analysis***

The qualitative data-processing methods for this study included a systematic approach that included transcription, input, management, security and validation to ensure accuracy, confidentiality and reliability. The audio-recorded interviews and focus group discussions were then manually written down word for word by the researcher, with non-verbal cues recorded to ensure that they were of relevance. The data was organised in Microsoft Word and imported into NVivo 14 for encoding and theme analysis, using unique identifiers of the participants to preserve anonymity. The structured data management plan ensured the secure storage of electronic files on encrypted devices and password-protected folders, while physical documents were stored in a locked box. Version control and a detailed audit trail were maintained throughout the entire process of initialisation of the product. Ethical data security practices included the de-identification of personal data and the restriction of access to the data by the research team.

Verification strategies such as member control, peer review, triangulation and a comprehensive audit trail were used to increase the credibility and reliability of findings. The data was analysed using thematic analysis. This permits the systematic identification and interpretation of patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The transcripts of the interviews and focus groups, together with observational field notes, were then cryptically coded to produce themes representing the experiences and perceptions of the participants. In order to validate the results and present a thorough picture of the effect of the absence of changing rooms on academic performance, the study employed triangulation. This merged data from multiple sources, including teacher interviews and student focus groups. According to Denzin (1978), this methodological triangulation improves the reliability and credibility of the study.

### **3. Results and Findings**

Thematic analysis of the qualitative information gathered through focus groups, interviews, and observations generated four main themes relevant to the objectives of the study. These topics provided a deep insight into the students' experiences, the professional perspectives of PE teachers, the psychosocial impact on students and the recommendations of both groups on how to address the infrastructure deficit in the eastern region of Ghana. Each theme was developed through a systematic coding process, in which recurring patterns, meanings and narratives were identified across the various data sources. Triangulation of data enhanced the credibility and reliability of the findings, as similar issues have emerged consistently in interviews, focus groups and observational data. The main themes and their related sub-themes are presented and described below.

#### **Theme 1: Students' Experiences and Challenges**

This theme incorporates students' personal and collective experiences with the lack of appropriate changing facilities during practical PE lessons. Students consistently reported considerable discomfort and embarrassment during practical PE sessions due to the lack of changing facilities. Out of 26 respondents, 10 rated discomfort and embarrassment as a major concern, eight also considered that time was wasted during lessons, and eight considered that the lack of changing rooms was a barrier to participation in PE. Students consistently reported difficulties in finding safe and private places for change, which resulted in feelings of discomfort and a reluctance to participate fully in the changeover process. The lack of facilities has also raised concerns about personal hygiene, especially for menstruating students, which sometimes leads to absenteeism. The following themes have been identified:

**Discomfort and Embarrassment.** Students expressed feelings of exposure, vulnerability, and anxiety while changing in open spaces. As one participant remarked,

*"Changes in open spaces make me feel exposed and uncomfortable, which affects my confidence in practical physical education lessons"* (Student 3).

Another student added,

*"I often avoid practical lessons because there's nowhere private to change, and that's frustrating"* (Student 7).

**Time Wastage During Lessons.** The lack of changing rooms also led to time management challenges. Students reported delays in starting lessons, reducing the overall lesson time available. One participant noted,

*"Because we don't have changing rooms, we spend too much time trying to find a spot to change, reducing actual activity time"* (Student 4).

Another shared,

*"This delay interrupts the flow of the lesson, and sometimes we can't complete the planned activities"* (Student 8).

**Impact on Participation.** As a result of these challenges, several students indicated reluctance to participate fully in practical physical education lessons. A participant stated,

*"Some of my classmates simply don't participate fully because they are embarrassed to change in public"* (Student 2).

Another added,

*“Lack of changing facilities has discouraged many from joining PE sessions, which is sad because PE is important for health” (Student 5).*

## **Theme 2: Physical Education Teachers’ Perspectives on Lesson Delivery**

This theme captures the professional experience of physical education teachers in how inadequate infrastructure impacts both their instruction and students' learning. Physical education teachers echoed the concerns of students and highlighted the negative impact of infrastructure deficits on the delivery and management of lessons. Out of the ten teachers, three highlighted the difficulty of teaching, five highlighted the reduced involvement of students, and two considered that safety and privacy concerns distorted their teaching. Teachers stressed that the absence of changing rooms often delays the start of lessons, lowers participation rates and affects the morale of students. They also noted problems with discipline and ensuring that students are properly dressed for the practical activities, which sometimes resulted in safety problems and reduced effectiveness of lessons. The following themes have been identified:

**Difficulty Managing Lessons.** Teachers described how the absence of proper facilities disrupted the organisation of PE lessons. One teacher observed:

*“Without proper changing rooms, lessons become disorganised as students take extra time to change, leading to a loss of teaching momentum” (Teacher 1).*

Another shared:

*“I often have to rush activities to compensate for the time wasted on changing, which affects lesson quality” (Teacher 3).*

**Reduced Student Engagement.** Teachers noted a clear decline in student focus and enthusiasm when students felt uncomfortable about changing conditions. A teacher remarked:

*“When students feel uncomfortable changing, their focus and energy during lessons drop noticeably” (Teacher 2).*

Another added:

*“I notice a decline in participation, especially among girls, because they feel exposed” (Teacher 4).*

**Safety and Privacy Concerns.** The absence of private changing spaces raised significant safety and privacy issues. As one teacher noted:

*“The absence of private changing spaces raises concerns about student safety and dignity, which we cannot ignore” (Teacher 5).*

Another highlighted: “

*We worry about possible harassment or bullying incidents because of this lack of infrastructure” (Teacher 6).*

## **Theme 3: Psychosocial Implications for Students**

The third theme captures the emotional and psychological impact of students having to navigate through PE without changing classrooms. Apart from the physical discomfort, students experienced significant psycho-social effects due to the lack of changing rooms. Most participants reported anxiety and stress, low self-esteem, peer pressure and bullying as the most common psychosocial consequences. Participants reported that the lack of changing facilities hurt their emotional well-being. Students reported feeling anxious, embarrassed and sometimes isolated, particularly during PE sessions with mixed genders. This psychosocial stress often translates into reduced participation and enthusiasm in PE. The analysis revealed the following themes:

**Anxiety and Stress.** Several students reported heightened stress and anxiety levels. One participant revealed:

*“Many students experience anxiety because they feel vulnerable changing without privacy” (Student 6).*

Another elaboration:

*Stress sometimes leads to reluctance to attend PE classes altogether” (Student 9).*

**Reduced Self-Esteem.** A lack of appropriate facilities also negatively affected students’ self-image. A student mentioned:

*“Not having a safe place to change impacts how students see themselves, often lowering their self-esteem” (Student 1).*

Another stated:

*“Some students become self-conscious, which affects their overall school engagement” (Student 10).*

**Peer Pressure and Bullying.** The open changing arrangements increased instances of teasing and bullying. One participant expressed: “

*Teasing happens frequently when students change in open areas, which hurts their confidence” (Student 7).*

Another added:

*“Bullying related to changing situations discourages some students from participating in sports” (Student 5).*

#### **Theme 4: Recommendations for Policy and Infrastructure Improvement**

The last theme presented by the participants was suggestions on how to solve infrastructure problems to improve the practical teaching of PE and the learning experience of students. Several actionable recommendations to improve the situation were proposed by students and teachers. Both students and teachers have called for urgent construction of gender-specific dressing rooms, improvements to PE equipment, and consistent maintenance of sports facilities. Participants also stressed that infrastructural investments in physical education should be prioritised by education authorities and policymakers to promote student health, safety and holistic development. The following themes have been developed:

**Need for Dedicated Changing Facilities.** Participants strongly advocated for the provision of proper changing rooms. A teacher stated:

*“Schools need to invest in proper changing rooms to create a conducive environment for PE” (Teacher 1).*

A student echoed:

*“Providing changing rooms will promote better participation and help students feel respected” (Student 4).*

**Training and Awareness for Staff.** The need for staff training in managing infrastructural limitations and supporting student well-being was highlighted. A teacher noted:

*“Teachers need training on managing lessons when facilities are limited and on supporting student comfort” (Teacher 3).*

Another suggested:

*“Awareness programs could help staff and students understand the importance of privacy and respect during PE” (Teacher 2).*

**Inclusive Policy Development.** Participants recommended that school policies explicitly address privacy and infrastructure for all students. One participant emphasised:

*“Policies should mandate safe, private changing areas that accommodate all genders to ensure inclusivity” (Teacher 5).*

Another advised:

*“Inclusive infrastructure policies will help remove barriers and improve PE effectiveness across the board” (Teacher 6).*

#### 4. Discussion

This study looked at how the absence of changing rooms affected the hands-on physical education classes in senior high schools in the eastern region of Ghana. The findings showed that students experienced discomfort, embarrassment, lost time and reduced participation, while PE teachers reported disruption of lessons, reduced pupil participation and safety concerns. Among students, psychological disorders such as anxiety, low self-esteem and bullying were identified. In addressing these challenges, participants recommended gender-sensitive change rooms, staff training, awareness-raising programmes and inclusive policy reforms to improve infrastructure conditions and promote effective participation by PE.

The difficulties and discomfort faced by students due to the lack of changing facilities are in line with the findings of World Vision Ghana, which has highlighted the negative impact of the lack of changing facilities on the education of girls, especially during menstruation (World Vision Ghana, 2024). Similarly, Amoah (2021) identified insufficient facilities as a major obstacle to students participating in physical activities in the Kassena Nankana municipality. The challenges faced by PE teachers, such as difficulties in teaching and reduced student participation, are confirmed by the findings of a study in Nigeria, where insufficient resources and equipment hampered effective PE provision (Akinro et al., 2022). This suggests that infrastructure deficits are a common problem in West African education landscapes.

The findings of the study on anxiety, reduced self-esteem and bullying due to inadequate changing facilities are congruent with the results of Srem-Sai et al. (2021), which found that a dangerous learning environment increases the stress level of students in the field of physical education in Ghana. This highlights how important it is to provide safe and supportive conditions that allow students to flourish. These findings confirm and expand existing studies on infrastructure problems in the school's PE environment in sub-Saharan Africa. Similar studies have shown that insufficient facilities, in particular private changing rooms, discourage student participation among women (Amoako et al., 2021). The identified psychosocial effects are in line with the results of Asare et al. (2022) on the emotional burden of a dangerous or inadequate school environment on the well-being of students.

Moreover, these findings support the arguments of the controversial revision by Ntiamoah et al. (2023) that logistical constraints on PE programmes compromise the delivery of lessons, student involvement and the overall educational value of PE. The calls of the participants for inclusive and gender-sensitive infrastructure policies echo the calls of Gyamera and Sarfo (2020) for inclusive education reforms that address the infrastructural inequalities in senior high schools in Ghana.

While the work focused on senior high schools in the eastern region of Ghana, the findings are broadly applicable to other developing countries where educational infrastructure is lagging behind policy mandates for holistic education. The identified psychosocial and educational problems are likely to be present in comparable socio-cultural and economic contexts throughout West Africa and similar regions. However, the conclusions of the study, due to their qualitative nature, are contextually specific and should be cautiously generalised beyond Ghana without further regional comparative research. The calls for specialised change management and inclusive policies are in line with the recommendations of the Ghana News Agency (2023), which highlighted the need to increase the allocation of the Ghana Education Trust Fund (GETF) to address the school infrastructure problem. This emphasises the wider consensus on the need for infrastructure investment to improve educational outcomes.

These findings add to the corpus of knowledge on the interface between educational infrastructure and student participation in physical education. They support theories that place the physical environment as a critical determinant of student motivation and learning outcomes (Baafi, 2020). The study highlights the urgent need for policymakers to give priority to the construction of gender-sensitive toilets in schools. These gaps could be filled, and equitable access to physical education for all encouraged by devoting a substantial share of educational funding to infrastructure development (Ghana News Agency, 2023).

#### **4.1 Practical Implications**

Teachers and school administrators should promote and implement interim measures to mitigate the problems caused by the lack of changeover facilities. This includes the planning of PE lessons so that students can change at the dormitories or the designation of private areas in the existing school infrastructure until a permanent solution is found. While previous studies have highlighted the general lack of facilities in the schools, this study provides a targeted investigation of the specific impact of the lack of changing rooms on PE lessons. It provides a deeper understanding of infrastructure challenges by detailing the psychosocial impact on students and the practical challenges facing teachers. The study highlights the often-overlooked problem of changing rooms and their significant impact on participation in PE. It offers a perspective that can inform targeted interventions by providing a qualitative insight into the lived experience of learners and teachers. The research makes a unique contribution to the debate on educational infrastructure by highlighting the need for facilities that promote the physical and psychological welfare of the students.

#### **5. Conclusion**

This study examined how the absence of changing rooms affects the delivery and participation in physical education in senior high schools in Ghana. The study, using qualitative research methods such as interviews, focus group discussions and observations, identified the main problems posed by this threat. The study found that students were deterred from participating in physical education because they felt vulnerable and uneasy when changing in public or makeshift settings. Teachers also reported that this infrastructure gap affected the timeliness of lessons, preparation and classroom management, compromising the intended learning outcomes of PE curricula that focus on active participation, skills development and lifelong healthy behaviours.

The research findings emphasise the imperative necessity for Ghanaian policymakers and educational stakeholders to give the provision of locker rooms in senior high schools top priority. Investing in such infrastructure is essential for enhancing the quality of practical PE instruction and promoting broader educational and social goals. The study links its recommendations to the achievement of several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This includes those related to health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, and reduced inequalities. It advocates for the integration of minimum infrastructure standards for PE facilities into national education policy and school development plans, urging researchers and policymakers alike to continue exploring solutions to barriers to inclusive PE participation.

While the study makes an important contribution to educational policy and practice in Ghana, it acknowledges certain limitations. This includes its reliance on self-reported data, which could introduce a subjective element, its qualitative focus, and the sample's geographic limitations. To strengthen the evidence base, the study recommends future national mixed-method research, involving larger and more diverse samples, to assess the broader impact of infrastructural challenges in PE across various socio-economic and regional contexts. It also calls for collaborative efforts among the Ghana Education Service, school authorities, local communities, and private sector partners to mobilise resources for building or improving changing facilities, recognising that doing so will uphold students' dignity, equity, and holistic educational development.

**Ethics Approval and Consent to Participants:** This study closely follows ethical guidelines governing research involving human subjects. Ethics clearance was provided before the study to ensure compliance with national and global ethical standards. The research protocol was thoroughly analysed to identify its possible effects on participants, confidentiality agreements and voluntary participation. In order to ensure inclusiveness across different demographic groups and academic programmes, participants were chosen from high schools in the Eastern Region of Ghana using a rigorous and stratified sampling technique. Each participant was fully informed about the objectives, parameters and methods of the study. Before participating in the study, each participant gave their informed consent to the moratorium. In addition to the consent of the student, parental and or guardian consent was essential for participants below the age of 18. All participants' privacy was safeguarded by anonymising personal identifiers and securely storing the information gathered in password-protected digital files that are only accessible by the research team. The research team has maintained responsibility and transparency throughout the entire process and ensured that the rights, dignity and general welfare of each participant were fully respected and protected.

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