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**The trend toward top grades: analysis of assessment practices in the Chilean  
subject of Physical Education and Health**

**La nota máxima está de moda: análisis de las prácticas evaluativas en la  
asignatura chilena de Educación Física y Salud**

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## Abstract

This study analyzes the assessment and grading practices of Physical Education and Health (PEH) teachers in Chile, using a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design. The qualitative phase involved semi-structured interviews with ten in-service teachers (seven men and three women) from the city of Talca, in the Maule region, whose ages ranged from 20 to 59 years and with professional experience ranging from 2 to 32 years. Subsequently, a quantitative analysis was conducted using official student grades from the 2018–2022 period. The methodological design followed a sequential exploratory mixed approach. The qualitative findings reveal that teachers tend to conceive assessment as a formative process that prioritizes participation, effort, and attitude over physical performance, and they tend to assign high grades. Based on these findings, the quantitative phase showed a sustained trend toward excellent grades, with a mode of 7.0 and a national average of 6.6 in 2022. This phenomenon raises questions about the relationship between grading and effective learning, suggesting the existence of an assessment culture that emphasizes inclusion and the recognition of effort. The findings offer new perspectives on the pedagogical meaning of grading in PEH, challenging traditional approaches focused on motor performance measurement and highlighting the need for a more equitable, comprehensive, and formative-aligned assessment model.

**Keywords:** mixed methods; assessment; attitudinal assessment; grading; teaching praxis.

## Resumen

Este estudio analiza las prácticas evaluativas y calificativas del profesorado de Educación Física y Salud (EFyS) en Chile, a través de un diseño mixto secuencial exploratorio. La fase cualitativa incluyó entrevistas semiestructuradas a diez docentes en ejercicio (siete hombres y tres mujeres) de la ciudad de Talca, región del Maule, cuyas edades oscilaban entre los 20 y 59 años, con trayectorias profesionales de entre 2 y 32 años. Posteriormente, se realizó un análisis cuantitativo de las calificaciones oficiales correspondientes al período 2018–2022. El diseño metodológico fue mixto secuencial exploratorio. Los resultados cualitativos revelan que el profesorado tiende a concebir la evaluación como un proceso formativo que prioriza la participación, el esfuerzo y la actitud por sobre el rendimiento físico y a calificar con notas altas. En base a estos hallazgos se llevó a cabo la fase cuantitativa, la cual mostró una tendencia sostenida hacia calificaciones de excelencia, con una moda de 7,0 y un promedio nacional de 6,6 en 2022. Este fenómeno plantea interrogantes respecto a la relación entre calificación y aprendizaje efectivo, y sugiere la existencia de una cultura evaluativa que prioriza la inclusión y el reconocimiento del esfuerzo. Los hallazgos abren nuevas perspectivas sobre el sentido pedagógico de la calificación en EFyS, cuestionando enfoques tradicionales centrados en la medición motriz y destacando la necesidad de una evaluación más equitativa, comprensiva y coherente con los principios formativos de la asignatura.

**Palabras clave:** análisis mixto; evaluación; evaluación actitudinal; calificación; praxis docente.

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## Introduction

Recent developments in educational policy have reflected the need to implement formative assessment processes (Calatayud, 2019; Talanquer, 2015) that engage students in achieving the objectives of the educational process. However, this aim directly conflicts with the legal requirement to conclude the student assessment process with a numerical grade that informs decisions regarding promotion or certification of each student's achievement (Ravela, 2009).

In the Chilean school system, both curriculum design and the assessment of learning are structured around Learning Objectives (LOs), as defined in the Curricular Bases of the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC, 2019) and regulated by Exempt Decree No. 67 (2018), and do not adopt a competency-based approach, as is the case in other countries. Decree 67 establishes the national minimum standards for assessment, grading, and promotion. It specifies that grading is the “representation of learning achievement through an assessment process, which conveys a shared meaning regarding such achievement by means of a number, symbol, or concept” (Ministerio de Educación, 2018, C). This definition is consistent with previous conceptualizations of grading in the scientific literature (López-Pastor, 2005; Mora, 2004; Sandoval et al., 2022). Despite this standardization, the regulation allows each educational institution recognized by the Chilean Ministry of Education to draft and implement its own assessment regulations, which could be associated with teacher empowerment in the assessment process (Santos Guerra, 1995)

## Assessment in Physical Education and Health in the Chilean Context

In Latin America, conceptions of assessment in the subject of Physical Education and Health (PEH) refer to two recurrent trends. One privileges quantitative aspects, addressed through measurement in the areas of sport and health; the other, qualitative, focuses on formative or attitudinal aspects (Secchi et al., 2016; Stieg & dos Santos, 2021). Despite the coexistence of both trends, there is ample evidence of the hegemonic nature of the former—one that understands assessment as a means of verifying the level of learning in order to grade based on performance, with a strong emphasis on physical fitness and sport-related aptitude tests. This has been documented in studies conducted in

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Latin American contexts (Atienza et al., 2018; Oliver-Álvarez & Martos-García, 2023; Toro-Suaza & Chaverra-Fernández, 2022) as well as at the international level (Zhu, 2015; Zubillaga & Cañadas, 2021).

The Chilean context appears to be no exception, as the focus of the subject is placed on “doing” and on the production of results that can be evaluated quantitatively and with “objectivity” (Castillo-Retamal et al., 2024; Moreno-Doña et al., 2016). This has been recently confirmed by Portes-Junior et al. (2022) and Muñoz-Sepúlveda et al. (in press), who conclude that there is a strong presence of physical fitness tests as an assessment method in the subject of PEH at the upper secondary level in Chile. This trend raises concerns about how students perceive receiving a grade based on these tests, as they are associated with negative emotions (Corbin, 2010; Muñoz-Sepúlveda et al., 2025) and, in some cases, even with humiliating situations (Oliver-Álvarez & Martos-García, 2023).

This approach has been driven by the Education Quality Measurement System (SIMCE), which has been administered within the PEH subject in Chile for more than a decade. This system has adopted a technical and reductionist perspective focused on physical fitness, evaluating students’ anthropometric characteristics, muscular performance, flexibility, and cardiorespiratory endurance (Ministerio de Educación, 2010). However, such standardized tests tend to promote assessment practices that are not formative and, in some cases, may even contribute to the professional devaluation of teachers (Moreno et al., 2014). It is also worth noting that the PEH subject currently contributes to students’ final annual grade. This grade is expressed on a numerical scale from 1 to 7, with 7 being the highest possible grade and 4 the minimum passing mark.

### **Formative Assessment as an Alternative Approach**

The shift from a technical and traditional paradigm of assessment—focused on performance and quantitative results—toward an approach that emphasizes alternative assessment has emerged as an urgent need in today’s educational context (Barba-Martín et al., 2020). Reflections and research in recent years have given rise to models with various names, all of which, despite this variety, are associated with the core principles of formative assessment, as well as with participatory, authentic, or emancipatory approaches. These models move away from classification and quantification objectives

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and focus instead on supporting learning processes (Calatayud, 2021; Herrera, 2018; Moreno, 2016; Talanquer, 2015). This alternative has also been explored within the context of the PE subject (Galán & López, 2012; Gallardo-Fuentes et al., 2017; Hortigüela et al., 2019), confirming its potential and multiple advantages. In short, formative assessment—which incorporates continuous feedback between teachers and students—emerges as an innovative approach to the evaluation of learning, with the primary objective of supporting student learning by encouraging the active participation of both students and teachers (Cañadas, 2020; López-Pastor et al., 2006). The relevance and appropriateness of this approach is reflected in various studies that have demonstrated its positive impact on the development of cognitive and metacognitive skills, as well as on increased student engagement, improved academic performance, and the development of self-esteem, confidence, and autonomy (Bizarro et al., 2021; García & García, 2022). In other words, recent and numerous studies have highlighted the benefits and advantages that the development of alternative assessment in PEH—based on formative principles—offers students, as emphasized in the recent literature review conducted by Herrero-González et al. (2023). The challenge of alternative assessment, as noted initially, is that it must be compatible with legislative requirements in education, which mandate condensing the assessment process into a single final grade.

## Research Questions

However, given the polysemy inherent in the very concept of grading, and the tensions between formative approaches and regulatory requirements, the following questions arise: What are grades like in the PEH subject? And, to delve deeper, how do this subject's teachers understand and operationalize assessment and grading processes? These questions have accompanied the development of the PEH subject both in the Chilean context (Gallardo-Fuentes et al., 2022; Moreno et al., 2014) and internationally (Bezeau et al., 2023; Hortigüela-Alcalá et al., 2021; Mohnsen, 2006; Svennberg, 2016), to name just a few examples. Considering the above, the purpose of this study was to understand the assessment and grading practices and perceptions of PEH teachers in Chile, as well as to analyze the behavior and national trends of annual and regional grades in this subject between 2018 and 2022.



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## Methodology

This study adopts a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design, in which the initial qualitative phase enables a deep understanding of the phenomenon under study, and its results guide the development of the subsequent quantitative phase (Creswell & Plano, 2011). In this case, the study began by exploring the assessment and grading perceptions and practices of PEH teachers in Chilean school settings, and then complemented these findings with a quantitative analysis of official national grades in the subject. This approach allows for the integration of the contextual richness of qualitative methods with the numerical systematization of quantitative analysis (Pole, 2009), facilitating a more comprehensive understanding of complex phenomena in education (Chaves, 2018; Şahin & Ozturk, 2019). Specifically in the field of PEH, it has proven suitable for addressing assessment and grading from a broad and contextualized perspective (Bagur-Pons et al., 2021; Castañer et al., 2013).

## Qualitative Phase

### Participants

The participants in the qualitative phase were 3 female and 7 male PEH teachers who, at the time of the interview, were working in various educational institutions in the city of Talca, in the Maule region of Chile. Their main characteristics are presented in Table 1. Among the inclusion criteria, the primary requirement was having at least one year of experience teaching PEH in any school context and voluntarily agreeing to participate in the study by providing informed consent.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Interviewed Teachers.

Participant	Gender	Age Range (years)	Years of Teaching Experience
1	Female	50 - 59	32
2	Female	40 - 49	24
3	Male	30 - 39	11
4	Male	30 - 39	10
5	Male	30 - 39	10
6	Male	30 - 39	8
7	Male	30 - 39	7
8	Male	30 - 39	4
9	Male	20 - 29	4
10	Female	20 - 29	2

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### ***Data Collection Technique and Procedure***

The first qualitative phase consisted of conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews, based on a script developed by the research team. The questions asked during the interviews were carefully designed to address different categories previously identified in the literature: conceptualization of assessment from practice, assessment and grading practices, and summative assessment (Evans, 2018; Hernández, 2014; Troncoso & Daniele, 2003).

The interviews were conducted in person and individually with each of the participants. They lasted approximately 45 minutes and were recorded using a voice recorder for subsequent transcription and analysis of hermeneutic units, which are described in the following section. It is important to note that pseudonyms were used in the direct quotations presented in the results section.

### ***Qualitative Data Analysis***

For the analysis of the qualitative data obtained from the interviews, an inductive categorical analysis methodology was adopted—a technique widely recognized in the academic literature (Hodge & Sharp, 2016; Pérez-Samaniego et al., 2011). This analytical strategy allows for an in-depth exploration of the data, beginning with the identification of meaning units. This process was carried out using each of the pre-established categories included in the interview (Rodríguez et al., 2005). Once the meaning units were identified, they were associated with codes that allowed for thematic grouping into categories. The results of the final matrix are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Matrix of Categories Developed from the Interviews.

Category	Subcategory	Codes	Description
Conceptualization	Formative	Progress Process Communicated Formative More than grading	Assessment is described as a process that must include follow-up over a period of time to communicate progress.
	Individualized	Individual Personalized Student interests Context Adequate Accessible	Emphasis is placed on adapting to and considering students' individual characteristics in assessment, making it accessible for all levels of motor competence.

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Grading Process	Focus	Qualitative Effort Behavior Information Transition Conceptual Procedural Attitudinal	The conception of assessment is mainly focused on the attitudinal dimension, considering effort and student participation. Procedural and conceptual dimensions are mentioned to a lesser extent.
	Frequency	One per Unit 2 to 3 per semester Always	It is noted that assessment is ongoing, but grading typically occurs 2 to 3 times per semester—i.e., 4 to 6 grades per year.
	Instruments	Class-by-class records Rating scales Checklists Rubrics Validated by the Technical-Pedagogical Unit (TPU)	Records per class through observation, rating scales, rubrics, and checklists are mentioned—always following an internal TPU validation process.
	Dimensions	Attitudinal Behavior Participation Conceptual Effort Achievement Procedural	Components of the attitudinal dimension are most frequently mentioned as key elements with the greatest weight in grading. Procedural and conceptual dimensions are also mentioned to a lesser extent.
	Uses	Diagnostic Formative Grading Attitude monitoring Class observation	The uses attributed to assessment range from diagnosis, class-by-class monitoring, process evaluations, and grading.

## Quantitative Phase

The second phase of this study corresponds to the quantitative approach, using a longitudinal trend design with a descriptive scope, as proposed by Delgado and Llorca (2004) for analyzing the behavior of a variable over a period longer than two years. This phase was conducted after the qualitative analysis, with the aim of complementing and expanding the understanding of the observed phenomenon by comparing teachers' perceptions and practices with objective data at the national level.

## Records Analyzed

The official PEH grades of students from 1st grade of primary school through 12th grade of secondary school (ages 6 to 18) were analyzed. These data were provided by the Chilean Ministry of Education through a public transparency request. The period considered was from 2018 to 2022, a range defined by both normative and methodological criteria. The year 2018 corresponds to the enactment of Decree No. 67, which introduced new guidelines for student assessment in Chile, while 2022 coincides



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with the year in which the teacher interviews were conducted. The databases used include information on annual grade averages by grade level, educational level, and subject area, disaggregated by each of the country's 16 regions. Table 3 presents the total number of records and schools included in the analysis for each academic year.

Table 3. Grade databases used in this study.

Academic year	Total number of records	Number of schools
2018	30612736	9160
2019	32227180	9068
2020	25196613	9040
2021	32410770	8964
2022	32793724	8903

### ***Quantitative Data Analysis***

The statistical analysis was conducted using the databases provided by the Ministry of Education's Center for Studies, which contain the reported grades from all educational institutions. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate the mean, standard deviation, and mode of the grades, for the grade averages at the national level, by region, and by educational level, using the statistical software SPSS 25. In addition, a histogram was created to illustrate the distribution of national grade averages for the year 2022. From the total number of records listed annually in Table 2, the following filters were applied:

- By subject area, retaining only records for the subject of Physical Education and Health.
- By educational level, excluding basic and secondary education for adults.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Universidad Autónoma de Chile (code No. CEC 38-21). In the qualitative phase, the principles of voluntariness, confidentiality, and identity protection were upheld. Teacher participation was voluntary, based on informed consent, and the interviews were conducted in person, lasting approximately 45 minutes. They were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using pseudonyms to preserve participants' identities.

In the quantitative phase, public databases obtained through the Chilean Transparency Law via the Ministry of Education were used. Although these databases did not contain

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personal information, institutional privacy was safeguarded by avoiding references to specific schools, thereby ensuring compliance with ethical principles in the handling of secondary data.

## Results

### Assessment Conceptualizations Grounded in Educational Practice

Based on the data, we can affirm that the interviewed teachers are able to clearly distinguish between assessment and grading, with the former being understood as a broader concept, as one teacher explains:

"Assessment, for me, is about analyzing different kinds of things—whether it's the context, content, or student behavior. In general, the concept of assessment can be applied to everything; you can assess any situation. It's different when we talk about graded assessment—then we're talking about student marks. But if you're asking just about assessment, it can be applied to any aspect you intend to analyze, really..."

- Isidora

Regarding the participants' conception of assessment, there seems to be a certain consensus in describing it as a dynamic and formative process that goes beyond assigning numerical grades. It values each student's individual progress and adopts assessment methods and criteria that ensure equity and the holistic development of students:

"Well, for us, assessment is generally more than just the result; it's about valuing the process." - Antonia

In this regard, it is worth noting that assessment is not understood as a single moment, but rather as an ongoing process that should, in turn, be formative and incorporate students' perspectives:

"Well, assessment in general, for us, is more than assigning a grade to a result — it's about evaluating the process..." - Antonia

"I believe that assessment is a comprehensive process, a formative one that is not only about the final result, but rather a process that requires a beginning, based on the student's interests..." - Dante

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"For me, assessment is a process—if that's how it should be, then it should be tailored to each individual student..." - Felix

## Assessment and Grading Practices

The conversations about assessment practices revealed that the participating teachers reported having changed their approach to evaluation, giving way to new proposals that move away from merely focusing on physical performance:

"At least now, as head of the department, I've tried to reach a consensus with my colleagues not to grade based on physical performance or fitness tests. So, we assess performance during the diagnostic phase—not to assign grades, but so that it serves as a reference for us to see what they've improved over the semester and the year..." - Alan

In some cases, the COVID-19 pandemic has been mentioned as a turning point in how students are assessed and graded:

"In previous years, when the SIMCE test was in vogue, we also graded based on physical fitness tests, but it didn't yield great results, mainly because the grades were very low. In the end, it was inconsistent with our thinking about what we wanted to achieve, and it was applied until the pandemic..." - Dante

One way or another, the data reflect a trend toward the development of assessment proposals more aligned with the formative paradigm and moving away from a technical, performance-based conception. Nonetheless, some comments point to the coexistence of both ways of understanding assessment:

"In the Physical Education department at the school, there are two types of teachers: older teachers and newer ones. The newer teachers focus on evaluating procedural and especially attitudinal aspects over physical performance. Our goal is for the students to make progress in their learning and improve class by class, but sometimes the older teachers are still stuck in the mindset of grading based on physical ability..." - Alan

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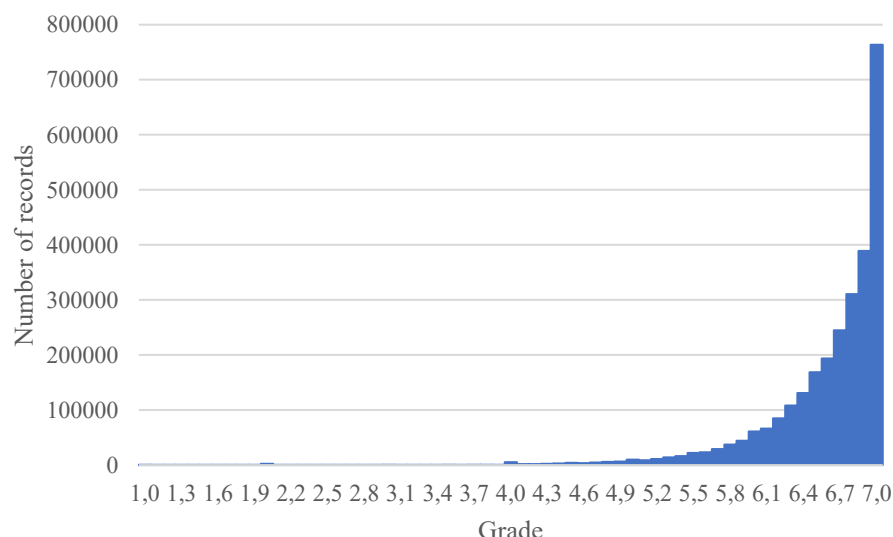
The interviewed teachers generally reported that annual grade averages in the subject are determined based on the results of two to three assessments per semester—that is, one per unit—using procedures validated by the Technical-Pedagogical Unit, and implemented through evaluation tools such as checklists, rating scales, rubrics, and class-by-class observation records. There was unanimous agreement regarding the typical range of annual grade averages in the subject, which generally span from 6.0 to 7.0, with participants making statements such as:

“It’s common for students to have grade averages above 6.0. Those who get low grades are the ones who don’t participate.” - Isidora

“The assessments are adapted so that everyone can access and complete them under optimal conditions...” - Dante

Statements regarding grading, as expressed by the teachers interviewed, help to explain the high grades observed. As shown in the histogram in Figure 1, approximately 28% of students nationwide received the highest possible grade in the subject of Physical Education and Health during the 2022 school year.

Figure 1. Histogram of national Physical Education and Health grades, 2022. (Scale from 1 to 7).



### High Grades as a National Trend

Based on the comments of all interviewed teachers, who reported that students typically received grades in the highest range, these statements are contrasted with the

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national trend observed over the past five years. Table 4 shows a trend in national grade averages in the subject toward excellence, with the five-year national grade averages consistently above 6.0, considering that 7.0 is the highest possible grade. The statistical mode for all years corresponded to the maximum grade (7.0). The mean grade over the last five years was 6.4.

Table 4. Grades in the PEH subject by level of education from 2018 to 2022.

	2018		2019		2020		2021		2022	
	N	M (SD)	N	M (SD)	N	M (SD)	N	M (SD)	N	M (SD)
All levels	2391419	6,44 (0,57)	2425677	6,48 (0,56)	1857483	6,18 (1,05)	2743759	6,31 (0,87)	2788981	6,60 (0,54)
<b>Level of education</b>										
Primary	1947731	6,48 (0,52)	1977000	6,51 (0,51)	1399796	6,22 (1,02)	2008110	6,38 (0,81)	2028332	6,63 (0,47)
Secondary (HS)	350300	6,34 (0,71)	361522	6,38 (0,70)	366874	6,15 (1,09)	573955	6,20 (0,97)	596462	6,54 (0,64)
Secondary (TP)	93386	6,03 (0,83)	85630	6,12 (0,79)	90813	5,73 (1,20)	161683	5,85 (1,07)	164187	6,32 (0,78)

M = Mean; SD = Standard deviation; N = Number of students; HC = Humanistic-scientific secondary schools; TP = Technical-professional secondary schools.

Considering Chile's geographical extension and territorial diversity, it was deemed appropriate to analyze grade trends by region. Table 5 presents the regional grade averages in the PEH subject between 2018 and 2022. In all cases, grades consistently remain between 6.0 and 6.7. Notably, 2022 shows the highest average grades across all regions of the country.

Table 5. Grades in the Physical Education and Health subject in Chile by geographic region.

Year	2018		2019		2020		2021		2022	
Region	N	M(SD)	N	M(SD)	N	M(SD)	N	M(SD)	N	M(SD)
Tarapacá	52622	6,44(0,59)	53979	6,47(0,58)	49690	6,11(1,10)	62569	6,28(0,88)	63054	6,62(0,52)
Antofagasta	90145	6,44(0,57)	92191	6,50(0,53)	85126	6,14(1,11)	103990	6,27(0,90)	106088	6,61(0,53)
Atacama	44405	6,42(0,65)	45901	6,47(0,61)	33174	6,26(1,04)	51364	6,31(0,89)	52989	6,58(0,59)
Coquimbo	113564	6,47(0,57)	116079	6,49(0,54)	93388	6,18(1,05)	133474	6,33(0,84)	137039	6,61(0,51)
Valparaíso	232856	6,45(0,58)	236890	6,48(0,56)	180197	6,18(1,07)	274139	6,35(0,85)	281009	6,60(0,54)
O'Higgins	130551	6,39(0,60)	132426	6,42(0,58)	90946	6,14(1,05)	151769	6,29(0,85)	155711	6,55(0,55)
Maule	145971	6,43(0,58)	147672	6,46(0,57)	103430	6,17(1,06)	171149	6,29(0,90)	175386	6,58(0,56)
Biobío	210047	6,51(0,53)	212413	6,54(0,52)	154256	6,35(0,95)	241252	6,41(0,81)	243748	6,64(0,50)
Araucanía	141228	6,46(0,54)	141620	6,47(0,54)	98571	6,22(0,98)	162381	6,33(0,83)	165239	6,59(0,53)
Los Lagos	121343	6,47(0,56)	121196	6,51(0,54)	54417	6,14(1,15)	138427	6,37(0,84)	139709	6,60(0,54)
Aysén	16529	6,46(0,55)	16354	6,46(0,57)	9644	6,36(1,02)	17881	6,34(0,88)	18178	6,56(0,60)
Magallanes	21829	6,58(0,50)	22345	6,59(0,48)	19621	6,46(0,88)	24445	6,46(0,76)	24836	6,69(0,47)
Metropolitana	917633	6,41(0,58)	930625	6,46(0,57)	771513	6,14(1,06)	1033580	6,27(0,90)	1045236	6,58(0,55)
Los Ríos	51645	6,48(0,54)	52460	6,53(0,53)	37970	6,20(1,04)	61804	6,33(0,85)	63419	6,64(0,49)
Arica	34682	6,55(0,54)	35642	6,59(0,52)	18283	6,13(1,07)	39862	6,33(0,87)	40043	6,68(0,50)
Ñuble	66367	6,51(0,53)	66450	6,54(0,52)	57257	6,29(0,96)	75662	6,44(0,76)	77297	6,66(0,48)

SD = Standard deviation; N = Number of students; M = Mean.



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## The Importance of Attitude and Effort in Grading

The shift toward considering dimensions beyond the strictly procedural is reflected, for example, in the weight that PEH teachers assign to attitudinal aspects in grading:

“...here at the school, all grades are affected by attitude and class-by-class participation. They are considered with equal weight—50% of the unit grade...” - Alan

“...I observe how they are improving. Now, if the student, for example, didn’t try to improve, I consider during the assessment whether they are engaged in class or perhaps focused on something else. In that case, obviously, the evaluation won’t be the same as for the others, so they won’t get a 7...” - Isidora

Notably, the theoretical component of the subject was the least mentioned in the grading process. The emphasis, then, lies both on attitudes and on the procedural dimension:

“...for example, when assessing manipulative skills, students must have all the worksheets glued and completed in their notebooks. So, those who have all the theoretical part completed get an extra point, depending on the total score of the assessment...” - Isidora

“For the theoretical part, I give most classes a test each semester, but in every lesson I ask them questions to check their conceptual understanding or what they remember from the previous class—this is not graded...” - Jaime

The focus of assessment on the procedural aspects of teaching brings to light the value placed on effort as a central element—not only as something to be assessed, but also as a key factor in determining students’ final grades, as reflected in Isidora’s quote. Expanding on this point, the teachers interviewed emphasized the importance of effort when calculating students’ grades:

“Grades are earned much more through the effort they put in, through the attitude they show, rather than the skills they may have, because in the end, our school’s entire curriculum is designed so that everyone can succeed...” - Dante

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“I adapt that assessment to the child who didn’t use to jump, and now I look at how far they can jump—if they’ve shown improvement in their physical condition or ability, I assess them differently. I might give them extra points, perhaps for effort. Or I might go beyond, taking into consideration some aspects that aren’t included in the curriculum guidelines.” - Isidora

However, the reorientation of assessment practices toward elements more closely related to attitudes and effort is associated with two important aspects: on the one hand, encouraging students to participate actively and to show respect for their peers, the class, and the teacher; and on the other, supporting students who are less skilled in motor abilities:

“I’m quite flexible with students’ grades when I see progress. But I’m also very strict about the grade they’ll receive for behavior, which is included as part of the grading criteria. We talk to them about the impact this will have on their final grade, and if they don’t want to participate or show a bad attitude, their grade drops significantly.” - Isidora

“...during the same class, I tell them what I’m going to assess, and I always include, for example, an item on coexistence and participation, and another on behavior, so I include those in the assessment as well...” - Felix

In a way, assessment is used as an incentive for student participation, meaning that extrinsic motivation comes into play in the form of grades:

“In the folklore unit, it’s a bit more complex because not everyone likes to dance. But everyone has to dance. And we understand that—not everyone likes dancing—so we assess the process, where students grade themselves class by class for working, participating in the dance, following the teacher’s instructions, and rehearsing with their partner or group. They assign themselves a grade, so we explain to them that everyone starts the unit with a 7.0, and they can only lower it if they don’t participate...” - Dante

“Those who don’t get high grades are usually the ones who show behavior that’s not appropriate for the class or who don’t participate. But we also have students

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who refuse to take part or who are injured, etc. In those cases, we also give them written assignments so they can still participate in the subject, even if it's from the library..."- Felix

## Discussion

The relationship between national education policies, the official curriculum, and assessment practices has been the subject of research in recent decades (Svennberg, 2016). In the Chilean context, Decree 67 (Ministerio de Educación, 2018) establishes that final grades must reflect the degree to which learning objectives have been achieved, thereby turning the grade into a symbol of educational goal attainment. However, as Zhu (2015) points out, the relationship between grading and actual learning is problematic. Along the same critical line, Santos Guerra (1995) argues that the measurement of the quantity of learning is often prioritized over the assessment of higher-order competencies such as analysis, critique, or synthesis.

Based on the qualitative phase of this research, the teachers' accounts reveal a more process-oriented and open conception of assessment. For them, the assessment process is not limited to measuring observable physical performance but also incorporates variables such as student effort, participation, and attitude. This more comprehensive view of assessment aligns with approaches advocated in recent literature (Castillo-Retamal et al., 2024; Hortigüela et al., 2019; Moreno, 2016; Talanquer, 2015), which emphasize valuing individual progress and student engagement rather than focusing solely on quantifiable outcomes.

In this regard, the interviewed teachers described the use of instruments such as rubrics, checklists, rating scales, and observation guides to document student progress, aiming to make the assessment process more transparent and to provide objectivity to the final grade. These tools must be internally validated by each school's Technical-Pedagogical Unit, thereby reinforcing the legitimacy of the process—consistent with findings by Portes-Junior et al. (2022), Castillo-Retamal et al. (2022), and Toro-Suaza and Chaverra-Fernández (2022). This trend is not unique to the Chilean context; in the United States, for example, the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) has promoted the use of standardized rubrics for motor and cognitive

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assessment (Fox, 2012), warning against “eyeball” evaluations that may undermine teacher professionalism (Matanin & Tannehill, 1994).

Within this more comprehensive view of assessment, teachers consider that low grades do not necessarily reflect low learning, but rather a lack of participation or engagement in class. This perspective has also been supported by research advocating for the evaluation of attitudinal dimensions alongside motor competencies (Atienza et al., 2018; Cañadas, 2020; López-Pastor, 2006; Toro-Suaza & Chaverra-Fernández, 2022), emphasizing the need for authentic assessment that prioritizes meaningful learning over observable performance (Barba-Martín et al., 2020).

However, this analysis must also be situated within a broader structural framework. PEH continues to face tensions related to its curricular status compared to so-called “core subjects” such as Mathematics or Language Arts. Recent studies show that this situation pushes the subject toward increasingly standardized and objective assessment strategies in an attempt to gain academic legitimacy and stand alongside other school disciplines. This pressure toward standardization translates into the implementation of physical fitness tests, performance measurement tools, and evaluation systems that prioritize quantifiable objectivity over more formative and humanistic processes. Nevertheless, this technical orientation conflicts with the humanizing nature of PEH, whose formative purpose encompasses the development of social skills, values, active participation, and meaningful motor experiences. Furthermore, recent reviews of school-based PEH assessment practices in the United States have revealed a lack of consistency in evaluation approaches, where the measurement of physical skills still predominates over the promotion of critical and reflective learning. All of this reflects an ongoing debate in the field of education regarding how to balance the need for curricular legitimacy with the preservation of the formative and emancipatory principles that underpin PEH in schools.

In the quantitative phase, the analysis of official databases (Tables 4 and 5) reveals a high concentration of grade averages between 6.0 and 7.0 at both national and regional levels in the PEH subject. This distribution confirms what was anticipated in the interviews: most students receive top grades, overwhelmingly falling within the highest performance range. From a theoretical critique, Biggs (2008) warns that summative

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grading tends to simplify complex learning processes, reducing them to a number. Similarly, Zhu (2015) and Santos Guerra (1995) question whether final grades reliably reflect what has been learned, highlighting the gap between grading and the actual development of competencies.

These data also reflect an assessment culture that, while aiming for objectivity through standardized instruments, continues to operate under traditional logics, as warned by Fox (2012) and Matanin and Tannehill (1994), especially in the context of PEH.

By integrating the qualitative and quantitative results, it can be argued that in the PEH subject in Chile, an evaluative approach prevails that prioritizes effort, participation, and commitment over the strict measurement of physical competence. This finding aligns with international trends, which show a gradual incorporation of attitudinal criteria into assessment practices, even though traditional elements persist. This is supported by research in Latin American contexts, such as that of Toro-Suaza and Chaverra-Fernández (2022) in Colombia, where—despite some changes—assessments still tend to focus on physical performance. Meanwhile, in Spain, although formative diagnostics and the improvement of learning processes are valued, there remains a strong focus on performance-based measurement (Zubillaga & Cañadas, 2021). Regarding the meaning of grades for students, recent studies show that high grades motivate participation, whereas low grades—especially when linked exclusively to physical performance—can be discouraging (Kleinman, 1997; Krijgsman et al., 2017; Mackley et al., 2022; Sevil-Serrano et al., 2020). Thus, grades exert a strong influence on students' lived experiences in PEH classes (Martos-García & García-Puchades, 2023; Muñoz-Sepúlveda et al., 2025).

Finally, this study confirms that effort and participation remain key elements in the assessment of PEH, in line with findings from other contexts (Baghurst, 2014; Hortigüela-Alcalá et al., 2021; James, 2018). However, the debate continues regarding how much weight should be assigned to these components in comparison to actual motor learning (Baghurst, 2013), and what the ideal balance is in a formative assessment approach that promotes both equity and the achievement of meaningful learning outcomes.

## Conclusions

This study first revealed that in-service PEH teachers in Chile understand assessment as a formative process that goes beyond the mere measurement of motor skills



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or physical fitness. The attitudinal dimension—participation, respect, behavior, and effort—takes on a predominant role when assigning grades, outweighing physical performance or theoretical learning outcomes. This prioritization is reflected in assessment practices focused on direct observation, checklists, rubrics, and rating scales—tools which, when used to assign grades, must first be validated by the Technical-Pedagogical Units of the schools.

Second, the analysis of official grades showed that they predominantly fall within the highest range, with a recurring mode of 7.0 (perfect grade) over the past five years and a national grade average of 6.6 in 2022. This phenomenon raises questions as to whether such results truly reflect the full achievement of curricular objectives or if they respond to other internal dynamics within the subject.

In this way, a shift can be observed in the assessment paradigm of Chilean PEH teachers, progressively moving away from a traditional, performance-oriented technical approach toward one that prioritizes the appreciation of students' commitment, active participation, and effort.

However, a limitation of this study lies in the fact that the interviews were conducted with a small number of individuals within a specific geographic context, which may account for the phenomenon studied in a localized setting rather than at the national level. Likewise, the analysis of quantitative data based on aggregated databases did not allow for a direct connection between the assessment practices of the interviewed teachers and the grades of their own students.

In the future, it would be relevant to compare these results with other international contexts in order to determine whether the high concentration of grades in the highest range is a phenomenon specific to the Chilean context or if it reflects a more widespread trend in school Physical Education and Health assessment at the Latin American or global level.

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