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Primary School Pupils' Perceptions of Learning Situations and Their Relationship to the Learning Process, as Viewed by Physical Education Teachers

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***Abstract*—**The aim of this study was to investigate primary school pupils' perceptions of learning situations (well-defined, semi-defined, and ill-defined) and their relationship to the learning process in physical education lessons, from the perspective of physical education teachers. The study adopted a descriptive approach, using a questionnaire addressed to physical education teachers and designed to measure their assessments of pupils' perceptions in the various learning situations, as well as indicators of the learning process such as participation, motivation, understanding, perseverance, and interaction. The instrument consists of three main dimensions representing the three learning situations and a fourth dimension relating to the learning process; a three-point Likert scale was used for responses. The data were statistically analyzed using SPSS. The study sought to reveal the differences between teachers' assessments of the three learning situations, as well as to determine the nature of the relationship between pupils' perceptions and the learning process, thereby contributing to the improvement of pedagogical practices in physical education lessons at the primary level.

***Keywords*—**Pupils' perceptions; problem-based learning situations; learning process.

1. Introduction

Representations, and their considerable importance in the construction of scientific knowledge, constitute a complex process in whose formation several multidimensional factors intervene: internal factors tied to the educational system as a whole, and external factors represented by the social, economic, and cultural configurations that exert a considerable influence on that system. Since the learner is the center of the teaching–learning process, attention must be paid to the learner's position within classroom practices, to meeting the learner's various needs and satisfying the different motives that drive him or her, and to taking into account all the factors that shape the learner's personality, upbringing, and learning. Learners enter the classroom with social, cultural, cognitive, and intellectual backgrounds that form the main starting point for the construction of learning, and these backgrounds are embodied in the concept of representations.

The topic of representations has attracted considerable interest among scholars and researchers across the human sciences, given the added value it brings to the development of the sciences in general and of the educational sciences in particular, and its contribution to the development of knowledge and information as well as of the learner, young or old, in acquiring that knowledge.[1]

Understanding how learners (pupils) think, and how they perceive the information and concepts presented to them and around them, is a process of the utmost importance within the teaching–learning process. For teachers to manage their classes in the way they prefer and to convey information effectively, they must become acquainted with pupils' opinions, beliefs, and conceptions; in other words, they must identify the representations that pupils hold of the subject being taught. The learner (pupil) is one of the important educational elements within the

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teaching process, one that plainly contributes to the curriculum's attainment of its objectives.[2]

The question of representations is closely linked to learning and the acquisition of knowledge in general, and of objective knowledge in particular; more precisely, it concerns the learning and teaching of science, which suffers serious shortcomings among wide segments of society, in terms of the difficulty of grasping scientific knowledge, of rapid forgetting, and of the persistence of mistaken ideas in learners in the face of the pressures of teaching at its various levels and stages.[3]

School curricula and teaching methods seek to make the learner an active participant in the learning process, so that lessons are planned and organized in a way that encourages learners to draw on their experiences and harness their representations to find solutions to problems. The aim is to acquire meaningful knowledge, information, and skills that help create links between new knowledge and previously acquired knowledge, from a constructivist perspective, in line with the problem situation.[4] A problem situation is regarded as a set of information presented in a context that requires the learner to work out the relations among its elements in order to accomplish a specific task whose product is not known in advance.[5]

The physical education and sports (PES) lesson is an experiential educational means, since it relies on the field to attain the objectives set for the formation of the learning individual. The physical movements and motor skills that the learner performs, even at a basic level of instruction and within an organized and structured framework, develop, improve, and enhance physical health and provide the individual with the knowledge, skills, experiences, and information that facilitate the satisfaction of his or her desires through experience, in all its mental, psychological, social, moral, and health aspects. This is intended to ensure the formation and development of the individual in order to achieve the objectives set at the level of groups, and it also reflects the effective role that social and psychological factors play in helping learners take part in the PES lesson at the primary stage.[6]

The PES lesson plays an important role in forming the learner's personality in all respects. The aim of the curriculum placed in the hands of primary school teachers is to make field practice of physical education and sports possible, founded on motivating learners by allowing them to discover everything around them, whether their own bodies or the human and material environment with which they interact.[7] In light of all the above, the following questions can be posed:

1. Is there a relationship between the well-defined situation and the learning process, from the viewpoint of physical education and sports teachers?
2. Is there a relationship between the semi-defined situation and the learning process, from the viewpoint of physical education and sports teachers?
3. Is there a relationship between the ill-defined situation and the learning process, from the viewpoint of physical education and sports teachers?

2. Research Hypotheses

- **H1:** There is a relationship between the well-defined situation and the learning process, from the viewpoint of physical education and sports teachers.
- **H2:** There is a relationship between the semi-defined situation and the learning process, from the viewpoint of physical education and sports teachers.
- **H3:** There is a relationship between the ill-defined situation and the learning process, from the viewpoint of physical education and sports teachers.

3. Research Objectives

- To identify learners' perceptions in well-defined, semi-defined, and ill-defined problem situations.
- To identify the opinions of primary-stage PES teachers regarding learners' perceptions in problem situations (well-defined, semi-defined, and ill-defined).
- To identify the relationship between learning situations (well-defined, semi-defined, and ill-defined) and the learning process.

4. Significance of the Study

Theoretical significance: We hope that our study will contribute to enriching the stock of scientific evidence on learners' perceptions in problem situations (well-defined, semi-defined, and ill-defined).

The significance of our study also derives from its contribution to developing the field of education in Algeria and improving the teaching–learning process, starting from an understanding of learners' perceptions as they learn the various activities of the PES lesson.

The study may serve as a reference guiding education-sector practitioners in Algeria, such as principals and teachers, and helping them to identify and develop pupils' mental and practical representations, such as cooperative work, problem solving, innovation, and critical thinking.

The study likewise derives its significance from the benefit expected in the future, from what educational institutions may achieve, and from the reflection of these results on society.

5. Definition of Study Terms

5.1 Representation (Perception)

Linguistic definition. In *al-Mu'jam al-Wajiz* (The Concise Dictionary), to "represent" (*tamaththala*) a thing is to picture its likeness, and to represent something is to make it an example or exemplar: "this is a likeness that you represent and by which you are represented."[8] In *al-Munjid fi al-Lugha*, assimilation (*tamaththul*) in nutrition means that food loses its form and takes on the form of the one nourished by it.[9]

Terminological definition. Moscovici defines representation as a set of conceptions and explanatory statements that emerge from everyday life; in our society they are the counterpart of the myths and belief systems of traditional societies, and one may even go further and regard them as the contemporary expression of common sense.[10] Representation is also defined as the assimilation of new experiences, and their classification and distribution, onto previously organized mental structures in an integrative manner.[11] It is likewise thought and mental activity by which we recall a thing as perceived, by representing an image of that absent thing.[12]

Representations and the educational process. The teacher's competencies come to the fore when dealing with a class group and seeking to help learners acquire the basic competencies that allow them to control their own learning and to move to a higher level of understanding and thinking. Individual differences, representations, and diverse prior learning prompt the teacher to modify these representations and to use them to bring the learner closer to the object of learning and to engage the learner in the learning situation, through which the teacher will unsettle the learner's concepts and representations and lead the learner to question how effective and appropriate they are for the task at hand. The teacher's role remains limited to helping the learner solve the problem that he or she faces and that impedes the course of his or her development. This will happen only if the learner integrates new knowledge and abilities by relying on his or her representations and mental operations. We regard representation as a form of intelligence in itself: when the teacher proposes a new learning topic that the pupil has never studied or encountered, the pupil tries to intervene and contribute ideas and solutions that may be right or wrong, and in either case the pupil moves closer to the answer and constructs his or her own knowledge.[13]

5.2 Problem Situation

In everyday life, a problem situation means, for example, "repairing a fault or managing time to complete a project." In the educational context, however, it is defined within a planned system, since behind every problem situation lies the teacher's intention to use the situation and the problem in relation to a learning sequence.[14]

It is a learning situation or puzzle posed to the learner that can be solved only by using a carefully designed conception or by acquiring a competence that the learner did not previously possess, so that the learner overcomes the difficulty posed; it is thus a pedagogical tool founded on the self-construction of knowledge.[15]

5.3 Operational Definition of the Primary Stage

The primary stage is the first stage of schooling, running from the preparatory class to the fifth year. It helps children think soundly and guarantees them a minimum of knowledge, skills, and experiences that prepare them for social life. It begins at the age of 5 to 7 years and ends at the age of 11 to 13 years.

6. Previous Studies

- The study by Dr. Youssef Achira Mehdi and Mohamed El Amine Koumidi (2022), entitled *Representations of Middle-School Teachers and Their Reflection on the Teaching of the Physical Education and Sports Lesson in the Shadow Areas of Chlef Province* (the so-called shadow areas being remote, underserved areas), aimed to determine how middle-school teachers' representations are reflected in the teaching of the PES lesson in those areas. The sample consisted of 20 teachers chosen purposively, and a questionnaire designed by the researchers was used as the study instrument. The study found that middle-school teachers' representations

are indeed reflected in the teaching of the PES lesson in the shadow areas of Chlef Province.

- The study by Ibtisam Ghanem (2021), entitled *Social Representations of Educational Trips among a Sample of Natural Science Teachers at the Middle Stage*, aimed to identify the social representations of educational trips held by a sample of middle-stage natural science teachers, by uncovering the structure of the social representations these teachers produce about educational trips and how such trips are organized, and by recording their opinions on the importance of educational trips. To achieve these two aims, the study followed the steps of the descriptive approach and applied the hierarchized evocation technique to a purposive sample of 29 teachers. According to the representations the teachers produced, the results showed a positive effect of educational trips in supporting pupils' teaching–learning process, in addition to the effectiveness of their use in the teaching the teachers carry out; the teachers' opinions on the educational importance of educational trips were also positive.
- The study by the students Bushra al-'Arabi and Inas Bujlal, supervised by Dr. Daoud Omar, entitled *Pupils' Representations of Their Relationship with Their Teacher: A Comparative Field Study between a Primary and a Secondary School in Tiaret* (2022), aimed to identify primary pupils' representations of their relationship with their teacher in comparison with secondary pupils' representations of their relationship with their teachers. It adopted the comparative approach, with the questionnaire as the main instrument, distributed to both primary and secondary pupils, and with observation and interview as secondary instruments; the sample was a quota sample. The study yielded a number of results, the most important of which is that the pedagogical gap between teacher and pupil at the primary level is marked by a wide pedagogical distance, owing to little communication and interaction among the parties to the educational process and to the teacher's lack of attention to, and consideration of, the circumstances and lives of his or her pupils, whereas the gap between teacher and pupil at the secondary level is marked by a narrower pedagogical distance, owing to the teacher's attention to pupils and close communication with them, whether pedagogical or personal.
- The study by Saadia Dahmane and Nouar Ferrahi, entitled *Using the Problem Situation in Social Subjects: Applied Models* (2023), aimed to identify the theoretical foundations of the problem situation, including its definition, its elements, its types according to function, and its educational value, and to propose an applied model for a more effective use of the problem situation in the subject of geography.

7. Methodological Procedures

7.1 Research Approach

The study adopted the descriptive approach, owing to its suitability to the nature of the topic, which seeks to uncover primary school pupils' perceptions of learning situations (well-defined, semi-defined, and ill-defined) and their relationship to the learning process from the viewpoint of physical education and sports teachers. This approach is appropriate for studying educational phenomena as they exist in reality; it is concerned with describing what exists and interpreting it by identifying the conditions and relationships among facts. It is one form of organized scientific analysis and interpretation for describing a specific phenomenon or problem and depicting it quantitatively, by collecting standardized data and information on the phenomenon under study, classifying them, and subjecting them to careful examination.

7.2 Study Population and Sample

The study population consisted of physical education and sports teachers working at the primary stage. The sample was chosen purposively and comprised teachers who are actually teaching and who adopt learning situations in their pedagogical practice. It included all the teachers of the Bouzareah district, Directorate of Education of Algiers-Centre, numbering 28 teachers.

7.3 Study Variables

- **Independent variable:** pupils' perceptions of learning situations (the well-defined situation, the semi-defined situation, and the ill-defined situation).
- **Dependent variable:** the learning process (participation, understanding, motivation, perseverance, and interaction).

7.4 Study Instrument

The researcher relied on a questionnaire addressed to physical education and sports teachers and designed specifically to achieve the study's objectives. The instrument was built on the basis of the educational literature on representations, learning situations, and problem-based learning. It consisted of four dimensions:

- **Dimension 1:** Pupils' perceptions of the well-defined situation. It comprises statements that measure the teacher's perception of how pupils interact with situations that have clear instructions and defined solutions.
- **Dimension 2:** Pupils' perceptions of the semi-defined situation. It comprises statements that measure pupils' ability to take some initiatives while benefiting from partial guidance.
- **Dimension 3:** Pupils' perceptions of the ill-defined situation. It comprises statements that measure autonomy, creativity, and the ability to search for solutions.
- **Dimension 4:** The learning process. It comprises statements that measure participation, understanding, motivation, perseverance, and interaction during learning.

Scoring of the questionnaire. The questionnaire relied on a three-point Likert scale, chosen for its suitability to the target group and to the nature of the assessments provided by the teachers: Agree = 3 points; Neutral = 2 points; Disagree = 1 point.

Validity of the instrument. The questionnaire was submitted to a group of expert referees specializing in the educational sciences and in the didactics of physical education and sports, in order to verify the soundness of its wording and the relevance of its items to the study's objectives. The amendments proposed by the referees were made before the final version was adopted.

7.5 Statistical Methods

The data were processed using SPSS by calculating Pearson's correlation coefficient and Spearman's correlation coefficient (because the assumption of a normal distribution was not met).

8. Results and Discussion

8.1 Results of the Relationship between the Well-Defined Situation and the Learning Process, from the Viewpoint of Physical Education and Sports Teachers

Table 1

Pearson's Correlation Coefficient for the Relationship between the Well-Defined Situation and the Learning Process

Statistic	Well-defined situation	Learning process
Pearson correlation	1	−0.225
Sig. (2-tailed)	—	0.249
N	28	28

Source: SPSS output.

The table shows that the correlation between the well-defined situation and the learning process, from the viewpoint of physical education and sports teachers, was −0.225. This is an inverse, very weak relationship that is not statistically significant (the significance value is greater than 0.05).

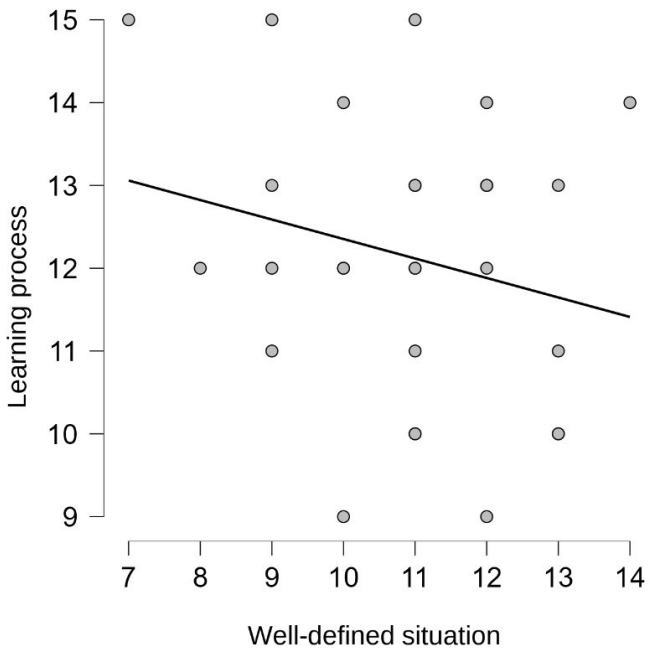
Figure 1

The relationship between the well-defined situation and the learning process

Source: SPSS output.

Analysis and Discussion of the Results of the First Hypothesis: The Relationship between the Well-Defined Problem Situation and the Learning Process

Table 1 presents the results of the correlational analysis of the relationship between the well-defined problem situation and the learning process, from the viewpoint of physical education and sports teachers, using Pearson's correlation coefficient. The results showed that the correlation coefficient was −0.225 and that the statistical significance value was 0.249, in a sample of 28 teachers. Since the significance value is greater than the adopted significance level of 0.05, the recorded relationship, despite its inverse direction and weakness, is not statistically



significant. Accordingly, there is insufficient statistical evidence to support the hypothesis of a statistically significant correlational relationship between the well-defined problem situation and the learning process. This result should be understood within the limits of the estimates provided by the participating teachers, without asserting that the relationship between the two variables is absolutely non-existent.

This result gains its importance from the fact that it shows that the clarity of the requirements of the learning situation and the specification of the path to completion are not necessarily associated, according to the sample members' estimates, with higher ratings of the learning process. From a didactic standpoint, the well-defined problem situation can help organize performance, clarify what is required, and reduce ambiguity for the learner. However, the learning process goes beyond merely carrying out instructions: it also includes understanding, interaction, initiative, and the construction of solutions. Consequently, organizing the activity and specifying its course are not, on their own, sufficient to infer the nature of the relationship between the learning situation and the learning process. The results therefore did not support the hypothesis that there is a statistically significant correlational relationship between the well-defined problem situation and the learning process. This result does not imply that this type of situation lacks educational value; rather, it indicates that the available data did not reveal a statistically significant correlation between the two variables. It also highlights the importance of distinguishing between organizing the conditions under which an activity is carried out and the correlation with the manifestations of the learning process, which allows a more precise understanding of the role of problem situations in teaching practice within the PES lesson.

8.2 Results of the Relationship between the Semi-Defined Situation and the Learning Process, from the Viewpoint of Physical Education and Sports Teachers

Table 2

Pearson's Correlation Coefficient for the Relationship between the Semi-Defined Situation and the Learning Process

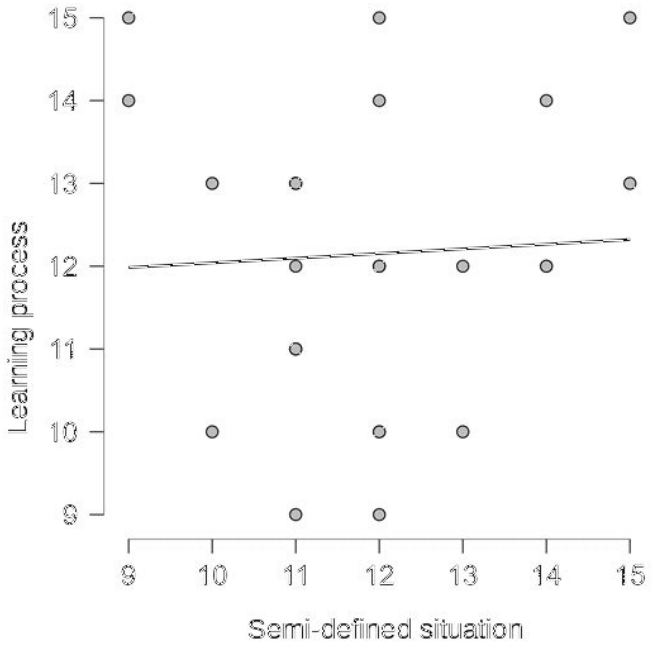
Statistic	Semi-defined situation	Learning process
Pearson correlation	1	0.051
Sig. (2-tailed)	—	0.798
N	28	28

Source: SPSS output.

The table shows that the correlation between the semi-defined situation and the learning process, from the viewpoint of physical education and sports teachers, was 0.051. This is a positive, very weak relationship (almost no correlation) that is not statistically significant (the significance value is greater than 0.05).

Figure 2

The relationship between the semi-defined situation and the learning process



Source: SPSS output.

Analysis and Discussion of the Results of the Second Hypothesis: The Relationship between the Semi-Defined Problem Situation and the Learning Process

Table 2 presents the results of the correlational analysis of the relationship between the semi-defined problem situation and the learning process, from the viewpoint of physical education and sports teachers, using Pearson's correlation coefficient. The results showed that the correlation coefficient was 0.051 and that the statistical significance value was 0.798, in a sample of 28 teachers. These results indicate a very weak positive correlation between the two variables, which is nevertheless not statistically significant, since the significance value is greater than the adopted significance level of 0.05. Accordingly, there is insufficient statistical evidence to support the hypothesis of a statistically significant correlational relationship between the semi-defined problem situation and the learning process. This result is interpreted within the limits of the estimates provided by the participating teachers, without asserting that the relationship between the two variables is absolutely non-existent.

This result gains its importance from the fact that it offers a field-based indicator of the relationship between a learning situation that gives the learner a degree of initiative and choice, while retaining part of the guidance and organization provided by the teacher, and the learning process as the teachers estimate it. From an educational standpoint, the semi-defined situation represents a type that combines guidance with the search for solutions. Yet merely allowing a partial space for choice is not, in itself, sufficient to infer a systematic correlation with the manifestations of the learning process; the nature of this relationship may depend on how the situation is constructed, on how well it suits the pupils' level of understanding and comprehension, on the nature of the motor task, and on how the teacher uses guidance, explanation, and simplification. On this basis, the results did not support the hypothesis that there is a statistically significant correlational relationship between the semi-defined problem situation and the learning process. This result adds an important dimension to the reading of the study's findings, as it shows that the relationship between the nature of the semi-defined problem situation and the learning process cannot be assumed automatically merely because the situation allows the learner a degree of choice; rather, one must consider its characteristics and how it is employed within the teaching context.

8.3 Results of the Relationship between the Ill-Defined Situation and the Learning Process, from the Viewpoint of Physical Education and Sports Teachers

Table 3

Spearman's Correlation Coefficient for the Relationship between the Ill-Defined Situation and the Learning Process

Statistic	Ill-defined situation	Learning process
Spearman's rho (correlation coefficient)	1	0.447*
Sig. (2-tailed)	—	0.017
N	28	28

Note. *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). Source: SPSS output.

The table shows that the correlation between the ill-defined situation and the learning process, from the viewpoint of physical education and sports teachers, was 0.447. This is a moderate positive relationship that is statistically significant (the significance value is less than 0.05).

Analysis and Discussion of the Results of the Third Hypothesis: The Relationship between the Ill-Defined Problem Situation and the Learning Process

The results of the statistical analysis showed a positive correlational relationship between the ill-defined problem situation and the learning process: Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was 0.447, at a statistical significance level of 0.017, in a sample of 28 teachers. This result indicates a moderate positive correlation that is statistically significant at the 0.05 level, which suggests that higher teacher ratings of the manifestations of the ill-defined problem situation go together with higher ratings of the learning process. The educational importance of this result emerges in light of the nature of the ill-defined problem situation, which gives learners a wider scope for exploring solutions, trying out motor alternatives, taking initiative, and assuming responsibility for finding a suitable solution. These characteristics can be regarded as didactic entry points that may accompany learners' engagement in the activity, their interaction with its demands, and their perseverance in the face of difficulties. In this context, the result is consistent with the educational orientations that stress the importance of active learning and problem solving in building motor experience, while bearing in mind the need to distinguish between this theoretical consistency and the demonstration of a direct causal effect. Accordingly, the results support the hypothesis that there is a statistically significant positive correlational relationship between the ill-defined problem situation and the learning process, within the limits of the sample studied. This result also represents an important field-based indicator that the relationship between types of problem situations and the learning process may vary according to the nature of the situation and the opportunities it offers for initiative and for the search for solutions.

9. Conclusion

The results of the study reveal a variation in the nature of the relationship between problem situations and the learning process in the PES lesson, from the teachers' viewpoint. The well-defined and semi-defined situations did not show a statistically significant correlation with the learning process. This may be attributed to several factors, chief among them that learners found the two situations difficult and did not perform them as required, or that they did not understand the two situations and did not absorb the teacher's explanation and directions. It may also be attributed to the teacher's inability to simplify the two situations so as to bring them down to the learners' level of perception and understanding.

By contrast, the ill-defined problem situation was positively, moderately, and significantly correlated with the learning process. These results highlight the importance of distinguishing between types of problem situations when analyzing the learning process, rather than treating them as a homogeneous teaching pattern. They also draw attention to the potential educational value of situations that give learners wider opportunities for initiative and for the search for solutions, and they provide field-based data that contribute to enriching the scientific debate on the organization of motor learning in physical education and sports.

Accordingly, our study offers a field-based contribution to understanding the relationship between the nature of problem situations (well-defined, semi-defined, and ill-defined) and the learning process in physical education and

sports, and it provides results that can be used in the didactic debate on organizing learning situations and guiding learners toward the search for solutions.

Our study sought to uncover the relationship between well-defined, semi-defined, and ill-defined problem situations and the learning process in the physical education and sports lesson, from the viewpoint of physical education and sports teachers. Using Spearman's rank correlation coefficient, the results showed no statistically significant correlation between the well-defined and semi-defined situations and the learning process, whereas there was a moderate positive and statistically significant correlation between the ill-defined situation and the learning process. This result underscores the importance of continuing research on the role of situations that give learners wider opportunities for exploration and for the search for solutions in the context of motor learning. However, confirming its educational implications requires broader studies in terms of sample size, more varied in terms of data-collection instruments, drawing on direct observation and the measurement of pupils' attainment, as well as experimental designs that make it possible to examine the actual effect of the types of problem situations on learning. Thus, the study offers a preliminary indicator of the differing correlation of the types of problem situations with the learning process, and it opens the way for later, more tightly controlled research to verify this relationship in physical education and sports.

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