

Literature Review

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Elementary School Classroom Teachers' Perceptions of Teaching Physical Education: A Literature Review

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Introduction

Elementary school physical education (PE) can play a unique role in providing educational experiences to students and may support physical, cognitive, and social-emotional development (Institute of Medicine, 2013). Studies illustrate that PE programs can improve the possibility of achieving student learning outcomes only when appropriately designed and delivered (Rink & Hall, 2008).

Research suggests that students' early experiences with PE are mainly led by elementary school teachers (Kirk, 2005). Globally, in several countries, either classroom teachers (i.e., a teacher who teaches every subject; a generalist), or PE specialists (i.e., a teacher who mainly teaches PE), have the responsibility to teach elementary PE (Dyson et al., 2018; Faulkner et al., 2008). For instance, in South Korea's elementary education system, PE is a required subject, and most PE classes are taught by classroom teachers rather than specialists (Jo & Lee, 2012).

Classroom teachers are best suited to teach the child-centered, integrated curriculum in elementary schools, and hence often teach PE as one element of that curriculum (Coulter et al., 2009). However, some teachers believe that elementary level PE engagement experiences inadequately prepared children for accomplishing PE learning outcomes and physically active lifestyle (Hardman, 2008; Jess, Keay, & Carse, 2016). In other words, in order for classroom teachers to successfully teach PE, they need to consider a dynamic combination of adaptation in school contexts, teaching various subjects, and understanding different students' developmental characteristics (Tinning & Rossi, 2013). Additionally, classroom teachers' beliefs that they are not qualified to teach PE adversely affects their PE teaching confidence (Harris, Cale, & Musson, 2012; Morgan & Bourke, 2008).

Examination of classroom teachers' different perspectives on teaching PE is particularly vital as an avenue for developing effective teacher education programs (Hunter, 2006). However, this aspect of elementary PE taught by classroom teachers is still unknown due to a relative scarcity of research studies in this area (Kirk, 2005, p. 247). Therefore, this paper provides an overview and discussion of illustrative findings of research conducted on

classroom teachers' perceptions of teaching PE.

Overview

The author conducted an exhaustive search of published research articles via three major databases: Google Scholar, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), and Web of Science. The search terms included elementary school classroom teacher, primary school classroom teacher, generalist, non-specialist, physical education, perception, experience, practice, barrier, belief, and value (see Figure 1). Using the resulting articles, the review is organized into the following themes (Thomas & Harden, 2008): (a) apprehension of teaching PE, (b) different perceptions of value for PE classes, and (c) ecological perspectives in teaching PE.

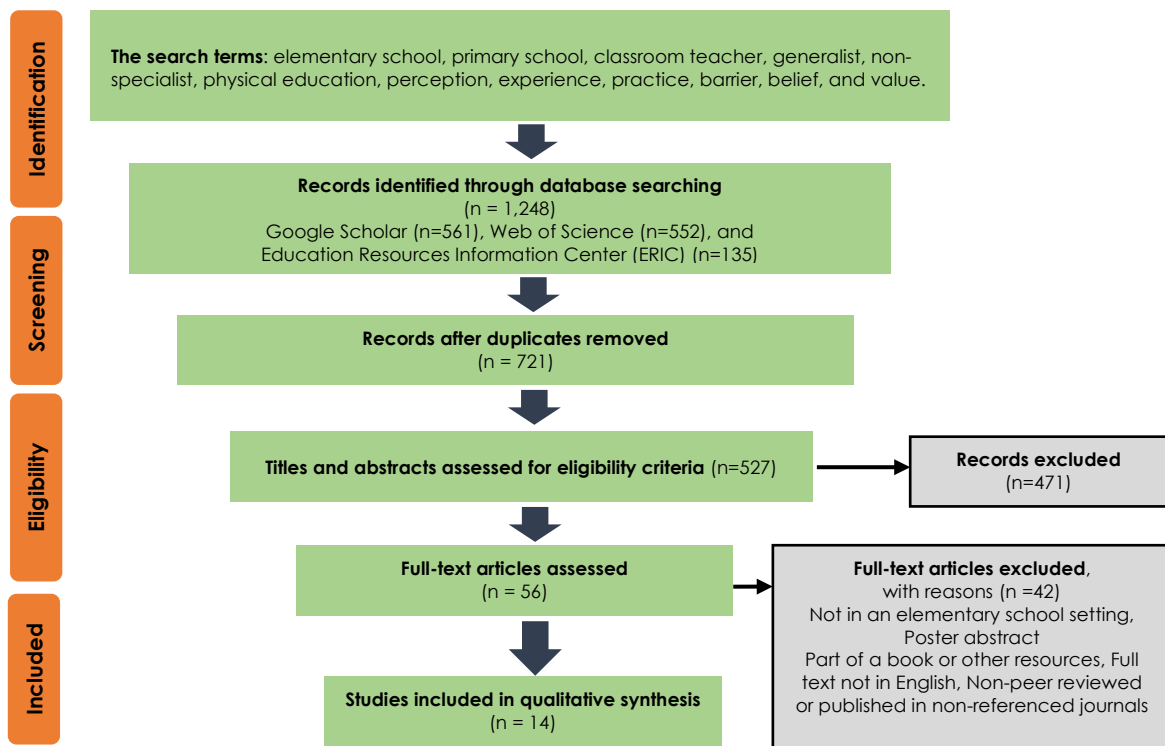


Figure 1. Flow Chart for Search Results and Selection of Article

Apprehension of Teaching PE

Various studies have highlighted the low levels of teacher expertise and confidence about teaching PE (Dyson et al., 2018; Gordon et al., 2016; Harris et al., 2012; Miller et al., 2016). Truelove et al. (2019) found that many classroom teachers expressed that they did not possess the subject knowledge or skills to deliver adequate PE lessons. In addition, studies reported that classroom teachers recognized the benefits of PE but would generally prefer to teach other subjects due to a perceived lack of knowledge and ability in this key learning area (Harris et al., 2012; Morgan & Hansen, 2008). Moreover, once teachers are in-service, there is a lack of professional learning opportunities to support them (Dyson, Gordon, & Cowan, 2011; Petrie & Lisahunter, 2011). Limited training opportunities exacerbate classroom teachers' lack of confidence in their ability to teach PE (Dyson et al., 2018).

Different Perceptions of Value for PE Classes

Studies have illustrated that some classroom teachers have negative attitudes and perceptions toward PE (Dyson et al., 2011; Sherman, Tran, & Alves, 2010) and do not believe that PE is an important subject (Barney & Deutsch, 2012). These negative perspectives significantly impact the quality of delivery and effectiveness of PE programs as well as the attitudes of their students (Morgan & Bourke, 2008; Morgan & Hansen, 2007). On the other hand, researchers have found that some classroom teachers do perceive PE to be an important part of the elementary school curriculum (Jess et al., 2016) but prefer to teach classroom-based subjects such as science and mathematics (Morgan & Bourke, 2008). Additionally, Morgan and Hansen (2008) mentioned that many classroom teachers were unwilling to teach PE but value it as an important curricula component. However, this perception of increased importance did not guarantee the delivery of quality PE or that students would develop desired knowledge and skills (DeCorby et al., 2005).

Ecological Perspectives in Teaching PE

Researchers have also found that a theoretical approach related with this research topic concerns the ecological perspective, which posits that the individuals studied are unique and holistic beings in a continuous process of becoming and seeking full personal integration in a changing environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). This perspective can be used to describe the classroom teachers' dynamic relationships among individuals, groups, and their environments of teaching PE (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). Many research studies conducted work based on this perspective (Jess et al., 2016).

Studies address the issues with classroom teachers' environments, the lack of clearly defined roles for classroom teachers, and the lack of peer-teacher support (Hendricks et al., 2016; Morgan & Bourke, 2008; Sherman et al., 2010). Despite a number of studies indicating that the most substantial factors for teaching PE are related to a classroom teacher's attitudinal disposition, others have claimed institutional factors (i.e., school environment), or factors outside a teacher's control (e.g., policy), are more pertinent impediments (Morgan, 2008). Hardman and Marshall (2001) presented that reduced time, poor financial and material support, and increasing marginalization hinder classroom teachers' efforts to teach elementary school PE. Similarly, Mandigo et al. (2004) described how classroom teachers believed that lack of funding, lack of equipment, and constrained time for PE in an already crowded curriculum were the barriers to PE lessons.

Considerations

This review can help provide educators with useful resources for classroom teachers' professional development that focuses on delivering quality PE lessons. In order to diminish the gap between instruction-theory and the practice of teaching in actual school contexts, more research is needed regarding the meaning of varied educational phenomena and lived experiences in school contexts (Pope, 2000). Additionally, there is very little empirical research conducted on the process by which novice classroom teachers develop into experienced teachers. For instance, there are insufficient studies to deeply understand the lived experiences of teaching PE that are based in the contexts of teachers who are required to teach every subject including PE, such as novice teachers in South Korea. Therefore, for future research, it is necessary to investigate the experiences of classroom teachers who teach PE in regard to their perceptions, barriers, and professional identity (e.g., teachers' perceptions of themselves, how their perceptions affect their teaching practices within school environments, etc.). This research will help to unveil the multiple realities of classroom teachers' experiences teaching PE, with the ultimate goal of improving pre- and in-service teacher education programs for quality teaching of PE.

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