Received: 10 Nov. 2022 | Revised: 25 Nov. 2022 | Accepted: 12 Dec.. 2022 | Published online: 30 Dec. 2022

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Contemporary Education and Teaching Research
2022, Vol.3(4)167-170
DOI: 10.47852/bonviewCETR2022030413

Chinese Pre-service Preschool Teachers' Professional Development in Physical Education

BON VIEW PUBLISHING

Qingmin Zhang[1,2*], Nelfianty binti Mohd Rasyid[1] & Jeffrey low Fook Lee[1]
[1]*Faculty of Sports Science and Coaching, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Malaysia*
[2]*Department of Early Education, Sichuan Preschool Educators College, China*

Abstract: *Physical Education* in the early years is a subset of the Chinese kindergarten curriculum's health domain. The "Health China 2030 Outline of the Plan," published in 2016, encourages a vigorous national physical fitness exercise, and children must participate in scientific workouts under special supervision. Also, the Outline for Building a Strong Sports Country in 2019 focuses on the advancement of early childhood movement education, which has recently gained popularity in Chinese preschool education. The increased importance on the development of physical education in the early years necessitates the training of quality teachers. This paper reviewed the professional development of physical education among pre-service preschool educators in China with the purpose to summarize the problems and shortcomings of existing research and to lay some groundwork for future research.

Keywords: Preschool Physical Education; Movement education; Pre-service preschool teacher; Teacher professional development; Pre-Service Preschool Teacher Education (PSPTE) programs

1. Introduction

Motor skill acquisition is critical during early childhood (Clark et al., 2009). Physical education for young children has often referred as "movement education", which is based on motor development and skill learning in a context of games, dance and gymnastic activities, combined with the concepts of movement, skill and activity (Donnelly, Mueller, & Gallahue, 2016; Gallahue, & Donnelly, 2007). Preschool teachers guide the structured physical activities (PA) during the physical education (PE) in the early years, and they should recognize the relationships between specific requirements of the movement task, biology of the child and conditions of the learning environment to ensure the choice of tasks, equipment and environment interaction during movement education (Goodway, Ozmun, & Gallahue, 2019). They significantly affect what happens in the classroom and the learning environment. Some systematic reviews confirm that interventions improve children's movement skills more than free play (Logan, Robinson, Wilson, & Lucas, 2012) or in ecological control groups (Iivonen & Sääkslahti, 2013; Logan et al., 2012; Morgan et al., 2013). Moreover, physical education in the early years requires preschool teachers to use more developmentally appropriate practices with a developmental perspective when facilitating the emergence of children's motor skills, taking into account each individual's developmental level and needs. As a result, their professional training and development in PE must be prioritized.

Movement education is an important part of preschool education. Chinese preschool education has been developing along an unstable but still linear trajectory under the influence of economic, demographic and political factors (Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2009). Considering the increasing number of children entering kindergarten, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has released three landmark policy documents to improve the quality of preschool education.

Firstly, **China's Guidance for Preschool Education-Trial Version (Guidance)** in 2001 organized preschool curriculum into five domains/content areas: health, language, social, science, and art (Luo, 2017; Zheng 2010), establishing basic educational requirements nationwide (Hu & Li, 2012). It prioritizes the health domain/content area, emphasizing that preschool teachers should fully follow and respect young children's growth law and development rules, as well as promote their fundamental motor skills development in a way that children are interested in while improving their coordination and flexibility. It emphasizes that the curriculum contents are comprehensive and illuminating, and that each domain is interconnected. Meanwhile, it points out that preschool teachers are responsible for cultivating and developing young children's positive personalities, strong will and social skills through a variety of active and interactive physical activities while promoting their physical health, mental health and social adaptability.

Secondly, according to the **Kindergarten Work Rules and Regulations of 2016**, children's outdoor activities should not be less than 2 hours per day, while the duration in boarding kindergartens should be no less than 3 hours, of which outdoor physical activities time should not be less than 1 hour. This policy document indicates that the

Corresponding Author: Qingmin Zhang
[1]Faculty of Sports Science and Coaching, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Malaysia
[2]Department of Early Education, Sichuan Preschool Educators College, China
Email: zhangscnu@163.com

kindergarten must have an outdoor activity avenue, which should be suitable for its size and equipped with the necessary facilitation.

Thirdly, in 2012, **China's Early Learning and Development Guidelines for Children 3-6 Years Old (ELDG)** raised reasonable expectations about what children should know, what they could do, and what level of development can be achieved for the five domains/content areas at their corresponding age stage, providing teachers and parents with a more specific foundation and practical guidance for understanding young children's physical and mental development level and characteristics. Specifically, the learning and development of young children in the health content area is divided into three subdomains: physical and mental conditions, motor development, habits, and life skills. The motor development subdomain has three goals: (a) to have a certain balance, motor coordination, and agility, (b) to have a certain strength and endurance, and (c) to have flexible coordination in hand movements. ELDG suggested that preschool teachers encourage young children to participate in physical activities, and physical activities in kindergartens should be rich and diverse, appropriate for children's age characteristics and developmental levels. Meanwhile, ELDG stressed preschool teachers should use playful and joyful games as teaching methods to carry out physical activities.

Obviously, the policy documents not only highlighted the key points for Chinese early childhood education, but also indicated the direction for the healthy development of young children (Sun, 2019; Li, Yang, & Xiao, 2019). These documents both assist in-service preschool educators in better understanding the qualification requirements, job responsibilities, and behavior standards, as well as in clarifying the direction of pre-service preschool educators' efforts. To meet the reasonable expectations outlined in China's ELDG (2012)'s motor development subdomain, Pre-Service Preschool Teacher Education (PSPTE) programs in higher education institutions should indeed prepare high-quality teachers to effectively promote 3-6-year-old children's fundamental movement development and physical activity participation.

Furthermore, most kindergarten teachers are those female educators, who had completed a three-year diploma programme in preschool teacher education at a higher vocational college, particularly those working in rural kindergartens in China's central and western regions (Song, Zhu, Xia, & Wu, 2014; Zhao & Hu, 2008). As a result, pre-service preschool teacher education programmes at higher vocational colleges are primarily responsible for training kindergarten teachers. Therefore, this article summarised studies on the professional development of pre-service preschool teachers in physical education at Chinese vocational colleges, with the goal of identifying problems and deficiencies in PSPTE programmes.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Search Strategy

The cnki database was primarily used to conduct a literature search of all published electronically archived literature. To generate search terms, four components were used: (1) "pre-service preschool teachers*" OR "undergraduate preschool education students*" OR "preschool student teachers*" OR "preschool education majors*" (2) "Physical literacy" OR "FMS instructional and facilitation" OR "PE teaching skills* OR ability* OR competence OR performance OR proficiency" (3) "training* OR cultivation*" (4) "Pre-Service Preschool Teacher Education (PSPTE) programmes" OR "Preschool Teacher Education and Development" OR "Physical Education Curriculum for Young Children* OR Child Movement Education Sessions"). Full-text Chinese articles published between January 2005 and April 2022 were collected.

2.2 Screen and Selection

After removing duplicates, the search results were reviewed and filtered by title and abstract.

3. Results

3.1 Curriculum nature and contents

In accordance with the MOE's National Physical Education Curriculum and Instruction Outline for Colleges and Universities in 2002 and the Physical Education Curriculum and Teaching Instruction Outline for National Higher Vocational Colleges in 2012, the contents of physical education and health programs for preschool education majors are primarily related to sports-specific skills with meticulous and rigidly formulated teaching methods (Zhao, 2015; Cui, 2011). The objectives are to boost students' interest in physical activities, develop their awareness and habit of participating in physical exercise, improve their physical health and exercise ability, promote overall physical development, and lay a good foundation for lifelong sports participation. Meanwhile, given the large number of female students, the contents are mainly sports games, traditional physical activities, and gymnastics led by educators (Cui, 2011; Yang, 2012; Zhao, 2015).

Furthermore, Kindergarten Education and Activities Guidance is a specialized compulsory course for pre-school education majors based on the five domains/content areas of Chinese preschool curriculum mentioned in **Guidance**. One session of the Kindergarten Health Education and Activity Guidance is the Kindergarten Physical Education and Activity Guidance chapter. However, the teachers in this chapter are mostly preschool educators who have received no professional training in the physical education and health fields and are unprofessional in their teaching of physical education (Yang, 2012). They are unable to instruct preschool education majors on how to conduct developmentally appropriate physical activities for young children.

Moreover, Zhao (2015) stated that there is currently no agreement on the competence, teaching skills, and appropriate practices required by movement education/preschool physical education. Han (2014) demonstrated that after participating in a 14-week

micro-teaching training course, 40 preschool education majors' lesson plan writing skills, explanation skills, demonstration skills, and classroom management skills improved. However, all of the skills in this study appear to lack age relevance and are unable to meet children's developmental needs because there is no discernible difference between the formal and structured physical education teaching practices applied in primary and secondary schools.

Furthermore, professional training in movement education for preschool education majors is insufficient, with a lack of movement education knowledge and skills, developmentally appropriate practises, effective teaching skills (e.g., demonstration and explanation skills), and classroom management skills (e.g., creating and maintaining a safe, active and interactive, supportive, and inclusive environment) (Wang, 2017). As a result, pre-service preschool teachers did not master the core elements of pedagogy for movement skill development, nor did they amass a collection of highly age-specific and developmentally appropriate instructional strategies to use with young children.

3.2 Instruction model

Physical educators always conduct formal and structured physical education lessons (Ding, 2017), which cannot indirectly contribute to the larger mission of cultivating early childhood movement skill development and physical activity by incorporating pre-K content and experiential learning requirements within the preschool education teacher education curriculum (Ross, 2013).

3.3 The teaching administration

The school administration has paid insufficient attention to the physical education and health curriculum, resulting in funding shortfalls for the physical education and health curriculum every year (Ding, 2017; Huang, 2012; Zhao, 2015). Many vocational college stadiums are in disrepair and difficult to use (Ding, 2017). The low effectiveness of public compulsory physical education and health programs in vocational colleges can also be attributed to the declining student entrance quality and a lack of interest in physical activities (Ding, 2017; Zhao, 2015). According to one survey of graduates, most preschool education majors recognize the importance of movement education for young children but lack the confidence and competence to implement appropriate physical activities in a preschool setting (Xu, 2018).

3.4 Co-training

Physical education teacher education (PETE) institutions, according to Ross (2013), may need to become more service-minded and outreach-oriented in order to form partnerships with early childhood settings. Similarly, previous research in China indicated that preschool teacher educators' colleges and other vocational colleges may need to form partnerships with early childhood settings such as baby care centers, kindergartens, and other training centers (Yao, 2012; Zhao, 2015; Zhao, 2011; Cui, 2011; Gao, 2013; Wang, 2017), but the fixed corresponding instruction model, curriculum model, and a comprehensive assessment and evaluation system are still being researched.

Recently, all preschool educator colleges have been striving to cultivate high-quality preschool teachers to meet society's needs while adhering to the philosophy of Chinese higher vocational colleges of serving society as the purpose, students' employment as the orientation, and professional development promotion through the integration of production, learning, and research (Liu, 2016; Long, 2017). Moreover, although scholars have proposed physical literacy development among pre-service preschool teachers, it has remained conceptually defined and lacks empirical proofs.

4. Discussion

The early years of life have been identified as a critical period because they lay the groundwork for all future development. To ensure that children learn and adopt healthy practices and behaviors, they should begin their journey toward a lifetime of movement as early as possible. Early childhood educators teach and model the development of skills, knowledge, and attitudes that lead to an active, healthy lifestyle during childhood. When the importance of this formative period in a person's life is considered, the appropriateness of practices used in early childhood education settings becomes even more important. Furthermore, preparing highly qualified physical education teachers has become an increasingly important issue in light of teaching responsibilities and educational reform (Lytle, Lavay, & Rizzo, 2010), and school-based physical education with numerous quality physical education experiences has been recognized as a proper response to the current public health concerns with childhood obesity and physical inactivity because all students deserved quality instruction and a well-prepared teacher (Graham et al., 2016; Koutsioumpas, 2016; Sallis et al., 2016a, 2016b; Hallal & Ramirez, 2015; Harold et al., 2012).

The purpose of this study was to examine the current situation of professional development for pre-service preschool teachers in physical education. To summarize, current public compulsory physical education and health courses only focus on their subject objectives, which cannot meet the professional development needs of preschool teachers due to a lack of understanding and neglect by administrators (Ding, 2017; Cui, 2011; Zhao, 2015). The existing formal and structured physical education courses focus primarily on specific sports skills such as basketball, volleyball, football, track and field, gymnastics, and so on (Cui, 2011; Yang, 2012; Zhao, 2015). The core elements of pedagogy for the development of movement skills are rarely involved and integrated. For preschool physical education or movement education, there are no developmentally appropriate instructional strategies. Again, no movement skills instruction method course is available. Therefore, content knowledge shortages, confidence shortages, interest shortages, training shortages, non-standardized curriculum, personal negative experiences with PE, and a lack of context-specific PE

teacher education are barriers that threaten pre-service preschool teachers' pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) of physical activity opportunities during structured movement sessions (Martínez-Bello, Bernabé-Villodre, Lahuerta-Contell, Vega-Perona, & Giménez-Calvo, 2021). Moreover, the existing studies are primarily from the perspectives of pedagogy and physical education, without considering the combination with social cognitive theory (SCL). There has been no research in China on pre-service preschool teachers' self-efficacy in teaching and facilitating fundamental movement skills (FMS), ignoring the extensive relationship between teachers' self-efficacy and teaching effectiveness.

5. Conclusion

In China, research on movement education in early childhood is still in its early stages. Despite the importance of children's fundamental motor skills development, little is known about how to effectively teach and promote it. Throughout China, the field of movement education teacher training and teacher preparation is still in its initial days (Li, Yang, 2019; Yan, 2016), and the existing programs are seriously disconnected from the real movement education in kindergartens. The content of physical education and health curriculum at higher vocational colleges should be expanded. To address the issues of "what to teach" and "how to teach", it is critical to develop a professional module course on pre-service preschool teachers' motor development and FMS training that includes and integrates some knowledge and skills related to fundamental movement skill development, as well as some supervised hands-on laboratory experiences and structured observations of preschool children for teaching movement education (Stork & Sanders, 2008; Carson, 1994). Meanwhile, based on current teacher training achievements in China, it is necessary to continuously learn and integrate international advanced concepts concentrated from successful trials and meaningful empirical studies into the preschool teacher education program. Also, evidence-based research on these topics seems particularly urgent.

Acknowledgement

This research was funded by a self-funding project from National Research Center for Children's Movement Development in the Early Childhood, Chengdu University, China (Project Code:YETYFZYJC02).

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest to this work.

References

Chen, X. M. (2020). Current situation analysis and reform countermeasure research on Chinese children movement education development in new era: A case in Luoding City. *Journal of Occupational Technology*, 19(7), 48-52. https://doi:10.19552/j.cnki.issn1672-0601.2020.07.010.

Cui, W. (2011). Physical education curriculum reform for preschool education specialty based on occupation and teacher's nature. *Journal of Shanxi College of Education*, 71-73 (04). doi: cnki: sun: shaa.0.2011-04-020.

Donnelly, F. C., Mueller, S. S., & Gallahue, D. L. (2016). Developmental physical education for all children: theory into practice. *Human Kinetics*.

Gallahue, D. L., & Donnelly, F. C. (2007). Developmental physical education for all children. Human Kinetics.

Goodway, J. D., Ozmun, J. C., & Gallahue, D. L. (2019). Understanding motor development: Infants, children, adolescents, adults. *Jones & Bartlett Learning*.

Ding, G. M. (2017). Research on the present situation and countermeasures of physical education curriculum for preschool education majors in higher vocational colleges of Heilongjiang province. *Master's thesis, Harbin Normal University*.

Gu, Q. (2018). On the training of pre-school education students' ability of organizing and teaching physical activities. *Journal of Contemporary Sports Technology*. 149,151 (24). doi:10.16655/j.cnki.2095-2813.2018.24.149.

Han, Y. L. (2014). Effect of micro-teaching on preschool education majors' PE teaching skills. *Master dissertation, Yunnan Normal University.*

Ross, S. M. (2013). Pre-K physical education: Universal initiatives and teacher preparation recommendations. *Quest*, 65(1), 1-13.

Wang, G. R. (2017). Research on the approach to cultivating preschool PE teaching ability for preschool education majors in Guizhou preschool teachers' college: A case study of Bijie preschool teachers' college. *Journal of Contemporary Sports Technology*. 73, 75 (32). doi:10.16655/j.cnki.2095-2813.2017.32.073

Zhao, Lin, & Hu, X. (2008). The development of early childhood education in rural areas in China. *Early Years*, 28(2). https://doi.org/10.1080/09575140802079756

Zhou, X. (2011). Early Childhood Education Policy Development in China. *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy*, 5(1). https://doi.org/10.1007/2288-6729-5-1-29

Zhou, X., Liu, Z., Han, C., & Wang, G. (2016). Early childhood education for sustainable development in China. *In International Perspectives on Early Childhood Education and Development* (Vol. 14). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-42208-4_4

Zhu, J. (2009). Early Childhood Education and Relative Policies in China. *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy*, 3(1). https://doi.org/10.1007/2288-6729-3-1-51

How to Cite: Zhang, Q., & Mohd Rasyid, N. binti. (2022). Chinese Pre-service Preschool Teachers' Professional Development in Physical Education. *Contemporary Education and Teaching Research*, *3*(4), 167–170. https://doi.org/10.47852/bonviewCETR2022030413