

Comparative Analysis of Chinese PE Teachers’ “Foster Virtues Through Education” Competencies in Selected Schools in Guangzhou, China

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Abstract:

The study comparatively analyzed the “foster virtue through education” competencies of PE teachers in Guangzhou, China. The “foster virtue through education” competencies were measured as a composite of general competencies, integration competencies, and behavioral competencies. The study showed that PE teachers have excellent “foster virtue through education” competencies. No significant difference was observed in the comparisons of assessments based on the level of school assignment.

Keywords: foster virtue through education, physical education

Introduction

Countries around the world consider the health of their citizens as a top priority. This has led to various government initiatives and policies which have direct and indirect impacts on education [1]. In China, the central government sought to transform the nation's health through education reform billed as “health first”. According to An et al. [2] the underlying principle of “health first” was put forward to physical education (PE). Under the “health first” policy, numerous PE curriculum reforms have been carried out already. Before the opening up of China, “health first” in school PE was focused on strengthening physical fitness through sports skills development. Following the improvements in PE education, the “health first” initiative has evolved to educate students in an all-round way [3] under the broader educational ideology of fostering virtue through education. According to An et al. [2], fostering virtue through education in school PE has brought many prominent problems to teachers.

Fostering virtue through education is China’s recognition of the great importance of virtue in talent training. The 18th National Congress to the Communist Party of China [4] emphasized that fostering virtue through education is a fundamental task of education. It recommended it at the direction of educational reforms. It is to take people-oriented measures in education, to put people first, and to take people as the starting point of education [5]. According to Liansong et al. [6], fostering virtue through education puts moral education first to ensure the continuity of Chinese socialism. This policy was stressed by Xin Jinping during a symposium of teachers of ideological and political theory [7]. It is also demanded in Chinese universities and colleges. Shen Yueyue, the Vice-Chairperson of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress stressed “foster virtue through education” during her visit to China's women's University [8].

The Guidelines on Strengthening and Improving Physical Education in Schools in the New Era [9] clearly stated that PE in Chinese schools at all levels should uphold the guiding ideology of "foster virtue through education". The guidelines, however, failed to give clear direction on how to integrate health and sports morals. This could be the reason why Huang et al., [10] found that some PE teachers did not welcome the new direction for PE. Some PE teachers believe that it lessens the importance of sports and physical fitness [11]. Gu and Liu [12] proposed that strengthening the physique should remain as the logical starting point and the fundamental goal of Chinese school PE. Likewise, Ren [13] argued that strengthening the physique should be the only target of school PE guided without any extensions as what is advocated by "foster virtue through education".

Xiong [14] and Jiang et al. [3] believe that "fostering virtue through education" should be seen from a macro-health view, rather than the limited function of improving physical conditions. In this way, teachers will see that "health first" and "foster virtue through education" are complementary. The complementarity between "health first" and "foster virtue through education" can also be seen in the curriculum as presented in the General High School Sports and Health Curriculum Standards [15]. Under the said standards, PE should develop students' athletic competencies, healthy behaviors, and sports morals. On the other hand, Deng and Yu [16] suggested that value orientation in school PE should be geared towards the promotion of a healthy lifestyle, inspiration of spiritual life, and molding of social life. When it comes to the social life perspective of school PE, Ji et al. [17] identified more specific goals for Chinese students. These are the so-called life skills that PE students should learn; teamwork, goal setting, social skills, decision making, leadership, time management, and communication.

The "foster virtue through education" has been around since 2016 but how to implement it in school PE is still an issue. Teaching competencies needed for the integration of "foster virtue through education" are not defined well by education authorities. Traditionally, instruction in PE is centered on sports [18], and Chinese PE teachers are having difficulty with moral education under the "foster virtue through education." As reported by Meng et al. [1], Chinese PE teachers felt the new curriculum has increased their roles and led to a loss of connection with familiar practices like teaching sports. The teachers also claimed that they did not have adequate training and knowledge to develop athletic competencies, healthy behaviors, and sports morals all at once. Moreover, there is a lack of materials about teaching under the ideology of fostering virtue through education [2]. The value proposition also lacks specific directions. Moreover, Chinese experts have yet to establish a PE teaching material system to "foster virtue in education" [20]. Recently, however, the studies of Peng and Jiang [21], and Dejun [22] have shown what PE teachers believed to be the needed competencies in fostering virtue through education. According to Peng and Jiang (2023), PE teachers' competency in fostering virtue through education is composed of knowledge, ability, teacher moral, motivation, values, and personality. In addressing the lack of understanding about competencies related to "foster virtue through education", Dejun [22] developed and validated a competency scale for it in PE. The scale has the following broad dimensions: integration-specific competencies, general competencies in PE, and behavioral competencies. The general competencies refer to the skills and knowledge needed by teachers to teach physical fitness, and sports skills, and in managing classrooms effectively. Meanwhile, the integration-specific competencies focus on how health and morals can be interwoven with physical fitness and sports. Lastly, behavioral competencies refer to the teachers' ability to influence students' moral cultivation through role modeling. Dejun [22] however did not report the level of competencies which was measured during the evaluation of his scale. This means that information on Chinese PE teacher's level of competencies in "foster virtue

in education" is not yet available. In line with this, the study gathered and analyzed information on the said matter. It is hoped that by assessing and comparing the PE teachers' "foster virtue through education" competencies, the study will contribute to its further enhancement.

"Foster virtue through education" is a moral development initiative in different school courses in China including PE. Since the initiative has been pursued for eight years now, it is assumed that the PE teachers have competencies in cultivating morals among their students already. This assumption is supported by Kohlberg's moral development theory. According to this theory, individuals pass through major stages of moral development; pre-conventional level, conventional level, and principled level. Given the maturity of the PE teachers as learned individuals, they are now at the principled level where their ethical principles are well within the perspectives of society, and even beyond it in some occasions. At this functioning stage, the idea of morality is now universal, and can easily manifest in their behavior.

Method

The quantitative method was used in the study to compare the "foster virtue through education" competencies of PE teachers at elementary, secondary, and tertiary levels. The respondents were PE teachers from different school levels in Guangzhou, China during the school year 2023-2024. The minimum sample size of 123 out of 180 PE teachers was selected randomly from eight schools. For data gathering, a researcher-developed survey questionnaire patterned from Dejun's [22] scale was used. It measured "foster virtue through education" competency in terms of general competency, integration competency, and behavioral competency. The survey provided a four-point response scale on each item. It underwent validation by experts and was pilot-tested to determine its reliability using Cronbach's alpha. The computed alphas were all within the acceptable range; general competencies (0.83), integration competencies (0.91), and behavioral competencies (0.73). Since the data were not distributed normally based on the Shapiro Wilk test which yielded a statistic =.883 and sig=.000; Kruskal-Wallis H test was used for the comparative analysis. The result of the analysis was evaluated at the .05 level of significance.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Assessment of Foster Virtue Through Education Competencies

Domains	Mean	SD	Interpretation
General Competencies	3.59	0.41	Excellent
Integration Competencies	3.59	0.46	Excellent
Behavioral Competencies	3.68	0.32	Excellent
Overall	3.62		Excellent

Table 1 shows the overall assessment of "foster virtue through education" competencies in PE. The general competencies got a mean of 3.59 which was considered excellent. It shows that the respondents are very good at fostering virtues through the daily routines of teaching physical skills and health. The respondents are also very good at integrating values and morals in their PE lessons as shown in the excellent level of integration competencies whose mean is 3.59. With behavioral competencies getting the highest mean (3.68) it is considered that the respondents are most competent in teaching morals and values in PE through demonstration of ethical behaviors. It highlights China's long tradition of emphasizing teacher ethics and regarding teachers as moral guardians [23]. The finding about the behavioral competencies of the

respondents is similar to the claim of Peng and Jiang [21] about the competencies of Chinese PE teachers. They reported that Chinese PE teachers’ competencies include moral cultivation characteristics which pertain to the ability of the PE teachers to practice morality, like having good professional ethics. The respondents’ excellent overall competencies ($\bar{x}=3.62$) imply that PE teachers have overcome the initial challenges of the ‘foster virtue through education’ directive. It should be noted that a few years ago, implementing it in school PE was still an issue. There was a lack of materials about teaching under the ideology of ‘foster virtue through education’ [2]. The value proposition also lacks specific directions. Moreover, Chinese experts have yet to establish PE teaching material system for ‘foster virtue in education’ [20].

Table 2: Difference in Foster Virtue Through Education Competencies

	Kruskal-Wallis H	df	Sig	Interpretation
General Competencies	0.219	2	.896	Not Significant
Integration Competencies	0.073	2	.964	Not Significant
Behavioral Competencies	1.613	2	.447	Not Significant
Overall Competencies	0.151	2	.927	Not Significant

Table 2 shows the result of the Kruskal-Wallis H test based on the school-level assignment of the respondents. In general competencies, the Kruskal-Wallis H is 0.219 while sig =.896. It means that there is no significant difference in the general competencies of the PE teachers in college, high school, and elementary school. The same is true with integration competencies (Kruskal-Wallis H = 0.073, sig =.964) and behavioral competencies (Kruskal-Wallis H = 1.613, sig =.447). Even in terms of the overall competencies, no significant difference was observed (Kruskal-Wallis H = 0.151, sig =.927). The finding implies that PE teachers in college, high school, and elementary have the same level of "foster virtue through education" competencies. They are all adept in cultivating morals through classroom management, integration of values and morals in their PE instruction, and demonstration of excellent moral character. It further implies that the "foster virtue through education" in PE, despite its difficult start has been cultivated well enough across all educational levels. It should be noted that the Guidelines on Strengthening and Improving Physical Education in Schools in the New Era (2020) made a clear directive that PE in Chinese schools at all levels should uphold the guiding ideology of "foster virtue through education".

Conclusion

The study has shown that the respondents have excellent “foster virtue through education” competencies in PE. Moreover, the study has shown that there is no significant difference in the “foster virtue through education competencies” among the college, high school, and elementary PE teacher respondents. It implies that the PE teachers in different educational levels have responded to the “foster virtue through education” directive positively and have reached the same level of competence. Future study should focus on how the PE teachers developed their “foster virtue through education” competencies. It should be noted that recent studies have documented the struggles of PE teachers in implementing "foster virtue education" due to a lack of competencies in teaching morals and values alongside physical skills and health literacy.

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