

Educational and Value Status of Physical Education and Vectors of Preventing and Resisting Marginalisation: Grounded Theory Literature Review

Research Article

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Abstract: This article uses grounded theory as a method to carry out the literature review in accordance with the guidelines developed by Wolfswinkel et al. ((2013). Using grounded theory as a method for rigorously reviewing literature. *European Journal of Information Systems*, 22(1): 45–55. doi: 10.1057/ejis). Based on the 35 selected articles, 8 subvectors and 3 vectors were formed: (1) self-initiative leadership, (2) transformation, and (3) policy for a comprehensive multilevel response to the low educational status of physical education. The article establishes that counteracting the low educational status of physical education requires comprehensive teamwork at different levels – educational, academic, and public. The vector of self-initiated leadership indicates that the profession should select and retain active people who have appropriate leadership qualities, are capable of broad communication and cooperation with all stakeholders, and are inclined to form and interact in professional communities. The transformational vector concerns (a) setting goals and an agenda in physical education, (b) creating special educational programmes in Physical Education Teacher Education that prepare for possible negative scenarios (e.g., reality shock) and the institute of mentors, and (c) readiness for self-transformation, openness to change and experimentation in a professional career. The policy vector represents a kind of idea of “representative democracy” in physical education, when it is supposed to mobilise stakeholders and capable actors for political action to protect and lobby for physical education at the levels (from local to state) on which it depends. The generalisability of the findings should be taken with the limitation that most of the studies included in the literature review were conducted in the United States.

Keywords: *Crisis • Prestige • Self-initiated leadership • Transformation • Policy*

1. Introduction

In global and regional surveys and reviews of the status of physical education, the marginality of the subject is often mentioned (Hardman et al., 2014; Podstawski et al., 2021; Puehse & Gerber, 2005). The educational status of physical education in terms of its curriculum weight, public recognition and perception of physical education, and teacher prestige has long been a concern for scholars in the Anglophone community (Chen, 2022; Hendry, 1975; Kirk, 1988, 1992, 2010; Sparkes et al., 1993; Tinning, 1990). The low educational status of physical education may be

manifested in the marginal position of physical education in the curriculum, which is reflected in the allocation of time to the discipline (Dudley & Burden, 2020; Gariglio, 2021, Onofre et al., 2012). Marginality also has real consequences in terms of inadequate facilities, equipment and resources or underdeveloped physical education infrastructure (MacPhail et al., 2005; Mäkelä et al., 2014; Richards et al., 2023), inadequate number of hours of physical education and manipulation of compulsory and elective components (Breda et al., 2018; D’Anna et al., 2019), and difficulties in recruiting trained teachers (Burnett, 2021). The low educational status of physical education is not only about the educational curriculum but also about social implications, which are manifested in the form of image

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problems and negative stereotypes (mental picture) about physical education on the part of the public (Gaudreault, 2014) and which are fuelled by cinema (Walton-Fisette et al., 2017) and social media (Setiawan, 2023). For example, McCullick et al. (2003), after a relevant film study, clearly state:

It is clear that the frames used for cinematic depictions of physical educators are negative, and could lead to behaviors that devalue physical education as a career and as an important part of the curriculum. (McCullick et al., 2003, p. 14)

Some authors explain the marginal status of physical education programs by the often-existing gap between policy and practice (Johns & Dimmock, 1999) because the priorities in the education are such that “academic” subjects are dominant, while the physical practical dimensions of physical education are secondary (Bailey, 2018; Fitzpatrick, 2023; Vlieghe, 2018). In this case, the marginalisation of physical education already has academic consequences, because if the discipline is second-rate, it will be treated accordingly by teachers of other disciplines and students. Examples of such academic consequences may include granting students with excuse notes/waivers, exemptions, and substitutions for physical education (Lamb, 2014; Prior & Curtner-Smith, 2020).

Feeling of low educational status of physical education, especially marginalisation and isolation (Spicer & Robinson, 2021), has a strong effect on physical education teachers. Even worse, marginalisation in some places has become a *status quo* (Sheehy, 2011), with the perception from outside and within the profession that physical educators are not always to be considered “real teachers” (Henninger & Carlson, 2011, p. 17). The marginal position of the discipline is reflected in the prestige of the profession, status, and respect for physical education teachers (Gaudreault et al., 2017; Kougioumtzis et al., 2011). Such marginalisation of physical education programs can leave teachers feeling burnout early in their careers (Laureano et al., 2014; Westerlund & Eliasson, 2022). Sakallı and Şenel’s (2024) study of the relationships between different factors contributing to marginalisation shows that role stress as a factor positively and directly predicts marginalisation. When marginality has a permanent place in the working educational environment of physical education teachers, it manifests itself in negative consequences, such as stress, burnout, and early career attrition (Richards et al., 2018b). Scholars (Blankenship & Coleman, 2009; Richards et al., 2017) report consequences related to the washout effect, where teachers who no longer feel as though they are making a significant contribution to children’s education may compromise their teaching practices. Experiences of marginalisation can lead teachers to sacrifice best practice to adapt to the values, beliefs, and

practices of the school they work in, which will ultimately affect the quality of their students’ physical education (O’Halloran & Moynihan, 2020). Therefore, this is nothing more than the negative impact of the marginalisation of physical education directly on students.

Social recognition is a necessary condition for a meaningful life (Vainienė et al., 2014), and this certainly cannot but affect the emotional state of a physical education teacher. Emotions may aid in, or interact with, feelings of marginality as either buffers or catalysts leading to adaptive or maladaptive actions and impact teacher well-being and job beliefs (Simonton et al., 2022a). Moreover, as noted by Shoval et al. (2010), beginning teachers may be affected by a gap between their own initiatives and a lack of appreciation of their workplace environment. Scholars (Nemiña et al., 2022) describe a directly proportional relationship where a fully satisfied teacher will implement educational activities more effectively and efficiently, as opposed to an unmotivated, frustrated, and exhausted teacher who will show less interest and enthusiasm for their teaching tasks. The status of the physical education profession and stress are among the additional factors that lead physical education teachers to consider leaving the profession, as Mäkelä et al. (2014) showed. Even a cursory look at the sources of stress for physical education teachers, suggested by Pels et al. (2022) and von Haaren-Mack et al. (2020), which include insufficient facilities and equipment, inadequate curriculum, problems with discipline and student motivation, and constant noise, reveals that some of the sources of stress overlap with the signs of the marginal status of physical education mentioned earlier. Therefore, the marginality of physical education, if it exists, is actually an additional source of stress for physical education teachers who love their profession and naturally consider it socially useful.

As mentioned earlier, it becomes obvious that the problem of the low educational status of physical education is, without exaggeration, an existential issue both for the field of physical education and for individual teachers. Although the nature of educational marginality and its consequences are well known within the physical education research community, we know less about proposals for improving the status of the subject. The aim of this work is to codify possible vectors of counteracting the problem of low educational status of physical education.

2. Methods

To address the research objectives, we followed the step-by-step guide to academic literature review proposed by Wolfswinkel et al. (2013), where the grounded theory is

used as a method. This method, compared to the traditional literature review and its variations, offers additional unique features (Noble, & Mitchell, 2016), among which the most valuable are the requirements for data collection and analysis, which should take place simultaneously rather than in a linear sequence (Dunne, 2011) and the inductive nature of the research, when the main concepts emerge during the analytical process, i.e., emerge from the literature itself, rather than being deductively derived beforehand (Wolfswinkel et al., 2013).

This article will follow the five-step approach outlined by Wolfswinkel et al. (2013) for a rigorous literature review: (1) define (the researcher defines the inclusion/exclusion criteria, areas of study, relevant sources and specific search terms); (2) search (working with databases); (3) selection (refining the sample); (4) analysis (the key principles of the grounded theory are applied – the selected texts are subjected to open, axial and selective coding and analysed by means of ongoing comparative analysis to identify relevant concepts); and (5) present (representation and structuring of the content).

2.1 Define

2.1.1 Criteria for inclusion/exclusion

The criteria for inclusion in this systematic review were studies that (a) indicated search descriptors in the title and/or abstract, (b) published in English, (c) peer-reviewed, (d) related to the field of physical education, and (e) necessarily included a possible solution to the problem (for qualitative research designs). The review also included quantitative studies with a pre–post study design and mixed methods that had to fulfil the required qualitative and quantitative criteria. Studies were excluded if they were (a) not available in full text, (b) review articles, (c) conference papers and proceedings, (d) focused on stating a problem rather than solutions, and (e) single or collective articles by the same authors in different journals that presented different aspects of the same problem.

An additional sampling criterion, which is not related to the main content of the study, was the limitation of the period of publication. The starting date for the search was 2001, as this was the year Marshall and Hardman (2000) presented the results of their worldwide survey of the status of physical education in schools, which clearly showed that school physical education was in a precarious position in all continental regions of the world. The period of inclusion of articles in this study (a little over two

decades of the twenty-first century) is so long because our search was focused on articles in which the authors not only stated or described the circumstances and consequences of the marginalisation crisis in physical education in a particular country but also, most importantly, offered both theoretical solutions to overcome marginalisation and shared practical experience that worked and brought success in specific situations.

2.1.2 Identification of research fields and appropriate sources

The selection of electronic databases was based on guidelines (Gusenbauer & Haddaway, 2020) on which search engines might be adequate for systematic searches. The main sources for the search of scientific papers were the disciplinary online database SPORTDiscus and two multidisciplinary databases Scopus and Web of Science. The relevant research “fields” were specified in the multidisciplinary databases Scopus and Web of Science, and in the first case, they are designated as subject areas, and in the second – categories. Thus, the main subject areas for this study in the Scopus database were Social Sciences; Arts and Humanities; Psychology; Health Professions, and in the Web of Science – Education & Educational Research; Education Scientific Disciplines; Social Issues; Social Sciences, Interdisciplinary; Humanities, Multidisciplinary; Psychology, Educational.

In addition, not to miss articles that are not included in these databases, but could be related to the topic we requested, we used the multidisciplinary search engine Google Scholar.

2.1.3 Deciding specific search terms

To search for scientific papers as widely as possible, various possible combinations of keywords directly and indirectly related to the topic under study were used. Logical operators such as AND OR are used to combine words from the search string to obtain more accurate results. To cover relevant research on the educational status of physical education, a combination of the following keywords was used in the electronic search (“status” OR “marginalisation” OR “crisis” OR “prestige” OR “professional burnout” OR isolation” OR “socialization” OR “reality”) AND (“education” OR “field” OR “sector” OR “area” OR “profession” OR “learning communities” OR “teacher” OR “pre-service teacher” OR “career” OR “primary” OR “elementary” OR “secondary” OR “high” OR “grade”) AND (“Physical Education” OR “PE” OR “school sport”).

2.2 Search and select

Overall, the initial search of the aforementioned databases identified 4,861 articles. After removing 1,589 duplicates, 3,272 results remained for the title and abstract screening phase. A total of 282 full-text articles (2,990 inappropriate/irrelevant) were reviewed using the defined inclusion/exclusion criteria. A full review of the 282 full-text articles was completed by the lead author, and this resulted in the exclusion of an additional 247 articles. The final review included 35 articles that did not raise any comments or concerns about their inclusion by an experienced co-author who independently assessed each included research paper through an inter-coder reliability check. The co-author did not express any contradictions regarding the reviewed studies. The example for reliability testing was also borrowed from Wolfswinkel et al. (2013) and was implemented in the form of a table called “List of included studies” (Table 1), where the last column was the reason for selecting the article, which revealed the generalised ideas of the article and presented relevant excerpts/quotes from each of the articles. Consensus was reached for all included studies. In the final version presented in this article, this column is absent due to the large amount of text it contained, thus overloading the size of the article.

The selected 35 scientific articles were published in 14 journals, with 3 journals accounting for 57.1% of all articles. These journals were the “Journal of Teaching in Physical Education” (10 articles or 28.6% of the total sample of articles), the “Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance” (6 articles or 17.1%), and “Sport, Education and Society” (4 articles or 11.4%). Even though the period of inclusion covered more than 20 years, 51% of the articles ($n = 18$) were published in the last 5 years. If we expand this to 10 years, we obtain 77% ($n = 27$). Thus, in the last decade, the issue of the value status of physical education, in particular the problem of marginality and isolation, has become much more active.

The analysis of the institutions represented by the researchers gives the impression that this is an exclusively American problem, as 74% of the first authors of the articles work in institutions of this country. However, the global research referred to in the first sentence of Section 1 cannot confirm this. Therefore, it is obvious that the use of only Anglophone journals reduces the possibility of including scholarship from authors whose first language is not English.

2.3 Analyse

All selected studies were subjected to analytical processes of interrelated types of coding: “open coding,” “axial

coding,” and “selective coding” as thoroughly described by Wolfswinkel et al. (2013).

“Open coding” was the process of reading all the articles relevant to the research topic and formulating key findings and ideas in the form of “excerpts,” supported by quotations from the text (some of which were quite extensive, as their main task was to accumulate and present the idea in its entirety), which formed the basis for the next stage of coding. At the initial stage of the research, when the reliability table was created, as mentioned earlier, there was a separate column for “excerpts/quotes. Later, when the vectors of low educational status of physical education were derived and formulated from the “excerpts/quotes, this column was removed.

After the “open coding” was completed, the data continued to be collected using “axial coding,” the concept of which is to “relates categories to subcategories, specifies the properties and dimensions of a category” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 60), to define a paradigm on this basis as a tool (not a set of directives) for identifying and relate structure to process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The “axial coding” involved the use of excerpts/quotes to identify possible sets of categories/subcategories and to find connections between them. For this purpose, there was a constant comparative analysis of possible interactions of categories/subcategories with each other and with the selected articles and excerpts/quotes. The “axial coding” allowed concentrating on 1) identification of the category/phenomenon of marginalisation (low educational status) of physical education in terms of conditions, circumstances, situations that form the structure of this phenomenon; 2) strategies, actions/interactions proposed by different scientists in scientific studies on how to solve the problem of low educational status of physical education; and 3) consequences of the proposed strategies, actions/interactions. This “axial coding” allowed us to answer several important questions “when, where, why, who, how, and with what consequences” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 125).

Selective coding as a process of identifying relations between the main categories was applied to integrate and clarify the various identified categories into one main category and, on its basis, to formulate a specific research question focused on seeking strategies (vectors) to counteract or prevent the low (marginal) educational status of physical education.

“Selective coding” completed the identification and development of relationships between (sub-) categories, which eventually led to the emergence of vectors and sub-vectors. All three stages of analytical coding described earlier were carried out in an interconnected way, moving back and forth between articles, excerpts, quotations,

Author(s) year	Title	Journal	Countries of the author(s)	Research approach	Purpose/aim of study
Beddoes et al. (2014)	Overcoming Marginalization of Physical Education in America's Schools with Professional Learning Communities	Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance	USA	Qualitative research	To investigate what is "professional learning communities" and how it can be used to overcome the conditions, forces, and barriers that have marginalised physical education
Blankenship (2017)	We Have Met the Enemy – And It Is Us	International Journal of Kinesiology in Higher Education	USA	Qualitative research	Ideas are presented on steps that physical education professionals could take to stop being their own worst enemy and possibly raise the status of physical education and PETE
Carson et al. (2016)	Exploring the Job Satisfaction of Late Career Secondary Physical Education Teachers	Journal of Teaching in Physical Education	USA	Qualitative research	To develop a qualitative understanding of facet job satisfaction among late career physical education teachers
Cazers and Curtner-Smith (2017)	Robin's Story: Life History of an Exemplary American Female Physical Education Teacher	Journal of Teaching in Physical Education	USA	Qualitative research	To construct the life history of Robin, an exemplary female physical educator, to hear her voice and to explore ways in which she experienced marginalisation
Christodoulou (2010)	The Status of Physical Education in Cypriot Schools	Physical Culture and Sport. Studies and Research	Hungary	Qualitative research	To discover situation and status of physical education at Cypriot schools, the most dominant ideals and predominant contents of physical education, and its future as a subject in the schools
Cooper et al. (2016)	Implementing Policies to Enhance Physical Education and Physical Activity in Schools	Research quarterly for exercise and sport	USA	Qualitative research	To provide an overview of national physical activity recommendations and policies and to discuss how these important initiatives can be implemented in local schools
Cruickshank et al. (2021)	Encounters in a marginalised subject: The experiential challenges faced by Tasmanian Health and Physical Education teachers	Australian Journal of Education	Australia	Qualitative research	To ascertain which challenges are the most difficult for Australian health and physical education teachers, and whether this difficulty varies according to their level of teaching experience and the ages of students within their classrooms
Dauenhauer et al. (2019)	State Physical Education Policy Changes From 2001 to 2016	J School Health	USA	Quantitative approach	State physical education policy changes in USA from 2001 to 2016 by analysing data reported in The Shape of the Nation Report

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Table 1: Continued

Author(s) year	Title	Journal	Countries of the author(s)	Research approach	Purpose/aim of study
Ensign and Woods (2017)	Navigating the Realities of the Induction Years: Exploring Approaches for Supporting Beginning Physical Education Teachers	Quest	USA	Qualitative research	To examine the factors that enhance or constrain beginning teachers' induction processes and offer recommendations for supporting physical educators as they assimilate into the field
Ferry and Westerlund (2023)	Professional networks, collegial support, and school leaders: How physical education teachers manage reality shock, marginalization, and isolation in a decentralized school system	European Physical Education Review	Sweden	Qualitative research	To provide insights into physical education teachers' experiences of reality shock, isolation, and marginalisation over time, as well as how they managed these challenges
Fitzpatrick (2023)	Physical education: a reflection on subject status, the critical, and the wellbeing agenda	Sport, Education and Society	New Zealand	Qualitative research	To reflect on the field of physical education
Flory (2015)	Early Career Experiences of Physical Education Teachers in Urban Schools	Journal of Teaching in Physical Education	USA	Qualitative research	To examine how three physical education teachers' early career experiences influenced their teaching in urban schools
France et al. (2011)	Increasing the Value of Physical Education in Schools and Communities	Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance	USA	Qualitative research	To examine select current innovations that may help in combating many of the issues of the marginalisation of physical education, and to examine the concept of community-based physical education and its role in addressing the marginalisation of physical education
Gaudreault et al. (2021)	Advocating for Physical Education Through Visibility and Relationship Building	Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance	USA	Qualitative research	(a) To describe how physical educators can promote themselves and their subject through the two strategies of intentional visibility and thoughtful relationship building and (b) to outline how educational experiences focused on the required knowledge, skills, and dispositions toward advocacy could be embedded in PETE programs
Gaudreault et al. (2018)	Understanding the perceived mattering of physical education teachers	Sport, Education and Society	USA	A mixed-methods design	To investigate both the perceived mattering of physical education as a subject and of those who

(Continued)

Table 1: Continued

Author(s) year	Title	Journal	Countries of the author(s)	Research approach	Purpose/aim of study
Gonçalves et al. (2022)	"We united to defend ourselves and face our struggles": nurturing a physical education teachers' community of practice in a precarious context	Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy	Brazil, Ireland, Australia	Qualitative research	teach it by drawing upon both qualitative and quantitative data To investigate the process of nurturing a democratic PE-CoP in a precarious, Brazilian school context
Gross and Buchanan (2014)	Perspectives of Physical Education Specialists who Teach in Large Class Settings	Journal of Physical Education and Sports Management	USA	Qualitative research	To determine the effects of teaching large classes on the professional and personal attitudes of elementary physical education specialists that teach in settings with large student: teacher ratios
Hagenah et al. (2022)	"Does Anyone Even Care That I'm Down Here?": Creating Shared Values in a District-Wide Physical Education Professional Learning Community	Journal of Teaching in Physical Education	USA	Qualitative research	To examine what shared values emerge when physical education teachers from different schools across a mid-sized urban district engage in a yearlong Professional Learning Communities
Heminger and Carlson (2011)	Strategies to Increase the Value of Physical Educators in K-12 Schools	Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance	USA	Qualitative research	To examine the effects of marginalisation on physical education teachers' status and to discuss ways in which physical educators can minimise those effects
Houlihan and Green (2006)	The changing status of school sport and physical education: explaining policy change	Sport, Education and Society	UK	Qualitative research	To examine the changing political salience of school sport and physical education over the last 15 years
Lawson et al. (2021)	Chapter 8: Collective Action for Learning, Improvement, and Redesign.	Journal of Teaching in Physical Education	USA	Qualitative research	To present a new agenda for physical education with roles and responsibilities for each stakeholder
Lux and McCullick (2011)	How One Exceptional Teacher Navigated Her Working Environment as the Teacher of a Marginal Subject	Journal of Teaching in Physical Education	USA	Qualitative research	To analyse how one exceptional elementary physical education teacher navigated her working environment as the teacher of a marginal subject
McLoughlin et al. (2020)	The Status of Physical Education Within a Nationally Recognized School Health and Wellness Program	Journal of Teaching in Physical Education	USA	A mixed-methods design	To investigate the status of physical education within a nationally recognised comprehensive school health promotion climate
Michael et al. (2019)	Physical Education Policies in US Schools: Differences by School Characteristics	J School Health	USA	Qualitative research	To implement physical education policies, the United States identified in SHAPE America' Essential Components of Physical Education Document and

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Table 1: Continued

Author(s) year	Title	Journal	Countries of the author(s)	Research approach	Purpose/aim of study
Richards et al. (2018b)	Physical education teachers' perceptions of perceived mattering and marginalization	Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy	USA	Qualitative research	how implementation of these policies varies by school To understand how the social environment of schools influences physical education teachers' perceptions of marginalisation and perceived mattering, and how these two constructs interact
Richards et al. (2018a)	Personal accomplishment, resilience, and perceived mattering as inhibitors of physical educators' perceptions of marginalization and isolation	Journal of Teaching in Physical Education	USA	A mixed-methods design	To examine hypothesised inhibitors of marginality and isolation, including feelings of personal accomplishment, resilience, and perceived mattering
Richardson (2011)	Physical Education Teacher Education: Creating a Foundation to Increase the Status of Physical Education in Schools	Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance	USA	Qualitative research	To present solutions to the problem of the marginality of physical education in schools through the transformation of PETE
Scanlon et al. (2021)	Teacher agency in enacting physical education in a period of curriculum change and reform in Ireland	The Curriculum Journal	Ireland	Qualitative research	To explore the potential evolution of the role of teachers as "policy actors"
Sheehy (2011)	Addressing Parents' Perceptions in the Marginalization of Physical Education	Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance	USA	Qualitative research	To examine parental perceptions of physical education and provide suggestions for addressing those perceptions in an effort to elevate the status of physical education in schools
Simonton et al. (2022b)	How teachers feel: exploring secondary physical educators' emotions, control beliefs, and coping mechanisms on the job	Sport, Education and Society	USA	Qualitative research	To explore how physical education teachers interpret their emotions while teaching and what internal and external factors may impact their perceived ability to control and cope with their positive and negative emotional situations
Ulas and Senel (2020)	The relationship between commitment to teaching, teacher efficacy, marginalisation and isolation: A study on physical education teachers	Cypriot Journal of Educational Sciences	Turkey	Quantitative approach	To examine the relationship between commitment to teaching, teacher efficacy, physical education teachers' marginalisation and isolation
van der Mars et al. (2021)	Chapter 2: Reversing Policy Neglect in U.S. Physical Education: A Policy-Focused Primer	Journal of Teaching in Physical Education	USA	Qualitative research	To explore recommendations for research and development in physical education that are policy-oriented and structure the new agenda are presented

(Continued)

Table 1: *Continued*

Author(s) year	Title	Journal	Countries of the author(s)	Research approach	Purpose/aim of study
Ward et al. (2021)	Chapter 3: PK-12 School Physical Education: Conditions, Lessons Learned, and Future Directions	Journal of Teaching in Physical Education	USA	Qualitative research	To address future alternatives for PK-12 physical education
Whipp et al. (2007)	Experienced Physical Education Teachers Reaching Their "Use-by Date": Powerless and Disrespected	Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport	Australia	Qualitative research	To retrospective study of the reasons for dissatisfaction with the working life of physical education teachers that led them to leave the profession
Woods and Lynn (2014)	One Physical Educator's Career Cycle: Strong Start, Great Run, Approaching Finish	Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport	USA	Qualitative research	To gain an understanding of a veteran physical educator's movement through his career cycle and the environmental factors that both enhanced and constrained his career development

Note. PETE, physical education teacher education; SHAPE America, The Society of Health and Physical Educators in United States.

Table 1. List of included studies.

Source: Author's contribution.

categories, and subcategories until all articles and excerpts were carefully read, linked and analysed and the effect of “theoretical saturation” (Wolfswinkel et al., 2013, p. 51) of data, concepts, and relationships was achieved (this effect occurred when no changes or new ones seemed necessary during the development of categories/subcategories).

3. Results and discussion

The results of this study are presented under the headings “self-initiative leadership vector,” “transformational vector,” and “policy vector.” The formulated vectors were obtained as a result of the analytical three-stage coding described earlier, during which eight subvectors/subcategories and, accordingly, three vectors/categories of counteracting the low educational status of physical education were formed (Table 2).

3.1 Self-initiated leadership vector

The self-initiated leadership vector is based on the idea that one should not wait for instructions from management or

requests (direct or implied) from other people to act but rather create an environment where the physical education teacher and, accordingly, his/her field of activity become the focus of attention. The three subvectors of the self-initiative vector require the personal involvement and leadership of each individual physical education teacher to a greater or lesser extent. No teacher, regardless of the subject, works in ideal conditions, and everyone who wants to be important in the educational environment must take leadership responsibility. Simonton et al. (2023) found a correlation between the perception of physical education mattering and the perceived importance of the teacher. Scholars even substantiate the concept of “cultural leaders” (Storm & Svendsen, 2023) in physical education, in which teachers could realise their role as an authority. For example, a study by Arar and Rigbi (2009) on the status and perceptions of physical education in a cultural setting that disapproves women’s physical education found that “devoted PE teachers who do their job in a PE-supporting school, can help to change the status of PE in their society” (p. 199). Flory (2015) showed that it is important for teachers to be prepared to learn from challenges rather than feel defeated by them, to become

Vector	Subvectors/subcategory	Author
Self-initiated leadership	Attracting professionals who are active and love their subject and are ready to be leaders and advocating for their programs	Cazers and Curtner-Smith, 2017; Christodoulou, 2010; McLoughlin et al., 2020; Richards et al., 2018b; Simonton et al., 2022a; Woods and Lynn, 2014
	Wider communicative interactions and collaboration with students, parents, work colleagues, education administrators	Carson et al., 2016; Cruickshank, et al., 2021; Flory, 2015; Gaudreault et al., 2021; Gross and Buchanan, 2014; Lux and McCullick, 2011; Sheehy, 2011
	Creating a professional community for the exchange of ideas and continuous professional development	Beddoes et al., 2014; Gonçalves et al., 2022; Hagenah et al., 2022; Lawson et al., 2021
Transformational	Changing the goals or agenda of physical education	Fitzpatrick, 2023; Lawson et al., 2021; Ward et al., 2021
	Creation of special educational programs (e.g., making more capable PETE programs) that prepare for possible negative scenarios (for example, reality shock) and the institution of mentors	Ensign and Woods, 2017; Ferry and Westerlund, 2023; Richards et al., 2018a, b; Richardson, 2011; Whipp et al., 2007
	Readiness for self-transformation, openness to change and experimentation in professional career	Blankenship, 2017; Gaudreault et al., 2018; Henninger and Carlson, 2011; Ulas and Senel, 2020
Policy	Political actions to protect and defend the interests of physical education	Dauenhauer et al., 2019; van der Mars et al., 2021
	Mobilisation and interaction of all physical education stakeholders to lobby for the values and place of physical education in education and the community in particular	Cooper et al., 2016; France et al., 2011; Michael et al., 2019; Scanlon et al., 2021

Table 2. Vectors of counteracting the low educational status of physical education. Source: Author’s contribution.

culturally relevant and to have the status of an “insider” rather than an “outsider” in the school.

The reluctance to take on more responsibility and not taking appropriate action to change the status of their discipline has been identified by some scholars (Laureano et al., 2014) as a serious factor in the marginalisation of physical education programmes. On the basis of their own findings, Lux and McCullick (2011) wrote “it seems difficult to separate the marginality of subject matter from the marginality of the individual teaching it” (p. 369). A teacher who is proactive and passionate about his or her profession can be compared to a magnet that attracts students.

Self-initiated leadership requires more enthusiasm (Christodoulou, 2010), inclusiveness (Cazers & Curtner-Smith, 2017; McLoughlin et al., 2020), and a willingness of the physical education teacher to perceive, communicate, and collaborate with key stakeholders (e.g., parents/guardians, other teachers) and sometimes even develop strategies to develop positive relationships (Cruickshank et al., 2021; Sheehy, 2011) or engage in more active advocacy and promotion of physical education in their schools (Richards et al., 2018b). Physical education teachers need to develop the skills to advocate for their program by offering a high-quality educational product (Simonton et al., 2022a).

The exemplary story of a successful career as a physical education teacher presented by Woods and Lynn (2014) clearly shows the factors that influence the desire to be an effective physical education teacher, including love for the profession and enthusiasm, on the one hand, and positive feedback from colleagues, students, parents, and administrators, on the other hand. The teacher was passionate about his profession for 19 years in a row and only when he felt indifference from parents did, he enter the stage of frustration.

A separate subvectors of the self-initiated leadership vector is the importance of interactions and communications between physical education teachers for professional development, discussions, and exchange of ideas on practice issues, including overcoming unfavourable conditions and barriers that marginalise physical education. Researchers propose both quite broad formal initiatives, such as joining professional learning communities (Beddoes et al., 2014; Hagenah et al., 2022; Lawson et al., 2021), developing democratic communities of practice in physical education (Gonçalves et al., 2022), and less formal ones, through social media such as Twitter (Richards et al., 2020).

3.2 Transformational vector

The transformational vector of physical education was formed from three subvectors focused on the possibility

of successfully confronting or even overcoming the marginalisation of physical education by making the necessary changes (both innovations and renovations), general or local, in the system of functioning of physical education as an educational institution, making it more flexible and adaptive to the environment on the one hand and self-sufficient (through the development of its own philosophy of physical education) on the other.

The transformational vector includes subvectors that are more radical, such as reorientation to other goals or the physical education agenda (Fitzpatrick, 2023; Lawson et al., 2021; Ward et al., 2021), as well as quite conservative with the intentions of the need for changes in teacher preparation programs and professional development of teachers throughout their career (Henninger & Carlson, 2011) to prepare competent teachers in both theory and practice (Ulas & Senel, 2020). Scholars suggest that formalised educational programs should be implemented through the involvement of experienced teachers to mentor and develop younger colleagues (Whipp et al., 2007). Effective educational programs can support pre-service teachers in understanding how to effectively address marginality, for example, through strategies that emerge from socialisation research (Gaudreault et al., 2018; Richards et al., 2018a, b). Particular attention is paid to PETE programs, where it is suggested that they should, at a minimum, inform physical education teachers about common manifestations such as isolation and marginalisation, as well as how to create a support network (Ferry & Westerlund, 2023). Other researchers have argued for more serious modifications to PETE, such as a “dramatic redesign that will help decrease the marginalization of physical education and place student learning at the center of preservice teachers’ work” (Richardson, 2011, p. 47). Blankenship (2017) suggests becoming more open to changes in the profession, and Ensign and Woods (2017) recommends increases PETE preparation prior to induction.

In addition, the transformation vector is not only limited to the institutional level, when all claims are made against the system of physical education or the imperfection of teacher training programs, but also extends further to the personal level, where each individual teacher can make themselves ready for self-transformation, which involves openness to change (Blankenship, 2017) and experimentation in one’s own career through continuous professional development (Henninger & Carlson, 2011; Ulas & Senel, 2020) to organise interactions and such an effective learning environment that works to improve the status of physical education and fights against marginalisation.

3.3 Policy vector

Physical education has always been very sensitive to the political factor that was decisive in the emergence of this discipline in education. Goal setting and agendas in physical education are often changed under the pressure of reforms that result from changes in education policy. Such changes usually place physical education in a precarious and contradictory position (Maguire et al., 2019). School physical education is in peril, and if it is to avoid being attacked by the threat of being reduced or even withdrawn from the curriculum, it is critical that physical educators advocate for policies that promote and support quality daily physical education (Solmon & Garn, 2014). As far back as 1988, Kirk provided the reasons and actions that should be taken to challenge the dominant technocratic assumptions of the physical education profession and to create opportunities for change, particularly through viewing education as a political process. Some of those ideas are only beginning to be widely developed today. Scholars advocate for stronger physical education policies (Dauenhauer et al., 2019). Michael et al. (2019) sees strengthening physical education policy in schools as the following actions:

The policies in this component include providing daily physical education; prohibiting waivers, substitutions, and exemptions; limiting class size; not assigning or withholding physical activity as punishment; ensuring full inclusion of all students in physical education; and having state-licensed or state-certified teachers who are endorsed to teach physical education. (Michael et al., 2019, p. 495)

Van der Mars (2018, van der Mars et al., 2021) explain the reasons for the marginalisation of educational programs in physical education in the USA lie in policy neglect. Therefore, in their opinion, the formation of a political agenda with the mandatory development of political literacy and strategic actions should become immediate priorities for physical education. Teachers can be “policy actors” (Scanlon et al., 2021) and their voices heard.

Thorburn and Gray (2009) wrote:

In some senses ‘unofficial voices’, for example, teachers and academics, are insufficiently loud and organised to draw attention to those with ‘official’ policy making responsibilities about many of the unresolved pedagogy and professional issues which require further support. (Thorburn & Gray, 2009, p. 69)

Cooper et al. (2016) recommend three strategies in this respect: the first calls for the development of a direct feedback loop between policy, its implementation, and its upstream and downstream effects; the second requires physical education stakeholders (physical education teachers, school administrators, and other health professionals) to educate the decision makers and policymakers about the importance of physical education and physical activity in the creation and promotion of specific policies; the third requires faculty in colleges and universities involved in physical education and health-related fields to engage talented, conscientious, intellectually curious people in these disciplines to advance the health and physical education professions.

Thus, the policy vector clearly shows that physical education stakeholders should have as many external targeted contacts and interactions as possible, including with politicians of different levels. In Mintrom’s (2019) terminology, there is a need to become “Political Entrepreneurs,” who achieve the best results compared to other conditional behaviour types of politicians. Lambert and Penney (2023) state that:

national and jurisdictional curriculum leadership is a complex task driven by powerful political agendas, it is also one imbued with subtle and sophisticated nuances and at times nervous interplay between individuals and structures, policy and pedagogy. (Lambert & Penney, 2023, p. 22)

It is obviously possible to cope with such a complex task only if all stakeholders consolidate their efforts. Because the most important thing in politics is who is behind whom, and what opposition there may be. If politicians cancel physical education and receive a philosophical condemnation in a scientific journal, then they will ignore it. If they are faced with millions of disgruntled parents who worry about wellbeing of their children, then they may find other areas to save money.

Thus, the advice on increasing the value status of physical education expresses both theoretical (philosophical) and practical steps in their implementation. However, it is clear to many that without change, physical education will find it difficult or even impossible to remain relevant and effective in a world of economic, political, and social precarity. Kirk (2020) has shown that precarity has a major impact on physical education. Despite the dominance of US research, which made up the majority of the articles selected for this article, the topic of the low social status of physical education is nevertheless growing in importance

worldwide as the consequences of this problem become more and more apparent.

4. Conclusions

This study has shown that the problem of low educational status (marginalisation) of physical education is more acute and not so secondary if it is purposefully focused on and considered from a variety of perspectives. A physical education teacher's awareness of marginalisation always has consequences and can easily lead to a lack of desire to progress or even stay in the profession. The literature review allowed us to identify three key vectors – self-initiated leadership, transformation and policy – which contain proposals from scholars around the world to overcome the marginalisation of physical education and increase its educational status. Our three vectors, which reveal the diversity and multidirectionality of the causes of marginalisation, serve as a kind of guideline for the steps and actions that should be taken to avoid being marginalised. First, all professionals working in the field of physical education should realise and accept the unpleasant fact that marginalisation can take place in the educational environment and it should be opposed, not tolerated. Second, the fight against marginalisation requires comprehensive teamwork, best of all in synergy in different spheres (educational, academic, and public).

In addition, the separated subvectors in each of the vectors provide specific answers to the question of what to do. The vector of self-initiated leadership indicates that the profession should select and retain people who love the subject and children and are ready to be leaders, to defend their programmes and values of physical education in interaction with students, parents, colleagues, and administrators. If necessary, professional communities can be created for the exchange of ideas and continuous professional development.

The transformation vector has shown that the low educational status of physical education can and should be addressed through timely changes or revision of the goals or agenda in physical education, and as an example, this can be a focus on wellbeing and mental health, a reorientation to the salutogenic model of health, and the pedagogies of affect. Another aspect of this vector focuses on PETE (in particular, the importance of implementing special modules, courses that prepare for possible negative scenarios such as reality shock), mentors, and post-graduate education of teachers.

The policy vector vividly represents the external dimension in physical education, in contrast to the initiative and

transformational vectors, which are more about the internal agenda. Subvectors of the policy vector include political action to protect and defend the interests of physical education and the mobilisation and interaction of all stakeholders to lobby for physical education in education and society in general. Thus, the vector presented earlier can be used as a roadmap to overcome the low educational status of physical education or to prevent marginalisation.

5. Limitations

Despite one of the greatest strengths of the grounded theory as an inductive abstraction, there is a risk of knowledge isolation due to this approach in this article. Therefore, the results should be taken as a starting point for further research, possibly using a different methodology. The second limiting factor is the cultural heterogeneity of the articles included in the study, as most of these studies were conducted in the United States.

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Author contributions

Mykola Sainchuk: conception and design of the study, acquisition of data, analysis and interpretation of data, manuscript preparation, and obtaining funding, David Kirk: conception and design of the study, analysis and interpretation of data, manuscript preparation, and obtaining funding.

Conflicts of interest statement

Authors state no conflict of interest.

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