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ORIGINAL SCIENTIFIC PAPER

Cultivating Universal Values through Physical Education Pedagogy

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Abstract

This study aimed to ascertain the function of physical education instructors in the integration of universal ideals within educational institutions via physical education. This research employs a quantitative methodology utilizing a comparative study approach. This study involved 169 physical education teachers across different educational levels, comprising 113 males and 56 females. The instrument used in this study is the Universal Values in Sport Instrument (UVSI). This instrument uses 5 dimensions and there are 23 indicators. The gender evaluation indicates a significance value greater than 0.05, signifying that there is no discernible difference between male and female teachers in the implementation of universal principles. Similarly, the results of the level evaluation indicate a significance value greater than 0.05, suggesting that both bachelor's and master's level educators possess comparable capabilities in the integration of universal values within physical education. Thus, training or professional development programs that focus on strengthening the teaching of universal values should be provided evenly to all physical education teachers. Furthermore, school policies can facilitate a uniform strategy for cultivating student character through physical activity, irrespective of the teacher's educational background or gender.

Keywords: *sports pedagogy, ethical learning, teacher professionalism, value-based teaching, student character formation*

Introduction

Physical education teachers play an important role in shaping their students' moral development (Dinghua, 1997; Guan, 2023). Through structured activities and sportsmanship, they can instill important values such as teamwork, respect, and perseverance, which are crucial for holistic development in students' lives (Freire et al., 2018; Görgüt & Tutkun, 2018; Roux & Dasoo, 2020). Moreover, the integration of value-based education in the physical education curriculum can provide a comprehensive framework that not only addresses physical fitness but also fosters character development, allowing students to cultivate discipline, honesty and resilience in their daily interactions and challenges (Mar et al., 2023; Roux & Dasoo, 2020; Sullivan, 2007). Moreover, physical education teachers must also embody and promote these universal values themselves, as their own moral qualities and teaching philosophies significantly influence students' perception and adoption of these values in sporting and academic contexts (Freire et al., 2018; Pennington, 2017; Xionghuai, 2014). Furthermore, an emphasis on a collaborative approach to teaching physical education may increase the effectiveness of instilling these values, as qualified educators can counteract the decline in moral standards by incorporating values-based principles into their training strategies and lesson plans, thus creating an environment that nurtures insightful individuals (Guan, 2023; Inna, 2020; Roux & Dasoo, 2020).

Physical education teachers should have a deep understanding of the purpose and importance of their subject, realizing that their role goes beyond mere physical fitness and sports skills. Their responsibilities include fostering students' physical fitness and the formation of a sporting spirit, which are fundamental to the educational process and should be

approached with seriousness and dedication (Guan, 2023; Li, 2020; Li & Deng, 2022). Thus, physical education teachers can effectively influence students' moral development while emphasizing the importance of physical education as an essential component of a well-rounded education (Gallego et al., 2020; Guan, 2023; Li, 2020; Zhao et al., 2022). To achieve this, it is important for physical education teachers to establish themselves as role models with noble moral qualities, as their attitudes and behaviors can have a great impact on students' understanding and appreciation of these universal values (Doolittle & Demas, 2001; Freire et al., 2018; Görgüt & Tutkun, 2018; Guan, 2023). Through deliberate pedagogical strategies that emphasize the connection between physical education and moral development, teachers can create experiences that not only enhance students' physical abilities but also promote important ethical values that contribute to their overall character formation (Freire et al., 2018; Guan, 2023; Muhtar et al., 2020; Zhao et al., 2022). This approach entails a deliberate focus on integrating ideological and moral education within the physical education curriculum, ensuring that each activity serves as a conduit for teaching fundamental ethical principles and encouraging students to embrace values that extend beyond the classroom and into their wider lives (Guan, 2023; Liu & Hu, 2020; Miller & Jarman, 1988).

This alignment between physical education and moral education not only enriches the educational experience but also prepares students to engage meaningfully in society, as they develop not only their physical skills but also their ethical framework and social responsibility (Balan et al., 2012; Guan, 2023; Miguel et al., 2023). In this context, the integration of moral education in physical education becomes particularly important, as it enriches the curriculum and emphasizes the development of students' ideological will and moral character alongside their physical abilities, thereby redefining the purpose of physical education in a way that aligns with the holistic goals of education in the modern era (Guan, 2023; Xionghuai, 2014; Zhao et al., 2022). In this endeavor, it becomes increasingly important for educators to employ effective teaching methods that foster a conducive learning environment, where values such as discipline and teamwork are not only taught but actively practiced through engaging physical activities, thus contributing to a strong moral education framework that is seamlessly woven into the physical education curriculum (Roux & Dasoo, 2020; Wang, 2011).

Research has shown that physical education teachers can play an important role in instilling universal values to students (Guan, 2023; Xionghuai, 2014; Zhao et al., 2022). By implementing character education in their lesson plans and fostering an environment that emphasizes cooperation and respect during physical activity, educators can significantly impact students' moral development in ways that go beyond physical fitness alone (Pennington, 2017; Suherman, 2018; Sullivan, 2007). This dual focus on the development of physical skills and moral character can lead to increased student engagement, better interpersonal relationships among peers, and the development of virtues that students carry throughout their lives, making physical education an essential component of character education in contemporary schools (Adu, 2023; Xionghuai, 2014; Zhao et al., 2022). The integration of moral education into the physical education curriculum is a key strategy in this regard, as it allows for the deliberate embedding of value-based principles into the learning process. This approach recognizes the inherent link between physical education and the development of important life skills, such as teamwork, discipline, and resilience, which are not only beneficial for success in sport but also contribute to students' overall moral and social growth (Bailey, 2006; Mar et al., 2023; Opstoel et al., 2020). Moreover, effective teaching methods that prioritize experiential learning can create opportunities for students to practice these values in real-world situations, further reinforcing their importance and relevance in daily life, thus achieving the goal of moral education alongside physical education (Wang, 2011; Xionghuai, 2014).

Physical education teachers are uniquely positioned to foster an environment that supports physical activity and moral development, acting as a catalyst to instill universal values in students through targeted teaching methods and curriculum integration, ultimately shaping them into responsible and insightful individuals (Suherman, 2018; Wang, 2011; Xionghuai, 2014; Zhao et al., 2022). This multifaceted approach is not only in line with contemporary educational reforms, but also responds to the growing need for character education in a society facing moral and ethical challenges, underscoring the integral role that physical education can play in cultivating a generation equipped with physical prowess and moral fortitude. In this regard, the recognition of physical education as an important vehicle for moral education becomes all the more relevant, as it emphasizes the transformative potential of physical activity in fostering virtues such as integrity, justice and perseverance among students, thereby promoting a holistic educational framework that prepares them for meaningful engagement in their communities and the world at large (Naylor & Yeager, 2013). Research shows that fostering an environment conducive to moral development during physical education is not only beneficial, but essential, as it creates a culture of respect and cooperation that extends beyond the physical activity itself, ultimately supporting the creation of well-rounded individuals who embody the values necessary for academic and social success (Balan et al., 2012; Butler, 2000). This suggests that the role of physical education teachers goes far beyond simply teaching sports skills; it includes the important responsibility of shaping students' moral frameworks and instilling universal values that are critical to their development as conscious citizens in a complex and interconnected world (Jones, 2005).

Furthermore, as physical education teachers embody and model these values through their own behavior, they provide a powerful example for students to emulate, thereby strengthening the link between physical activity and moral character development, which is critical in building a foundation for responsible citizenship in an ever-evolving social landscape (Gordon, 2010; Pennington, 2017). In this context, it is imperative for physical education programs to not only focus on improving physical abilities, but also comprehensively incorporate character education, which serves to bridge the gap between fitness and ethical behavior development,

promoting an environment conducive to nurturing moral individuals equipped to face the challenges of the 21st century (Liu & Hu, 2020; Suherman, 2018; Zhang, 2018).

Several studies have explored the relationship between physical education and moral or value-based education. Participation in physical activity has been shown to contribute to social and moral development (Bailey, 2006), while sport-based programs can enhance students' interpersonal and emotional skills when implemented through well-structured pedagogical models (Opstoel et al., 2020). Integrating moral principles into teaching practices has also been found to positively influence students' ethical reasoning and cooperation skills (Roux & Dasoo, 2020). Furthermore, teachers who intentionally embed moral instruction in physical education tend to produce stronger behavioral outcomes in students, including fairness, respect, and responsibility (Muhtar et al., 2020). Value-oriented physical education has likewise been emphasized as a tool for character education when teachers act as role models and employ reflective teaching strategies (Suherman, 2018).

Despite increasing attention to the integration of moral education in physical education, most previous research has primarily focused on student outcomes rather than examining teachers' roles and implementation strategies (Guan, 2023; Zhao et al., 2022). There remains limited empirical evidence comparing how teacher characteristics such as gender or educational background affect the implementation of universal values within physical education contexts (Zhao et al., 2022). While previous studies have highlighted the importance of teacher competence and moral orientation in values-based instruction (Guan, 2023), quantitative evidence differentiating these influences across teacher demographics remains scarce. In addition, few studies have utilized standardized measurement instruments, such as the Universal Values in Sport Instrument (UVSI), to assess how these values are practiced and internalized in educational settings.

Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by examining the role of physical education teachers in implementing universal values through a quantitative comparative approach. Specifically, the study investigates (1) the differences in the implementation of universal values through physical education based on teachers' gender, and (2) the differences based on teachers' education level. By addressing these aspects, this research contributes empirical insights into how teacher-related factors influence the enactment of moral and ethical values in physical education settings. The findings are expected to inform teacher development programs and school policies that promote equitable and effective moral education practices across diverse educational contexts.

Material and methods

Study design and participants

This research utilized a comparative study design to evaluate the implementation of physical education in schools alongside the application of universal values by educators. The sample comprised 169 physical education instructors, categorized by gender 113 males and 56 females and by educational attainment 148 holding bachelor's degrees and 21 possessing master's degrees.

Instrument

This research uses the Universal Values in Sport Instrument (UVSI). This instrument uses 5 dimensions and there are 23 indicators. Dimensions of Universal Values: Ethics and Morals (respect for the rules, respect for others, fair play, self-esteem, honesty, tolerance); Knowledge and understanding (problem solving, understanding, how to win, how to lose); Social (cooperation, communication, connecting with others, teamwork, trust); Psychological (value of effort, resilience, confidence, discipline, self-respect); Leadership and Organization (leadership, how to manage competition, sharing) (Purnomo et al., 2024). The instrument has met the criteria for use with a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.990.

Statistical analysis

Data were evaluated utilizing Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to investigate significant differences in instructors' engagement according to gender and educational attainment. All statistical analyses were performed utilizing IBM SPSS Statistics version 26.0 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA). The threshold for statistical significance was established at $p<0.05$.

Ethics

This study was deemed ethically appropriate in accordance with the seven WHO (2011) Standards: (1) Social Values, (2) Scientific Values, (3) Equitable Assessment and Benefits, (4) Risks, (5) Persuasion/Exploitation, (6) Confidentiality and Privacy, and (7) Informed Consent, as outlined in the 2016 CIOMS Guidelines. This is demonstrated by the attainment of the criteria for each standard. The Declaration of Ethics received approval from the Health Research Ethics Committee of Universitas Negeri Malang (Approval No. 16.07.1/UN32.14.2.8/LT/2024), effective from July 16, 2024, to July 16, 2025. Before data collection, each participant was apprised of the study's purpose and objectives and granted signed consent to participate.

Results

Results of developing universal values through physical education based on gender

This section provides a comparative investigation of the development of universal values among male and female physical education teachers. This overview presents the findings of the Independent Samples t-test, which assesses the impact of gender differences on the application of universal values across numerous key aspects, as illustrated in table 1 below.

According to table 1, the descriptive statistics indicate that male and female physical education teachers exhibit remarkably similar performance across all aspects of universal values. In the Ethics and Morals dimension, male teachers achieve an average score of 77.56 (SD=7.02), closely resembling the score of female instructors at 77.59 (SD=5.48). In

Knowledge and Understanding, males achieve a score of 75.91 (SD=7.25), marginally surpassing girls who score 74.64 (SD=7.44). The Social dimension exhibits comparable outcomes, with male educators averaging 88.88 (SD=6.72) and female educators 89.29 (SD=6.67). In the Psychological dimension, male teachers have a score of 87.23 (SD=8.02), while female teachers score 86.71 (SD=8.17). In Leadership and Organization, men educators have an average score of 44.84 (SD=4.88), but female educators average 44.23 (SD=5.01). The constantly minor discrepancies suggest that both groups have comparable levels of universal values application.

Table 1. Results of independent samples t-test on universal values development based on gender

	Male		Female		df	t	p	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD				
Ethics and Morals	77.56	7.02	77.59	5.48	136	-0.03	0.98	-0.01
Knowledge and understanding	75.91	7.25	74.64	7.44	107	1.06	0.29	0.17
Social	88.88	6.72	89.29	6.67	110	-0.37	0.71	-0.06
Psychological	87.23	8.02	86.71	8.17	107	0.39	0.70	0.06
Leadership and Organization	44.84	4.88	44.23	5.01	107	0.76	0.45	0.12

The t-test results presented in table 1 corroborate these descriptive findings. All p-values above 0.05, indicating no statistically significant differences between genders. In Ethics and Morals, the t-value is –0.03 with a p-value of 0.98, corroborated by a negligible effect size (Cohen's d=–0.01), signifying an almost imperceptible difference. In Knowledge and Understanding, t=1.06 and p=0.29, indicating a small effect size (d=0.17), which further implies a negligible practical difference. The Social dimension indicates t=–0.37, p=0.71, and d=–0.06, demonstrating a minor influence. The Psychological dimension yielded t=0.39, p=0.70, and d=0.06, signifying a very minor and inconsequential difference. Finally, in Leadership and Organization, the t-value is 0.76, the p-value is 0.45, and the effect size is minimal (d=0.12).

In summary, both the statistical differences and effect sizes indicate that male and female teachers apply universal values at nearly equivalent levels, with all Cohen's d values residing within the negligible to very small range, thereby affirming that gender does not significantly affect the implementation of universal values across the five dimensions.

Results of developing universal values through physical education based on education level

The subsequent section summarizes the comparison of universal values development between educators holding Bachelor's and Master's degrees. This overview presents the findings of the Independent Samples t-test, which investigates the correlation between education level and the discrepancies in instructors' application of universal values across multiple dimensions, as illustrated in Table 2 below.

According to Table 2, the descriptive data indicate that educators possessing Bachelor's and Master's degrees exhibit comparable performance across all five dimensions of universal values. In Ethics and Morals, educators with a Bachelor's degree have an average score of 77.45 (SD=6.58), but those with a Master's degree achieve an average score of 78.38 (SD=6.27). In Knowledge and Understanding, the groups are almost indistinguishable, with Bachelor's score 75.51 (SD=7.39) and Master's scoring 75.33 (SD=6.93). In the Social dimension, Bachelor's degree educators have an average score of 89.16 (SD=6.77), but Master's degree educators average 88.05 (SD=6.10). The psychological dimension is almost indistinguishable, with Bachelor's educators score 87.07 (SD=8.15) and Master's educators scoring 87.00 (SD=7.47). Bachelor's degree holders in Leadership and Organization achieve a score of 44.68 (SD=4.98), whereas Master's degree holders attain a score of 44.33 (SD=4.60). These findings indicate negligible disparities among educational levels.

Table 2. Results of independent samples t-test on universal values development based on education level

	Male		Female		df	t	p	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD				
Ethics and Morals	77.45	6.58	78.38	6.27	26.66	-0.61	0.54	-0.14
Knowledge and understanding	75.51	7.39	75.33	6.93	26.87	0.11	0.91	0.03

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Table 2. Results of independent samples t-test on universal values development based on education level

	Male		Female		df	t	p	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD				
Social	89.16	6.77	88.05	6.10	27.49	0.71	0.48	0.16
Psychological	87.07	8.15	87.00	7.47	27.22	0.04	0.97	0.01
Leadership and Organization	44.68	4.98	44.33	4.60	27.10	0.30	0.76	0.07

The inferential results shown in Table 2 indicate that these discrepancies lack statistical significance. All t-values are confined within a limited spectrum from –0.61 to 0.71, with associated p-values beyond 0.05 (Ethics and Morals: p=0.54; Knowledge and Understanding: p=0.91; Social: p=0.48; Psychological: p=0.97; Leadership and Organization: p=0.76). The Cohen's d values across all dimensions demonstrate negligible effect sizes, reinforcing the lack of significant differences. The effect sizes are –0.14 for Ethics and Morals, 0.03 for Knowledge and Understanding, 0.16 for Social, 0.01 for Psychological, and 0.07 for Leadership and Organization, all categorized as negligible to very tiny. This indicates that the observed differences in mean scores between teachers holding Bachelor's and Master's degrees are minimal and lack practical significance.

The aggregated descriptive and inferential results indicate that educators holding Bachelor's and Master's degrees use universal values in physical education at similar levels, with no statistically or practically significant differences across all five variables.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that gender does not significantly influence the application of universal values in physical education. The statistical results show that the average scores in the five dimensions of male and female teachers are almost identical: Ethics and Morals (77.56 vs. 77.59), Knowledge and Understanding (75.91 vs. 74.64), Social (88.88 vs. 89.29), Psychological (87.23 vs. 86.71), and Leadership and Organization (44.84 vs. 44.23). All t-test results show p>0.05, such as Ethics and Morals (t=–0.03, p=0.98, d=–0.01), which explains that there is no difference between males and females in the application of universal values in PE. These results align with previous studies showing that gender does not significantly influence teachers' ethical practices due to standard expectations in PE teaching (Bronikowska et al., 2019). Although some research findings suggest that female teachers are more likely to exhibit a more relational value orientation (Temel et al., 2022), the quantitative data and the minimal numerical differences in these findings suggest that Physical Education teachers share the same professional moral commitment regardless of gender, which may be influenced by uniform curriculum guidelines that emphasize fairness, respect, and sportsmanship (Aydin, 2024; Haerens et al., 2011; Raj & Prasad, 2023).

Meanwhile, the results showed that differences in educational level did not significantly influence the implementation of universal values by PE teachers in schools. Descriptive analysis showed that teachers with Bachelor's and Master's degrees achieved almost the same average scores in all dimensions: Ethics and Morals (77.45 vs. 78.38), Knowledge and Understanding (75.51 vs. 75.33), Social (89.16 vs. 88.05), Psychological (87.07 vs. 87.00), and Leadership and Organization (44.68 vs. 44.33). Inferential statistics did not confirm significant differences, as the p-values obtained ranged from 0.48 to 0.97, such as Psychological (t=0.04, p=0.97, d=0.01). These findings support research showing that teaching competence is not solely shaped by academic qualifications, but also by ongoing practice and professional culture (Guan, 2023; Roux & Dasoo, 2020). Although other research has found that further education can improve ethical reasoning (Blaich et al., 2023), the results of the calculation of negligible effect sizes in this study (all d<0.20) indicate that there is no difference in the level of education in the application. This also has similarities with the results in the section above regarding gender which also states that gender differences do not affect the results of the application of universal values, all depending on how the development of moral-pedagogical skills is more in-depth and more effective application.

Consistent statistical equality across groups indicates that the implementation of universal values in Physical Education is more influenced by teachers' professional experience and consistency in implementing universal values through physical education. Teachers' backgrounds, regardless of gender or degree, operate within the same professional framework of educators and teachers in schools, prioritizing ethical behavior and social development. Physical Education's content, which incorporates experiential learning through teamwork and collaborative activities, creates alignment in values-based outcomes, as demonstrated by the high and tightly clustered mean scores on the social dimension (88.88–89.29). These results align with the view that moral skills in Physical Education emerge through modeling, classroom interactions, and reflective practice, rather than from personal characteristics or academic hierarchies (Li, 2020; Naylor & Yeager, 2013).

In this study, the above figures are of particular interest to teachers and policymakers, who should better understand and comprehend teacher needs. This is not limited to physical education teachers being male or even having a master's degree, but also to the competency, desire, and persistence

in implementing a quality physical education program. The narrow range of scores and consistently small effect sizes may be due to the program's homogeneity and the limited or even small sample size. Furthermore, data obtained from self-assessments may also inflate the averages for moral-based constructs due to social desirability tendencies. Furthermore, contextual influences such as leadership support, peer collaboration, and student behavior were not analyzed, although these influences may explain subtle variations in value implementation (Zhao et al., 2022). Because this study was limited to a single geographic region, future research should include a larger and more diverse sample, while integrating observational assessments and longitudinal tracking to capture how teachers' universal value practices evolve over time.

Conclusions

This study's findings indicate that the use of universal values in physical education reveals no statistically significant variations related to the gender or educational level of teachers. The independent samples test indicated that all five dimensions ethics and morals, knowledge and understanding, social, psychological, and leadership and organization exhibited p-values over 0.05, signifying equivalent performance across all instructor groups. The t-values varied from −0.608 to 0.709 for education level and from −0.030 to 0.756 for gender, indicating that both male and female educators, as well as those with bachelor's and master's degrees, demonstrate comparable efficacy in fostering universal ideals.

The results indicate that the incorporation of moral and ethical training in physical education is uniformly applied across teacher demographics, demonstrating a consistent pedagogical approach within the educational system. Consequently, professional development programs must be developed inclusively, guaranteeing that all educators irrespective of gender or academic credentials obtain equitable support in enhancing value-based educational practices. The study emphasizes the collective efficacy of the physical education profession in promoting universal values and establishes a basis for future research to investigate contextual or cultural elements that may further improve moral learning results. The findings indicate that educational policymakers and curriculum creators ought to integrate universal value education more systematically into physical education programs at all educational tiers.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank the physical education teachers who were willing to be respondents in this study.

Conflicts of Interest

No potential conflicts of interest relevant to this article could be reported.

Received: 15 March 2025 | Accepted: 14 December 2025 | Published: 01 February 2026

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