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Seungyeon Park
Department of Health, Physical
Education and Exercise Science,
Norfolk State University,
Norfolk, Virginia 23517,
United States

Qualitative inquiry of the variables perceived to influence adapted physical education course: Pilot study

Seungyeon Park

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Abstract

As a required part of kinesiology curriculum, undergraduate students need to take Adapted Physical Education (APE) course in general. The variables that promote learning of undergraduate students in APE should be clearly identified. The aim of this study was to conceptualize variables to consider relating to APE course instruction and delivery. Data collection was based on focused interviews of faculty in the field of kinesiology. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis. APE instructors should include the most important concepts to strengthen learning of undergraduate students. Regarding APE course delivery, instructors can include diverse contents to support learning of undergraduate students. Particularly, by engaging practical experiences, undergraduate students can have appropriate level of pedagogical skills to work with individuals with special needs. Additionally, there are diverse types of institutions across the states. Course delivery should be more contextual depending on the characteristics of the program and institutions.

Keywords: Adapted physical education, undergraduate students, kinesiology program, higher education institutions

1. Introduction

The previous literature described in-service physical education teachers and/or physical activity practitioners have multiple challenges to work with individuals with special needs^[1, 2, 3]. As an instance, in-service kinesiology professionals expressed that they have difficulties to create lesson plan, and manage environment^[4, 5]. Similarly, in-service kinesiology professionals frequently mentioned that they have the lack of preparation and confidence when they work with individuals with diverse types of disabilities in physical education and/or physical activity settings in public schools or community settings^[6, 7, 8]. Those challenges are attributed to their lack of preparation during their college years. Firstly, undergraduate students in the area of kinesiology generally have limited number of courses in relation to physical education and/or physical activity for people with disabilities. Usually, one or only few courses regarding physical education and/or activity for individuals with disabilities are included in kinesiology program curriculums at universities^[9, 10].

It is necessary to acknowledge reality issues. At the same time, it will be crucial for university level APE instructors to provide quality of APE course for their students. For instance, APE instructors need to organize their courses by aligning with state and national professional standards for kinesiology professionals. For example, there are professional standards which guide university curriculums. Specifically, NASPE (The NASPE Beginning Physical Education Teacher Standards) clarify that kinesiology in-service professionals need to acquire appropriate level of pedagogical knowledge for their instructional and managerial skills and strategies when they work for students with special needs. These professional standards imply the importance of highly qualified kinesiology undergraduate students in kinesiology programs.

The present study sought to answer the following questions: (a) What were the variables that promote learning of undergraduate kinesiology students regarding APE course instruction at universities? and (b) What were the perceptions of university level instructors regarding APE course and undergraduate students?

Corresponding Author:
Seungyeon Park
Department of Health, Physical
Education and Exercise Science,
Norfolk State University,
Norfolk, Virginia 23517,
United States

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Purpose of the study

The aim of this study was to investigate the variables in relation to APE course delivery for undergraduate students in higher education institutions. There were two main questions relating to this study: (1) how we could maximally promote learning of undergraduate student in APE, and (2) what variables faculty should consider when they deliver APE course and instruction at college level.

2.2 Methodology

Focused interview was used for data collection in the present study. Study participants were faculty of higher educational institutions across the states. Brief demographic information was checked before each interview. The participants were only limited to faculty in the field kinesiology such as exercise science and physical education areas. Individual focused interviews were conducted as online module (e.g., zoom) or direct in-person meeting. The length of each interview was approximately one hour. Additionally, follow up conversation was made if necessary. To identify important themes, thematic analysis was conducted. Interview transcriptions were basically completed with multiple accuracy checkup. The transcripts were reviewed and then sorted into subthemes.

3. Findings

The aim of this study was to identify what variables we need to consider relating to delivery of APE course at college level. Based on the data collection, there were multiple common perceptions to answer for those two research questions. The findings of this study are summarized into four subsections.

3.1 Building Blocks of APE course

From perspective of interviewees, there were several suggestions. To consist of the basic concepts of APE were recommended. Undergraduate students who do not have previous experiences to work with individuals with disabilities can strengthen their understanding. Specifically, undergraduate kinesiology major students should learn subcomponents relating to APE such as history, legislation, terminology, and various types of disabilities. For instance, undergraduate students should know the laws and regulations with respect to individuals with disabilities and physical education and/or physical activity settings. There are two main parts: (1) IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act; recent authorization of PL 108-446, and (2) Americans with Disability Act (ADA; recent authorization of PL 101-336). Connected to the laws and regulations with related to APE, undergraduate students should review subcomponents as the next step. For instance, there are key concepts such as Individualized Education Program (IEP), and Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Next, to match the laws and regulations which were established for ensuring the right of individuals with special needs, preservice kinesiology students must learn how modify and accommodate physical education and activity for population with diverse types of disabilities.

Study participants emphasized that undergraduate students should learn all the procedures for accommodation of individuals with disabilities in developmental approaches. Undergraduate student in APE course should know how to design physical education and activity programs to meet the unique needs of individuals in diverse environments. The above is the common factors from perspective of faculty, several of the interview participants expressed that only one course regarding physical education and activity for

individuals with disabilities is difficult part. Thus, undergraduate students should continuously engage in various settings regarding physical education and activity for people with disabilities when they have other courses such as method courses, student teaching and internship hours.

3.2 Course Delivery Approaches

Based on the interviewed data, there were several notions. Traditional approach of APE lectures will be not enough for undergraduate students in APE course. APE instructors should organize their courses with a variety of methods to promote learning of students. Particularly, APE is unfamiliar subject area for most undergraduate students in that they generally do not or have limited previous experience to interact with population with disabilities. By utilizing multiple approaches in APE course, students can be more critical and reflective to learn about people with disabilities in physical education and activity environments. As an instance, there are diverse methods such as weekly quizzes, reflections, discussion boards on online, and in-class activities. Recently, online resources enabled students to have diverse learning experiences. For instance, using podcast developed for APE could be supportive to improve practical learning of kinesiology undergraduate students. Particularly, diverse, and brand-new topics regarding APE are immediately accessible to match undergraduate student's interest area and their concentration^[11]. Multiple policies have been exited to guarantee the right of individuals with disabilities, APE instructors need to recognize reality issues connecting to their APE course at universities for undergraduate students. For instance, from research-based implications, kinesiology programs at universities frequently described that they did not provide enough training and practice for undergraduate preservice teachers which could be resulted in the lack of professional preparation when they become in-service professionals in the community settings^[12]. Thus, study participants in the study emphasized that undergraduate students in APE course must have practical learning and hands-on experiences in APE course as possible. Next session will explain about the importance of practical APE experiences from view of interview participants.

3.3 Practical Experiences

Study participants explained that APE related practical experiences will be key for successful learning for undergraduate students in APE. To promote practical and pedagogical skills, undergraduate students can participate in diverse practicum settings. To compensate limitations like lack of practical learning for kinesiology undergraduate students in relation to APE, interview participants continuously emphasized the importance of practical APE experiences.

In other words, undergraduate student could strengthen their pedagogical content knowledge and skill if they engage in various settings of APE in the community. Practical learning experiences of APE could have several options. Undergraduate students can participate in on campus or off campus-based settings to work with population with disabilities.

Interviewed faculty in the study explained that APE instructors should search given options depending on their circumstances. Additionally, going diverse settings including public schools, community facilities, and working with diverse types of age groups and disabilities will lead undergraduate students to broaden their understanding and promote professional development as preservice kinesiology undergraduates.

3.4 Contextual Variables

Interviewed faculty of this study pointed out the importance of contextual factors in relation to APE course delivery. Kinesiology department at universities include multiple concentrations such as physical education teacher education, and exercise science. Under these two primary lines, all the subcomponents of the university will be differently organized. Moreover, population of students and faculty, social and physical characteristics of the institutions will be related to atmosphere of each institution. Institution can be in suburban and urban areas. There are diverse tiers under university system, which often described as research I, and teaching school. Also, kinesiology department could include both undergraduate (Bachelor's degree) and graduate programs (master and doctoral degree) or undergraduate program only. Depending on the concentrations, major and minor requirements for undergraduate students will be various in terms of the curriculum. By considering all the factors related to institution, APE instructor should provide their courses.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study are consistent with the previous literature. Faculty indicated the importance of practical learning experiences of APE for undergraduate students which were aligned with the previous literature [13, 14, 15]. If undergraduate students will engage in diverse practicum settings regarding APE, positive learning outcomes such as improvement of practical, pedagogical skills and confidence level are expected [16, 17, 18]. To organize APE course as university level instructor, it will be important to include the most needed and basic concepts regarding APE. Undergraduate students should be guided developmentally to systematically learn with related to APE concepts. To promote student leadership and professional development, APE course should have various resources and modules. APE course should be also contextual to consider the characteristics of universities, programs, and physical environment.

5. Conclusion

To lead successful preparation of in-service kinesiology students at universities, there are several suggestions from the study participants. Basic but most needed contents with multiple delivery methods in APE course should be available for undergraduate students. Compared to traditional approach for course delivery, the current APE course can be organized with diverse contents using both online and offline methods. Also, practicum will be integral part to strengthen pedagogical knowledge for undergraduate students so that preservice kinesiology students could be more competitive professionals after their graduations. APE instructors at universities need to prepare their APE course delivery by seeing diverse concentrations of their programs and the physical, social characteristics of institution.

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