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Seeing Eye to Eye: Contrasting Perspectives and Access to Research for Physical Education Teachers and Academics

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ABSTRACT

Within the field of physical education (PE), a research-to-practice gap is widespread. Yet, the need for the use of educational research and research-informed practices to improve student learning is evident. The purpose of this study was to examine the variations in understanding between PE teachers and academics regarding their definition and conceptualization of research. This study developed a survey involving 215 participants (74 PE teachers, 117 PE academics) that explored their definitions of research and sources of information access. Findings reveal significant differences between PE teachers and academics about the definition of research and access to information. PE academics prioritize systematic approaches, while teachers focus on application. In addition, logistic regressions show notable differences in information access between the two groups. This study highlights the need for PE academics to better communicate and collaborate with physical educators to bridge the research-to-practice gap.

KEYWORDS

Knowledge dissemination; knowledge translation; social media; academic journals; research-informed practice

Teaching constitutes a complex practice that continually prompts educators to seek effective pedagogical strategies. To identify these strategies and practices, teachers need to distinguish efficient teaching strategies, identify pedagogical philosophies, and determine the extent to which a specific activity promotes student learning outcomes (British Educational Research Association [BERA], 2014; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990; Montgomery & Smith, 2015). Within this archetype, educational research can be conceptualized as a tool to lead educators to identify these strategies and approaches while providing valuable nuances associated with pedagogy. The use of research within an educator's praxis may be vital across subject foci, especially among teachers who teach dynamic and often marginalized subjects such as physical education (PE; Richards et al., 2018).

Along with daily managerial tasks and staying informed of best practices akin to their classroom-based peers, PE teachers must regularly juggle additional tasks such as: (a) assess physical activity and motor skills (Kinnunen & Lewis, 2013; Townsley & McNamara, 2021); (b) advocate for their discipline to classroom teachers and administrators (Kinnunen & Lewis, 2013; Richards et al., 2018); and (c) manage student behaviors within dynamic environments and activities (Kinnunen & Lewis, 2013; Morgan & Hansen, 2008).

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Evidence has shown that physical educators' use of research-informed practices can result in a meaningful impact on students' learning and overall experience (Kirk, 2010; Lonsdale et al., 2013; Tsuda et al., 2021). Ward et al. (2015) demonstrated that providing PE teachers with professional development (PD) paired with direct feedback following their lessons led to a significant improvement in their pedagogical content knowledge and student learning outcomes, showcasing moderate to large effect sizes when compared to a control group.

Given the potential benefits of translating research evidence into practice, educational researchers have long been perplexed as to why research amongst PE teachers is seldom used (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990; Montgomery & Smith, 2015). The literature to-date has provided a myriad of reasons for the limited utilization of research by PE teachers. PE teachers have voiced the belief that academics and their research publications focus too heavily on theoretical frameworks and may not be directly related to their daily tasks (Armour, 2017, McNamara et al., 2021; Montgomery & Smith, 2015; Vanderlinde & van Braak, 2010). Additionally, the use of technical and other jargonistic language can be difficult for K-12 practitioners to interpret (Binswanger, 2015; Borg, 2010), raising questions about the accessibility and applicability of research. Coincidentally, publishers of academic journals frequently have excessive paywalls that further increase the likelihood of practitioners being unable to access research, with reports that only half of PE teachers have access to a library with academic journal subscriptions (McNamara et al., 2021). In simpler terms, teachers may find academic research less relevant to their professional lives given that academic research might not be geared toward solving practical problems, with little focus on the immediate application of findings to real-world situations. Conversely, academics may tend to understand and value research based within specific methodologies or theoretical frameworks used to expand knowledge in a particular field, without necessarily considering immediate practical applications.

McNamara et al. (2021) emphasized that although PE teachers may value educational research, teachers rarely use educational research to guide their practice nor it accessible. Within this study, they surveyed 124 adapted PE teachers[1] on their perceptions of the utility of educational research and the sources that they used to identify it. Participants reported accessing research mostly through such sources as consulting with colleagues, state conferences, and practitioner journals. Intriguingly, many indicated that they had used research, particularly regarding areas pertinent to their class experiences, such as behavior management and advocacy for students with disabilities. Interestingly, the data suggested a significant correlation between higher levels of education and experience, leading to lower perceptions regarding the validity and utility of research. Of further interest, most participants reported "conducting their own research" (McNamara et al., 2021). This conflicts with prior evidence related to practitioners conducting research given the reported barriers that may be faced while attempting to use or conduct research (Binswanger, 2015; Montgomery & Smith, 2015). This finding may be partially due to McNamara et al. failing to provide a definition of educational research, bringing into question how PE teachers conceptualize and define research. This work directly informs the current investigation into how differing conceptualizations of educational research among teachers and academics may contribute to the persistent research-to-practice gap in PE. As it is plausible that some of the research-to-practice gap may be attributable to the differences in how higher education professionals – who will be referred to as "academics" henceforth – and PE teachers define and conceptualize research and the broader scientific process.

Although there have been calls to increase teacher and teacher educators' engagement with research at an international level (BERA, 2014), each group may view the usefulness of research or what constitutes research in distinctly different ways (Vanderlinde & van Braak, 2010). For decades, scholars have made arguments that academics and teachers across various fields may conceptualize research and its' relevance quite differently (Kieser & Leiner, 2009, 2012). For example, Bartunek and Rynes (2014) posit that the divergent logic employed by academics and teachers not only shapes their problem-solving approaches but also contributes to a broader systemic self-referentiality, a phenomenon noted in various fields, including education (Kieser & Leiner, 2009). This self-referential nature implies these systems tend to reinforce their own internal structures, norms, and modes of thinking, potentially creating insular environments that hinder the integration of new insights and methodologies. These differences certainly extend to academics and teachers, making it difficult for each group to authentically integrate one another's perspectives into their own systems, as well as communicate effectively with one another (Armour, 2017; Binswanger, 2015; Kieser & Leiner, 2012). For example, teachers may benefit more from engaging with inquiry-oriented research (we will define as practitioner research in this manuscript). This approach involves having the capacity, motivation, and opportunity to use research related skills to investigate what is working well and what is not fully effective in their own practice (BERA, 2014). Academics, however, may strive to use analytical and systematic processes to produce societal and scientific impact (D'Este et al., 2018). This can be viewed as problematic when scholars write their research to fit the parameters of these academic journals, which often are written in a manner that conforms to a specific set of standards that are deemed acceptable by other academics (Montgomery & Smith, 2015; Vanderlinde & van Braak, 2010). These distinctions become increasingly evident and pronounced in interdisciplinary fields like PE that are positioned across multiple inconsistently defined content areas, adding complexity to the potential divergent views on research and research-to-practice gap (Armour, 2017).

Despite the research-to-practice gap, the need for the uptake and use of educational research and research-informed practices to improve student learning is evident (Tsuda et al., 2021). Yet, the avenue for acquiring these strategies may often bypass engaging directly with empirical evidence (Bevan, 2004; McNamara et al., 2021). Hence, the purpose of this study was to examine the variations in understanding between teachers and academics regarding their definition and conceptualization of research in the field of PE. More specifically, the following research questions guided this inquiry:

(1) Do PE teachers define research similarly to PE academics?
(2) How do PE teachers and academics differ in accessing information related to their teaching?

Methods

Participants and data collection

A total of 215 participants (133 females, 73 males, 9 non-binary) from both public primary and higher education institutions (74 teachers, 117 academics) participated in this study. All US states were represented except for Delaware and Nevada. Participants' ages ranged from

Table 1. Demographic characteristics.

Characteristic	PE Teacher ($n = 74$)	Academics ($n = 114$)	Total
Gender			
Male	24	53	77
Female	49	84	133
Non-Binary/Third Gender	0	2	2
Prefer Not to Share	1	2	3
Education Level			
Bachelors	16	0	16
Masters	52	18	70
Doctorate	12	111	123
Other	2	4	6
Age			
Mean (SD)	41.64 (10.94)	48.95 (11.09)	46.41 (11.55)
Years of Exp*			
Mean (SD)	14.91 (9.73)	15.96 (11.55)	15.16 (10.95)
Race			
American Indian or Alaska Native	1	1	2
Asian	1	10	11
Black	2	8	10
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0	1	1
White	69	115	184
Other – Prefer Self-Identify	2	7	9

Note: SD = Standard deviation, * = Missing data, Exp = Experience.

23 to 79 years old, with a mean age of 46.41 years ($SD = 11.55$). Their years of experience ranged from 1 to 50, with a mean of 15.16 years ($SD = 10.85$). Most of the participants were female (61.9%), White (85.6%), and non-Hispanic (97.2%). Table 1 provides more detailed demographic characteristics. A survey developed to examine definitions and access of research differences between PE teachers and academics was administered to a convenience sample of these populations using a multistage sampling technique (Creswell & Clark, 2017) in which samples from multiple sources were recruited. These sources included approximately 60 PE associations that were asked to forward an e-mail containing the online survey to their members. In addition, the investigators asked physical educators of the year from the Society of Health and Physical Education (SHAPE America) to complete and forward the survey to their professional networks. Finally, the research team sent the survey to their personal colleagues and networks. The Dillman (1978) method was employed by sending reminders every 2 weeks over an eight-week duration. Inclusion criteria included being a current physical educator in the US or an academic who teaches PE college courses in the US. Research procedures were approved by the primary author's Institutional Review Board.

Instrument

To answer the two research questions, a survey was developed to examine the research orientation (definition of research) and collect where participants accessed disseminated research related to their field. Additionally, the survey collected demographic information, such as gender, professional role, and years of experience. The research questionnaire featured five forced-choice items. Each of the forced-choice items presented two statements that defined either "academic" or "practitioner" research. Academic research orientation prioritized systematic and methodological approaches, which prioritized comprehending

the fundamental underpinnings of a phenomenon (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2015). Meanwhile, practitioner research orientation centered on the direct improvement of practice related to their day-to-day professional lives, which also had comparatively less methodological rigor than the traditional orientation of research (BERA, 2014). For instance, one item asked them to choose between two statements: (1) "Research must be applicable to teachers and students' everyday lives to help navigate specific educational issues and problems (e.g., practitioner)"; and (2) "Research focuses on being applicable to teachers and students' daily experiences, or on the advancement of knowledge that does not solve a specific issue (e.g., academic)." The scores for research orientation were the sum of four items, and higher scores are more aligned with an academic research orientation, whereas lower scores are related to a practitioner research orientation. In addition, this section, which included two "dummy" questions, ensured participants were following directions and reading each question. If participants recorded the incorrect answer on both dummy questions, their data was excluded from the study.

Two different approaches were employed to identify the sources used by PE academics and teachers. First, we asked them to select the top three frequently used sources they use to obtain information for teaching their classes. A list of 11 options was provided as choices, including professional networks, academic journals, textbooks, social media, etc. Additionally, the survey asked participants about the sources participants used over the previous 12 months. A list of seven options was provided, including sources from the government (such as the Department of Education, district offices, etc.), social media, colleagues, media, written literature, and PD. This section inquired whether participants accessed research from seven possible overarching sources (yes/no). Access to research items was adopted and modified from a survey developed by McNamara et al. (2021) that examined PE teachers' research utilization.

After the initial development of the survey, four professionals with expertise in survey development and PE reviewed the survey and provided feedback on content relevancy and question structure based on the research questions. Based on their feedback, changes were made to differentiate the forced-choice research definition items more clearly, and additional options within the access to research items were embedded. Next, we conducted concurrent think-aloud interviews (Hagen et al., 2008) with four individuals who met the inclusion criteria (two PE teachers and two PE academics) to ensure the survey was accessible and to understand the rationale for their answers. This method provides a level of validity evidence for the survey, minimizes redundancy, and enhances comprehension of each item. Based on these interviews, minor adjustments were made to survey items to improve their readability.

Data analysis

A total of 295 participants started the survey and 227 participants completed it. Two dummy questions and one cross-check item were used to ensure participant adherence. Twelve participants who did not correctly answer both dummy questions and provided inconsistent responses to the cross-check items were therefore excluded. A total of 215 participants were included in the final analysis. To answer the first research question, a one-way ANOVA was conducted with the research orientation scores as the dependent variable and current responsibility (public school vs. higher education) as the independent variable.

To answer the second question, logistic regressions were administered for the seven potential sources used during the last 12 months as well as the top three most frequently used sources for their teaching. The independent variables were current responsibility (public school vs. higher education). All statistical analyses were conducted by IBM SPSS 28 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY).

Results

Do PE teachers define research similarly to PE academics?

The results indicated that the research orientation scores for PE teachers were a mean of 1.68 ($SD = 1.18$), with a 95% confidence interval (CI) of 1.40 to 1.95. For academics, the mean score was 2.07 ($SD = 1.19$), with a 95% CI of 1.88 to 2.28. The ANOVA results revealed a significant difference in research orientation between the two groups, $F(1, 213) = 5.57$, $p < 0.05$, partial $\eta^2 = .025$. Additionally, educators with bachelor's and master's degrees had a mean score of 1.67 ($SD = 1.16$), 95% CI 1.43 to 1.91, whereas those with doctoral degrees had a mean score of 2.13 ($SD = 1.20$), 95% CI 1.92 to 2.34. The results of ANOVA revealed a significant difference in research orientation between participants with and without doctoral degrees, $F(1, 213) = 7.66$, $p < 0.01$, partial $\eta^2 = .035$.

To what degree and where are PE teachers and academics accessing information related to their teaching?

Both groups identified professional networks and personal experiences as the top two frequent sources for obtaining information about teaching. However, academics more commonly followed research journals, professional journals, and textbooks, whereas PE teachers relied more on social media, websites, and conferences. A very small number of PE teachers use research journals as the primary sources of information related to teaching. They were the least frequently used sources for obtaining information for teaching.

The results of logistic regressions demonstrate significant differences in access to research between these groups. Specifically, PE teachers from public schools are significantly more likely to use professional networks, conferences, social media, websites, and continuing education as their primary sources of information for teaching children compared to academics. The odds ratios were 1.90, 1.90, 16.22, 1.85, and 2.92, respectively. In contrast, academics are significantly more likely to use textbooks, professional journals, and academic journals, with odd ratios of 3.97, 8.37, and 14.10, respectively. Although some may view professional journals such as the Journal of Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance (JOPERD) as being targeted toward PE teachers, the results indicate that only about 10% of PE teachers use it as the primary source of teaching from these journals. The academics were eight times more odds to use professional journals in their teaching than public school teachers. Table 2 provides more detailed information regarding the results of logistics regression on the top three frequently used sources they use to obtain information for teaching their classes.

The results regarding the sources PE teachers used in the past 12 months revealed that more than 50% of PE teachers identified professional networks, PD/conferences, social media, and media as their main sources for obtaining information. In contrast, academics

Table 2. Logistic regression results on the top three teaching sources.

Top three courses for teaching					
	B	S.E.	Odds	95% CI	*p*
Professional network*	.64	.30	1.90	1.05 – 3.43	.034
Personal experience*	.26	.29	1.29	.73 – 2.28	.376
PD/Conference*	.64	.29	1.90	1.07 – 3.35	.028
Social media*	2.79	.48	16.22	6.34 – 41.49	<.001
Website*	.61	.30	1.85	1.02 – 3.35	.043
Continue education*	1.07	.39	2.92	1.36 – 6.27	.006
Textbook**	1.38	.38	3.97	1.88 – 8.39	<.001
Professional journal**	2.12	.41	8.37	3.74 – 18.71	<.001
Podcast*	−.14	.52	.87	.32 – 2.39	.79
Past Classes*	.19	.59	1.21	.38 – 3.82	.752
Academic journal**	2.67	.49	14.10	5.48 – 37.83	<.001

Note: PD = Professional development, * Reference group academics, ** reference is physical educators.

Table 3. Logistic regression results on the sources used in the past 12 months.

The sources teachers used in the past 12 months					
	B	S.E.	Odds	95% CI	P
Government*	1.16	.30	3.20	1.76 – 5.80	<.001
Social Media**	1.24	.31	3.44	1.87 – 6.34	<.001
Network**	.118	.43	1.13	.482 – 2.63	.786
Media**	.497	.34	1.64	.851 – 3.18	.139
Written Literature*	3.17	.45	23.78	9.79 – 57.77	<.001
PD/Conferences*	.400	.35	1.49	.75 – 2.96	.253
Other*	.52	.57	1.05	.346 – 3.20	.927

Note: PD = Professional development, * Reference group Academic personnel in institutions of higher education, ** reference is physical educators from public school.

reported using a more varied range of information sources. More than 50% of academics used all sources except social media to get information to teach students.

The results of logistic regressions on the sources that participants used in the past 12 months demonstrated that PE teachers rely more on social media than academics. PE teachers have more than three times the odds of using social media compared to academic personnel, with an OR of 3.44 ($p < 0.001$). In contrast, academics have significantly higher odds of using sources from the government and written literature, with ORs of 3.20 ($p < 0.001$) and 23.78 ($p < 0.001$), respectively. Table 3 provides more detailed information regarding the results of logistic regression on the sources participants used in the past 12 months.

Discussion

This study sought to examine how PE teachers and academics differ in their definitions and access to research to better comprehend the nuances of the research-to-practice gaps and potential strategies to remediate it. Findings highlight that PE teachers and academics have differing views on what research is, with academics emphasizing systematic and methodological rigor while teachers prioritize the direct applicability of finding is their day-to-day life. Aligning with previous literature (Carpenter & Harvey, 2020; McNamara et al., 2022), academics appear to hold more value toward formally written documents such as research and professional journals as means to access information compared to PE teachers who

prefer more accessible and convenient sources, although perhaps more susceptible to inaccurate information, such as social media. Differences in sourcing information further highlight the divide in academics and practitioners' operationalization of "research" and its' purpose. The identification of these distinctions may serve as a crucial step toward developing targeted interventions and strategies to increase the use of research by practitioners.

Present findings demonstrate that PE academics tended to view research from a more "traditional" lens, while teachers lean toward a practitioner and inquiry-oriented perspective. Vanderlinde and van Braak (2010) explained these gaps can be monumental in relation to teachers implementing research-informed practices, as this may lead to these groups using completely different vocabulary when referring to what "is" and "is not" research through the lens of academics. Consequently, these differing perspectives are likely to impede collaboration between the two groups as semantic language related to research breeds confusion in communication. Martell et al. (2021) highlighted the adverse effects of teachers' limited involvement in shaping the knowledge base of teaching, resulting in a deficiency of information about classroom dynamics from an insider's perspective. Vanderlinde and van Braak (2010) delineated two distinct types of knowledge for academics and teachers, with one emphasizing scientific research-based knowledge and the other focusing on experiences driven knowledge. Bates (2002) contends these differences can be seen on full display at professional conferences, where tension arises between academics and teachers, as teachers seek new solutions to operational problems while academics pursue the creation of new knowledge. De Vries and Pieters (2007) acknowledged a fundamental gap between these groups, marked by differences in opinions regarding the nature of "knowledge" and "theory," variations in vocabulary, and distinct reward systems.

Although there were significant differences in research definitions between groups, there was a good deal of variance within each group, especially among academics. Suggesting that although a foundational difference may exist between these groups, they may not be insurmountable. There are multiple possible reasons for the varied definitions of research among academics, but it may be more feasible for some academics to act as mediators in bridging this gap. Collaborative initiatives that have long been called for to bridge this gap (e.g., Vanderlinde & van Braak, 2010) may involve academics facilitating dialogs and knowledge exchange between academics and teachers. Acknowledging and addressing the differences in views and vocabulary, especially around the nature of research and knowledge, could be a starting point for establishing common ground. Additionally, it may be helpful to address the lack of emphasis on using and conducting research in teacher education programs. Unlike academics who often receive additional training that equips them with skills to use and conduct research, teachers often lack formal training in research literacy. Consequently, they may underutilize research and research journals. To bridge this gap, teacher education programs may consider incorporating training on how to use, conduct, and appreciate research into the preparation of pre-service teachers. This approach is not a new idea. For example, the field of medicine has focused on research-informed practices by educating residents for over 30 years (Guyatt et al., 1992).

MacPhail et al. (2023) conducted focus groups with PE graduate students to evaluate the impact of two practitioner-research modules. These preliminary findings suggest that initiatives around teaching pre-service physical educators how to use research in practical settings can be effective by growing their understanding of and appreciation for

research to improve practices, as well as improving the skills to access, interpret, and apply research in PE settings. However, participants reported challenges, including limited time to engage with research, difficulty accessing relevant studies, and uncertainty about their ability to apply these skills as new teachers. Approaches such as these would not only enhance physical educators' reflectiveness and effectiveness as educators but could also cultivate a larger ethos that put greater value on academic research and research-informed practices.

In alignment with our findings around differing definitions of research, we also detected the sources used to locate research and information related to their profession were quite distinct. Academics value more "traditional" sources to attain their information than their teacher counterparts. This was most pronounced around the disparities in the use of academic and professional journals. This is not overly surprising as prior research has shown teachers often do not use these sources (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990; McNamara et al., 2021) and there are a vast number of barriers to educators accessing these traditional sources of research (Binswanger, 2015; Borg, 2010). Yet, scholars have demonstrated that academics often perceive they are addressing the research-to-practice gap by publishing in perceived practitioner journals which are targeted toward teachers, yet "these journals are not well known by school leaders and even unknown by teachers" (Vanderlinde & van Braak, 2010, p. 312). The present results confirmed that PE teachers are not reading professional journals, which academics believe are targeted toward teachers. This finding might contradict the notion that tailoring research to teachers or publishing in practitioner-oriented journals would bridge the research-to-practice gap (Armour, 2017; Martell et al., 2021). The long-standing assumption that researchers should disseminate knowledge to teachers through hierarchical models may not be effective if teachers do not engage with these scholarly sources (Broekkamp & van Hout-Wolters, 2007; Vanderlinde & van Braak, 2010). Even working with teachers to co-produce and develop research and knowledge, an action that has received quite a bit of attention as a means to reduce the research-to-practice gap in recent years (e.g., Armour, 2017; Martell et al., 2021), may not be especially helpful if this work is only published in academic or professional journals that teachers often do not use. Hence, along with participatory methods where academics and PE teachers collaborate to inform research, it is also vital to identify how to have this community engage more regularly with these primary sources.

The present research highlights that PE teachers rely more on accessible sources such as social media and websites to access research and information related to their work, a trend consistent with previous literature that has reported high use of these platforms among PE teachers (Carpenter and Harvey 2020; McNamara et al., 2021). While these sources offer convenience, concern arises when they become the primary means for accessing information (Carpenter & Harvey, 2020; Krutka et al., 2017). For example, Nelimarkka et al. (2021) examined a Facebook teachers' group with approximately 20,000 users over an eight-year period and found that although the benefits of engaging in this medium had professional benefits (e.g., sharing of tools, community development), there was a lack of quality PD hallmarks and often topics were only discussed at superficial levels. Further, only engaging with these sources may lead to a reliance on predominantly secondary and increase the likelihood of engaging with less credible information (Carpenter & Harvey, 2020; Krutka et al., 2017). Possibly exposing teachers to poorly conceptualized research and pedagogical practices.

One promising avenue to address these concerns is the creation of curated online platforms endorsed and potentially run by PE organizations, where PE teachers can access synthesized research findings, practical applications, and insights from researchers and practitioners. These practices have become increasingly popular among PE associations, and to a lesser extent PE journals. Research indicates that online and social media-based PD can be significantly more advantageous when facilitated by trained leaders and guided by established learning theories (Harvey et al., 2020; McNamara et al., 2019). PE organizations implementing a peer review process for content disseminated through their social media platforms present a compromise between traditional academic journals and the convenience of social media, addressing concerns of credibility.

Attending conferences and utilizing professional experiences and networks were used at similar rates, with more than three-quarters of both groups using these sources. These rates align with previous research that has shown that PE teachers frequently use their professional networks and conferences to access information and research (McNamara et al., 2021), as well as that academics regularly attend conferences to engage with research (Vanderlinde & van Braak, 2010). This suggests conferences may be the one established venue in which PE teachers and academics interact and engage in a level of knowledge exchange. Nonetheless, scholars have purported these conferences can also lead to an imbalanced hierarchy, where "conferences sustain traditional role divisions in which researchers present and practitioners consume" (De Vries & Pieters, 2007, p. 237). Hence, although these conferences are a vital place to capitalize on disrupting the ever-present research-to-practice gap, the paradigm in which PE teachers and academics interact in this context should be reevaluated. PE associations should consider organizing conferences or workshops that facilitate direct interaction between PE teachers and academics, fostering mutual understanding and collaboration. Additionally, examining the sustained effects arising from PE teachers and academics engaging as equal partners in conferences is essential.

Limitations

Several limitations require consideration to interpret the results of the present study. Firstly, typical of survey research, the survey questions often lacked the capacity to unveil the underlying reasons behind participants' responses (Portney & Watkins, 2009). Future research endeavors should employ individual or group interviews to delve deeper into the usage and perceptions of research among PE teachers. This approach would enable researchers to pose follow-up questions and attain a more comprehensive understanding of the subject. Secondly, drawing comparisons among PE teachers and academics across different states and different types of universities may pose some challenges. The variability in teaching certificate requirements controlled by individual states in the US can result in significant differences in training and education. Thirdly, age was not included as a variable in our analysis, which may have influenced participants' definitions of and access to research. For example, generational differences in training experiences and technological fluency could affect how individuals engage with and value research sources (Volti & Croissant, 2024). Future research should consider age-related factors to better understand how they may shape research orientation and information-seeking behaviors among PE teachers and academics. Lastly, the reliance on self-reported results introduces a potential

bias, as the validity of the findings depends on the trustworthiness of participants' responses (Portney & Watkins, 2009).

Conclusion

This inquiry highlights differences in defining and accessing research within the domain of PE among teachers and academics necessitates targeted interventions to ameliorate the pronounced gap between research and practice. Increasing PE teachers' use of research and research-informed practices is pivotal for improving their practice. In addition, it is important for PE academics to better understand, communicate, and collaborate with PE teachers as they will help them better understand the feasibility and relevance of their scholarship. Yet, these groups often do not interact and collaborate in meaningful ways. Moreover, these groups often use the term "research" to mean *at least* two distinct concepts; as such, there is a potential that even when these groups communicate with one another, they may be conflating terms that hold vastly different values around specific aspects of research. For instance, the purpose of research from academia is to advance understanding in their field, with an emphasis on contributing to advancing the current body of knowledge. In contrast, the purpose of research for teachers may be to solve the problems they may face. Hence, it is necessary to identify means to create a shared set of language and value systems around research in the field of PE, as well as capitalize on the sources used to access information and research related to PE. These findings resonate with emerging arguments in adapted PE emphasizing that sustainable progress will require dismantling top-down knowledge hierarchies and embracing collaborative, practice-informed research models (Haegele & Yun, 2025). Subsequent research initiatives should delve into and evaluate innovative strategies to develop more collaborative relationships between PE teachers and academics, as well as around disseminating research to PE teachers. This should involve the development of user-friendly platforms, summarization techniques, and visual aids that display research findings for immediate practical application.

Note

1. Adapted PE has the overall objectives as general PE but focuses on individualizing instruction and curriculum based on students with disabilities' unique needs (Winnick & Porretta, 2022).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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