

INTEGRATING HUMANISTIC VALUES IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION: A FOCUS ON CURRICULUM DESIGN AND STUDENT-CENTRIC APPROACHES IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN CHINA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the integration of humanistic values, student-centric approaches, and holistic curriculum design in physical education (PE) programs at universities in Sichuan Province, China. Using a quantitative survey design, data were collected from 403 participants, including teachers and students, across 26 universities. Descriptive statistics were employed to analyze the data, revealing moderate integration of humanistic principles in PE programs. The findings highlight strengths in promoting health and well-being, leveraging technology for blended learning, and fostering teacher-student relationships. However, gaps persist in areas such as fostering empathy, enhancing community involvement, and providing individualized learning opportunities. The study underscores the importance of targeted interventions to address these gaps, including enhancing teacher training, incorporating student feedback, and aligning curricula with humanistic and interdisciplinary approaches. By addressing these challenges, PE programs can better support students' holistic development, fostering physical, emotional, and social growth. This research contributes to the growing body of literature on humanistic education and provides actionable insights for educators, policymakers, and curriculum designers aiming to improve the quality of PE programs in higher education.

Keywords: Humanistic Values, Physical Education, Student-Centric Approaches, Holistic Curriculum

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the primitive society, sports are only a means of making a living for people to dabble in. At the same time, sports are only a means for people to defend against the invasion of wild animals and fight between tribes (Omoregie & Omoregie, 2016). Therefore, the development of sports majors and humanistic qualities of primitive humans only reflects the spirit of warriors and the means of earning a living (Sun & Hu, 2017). However, under the dominance of powerful science and technology in modern sports majors, human cultural concepts of sports majors will gradually be technologicalized. The humanistic quality of sports majors is hidden behind the core of sports majors and hidden in the core of the main body of sports majors (Wu, X. 2021).

The humanities disciplines of sports majors have developed from a single discipline to a discipline group, which has the basis for forming a discipline system (Vlada Bilohur et al., 2022). In the sense of subject classification, these subjects form a new subject group according to the same subject nature, because these subjects have common characteristics. A discipline that is composed of humanities and social science research in a certain aspect or field. The

widespread acknowledgment of the humanistic concept within sports disciplines has significantly contributed to advancing the construction and development of humanities and social sciences in sports education (You & Mun, 2017).

Across the historical trajectory of physical education, the groundbreaking achievements of sports research are distilled and synthesized into foundational theories for physical education and practical sports courses (Light, 2011). As a result, the physical education in colleges and universities has formed a specific structure of physical education courses and teaching. The main structure of physical education in colleges and universities is mainly manifested in the relationship between teaching media, teaching and learning between teachers and students. The process of teaching activities is actually a process of information processing and transmission among the various subjects of teaching (Sailer, M., Schultz-Pernice, F., & Fischer, F. 2021). From the perspective of pedagogy, teaching activity is a very complicated process of cognition, thinking, psychology and practice. The teaching object is mainly reflected in the structural composition of multiple elements such as courses, textbooks, classrooms, lectures, experiments, and teaching effect evaluations (Wang, H., & Cui, J. 2021). These elements themselves are also a teaching microsystem, such as setting courses, compiling textbooks, organizing classrooms, prepare lectures, design experiments, formulate evaluation criteria, etc. And these links all contain more subtle and specific teaching behaviors and practical activities. The most critical and core work is to digest and absorb the development achievements of sports majors and transform them into new teaching elements, new subjects and new courses.

The construction of the discipline path for humanistic literacy within sports disciplines is the external manifestation of its goals, orientation, methods, implementation paths, and other aspects of discipline construction. Based on this, this study is based on the educational connotation and structural content of the discipline construction of humanistic literacy in college physical education majors as the theoretical basis, aiming to analyze the construction of humanistic literacy disciplines and the development of discipline paths in colleges and universities in Sichuan Province, so as to provide a basis for the development of humanistic literacy in college physical education majors in the future. The demands and development of discipline construction need to provide experience for reference.

1.1 Problem Statement

The significant strides in the field of physical education in China, especially following the reform and opening up in the late 1970s, have not only modernized the discipline but also introduced the integration of humanities into sports education. This integration aimed at cultivating a more holistic understanding of sports, recognizing its cultural, social, and ethical dimensions (Bao et al., 2020). The literature reveals a fragmented approach to embedding humanistic values within physical education, highlighting the need for a comprehensive framework that not only addresses these challenges but also leverages the unique opportunities presented by the regional context of Sichuan Province. The research gap, therefore, lies in the absence of a holistic and integrated discipline path that effectively cultivates humanistic literacy among physical education majors, preparing them to navigate and contribute to the multifaceted world of sports with a deep understanding of its humanistic aspects (Yanmei et al., 2023).

As national production and living standards rise, so does the public's emphasis on physical health, driving a shift in the objectives of contemporary education to include national health goals. This shift reveals a critical shortfall in traditional physical education (PE) ideologies, which now struggle to fulfill modern educational demands. Today's university students seek a holistic form of health that encompasses both physical and mental well-being, influenced significantly by social interactions and changes in the internal ecological environment of educational institutions. These changes challenge the conventional boundaries of PE teaching in universities, necessitating a reform in physical education that encompasses several key issues. The growing significance of physical education, propelled by the widespread adoption of quality education, has elevated its academic standing within higher education. Concurrently, the competitive environment within universities has intensified, marked by a race for talent, technology, and projects, leading to a decline in the ecological quality of university campuses. In response, universities have initiated various institutional reforms aimed at attracting more students to their campuses, acknowledging the evolving landscape of physical education and its increasing relevance to student health and institutional competitiveness (Kuh et al., 2006; Tremblay et al., 2012b).

Developing a comprehensive discipline path for humanistic quality within physical education majors in universities situated in Sichuan Province, China faces several challenges. Firstly, there exists a notable gap between the external goals, methods, and implementation strategies, and the internal content and training path of discipline construction. This lack of cohesive integration undermines the effectiveness of current strategies aimed at promoting humanistic literacy (Adomat et al., 2021). Secondly, the predominant focus on skill-based education within physical education programs tends to overshadow the humanistic components, leaving students with limited awareness of the broader societal implications and cultural values of sports (Dai, 2014). Thirdly, students often lack exposure to the diverse humanities aspects related to sports, including its history, politics, and traditional practices, which restricts their comprehension and appreciation of sports' cultural heritage (Ekholm, 2016). Lastly, inadequate attention to the regional context, with a heavy reliance on Western models, fails to address the unique challenges and opportunities within the Chinese context, thereby limiting the potential for a more relevant and impactful curriculum (Li, 2022). These challenges collectively hinder the development of a comprehensive discipline path for humanistic quality within physical education majors in Sichuan Province universities. This study mainly addresses the following specific research questions.

1. What is the current status of integrating humanistic values (diversity and inclusion, health and well-being, holistic approach) into physical education courses at universities?
2. How are student-centric approaches implemented within physical education curricula, particularly in fostering student-centered learning and enhancing instructor qualities?
3. What is the status of holistic curriculum implementation in physical education programs, focusing on curriculum design, pedagogy, and practical experiences?

2.0 THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework for this study establishes the theoretical foundation for understanding how humanistic approaches can be effectively integrated into physical education

(PE) curricula in higher education institutions across China, with a particular focus on Sichuan Province. The framework is structured around three primary pillars—humanistic values, student-centric pedagogy, and holistic curriculum design—which collectively contribute to a comprehensive model of **Humanistic Physical Education (HPE)** aimed at fostering physical, mental, and social well-being.

Humanistic Physical Education (HPE)

At its core, Humanistic Physical Education (HPE) is an educational model that prioritizes the development of the whole person by integrating humanistic values into teaching, learning, and curriculum design. It shifts the focus of PE from purely physical performance to a more inclusive approach that fosters personal growth, empathy, ethical awareness, and social engagement. HPE aims to:

- Create a supportive and inclusive learning environment where students feel respected, valued, and empowered.
- Promote the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of students, recognizing that physical education is essential for holistic development.
- Encourage active participation and collaboration, enabling students to develop life skills such as leadership, teamwork, and resilience.

The HPE model bridges the gap between theoretical principles and practical applications, ensuring that PE is not only a platform for physical activity but also a transformative tool for personal and societal growth.

1. Humanistic Values

At the heart of this framework are humanistic values, including diversity, inclusion, health, and well-being. These values underscore the importance of creating an inclusive educational environment where all students feel valued and supported.

- **Diversity and Inclusion:** By recognizing and addressing the diverse needs of students, PE programs can ensure equitable participation for all, irrespective of background or ability. Research by Hernando-Garijo et al. (2021) highlights how embracing individual differences promotes a sense of belonging, enhancing student engagement and growth.
- **Health and Well-Being:** Beyond physical fitness, PE should cultivate mental resilience and emotional stability, aligning with holistic education principles to prepare students for life's complexities (Dai, 2014).
- **Holistic Approach:** This approach integrates physical, mental, and emotional dimensions, reflecting a comprehensive view of education that nurtures the whole person.

By embedding these values into teaching and curriculum design, Humanistic PE transforms physical education into a vehicle for fostering empathy, ethical decision-making, and societal harmony.

2. Student-Centric Pedagogy

The framework emphasizes teaching approaches that prioritize students' needs, interests, and capabilities, ensuring their active participation and personal growth.

- **Student-Centered Learning:** Teachers play a vital role in crafting engaging lessons that resonate with the unique traits of their students. Active learning strategies—such as collaborative projects and peer-led activities—empower students to take ownership of their learning (Rus & Radu, 2014).
- **Instructor Qualities:** Effective instructors function as facilitators, fostering a supportive and non-authoritarian learning environment. According to Fletcher and Ní Chróinín (2022), positive teacher-student relationships significantly enhance student motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes.

This student-centric approach ensures that physical education not only imparts knowledge but also cultivates meaningful personal development.

3. Holistic Curriculum Design

A well-rounded curriculum serves as the backbone of this framework, integrating theoretical knowledge with practical experiences and interdisciplinary learning.

- **Curriculum and Pedagogy:** The curriculum should encompass diverse foundational, professional, and elective courses, equipping students with both broad and specialized knowledge. Incorporating humanistic elements, such as leadership, teamwork, and ethical decision-making, ensures students are prepared for real-world challenges (de Oliveira Freire et al., 2020).
- **Practical Experience:** Hands-on activities like sports, games, and community projects bridge the gap between theory and practice. These activities develop essential life skills such as collaboration, resilience, and adaptability.
- **Interdisciplinary Approaches:** Drawing insights from sociology, psychology, and cultural studies enriches the understanding of sports as a cultural and historical phenomenon, fostering pride and identity (You & Mun, 2017).

Implementation Strategies

The effective realization of this framework depends on the following implementation strategies:

- **Adapting Teaching Philosophies:** Educators should employ flexible, inclusive teaching methods that respect individual differences, thereby enhancing accessibility and learning outcomes (Hernando-Garijo et al., 2021).
- **Curriculum Optimization:** Periodic curriculum updates should reflect advancements in pedagogy and evolving societal needs. Incorporating diverse courses that promote physical, mental, and social well-being ensures continued relevance and effectiveness (Chen, 2023).
- **Engaging Students Actively:** Involving students in decision-making processes related to their education fosters a sense of ownership and accountability, leading to increased motivation and engagement.

By aligning these strategies with the framework's principles, this study aims to demonstrate that a humanistic approach to physical education can not only enhance students' academic and personal development but also prepare them to contribute meaningfully to society.

3.0 THE METHODOLOGY

3.1 Study Design

This study employs a quantitative research design to explore the integration of humanistic literacy into physical education (PE) programs at universities in Sichuan Province, China. A survey was conducted using structured questionnaires to collect data from educators and students. This approach allowed for the systematic collection of data to describe and analyze relationships between key factors influencing humanistic PE.

3.2 Population, Sampling Size, and Location

The study targeted 26 universities in Sichuan Province, selected systematically from a total of 52 undergraduate institutions. These universities represent diverse academic levels, including undergraduate, master's, and doctoral colleges. A total of 403 participants—comprising faculty members and students—were included to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the study's focus.

3.2.1 Sampling Procedure

The sampling process followed these steps:

1. **University Selection:** Using a systematic sampling method, every 2nd institution from the list of 52 universities was chosen, resulting in 26 universities.
2. **Participant Selection:** From each selected university, 10 faculty members and a proportionate number of students were randomly sampled, ensuring diverse and representative input.

This process provided a broad range of perspectives from both educators and students across different institutions.

3.3 Research Instruments

A structured questionnaire was developed to gather data on key components of humanistic PE, including:

1. **Curriculum and Pedagogy:** Evaluating the integration of humanistic principles in PE programs.
2. **Holistic Approach:** Assessing empathy, self-expression, and social awareness in education.
3. **Instructor Qualities:** Exploring the role of teacher training and support in humanistic education.
4. **Diversity and Inclusion:** Measuring efforts to address student needs and promote equity.
5. **Practical Experience:** Linking theory to practice through sports and activities.

6. Student-Centered Learning: Assessing student involvement in educational processes.
7. Health and Well-Being: Evaluating the program's impact on students' physical and mental health.
8. Holistic Curriculum Design: Analyzing how curriculum strategies align with humanistic education goals.
9. Physical Well-Being: Understanding how programs promote teamwork, self-esteem, and resilience.

All questionnaire items were rated on a Likert scale, with reliability confirmed through Cronbach's Alpha values ranging from 0.705 to 0.909.

3.4 Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the survey data. Frequencies, means, and standard deviations were calculated to summarize the responses and identify key trends. This approach provided clear insights into the current state of humanistic PE and the relationships among the measured variables.

The use of descriptive statistics ensured a straightforward and systematic analysis, offering valuable evidence to inform curriculum development and policy recommendations for PE programs in universities.

1. Demographic Profile

The demographic profile of the respondents provides an overview of their type, gender, and age distribution, offering context for the study findings. This section ensures data representativeness and helps establish the foundation for subsequent analysis.

Type of Respondents

The sample consists of 201 teachers (49.9%) and 202 students (50.1%), indicating a nearly equal distribution. This balanced representation ensures that the study incorporates both educators' and learners' perspectives, which is critical for an educational context where both groups play complementary roles in implementing humanistic values.

Type	Frequency	Percent
Teachers	201	49.9
Students	202	50.1
Total	403	100.0

This equal representation allows for a holistic understanding of the status of humanistic physical education, ensuring the findings are not biased toward one group.

Gender Distribution

Of the 403 respondents, 220 (54.6%) are female, and 183 (45.4%) are male. The slightly higher representation of females reflects the potential gender composition of the universities studied

and highlights the need to consider gender-based differences in perceptions of humanistic physical education.

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	183	45.4
Female	220	54.6
Total	403	100.0

This gender distribution ensures diverse perspectives, as gender may influence experiences and expectations in physical education programs.

2. Descriptive Analysis

This section presents findings based on the research questions, focusing on integrating humanistic values, implementing student-centric approaches, and the status of holistic curriculum implementation.

- Integration of Humanistic Values

The first research question explores the integration of humanistic values into physical education courses. Results are summarized below:

Domain	Mean	Std. Deviation
Overall Humanistic Values	2.86	0.742
Holistic Approach	2.53	0.672
Diversity and Inclusion	2.80	0.777
Health and Well-Being	3.25	0.967

- **Overall Humanistic Values:** The mean score ($M = 2.86$) indicates that respondents have a neutral perception of the integration of humanistic values. This suggests moderate progress, with room for improvement.
- **Holistic Approach:** With the lowest mean score ($M = 2.53$), the findings highlight inadequacies in promoting holistic education. Fostering empathy and emotional awareness needs significant attention.
- **Diversity and Inclusion:** A mean score of 2.80 reflects moderate implementation, with strengths in collaborating with external experts but weaknesses in engaging the community.
- **Health and Well-Being:** Scoring the highest ($M = 3.25$), this domain indicates relatively stronger integration, particularly in promoting healthy lifestyles, though stress reduction activities require improvement.

- Implementation of Student-Centric Approaches

The second research question examines the implementation of student-centric approaches, focusing on student-centered learning and instructor qualities.

Domain	Mean	Std. Deviation
Student-Centered Learning	3.09	1.081
Instructor Qualities	2.97	0.929

- **Student-Centered Learning:** The mean score of 3.09 indicates moderate implementation. While teacher-student relationships are relatively strong, more emphasis is needed on incorporating student feedback.
- **Instructor Qualities:** Scoring slightly lower at 2.97, this domain reveals that while holistic development and professional training are progressing, individualized learning opportunities and cultural integration are insufficient.

- **Holistic Curriculum Implementation**

The third research question assesses the status of holistic curriculum implementation, focusing on key elements such as curriculum design, pedagogy, and practical experiences.

Domain	Mean	Std. Deviation
Holistic Curriculum	3.06	0.870
Curriculum and Pedagogy	2.87	0.675
Practical Experience	3.28	1.363

- **Holistic Curriculum:** A mean score of 3.06 indicates moderate implementation, with strengths in blended learning approaches but limited emphasis on fostering socialization and personal values.
- **Curriculum and Pedagogy:** Scoring 2.87, this domain highlights areas for improvement, particularly in integrating humanistic principles and aligning teaching philosophies with holistic goals.
- **Practical Experience:** Scoring highest at 3.28, this domain suggests progress in engaging students and leveraging academic leadership but emphasizes the need for more robust evaluation systems.

The results indicate moderate progress across all domains, with notable strengths in promoting healthy lifestyles, teacher-student relationships, and practical experiences. However, areas like empathy, community involvement, individualized learning opportunities, and socialization require targeted interventions to enhance the integration of humanistic principles in physical education programs. These insights provide a comprehensive foundation for improving curriculum design and instructional practices in universities.

4.0 DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal both strengths and challenges in the integration of humanistic values, student-centric approaches, and holistic curriculum design in physical education (PE) programs at universities in Sichuan Province, China. These results align with global perspectives on the evolving role of physical education as a platform for fostering holistic development, while also highlighting critical areas that require attention.

4.1 Integration of Humanistic Values

The results suggest that while health and well-being are well-addressed, aspects such as fostering empathy and community engagement are less emphasized. Noddings (2013) emphasizes the role of care and interpersonal relationships in humanistic education, underscoring the need for PE programs to cultivate emotional intelligence and social awareness. Similarly, Hernando-Garijo et al. (2021) advocate for using diversity and inclusion as central themes in PE to promote a sense of belonging and societal harmony. The limited focus on these areas suggests an opportunity to expand the curriculum to better integrate these essential humanistic values.

4.2 Student-Centric Approaches

Student-centered learning and instructor qualities are moderately implemented but lack depth in critical areas such as individualized learning and cultural integration. Research by Fletcher and Ní Chróinín (2022) highlights the importance of teacher-student relationships in enhancing student motivation and engagement, which aligns with the findings of this study. However, the lack of focus on adapting teaching methods to meet diverse student needs, as discussed by Rus and Radu (2014), limits the effectiveness of these approaches. Strengthening teacher training and providing continuous professional development can address these gaps and empower educators to adopt more inclusive and student-focused teaching strategies.

4.3 Holistic Curriculum Implementation

The implementation of holistic curriculum design demonstrates moderate progress, particularly in leveraging technology and interdisciplinary approaches. According to You and Mun (2017), integrating sociology, psychology, and cultural studies can enrich PE programs by providing students with a deeper understanding of the societal impact of sports. However, challenges remain in fostering personal growth and socialization, as noted by de Oliveira Freire et al. (2020), who argue that curriculum design should prioritize leadership, teamwork, and ethical development. Addressing these gaps can ensure that PE programs not only impart physical skills but also nurture critical life skills and humanistic qualities.

In summary, the findings reflect global trends in education while highlighting the unique challenges faced by universities in Sichuan Province. By addressing gaps in empathy, inclusivity, and practical application, PE programs can evolve into transformative spaces for holistic student development.

5.0 CONCLUSION

This study explored the integration of humanistic values, student-centric approaches, and holistic curriculum design in physical education programs at universities in Sichuan Province, China. The findings reveal moderate progress, with notable strengths in health and well-being, teacher-student relationships, and technological integration. However, critical gaps in fostering empathy, enhancing community engagement, and providing individualized learning opportunities persist.

These results emphasize the importance of targeted reforms to strengthen the humanistic dimensions of physical education. By promoting inclusivity, enhancing teacher training, and aligning curriculum design with interdisciplinary and ethical principles, universities can ensure that PE programs contribute meaningfully to students' physical, emotional, and social development.

This study provides valuable insights for policy-makers, educators, and curriculum designers, offering a foundation for further research on enhancing humanistic education in physical education programs. Addressing the identified challenges can create a more inclusive and impactful PE framework, aligning with global educational goals of holistic student development.

5.1 Ethical Approval

This study involving human subjects was conducted following ethical standards, and ethical approval was obtained from UPSI.

5.2 Conflict of Interest

The researchers declare no potential conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this study.

5.3 Data Availability

The data supporting the findings of this research are not publicly available due to confidentiality agreements with participants. However, data can be made available upon reasonable request to the corresponding author, subject to approval and adherence to ethical guidelines.

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