

The interplay of normative, descriptive, and prescriptive discourses in shaping student teacher development: an analysis of physical education inspection reports

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Purpose: This study aimed to analyze physical education (PE) inspection discourse for insights into mentoring practices and teaching quality improvement. Examining reports provided perspective into normative, descriptive, and prescriptive evaluation aspects shaping student teacher development.

Methods: The study involved 29 Tunisian inspectors of student teachers at the High Institute of Sport and Physical Education during the Fall 2022 academic term. In total, 117 pedagogical reports were obtained confidentially for discourse analysis. The analysis focuses on three types of discourse that may be present in the inspection reports: normative, descriptive, and prescriptive. The objective is to extract the most frequently used words and verbs by inspectors and to quantify the frequency of terms related to these three dimensions.

Results: Analysis of verb and word frequencies within different discourse types revealed a significant association (χ^2 test, $P = .0013$, Cramer's $V = .17$, moderate effect size). Pedagogical inspectors predominantly employed normative language, with 78.1% of words and 62.7% of verbs falling into this category. This dominance suggests a focus on guiding, advising, and encouraging teachers through references to specific standards and practices. Notably, verbs like "guide" and "suggest" (14% and 12% frequency, respectively) were prevalent, highlighting a collaborative approach over direct imposition.

Conclusions: This study challenges the singular focus on discourse modalities in inspector reports, revealing a multifaceted discourse ecosystem. While normative language sets standards and benchmarks, descriptive language captures classroom realities, and prescriptive language offers targeted guidance. This interplay fosters critical reflection, professional autonomy, and continuous improvement in student teachers. Inspectors, therefore, emerge as more than evaluators; they are facilitators.

Keywords: multifaceted discourse, normative guidance, collaborative mentorship, critical reflection, facilitator inspectors.

Introduction

The inspection process is a critical component in the field of physical education (PE), influencing not only the practices of teachers but also shaping educational policies and the overall quality of the discipline¹⁻³. The scope of physical education inspection extends beyond the mere assessment of individual teachers' competencies. It serves as a lens to examine pedagogical practices and highlight key issues within the field. The discourse adopted by inspectors and educational counselors plays a significant role in shaping teaching methodologies⁴. Therefore, understanding the normative, prescriptive, and descriptive discourses is crucial for enhancing the quality of education, particularly for student interns during their pedagogical internships⁵. Normative discourse within physical education (PE) inspection reports typically involves the establishment of standards, guidelines, and expectations for teaching practices,

often referencing predetermined benchmarks and educational policies. This discourse type serves to guide and evaluate teachers based on established norms and best practices in the field⁵. Prescriptive discourse, on the other hand, offers specific recommendations, suggestions, or directives aimed at addressing areas for improvement or enhancing teaching effectiveness. It provides targeted guidance to educators on how to enhance their pedagogical practices based on identified strengths and areas needing development⁵. Descriptive discourse focuses on providing a detailed account or analysis of observed teaching practices, classroom dynamics, and student engagement during inspections. It aims to objectively document and analyze the reality of teaching situations, offering insights into the implementation of instructional strategies and the overall learning environment⁵. Given inspection's key role, analysis of inspectors' observations offers insights into the evolving landscape of PE⁶.

The inspection process in PE stands as a fundamental element, exerting profound influence not only on individual teaching practices but also on broader educational policies within the discipline⁶. It serves as a comprehensive lens through which pedagogical practices are scrutinized and essential issues are illuminated. For instance, consider a scenario where an inspector observes a PE class where students are engaged in a game-based learning activity. By meticulously analyzing such practices, inspectors can discern effective teaching methodologies and identify areas for improvement, such as inclusive strategies for students with diverse abilities or innovative approaches to promoting lifelong physical activity. Furthermore, inspectors' discourse during inspections plays a beneficial role in shaping teaching methodologies and educational standards⁷. For example, a specific instance could be cited where an inspector provides feedback to a PE teacher about incorporating more student-centered learning approaches, emphasizing the importance of fostering autonomy and decision-making skills among students. Such feedback not only influences the teacher's practices but also sets benchmarks for instructional quality and student engagement within the field.

Specifically, inspectors' discourse could impact various facets of teachers' development like lesson planning, assessment, and professional identity⁷. An important question to consider is how student interns interpret this discourse, its role in their professional development, and the potential challenges it may present in their understanding. For both student and experienced PE teachers, the normative discourse of inspectors is of paramount importance in the educational landscape. It shapes the contours of pedagogical practices within the discipline and can also ensure the quality of teaching^{3,8}. Thus, PE inspectors play a decisive role in defining the standards, expectations, and guidelines that guide teachers and institutions. A pertinent question that arises is whether inspectors adopt the same discourse when interacting with student interns during their pedagogical internships.

The discourse of inspectors holds significant importance in the educational context, especially during the inspection of teachers, particularly student teachers. The process of inspecting student interns goes beyond a simple evaluation. It serves as an opportunity to provide guidance, encouragement, and support for the professional development of teachers⁹. It is emphasized that the fundamental principle of inspection should not be the domination of teachers, but rather constructive collaboration aimed at improving the quality of teaching. Pedagogical reports are not merely static documents. They shape the future by influencing pedagogical development^{10,11}. Recommendations and observations guide the professional development of student interns, thus contributing to the creation of competent and thoughtful teachers¹². To achieve this, inspectors use precise and detailed language to describe demonstrated skills, adopted pedagogical methods, and the overall effectiveness of teaching. Overall, analysis of discourse within pedagogical reports is integral for enhancing the teaching-learning process.

This study aims to elucidate inspection discourse, promote dialogue around mentoring practices, and ultimately uplift physical education quality by: (i) Identifying Dominant Discourses: Through discourse analysis of inspection reports, we will categorize the most frequently used language patterns associated with normative, descriptive, and prescriptive approaches. This will provide a clearer picture of the inspectors' focus and expectations for student teachers. (ii) Highlighting Dissonance: By analyzing the interplay between these discourse types, we may identify potential areas of dissonance between inspectors' expectations and the reported practices. This

dissonance could indicate a need for improved communication or alignment between inspectors and teacher education programs. (iii) Informing Dialogue: The findings from this study can be used to initiate dialogue amongst inspectors, teacher educators, and student teachers themselves. Discussions around the identified discourses can lead to a more unified approach to mentoring practices and ensure consistency in expectations for future PE professionals. (iii) Enhancing Quality: By fostering a collaborative environment informed by the analysis of inspection discourse, we aim to contribute to the overall improvement of physical education quality. This can involve ensuring consistency between inspection practices, teacher preparation programs, and ultimately, the delivery of effective PE instruction in schools.

Methods

Participants

The study sample comprises 29 Tunisian inspectors of student teachers at the High Institute of Sport and Physical Education of Kef (ISSEP Kef) during the Fall 2022 academic term. A total of 117 pedagogical reports were confidentially obtained for discourse analysis. These reports provide a comprehensive representation of the inspectors' discourse and their pedagogical perspectives.

Design

This study is designed to explore the discourse of pedagogical inspectors in Physical Education. The analysis is centered on three types of discourse that are potentially present in the inspection reports: normative, descriptive, and prescriptive. The objective is to extract the most frequently used words and verbs by inspectors and to quantify the frequency of terms related to these three dimensions. This linguistic choice is intended to reflect the inspectors' orientation towards practices that align with their pedagogical conceptions.

Procedure:

Pedagogical reports were confidentially obtained with informed consent from the inspectors following approval from the ISSEP Kef ethics committee. The selection of reports was based on a criterion that ensured a broad coverage of student teacher grades and specializations. This approach was adopted to ensure a comprehensive analysis of the discourse used across different levels and areas of physical education.

Data Analysis

Discourse Analysis: Three types of discourse were identified based on established frameworks¹³. These frameworks, which are seminal in the field of discourse analysis, provide a systematic approach to identifying and categorizing different types of discourse. They are based on linguistic features, communicative functions, and social contexts of the discourse:

Normative Discourse: This discourse focuses on evaluating the performance of student interns based on established standards, such as institutional regulations, educational standards, and pedagogical guidelines. The most frequently used words (e.g., norm, obligation, guideline, requirement, regulation, instruction, imperative, direct, law and order) and verbs (e.g., to opt, obligate, insist on, set up, fix, stop, focus, order, impose and establish) indicating compliance with normative discourse were collected.

Descriptive Discourse: This discourse involves providing a detailed account of the observations made during the internship period of students. The most used verbs (e.g., analyze, to tell, to detail, list, describe, design, state, suggest, mention and sketch) and descriptive terms (e.g., study, description, observation, evaluation, analyze, lightening, listing, illustration, characterization and approach) characterizing the actions,

behaviors, and teaching methods of student interns were noted. *Prescriptive Discourse*: This discourse goes beyond evaluation by offering advice, recommendations, and specific actions to enhance the pedagogical skills of student interns. Terms (e.g., planning, adaptability, integration, progression, anticipation, evolution, development, prospective, reflection and orientation) and verbs (e.g., plan, develop, prescribe, adopt, select, suggest, program, orient, anticipate and promote) indicating advice and recommendations in the reports were identified.

Inter-coder reliability will be ensured through a standardized coding manual and pilot coding exercises with independent coders.

Statistical Analysis

The mean and standard deviations (SD) were calculated after checking the data distributions based on the “Kolmogorov-Smirnov” test. Comparisons were made between variables using One-way ANOVA or Kruskal-Wallis test and the modified “Tukey” or “Dunn” test for post-hoc comparisons, when appropriate. The chi-square (χ^2) test was used to examine the relationships between frequency and other variables, while the “Cramer’s *V*” index was used to measure the strength of the relationship. The Cohen¹⁴ scale was used for the interpretation of “Cramer’s *V*”: Cramer’s *V* < .10 was considered weak, .10 to < .50 moderate, and \geq .50 strong relationship. The error threshold was set at 5%. Data analysis was performed using SPSS version 28.0 software (SPSS, Inc. Chicago, IL, USA).

Results

The comparison of the evolution of discourses type frequencies between verbs and words determined using the χ^2 test. The results showed a significant relationship ($P= .0013$, Cramer’s *V*= .17 [moderate]) between discourse type and used terms (i.e., words and verbs). This result show that pedagogical inspectors more frequently use normative words (78.1%) and verbs (62.7%) in the writing of their pedagogical reports. This indicates a normative discourse aimed at guiding, advising, and encouraging teachers by highlighting specific standards, practices, or orientations in physical education sessions. These terms and verbs can be strategically used to articulate constructive recommendations and advice in the normative discourse of the pedagogical inspector in Physical Education (Table 1). However, the verbs (20.4% and 16.9%) and indicative terms (13.5% and 8.4%) of descriptive and perspective discourse are limited respectively (Table 1). The utilization of these verb types and expressions is geared towards intricately delineating and accurately presenting the observations, practices, and conditions identified during the inspection of the session conducted by the student intern. This type of discourse aims to provide a detailed and objective image of the session's unfolding, highlighting strengths and areas that may require improvements. In the other hand, the expressions and verbs employed in a prescriptive discourse serve specific roles in guiding and directing student interns. This type of discourse also aims to improve the quality of teaching by providing targeted guidance and recommendations to these students.

Table 1. In-between discourses type comparisons of verbs-words rate

	Normative discourse	Perspective discourse	Descriptive discourse	Chi square	Sig. (P)	Cramer’s V
% Verbs (Frequency)	62.7 (121)	16.9 (38)	20.4 (46)	$\chi^2 = 11.59$.003	.17
% Word (Frequency)	78.1 (109)	8.4 (15)	13.5 (24)			
Total (%)	230 (69.5)	53 (13.2)	70 (17.4)			

Figures 1, 2 and 3 illustrates the percentage of frequency of indicative terms (i.e. words) and verbs used by pedagogical

inspectors in different discourse modalities (i.e., normative, descriptive, perspective).

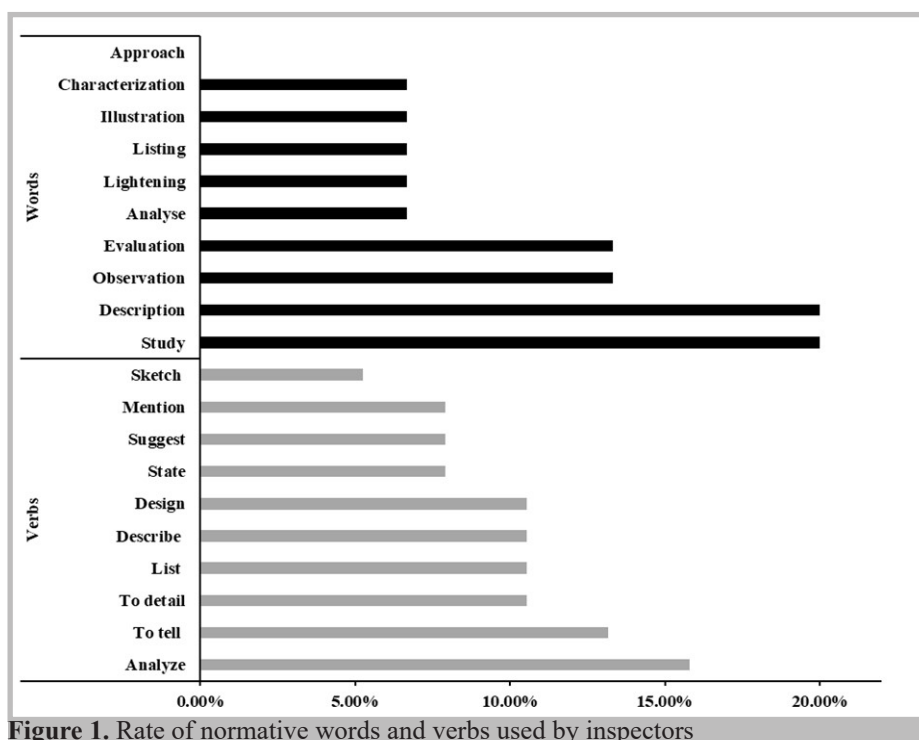


Figure 1. Rate of normative words and verbs used by inspectors

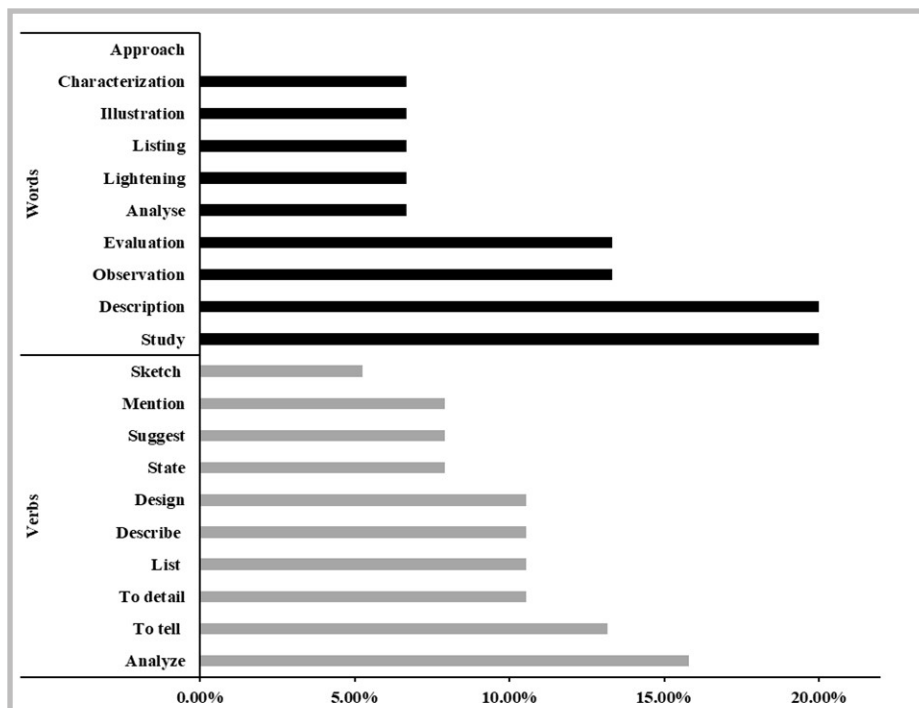


Figure 2. Rate of descriptive words and verbs used by inspectors

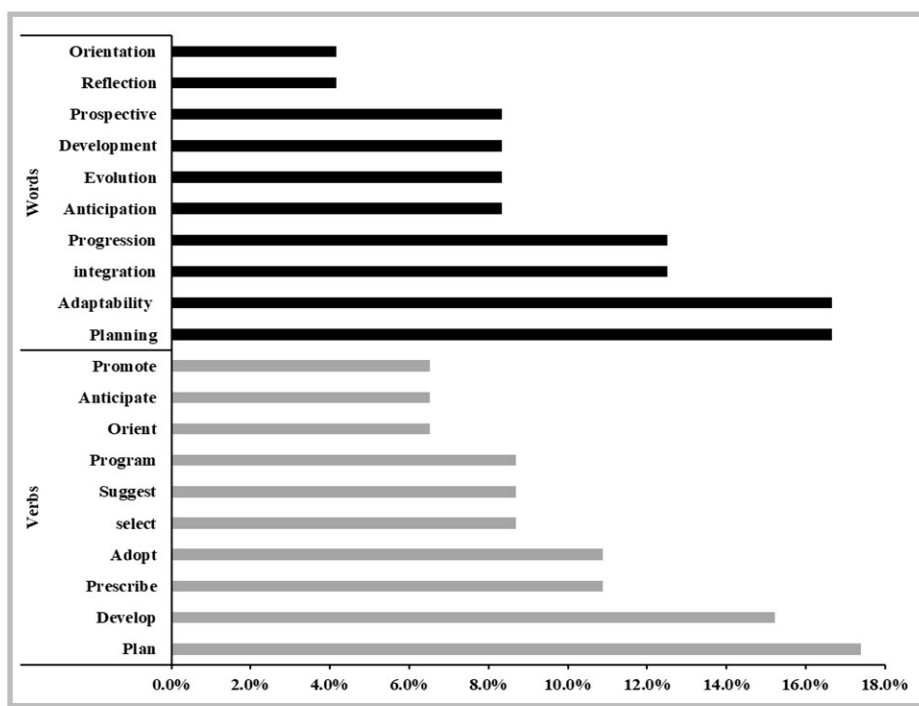


Figure 3. Rate of perspective words and verbs used by inspectors

Discussion

This study aims to address this gap by investigating the discourse employed by PE inspectors during student internships and its role in shaping these future educators' professional development and pedagogical practices. Understanding how inspectors' language, recommendations, and feedback guide student teachers' growth can have significant implications for improving PE teacher training programs, enhancing teaching quality, and ultimately benefiting student learning. The analysis of verb and word frequencies within different discourse types revealed a significant association. Pedagogical inspectors predominantly employed normative language, with 78.1% of words and 62.7% of verbs falling into this category. This dominance suggests a focus on guiding, advising, and encouraging teachers through references to specific standards and practices. Notably, verbs like "guide" and "suggest" (14% and 12% frequency, respectively)

were prevalent, highlighting a collaborative approach over direct imposition.

Inspectors heavily rely on normative discourse articulating standardized expectations within physical education sessions. Reports utilizing descriptive discourse, capturing authentic internship experiences, are less common. This imbalance stems from potential misconceptions of descriptive discourse as more empirical and less theoretical versus normative/prescriptive approaches. However, effective inspection should provide developmental guidance, not just enforce norms. The objective is not simply establishing norms but facilitating interns' academic and professional growth through career advising, elucidating job prospects, and offering personalized support¹⁵. Nonetheless, normative discourse manifests through inspectors' evaluations, recommendations, and directives shaping physical education teaching^{7,16}. This language seeks to maintain teaching consistency, quality, and relevance^{17,18}. Analysis reveals

dependence on predefined institutional criteria to evaluate intern compliance. Phrases like “in agreement with” demonstrate applying standards to assess performance^{19,20}. While dominant, overemphasis on normative discourse risks narrowing the developmental, supportive functions of inspection. Blending standards with descriptive detail and constructive feedback can enrich more holistic, compassionate mentorship. Ideal discourse should adopt a collaborative developmental approach versus directive norms alone.

The study compared the frequency of discourse types between verbs and words using the χ^2 test. The results showed a significant relationship ($P = .0013$, Cramer's $V = .17$ [*moderate*]) between discourse type and used terms. Pedagogical inspectors more frequently use normative words (78.1%) and verbs (62.7%) in their pedagogical reports, indicating a normative discourse aimed at guiding, advising, and encouraging teachers by highlighting specific standards, practices, or orientations in physical education sessions. These terms and verbs can be strategically used to articulate constructive recommendations and advice in the normative discourse of the pedagogical inspector in Physical Education. However, the verbs (20.4% and 16.9%) and indicative terms (13.5% and 8.4%) of descriptive and perspective discourse are limited respectively. The utilization of these verb types and expressions is geared towards intricately delineating and accurately presenting the observations, practices, and conditions identified during the inspection of the session conducted by the student intern. This type of discourse aims to provide a detailed and objective image of the session's unfolding, highlighting strengths and areas that may require improvements. The expressions and verbs employed in a prescriptive discourse serve specific roles in guiding and directing student interns and aim to improve the quality of teaching by providing targeted guidance and recommendations.

The descriptive discourse details sessions' progression through factual internship depictions²¹. Terms like “observed” and “demonstrated” provide insights into the on-the-ground reality²². While less frequent, descriptive accounts uniquely spotlight authentic student teacher development. Additionally, inspectors' perspective discourse constitutes informed, forward-focused analyses anticipating advances and issues in physical education^{23,24}. Outlining innovations transcending status quo practices^{25,26}, this strategic guidance spurs continuous betterment. Thereby, perspective discourse enables proactive future-oriented envisioning. Critically, prescriptive discourse should emphasize constructive skill improvements^{27,28}, not just evaluation. Inspection aims to provide supportive understanding, not hierarchical control. Interns require individualized guidance suited to their transitional learning stage – as trainees undertaking professional development^{29,30}, not fully certified teachers. Hence, they need customized feedback prioritizing growth over standardized norms alone to excel.

Inspectors' pedagogical reports significantly impact interns' careers, serving as guides for continuous professional development^{3,29,30}. To enhance effectiveness, reports should adhere to standardization while being tailored to each intern's requirements. The prescriptive discourse goes beyond evaluation by providing advice and specific guidance to improve the pedagogical skills of student interns^{16,19,24}. The discourse of inspectors should facilitate a partnership between the inspector and the student, contributing to the continuous improvement of teaching quality^{31,32}. This section emphasizes the crucial role of student internships in the educational process and the impact of inspector reports on the training of future educators. Consequently, this study advocates the adoption of perspective

discourses in the pedagogical reports of inspectors in PE and sports to align with the evolving needs of student interns.

This work aligns with the studies of Luff^{33,34}, identifying three discourses: the critical and problematic discourse of researchers, the pragmatic discourse of trainers oscillating between the descriptive and prescriptive, and the normative discourse of inspectors characterized by evaluation in accordance with predefined educational standards.

This study has several limitations that need to be acknowledged. Firstly, the quantitative analysis of word and verb frequencies may not fully capture the qualitative nuances present in inspector discourse, such as tone and context. This limitation suggests that certain aspects of the discourse may not be adequately represented in the findings. Secondly, the sample size of 117 reports, while representative of the study population, may be relatively small compared to the total population of PE inspectors in Tunisia. As a result, the generalizability of the findings may be limited. Additionally, the study's focus on a specific geographical context may restrict the applicability of the results to other settings with different educational systems or cultural backgrounds. Moreover, the reliance on written reports as the primary data source may not capture the entirety of inspector interactions during inspections, potentially overlooking valuable insights gained through verbal communication. These limitations underscore the need for caution in interpreting the findings and highlight avenues for future research to address these constraints and deepen our understanding of inspector discourse in PE.

Practical Applications

This analysis of 117 reports provides valuable insights to strengthen the student teacher evaluation and developmental process. Examining discourse patterns illuminates these documents' multifaceted impacts, highlighting each dimension's contributions to mentorship and growth. Therefore, inspector reports should be viewed as dynamic tools for growth, not static pronouncements of judgment. By embracing the power of each discourse type and tailoring their approach to individual needs, inspectors can foster a supportive and collaborative environment that empowers student interns to become skilled and adaptable educators. In doing so, they illuminate the path not just towards quality education, but towards educational excellence across the wider landscape.

Conclusions

This study challenges the singular focus on discourse modalities in inspector reports, revealing a multifaceted discourse ecosystem. While normative language sets standards and benchmarks, descriptive language captures classroom realities, and prescriptive language offers targeted guidance. This interplay fosters critical reflection, professional autonomy, and continuous improvement in student teachers. Inspectors, therefore, emerge as more than evaluators; they are facilitators. By harnessing the power of each discourse type and tailoring their approach to individual needs, they create a supportive environment that empowers student teachers to navigate the complexities of their internships and ultimately become highly skilled and adaptable educators. This reframed perspective not only benefits the physical education college but contributes to shaping a more dynamic and responsive educational landscape.

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Ethical Committee approval

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Institutional Review Board of the local committee for personal protection (CPP NO 0564/2023).

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Author-s contribution

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