

ANALYSIS OF LIFELONG PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN UNIVERSITY PHYSICAL EDUCATION AT THAI NGUYEN UNIVERSITY (VIETNAM)

Hoang Thi Huyen

School of Foreign Languages – Thai Nguyen University, Thai Nguyen, Viet Nam

ABSTRACT

With rising global health awareness and a shift to a "health-first" paradigm, physical education (PE) is evolving. Its function is shifting from just enhancing physical fitness and motor skills to fostering holistic student development and encouraging lifelong health competencies. Lifelong physical education is now a core principle of modern PE. It focuses on consistent participation in physical activity throughout one's life and its ongoing integration into everyday routines.

Thai Nguyen University (Vietnam) is a key regional higher education institution and plays a foundational role in developing human resources. However, the PE system still faces limitations in applying lifelong physical education concepts. This study adopts a lifelong physical education perspective to analyze current issues in PE at Thai Nguyen University and proposes improvement strategies. The goal is to offer references for reforming university PE and promoting students' long-term health.

Keywords: *University Physical Education; Lifelong Physical Education; PE Reform; Health Promotion; Thai Nguyen University.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Amid rapid socio-economic development and profound changes in modern lifestyles, global public health challenges have become increasingly prominent. These include rising obesity rates, the growing prevalence of sub-healthy conditions, and the widespread adoption of sedentary lifestyles. Such factors have become critical determinants of overall health status. Reports from the World Health Organization (WHO) and numerous public health studies indicate that insufficient physical activity is a major contributor to the increasing prevalence and early onset of chronic diseases.

In this context, enhancing individuals' levels of physical activity through educational systems and promoting sustained health behaviors have become shared concerns across both educational sciences and public health domains.

As a fundamental educational medium for promoting physical and mental development, physical education is undergoing a clear transformation in its functional role. Traditional PE has primarily focused on the acquisition of

motor skills, short-term physical fitness improvement, and meeting assessment requirements. However, driven by modern educational philosophies, its content and objectives are expanding from a "skill-oriented" approach toward "health-oriented" and "holistic development" paradigms.

Within this transition, fostering students' scientific health awareness, mastery of self-directed exercise methods, and the ability to maintain consistent physical activity over time has become a key criterion for evaluating the quality of university PE.

The concept of lifelong physical education emerges from this transformation. Its core objective is to enable individuals, through systematic PE, not only to acquire fundamental motor competencies during schooling but, more importantly, to develop intrinsic motivation and the capacity for sustained engagement in physical activity. This ultimately transforms physical exercise into an integral component of one's lifelong lifestyle. This perspective emphasizes continuity and autonomy in physical activity

behavior, marking a shift from “stage-based education” to “lifelong development,” and holds significant implications for public health enhancement.

From a developmental perspective, the university stage is a critical period for shaping life values and stabilizing lifestyle patterns, as well as a “window of opportunity” for forming exercise habits. During this period, students face academic pressures and social adaptation challenges while gradually establishing stable behavioral patterns. Consequently, the quality of university PE significantly influences long-term health behaviors and post-graduation lifestyle choices. Failure to establish scientific exercise awareness and stable activity habits during this stage may lead to insufficient physical activity and accumulated health risks in later life.

Thai Nguyen University, as a major comprehensive university in Northern Vietnam, holds a significant position within the regional higher education system. The university has established a foundational framework in curriculum design, instructional organization, and sports activity implementation, thereby providing basic conditions for student participation in physical training. However, from the perspective of lifelong physical education, there remains room for improvement. For example, course objectives do not sufficiently emphasize long-term health behavior orientation; the cultivation of students’ self-directed exercise competence lacks systematic implementation; and extracurricular sports participation mechanisms are not yet fully developed. These factors, to some extent, constrain the deep integration of lifelong PE concepts into university education.

Therefore, a systematic analysis of the current state of PE at Thai Nguyen University not only facilitates a deeper understanding of practical challenges in the transformation of PE paradigms but also provides theoretical and empirical foundations for optimizing curriculum structures, innovating teaching methodologies, and enhancing comprehensive education mechanisms. At a broader level, this study contributes to advancing university PE reform, improving

students’ long-term health outcomes, and enhancing the overall quality of higher education.

2. CONCEPTUAL CONNOTATION OF LIFELONG PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Lifelong physical education (LPE) is a modern educational philosophy and a health development model in which individuals continuously and consciously engage in physical activity throughout the entire lifespan. Over time, physical activity behavior is gradually internalized into a stable, regular, and self-regulated lifestyle. This concept not only emphasizes learning and practicing physical activities within formal educational settings but also places particular importance on individuals’ ability to continue engaging in scientifically grounded exercise after leaving formal education, driven by intrinsic motivation and health needs. Through this process, long-term maintenance and optimization of physical health status can be achieved.

From a structural perspective, lifelong physical education is primarily characterized by three core dimensions: continuity, autonomy, and scientificity.

- Continuity refers to the sustained and stable engagement in physical activity over time, extending across the entire lifespan—from adolescence to old age—rather than being intermittent or short-term.
- Autonomy emphasizes the role of intrinsic motivation in participation, representing a transition from passive involvement to active choice, and the formation of physical activity behavior patterns based on personal interests, individual needs, and health awareness.
- Scientificity requires that physical activity be grounded in exercise physiology, sport training theory, and health management knowledge. This enables individuals to appropriately regulate exercise intensity, frequency, and modality, thereby avoiding unstructured or unsafe practices, minimizing the risk of sports injuries, and enhancing both safety and long-term effectiveness.

From the perspective of educational science, lifelong physical education is not merely a mode of participation in sports activities, but a value-oriented educational approach aimed at promoting holistic human development. Its core focus extends beyond the transmission of motor skills to the cultivation of systematic exercise habits, the deep internalization of health consciousness, and the development of long-term self-directed exercise competence. In essence, lifelong PE emphasizes a developmental pathway structured around the progression of “competence – habit – behavior.” Through this process, university students are expected not only to acquire sports-related knowledge and master motor skills, but also to establish stable exercise habits, ultimately integrating physical activity as a regular and natural component of their lifestyle. The integration of lifelong physical education into university PE systems carries significant practical implications. First, in terms of physical health, it contributes to improvements in cardiorespiratory function, motor coordination, and overall physical fitness, while reducing health risks associated with sedentary lifestyles. Second, regarding mental health, regular physical activity helps alleviate academic stress, stabilize emotions, and enhance psychological resilience. Third, in terms of social adaptability, elements such as discipline, competitiveness, and teamwork cultivated through sports activities contribute to the development of communication skills and social adaptability among students.

Therefore, lifelong physical education is not only a key trend in the reform of modern university PE but also an essential component in achieving the comprehensive educational objective of moral, intellectual, physical, and aesthetic development. The effective integration and deepening of this concept within university PE teaching will facilitate the transition from a “stage-based education model” to a “lifelong physical development support system,” thereby better meeting students’ long-term health development needs.

3. EXISTING ISSUES IN UNIVERSITY PHYSICAL EDUCATION

In the context of the deepening conceptualization of lifelong physical education (LPE), university physical education still faces a number of structural and cognitive challenges in practice. To varying degrees, these issues constrain the development of students’ lifelong sports awareness and diminish the effectiveness of the educational functions of PE.

3.1 Insufficient Emphasis on Lifelong Physical Education Concepts

At present, in some higher education institutions, the status of physical education has not been fully recognized. The subject is often regarded as auxiliary or marginal, with its primary function limited to fulfilling teaching requirements, meeting credit obligations, and achieving physical fitness assessment standards. Under such an orientation, PE tends to function more as a “course requirement” rather than as a means of fostering students’ long-term development.

In teaching practice, some instructors continue to focus predominantly on the transmission of motor skills and the attainment of technical proficiency standards, while insufficient attention is given to the broader educational value of PE in cultivating exercise habits and promoting students’ long-term health development. As a result, instructional objectives tend to be short-term and outcome-oriented.

At the same time, students are prone to developing an “assessment-driven” mindset, whereby participation in physical activity is primarily motivated by the need to fulfill evaluation requirements rather than by intrinsic interest or health-related needs. This weakens intrinsic motivation and is not conducive to the formation of sustainable physical activity behaviors.

3.2 Weakness in Theoretical Instruction and Exercise Methodology

Within current university PE systems, the phenomenon of “emphasizing practice while neglecting theory” remains prevalent. Although students may acquire basic motor skills and

perform technical movements during class, their systematic understanding of exercise science, training methodologies, and health management knowledge is often insufficient.

This structural deficiency results in a lack of capacity for self-directed and scientifically informed exercise once students leave the classroom environment. For instance, many students lack a clear understanding of key principles such as exercise intensity regulation, training load management, and injury prevention strategies. Consequently, their physical activity tends to be unstructured, poorly planned, and associated with a higher risk of sports-related injuries.

This not only reduces students' willingness to engage in physical activity but also undermines the sustainability and long-term effectiveness of physical education outcomes.

3.3 Monotony in Curriculum Content and Teaching Methods

In terms of curriculum content, some universities continue to rely predominantly on traditional sports such as athletics, basketball, and volleyball. Meanwhile, the pace of curricular innovation remains relatively slow, with insufficient incorporation of emerging sports or diversified forms of physical activity. As a result, the curriculum struggles to meet the increasingly diverse and individualized needs of students.

Regarding instructional approaches, the traditional model of "teacher demonstration-student imitation" still dominates. Classroom interaction remains limited, and the active, central role of students in the learning process has not been fully realized. Contemporary pedagogical approaches—such as scenario-based learning, cooperative learning, and inquiry-based learning—have not been widely implemented, leading to a relatively monotonous classroom environment and reduced levels of student engagement.

This situation weakens students' ability to develop sustained interest in physical activity and undermines the formation of long-term motivation for sports participation.

3.4 Insufficient Motivation for Student Participation in Physical Activity

At the student level, insufficient motivation to engage in physical activity represents a critical factor affecting the implementation of lifelong physical education. A proportion of students continue to perceive PE primarily as a course requirement or credit obligation, without fully recognizing the relationship between physical activity and personal health development. Consequently, their level of initiative in engaging in physical exercise remains low.

In addition, students' participation in extracurricular sports activities is generally unstable. Physical activity behavior often exhibits a stage-dependent pattern—for example, increased engagement during assessment periods, followed by a significant decline when academic requirements are absent. This "short-term motivation" pattern is difficult to transform into sustained behavioral habits, thereby hindering the development of lifelong sports awareness.

Furthermore, due to insufficient scientific guidance and a lack of appropriate alignment with personal interests, some students are unable to maintain consistent exercise motivation. This contributes to disparities in levels of physical activity participation among different student groups.

4. OPTIMIZATION STRATEGIES FOR LIFELONG PHYSICAL EDUCATION

To address the structural challenges in implementing lifelong physical education (LPE) at the university level, systematic optimization is required across multiple dimensions, including curriculum design, pedagogical innovation, enhancement of practical systems, cultivation of exercise habits, and reform of evaluation mechanisms. Through these efforts, a more scientific, sustainable, and effective university physical education system can be established.

4.1 Developing a Systematic Curriculum Framework

Higher education institutions should adopt the concept of lifelong physical education as a core guiding principle and undertake a comprehensive

restructuring of existing PE curricula, shifting from a “skill-oriented” approach toward a “competency-based and holistic development” framework.

In terms of curriculum structure, it is essential to strengthen integrated and tiered design by establishing a multi-level curriculum system comprising foundational courses, extension modules, and specialized elective courses.

- Foundational courses should focus on enhancing students’ basic physical fitness and equipping them with essential motor skills, thereby providing a solid basis for subsequent physical learning and development.
- Extension modules should emphasize the cultivation of interest in physical activity and exposure to a diverse range of sports, thereby increasing students’ awareness of and engagement in various forms of physical activity.
- Specialized elective courses are designed to meet individualized development needs, enabling students to concentrate on one or more specific sports disciplines in order to improve their proficiency and develop specialized competencies.

Through the coordinated integration of these curriculum levels, the overall training system becomes more flexible and adaptive, while effectively accommodating differences in students’ physical conditions, interests, and developmental goals. This, in turn, contributes to enhancing the overall quality and effectiveness of physical education.

4.2 Innovating Teaching Methodologies

From a pedagogical perspective, university physical education should actively promote a transition from a traditional linear instructional model to a more diversified, interactive, and technology-enhanced approach, with the aim of improving instructional quality and increasing student engagement.

Specifically, it is essential to flexibly integrate teaching approaches such as scenario-based learning, differentiated instruction, and the application of information technology, thereby

creating a more open and dynamic learning environment.

- Scenario-based learning enables the simulation of real-life physical activity contexts or competitive situations, thereby enhancing students’ learning experiences and their capacity for practical application.
- Differentiated instruction allows for the adaptation of teaching content and requirements according to students’ varying levels of physical fitness and motor competence, ensuring that all learners have appropriate opportunities for development.
- The integration of information technology, including video analysis, physical activity data tracking, and online learning platforms, contributes to improving the scientific rigor and precision of instruction.

At the same time, it is necessary to strengthen the learner-centered orientation by enhancing students’ active roles in the learning process through approaches such as task-based learning, cooperative learning, and inquiry-based learning. These methods help to develop students’ self-directed learning capacity and their ability to sustain long-term participation in physical activity.

4.3 Strengthening the Practical System of Physical Education

Given the inherently practical nature of physical education, it is essential to prioritize the development of a comprehensive practice system that ensures effective integration and complementarity between in-class instruction and extracurricular activities.

Universities should expand extracurricular sports systems by organizing regular physical activity programs, interest-based sports groups, and multi-level recreational competitions. These initiatives provide students with continuous opportunities to engage in physical activity beyond the classroom setting.

In addition, it is necessary to strengthen the development and management of sports clubs through more structured and institutionalized

approaches. This enhances both the stability and self-regulatory capacity of students' participation in physical activity, gradually integrating exercise into everyday campus life.

Furthermore, institutions should improve mechanisms for integrating sports resources both within and outside the university, actively leveraging community resources and professional training facilities to provide more diverse and specialized exercise environments.

Through the effective integration of classroom-based learning and extracurricular practice, physical education can evolve from a "classroom-centered model" to a "life-integrated model," thereby enhancing both the sustainability and practical value of physical activity engagement.

4.4 Cultivating Lifelong Physical Activity Habits

The core objective of lifelong physical education (LPE) is the internalization of behavior and the formation of sustainable habits. Therefore, particular emphasis should be placed on cultivating students' physical activity habits through systematic educational processes and long-term developmental orientation.

In the teaching process, it is essential to strengthen health education in order to enhance students' understanding of the value of physical activity in improving physical health, regulating psychological well-being, and enhancing overall quality of life. This, in turn, contributes to strengthening intrinsic motivation for participation.

At the same time, students should be guided to master scientifically grounded exercise methods and fundamental training principles, thereby improving their capacity for independent organization and management of physical activity.

At the behavioral level, students should be encouraged to develop personalized and phase-based exercise plans, with flexible adjustments based on ongoing feedback and individual responses. Through continuous educational intervention and behavioral reinforcement, physical activity can gradually shift from an "externally imposed requirement" to an "internally driven need," ultimately leading to the formation

of stable exercise habits and lifelong sports awareness.

4.5 Establishing a Multi-dimensional Evaluation System (A Key Institutional Mechanism)

The traditional evaluation model, which is predominantly centered on examination scores, has increasingly revealed its limitations in meeting the developmental requirements of lifelong physical education. Therefore, it is necessary to establish a scientific, multi-dimensional, and dynamic evaluation system that comprehensively reflects the development of students' physical competencies.

First, higher education institutions should develop a comprehensive assessment mechanism that integrates both process-based and outcome-based evaluation. In addition to final performance outcomes, evaluation criteria should incorporate factors such as classroom participation, frequency of extracurricular physical activity, progression in motor skill development, and health-related behavioral indicators. This approach enables a more holistic assessment of students' learning and development processes.

Furthermore, a multi-source evaluation model should be implemented, combining self-assessment, peer assessment, and instructor evaluation. Diversifying evaluation agents not only enhances objectivity but also encourages students to engage in reflective practice regarding their physical activity behaviors, thereby strengthening their capacity for self-regulation and self-management.

At the same time, it is essential to establish a systematic and continuous feedback mechanism. Through regular feedback, students can clearly identify their strengths and limitations in physical activity, adjust their exercise plans accordingly, and gradually develop stable exercise habits.

From an institutional perspective, a multi-dimensional evaluation system not only enhances students' active participation in physical activity but also serves as a critical mechanism for ensuring the sustainability of lifelong physical education implementation. Therefore, it

represents a foundational component in the ongoing reform of university physical education.

5. CONCLUSION

Lifelong physical education (LPE) represents one of the core directions in the reform and development of university physical education in the current era, and it also serves as an important indicator reflecting both the quality of training and the level of modernization of higher education systems. The essence of this concept extends beyond merely improving students' physical fitness and motor skills during their university years. More importantly, through a systematic and continuous physical education process, it aims to cultivate long-term exercise habits and promote a healthy, scientifically grounded lifestyle among learners. On this basis, it contributes to the harmonious development of physical and mental health while establishing a solid foundation for students' adaptability in social life and future professional activities.

From a broader developmental perspective, the proposal and implementation of lifelong physical education constitute an inevitable extension and evolution of traditional PE models, reflecting a significant transformation from a "stage-based education" approach to a "lifelong development support system." In this transition, physical education is no longer merely a supplementary component within the curriculum but increasingly becomes a foundational element in promoting the holistic development of learners, with growing practical significance and long-term value.

For Thai Nguyen University (Vietnam), in the context of ongoing and intensifying reforms in physical education, it is essential to further strengthen the systematic implementation of lifelong PE concepts in teaching practice. Specifically, reforms should be coordinated across multiple dimensions, including optimization of curriculum structure, innovation in teaching methodologies, enhancement of practical physical activity systems, and improvement of evaluation mechanisms. These efforts will contribute to the establishment of a more scientifically grounded and contextually appropriate PE system that

aligns with the laws of physical development and the future developmental needs of students.

In addition, particular attention should be given to ensuring the systematicity and continuity of physical education by integrating improvements in classroom instruction with the expansion of extracurricular practice spaces. Through this approach, a more comprehensive PE system can be developed, within which students are able to gradually cultivate self-directed exercise awareness and lifelong physical activity competence through sustained, multi-level, and multidimensional participation in sports activities.

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