



What Makes a Difference Between Teachers?: Exploring South Korea's Early Childhood Physical Education Teachers' Competency

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Abstract

Physical activity in early childhood plays a crucial role in the holistic development of young children. However, challenges persist in the effective implementation of early childhood physical education (ECPE) due to the lack of specialized expertise among early childhood teachers. This study aimed to identify the essential components of the teaching competency required for ECPE through a Delphi survey approach. A panel of experts categorized teaching competency into four core areas: physical activity education, understanding learners, professional development, and environmental management. This study highlights the importance of reflective professionalism, safety management, and creating a positive learning environment. The findings offer valuable guidance for enhancing teacher education and professional development programs, ultimately empowering early childhood teachers to provide meaningful and effective physical activity education to young children. Further research is needed to explore how these competencies can be effectively integrated into ECPE settings.

Key words: teaching competency, early childhood physical education, teacher education, Delphi survey

Introduction

Physical activity education during early childhood holds great significance for the overall development of young children. At this stage, children perceive the world through their senses and develop a positive understanding of their physical abilities by engaging in various body movements and experiences (Whitehead, 2013). This is also a critical period for fostering their ability to regulate and control their bodies while developing fundamental motor skills (Ministry of Education & Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2019).

Physical activity provides young children with various bodily movements to support physical growth and development, as well as aiding in the development of fundamental motor skills and physical fitness (Capio & Eguia, 2021; Preedy et al., 2022). Furthermore, physical activity stimulates the growth of brain-derived neurotrophic factor and activates the secretion of neurotransmitters by using the body as a learning tool, thereby enhancing young children's memory, attention, and problem-solving skills, while also promoting concepts such as space, direction, distance, and height (Ferreira Vorkapic et al., 2021). Moreover, through physical activity, young children gain confidence, self-concept, and a sense of achievement as they move freely according to their intentions, and engage in

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cooperative movements with peers, thereby promoting prosocial behaviors (Liu et al., 2015; Welk & Eklund, 2005). In this context, early childhood physical education (ECPE) plays a central role in various aspects of young children's physical, cognitive, and socioemotional development.

Recognizing the importance of ECPE, South Korea implemented the Nuri Curriculum, a national-level curriculum, for over two decades. The curriculum's objectives include promoting active participation in physical activities, fostering a positive body image, and instilling in young children a healthy and safe lifestyle. However, challenges exist in the actual implementation of ECPE in early childhood education settings (Ministry of Education & Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2019).

In Korean early childhood education settings, sedentary learning activities and indoor programs have become increasingly prevalent due to safety concerns (Lee, 2018). Inadequate facilities for physical activity and a lack of awareness, confidence, and efficacy among educators regarding physical activities are some of the reasons hindering the effective implementation of physical activity instruction (Joo & Sung, 2012; Kwak, 2015). In particular, it is challenging for early childhood teachers to cultivate expertise in ECPE due to the elective nature of physical activity-related subjects in pre-service early childhood teacher education programs and the focus on mere movement techniques or skills acquisition in in-service early childhood teacher education programs (Park & Lee, 2021). Consequently, in early childhood education settings, rather than being prominently integrated into the curriculum, ECPE is often conducted as special activities once or twice a week by external instructors (Lee, 2018). This reliance on external instructors for ECPE may lead early childhood teachers to perceive ECPE as not within their responsibilities, potentially exacerbating their lack of confidence and expertise in ECPE. This perception among early childhood teachers could deepen the existing issues of low confidence and lack of expertise in ECPE (Park, 2020). It can be argued that many early

childhood teachers face difficulties in instructing ECPE and lack the required teaching expertise in this domain compared to other educational areas (Bigelow & Fenesi, 2022; Senol, 2021).

Early childhood teachers' role in ECPE cannot be overstated (Martyniuk & Tucker, 2014; Vidoni et al., 2023). They play a vital role in translating a national-level curriculum into practical applications that consider young children's developmental stages and interests. By providing opportunities for active participation in a wide range of physical activities, both indoors and outdoors, they create an environment that fosters engagement and learning. Early childhood teachers' influence goes beyond just encouraging young children to participate in physical activities. They also play a critical role in instilling a lifelong commitment to active and healthy living (Senol, 2021). A lack of professional expertise among early childhood teachers in the field of ECPE is attributed to the insufficient training and knowledge necessary to develop well-structured lessons in actual ECPE settings (Lu & Montague, 2016; Min & Kim, 2012).

In taking the first step toward improving ECPE, it is necessary to identify teaching competency in this area. This process will contribute to enhancing the overall quality of pre-service and in-service teacher education programs, ultimately empowering early childhood teachers to promote vibrant and healthy lives among young children.

Recently, the concept of "teaching competency" has received attention as a concrete idea within "teacher professionalism," a required qualification for educators. Teaching competency refers to "the totality of personal characteristics, knowledge, skills, attitudes, etc. that each teacher needs to have to achieve successful teaching in a specific teaching context" (Klaassen, 2002, p. 152; Varvel, 2007, p. 2). This concept is distinguished from the traditional notion of professionalism in terms of its comprehensiveness and practical orientation. While the concept of professionalism now includes knowledge as well as skills and attitudes as a whole,

teaching competency is a specific concept that actively incorporates these perspectives. In particular, teaching competency is significant in that it is a practical qualification that considers various contexts and variables in educational situations. Considering current social and educational circumstances that require flexible and resilient competencies to address situations that are not fixed or rigid (Day & Gu, 2013), teaching competency should be the basis and ultimate goal of teacher education.

Scholars have argued that teaching competency should be structured to reflect the specificity of a particular teaching context, that is, the special characteristics of each subject and specific area (Barth et al., 2007; Lohmann et al., 2021). Diverse studies have also been conducted on teaching competency in the field of early childhood education, exploring various aspects of effective teaching, including the knowledge, skills, and disposition that teachers need to effectively support children's learning and development. This research has identified a range of important competencies for early childhood teachers, such as content knowledge in child development and early learning (McCreay & Chen, 2012; Oppermann et al., 2016), the ability to create a positive and supportive learning environment (Shewark et al., 2018), the ability to develop and implement a developmentally appropriate curriculum (Brown & Lee, 2012), and the ability to effectively engage families and communities (Evans, 2013).

Meanwhile, research on teaching competency in the field of ECPE is scant. Soini et al. (2021) explored pre-service teachers' perceptions of competence in ECPE and categorized teaching competency into areas such as 'supporting a child's physical activity, teaching physical education, and observing and assessing a child's motor skills and physical activity. This research was conducted with pre-service early childhood teachers in Finland, so there are limitations in representing the ECPE competencies for early childhood teachers in Korea. In contrast, there is more research on teaching competency in the elementary or secondary physical

education domains. Depending on the scholar and educational context, teachers' competencies have been categorized in various ways, but they are generally summarized into three main categories: instructional competencies (e.g., setting appropriate educational goals and identifying effective teaching methods), implementation competencies (e.g., considering individual differences among students and communication skills), and personal and social competencies (e.g., developing students' personalities, and teachers' positive attitudes) (Al-Tawel & AlJa'afreh, 2017). While teaching competencies in the elementary or secondary physical education domains may be similar to those in the context of ECPE, there is a need to explore teaching competencies specifically suitable for ECPE, taking into account the context of preschool teachers and the unique characteristics of young children's physical activities.

In this context, the purpose of this current study was to identify the structure of teaching competency in ECPE, encompassing a comprehensive understanding of the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and practices required for effective teaching in a practical and context-oriented manner. The findings of this study can aid in exploring specific educational strategies for both pre-service and in-service teacher education, ultimately contributing to the professional development of early childhood teachers.

Methods

Research Design

This study conducted Delphi surveys to systematically collect and organize expert opinions in identifying the teaching ECPE competency in Korea. The Delphi survey is a panel-based research method that prevents negative effects that may arise during the discussion process by assuming that the judgment of two individuals is more accurate than that of one individual and by establishing a consensus group for

matters that require agreement (Kang, 2008; Rowe & Wright, 2011).

In this current study, it was important to structure the communication process to effectively handle complex issues; thus, the following procedures were applied: (1) repeat a procedure and do controlled feedback, (2) ensure respondents' anonymity and (3) follow procedures for statistical-group responses (Hasson et al., 2000; Noh, 2006).

Participant Eligibility and Panel Recruitment

For the Delphi surveys, this study recruited 20 experts, comprising 10 early childhood education experts and 10 experts in physical activity for young children. As early childhood physical education is an intersection of ECPE fields, this study established two expert panels to enhance the reliability of the groups. The early childhood education experts selected were professionals who graduated from an early childhood education-related undergraduate program and had at least five years of field experience in daycare centers or kindergartens.

The physical activity experts for young children included individuals who graduated from a physical education or dance education-related undergraduate program, held qualifications in physical education or dance education for young children, were either responsible for physical education or dance education for young children or were involved in teacher training regarding physical education or dance education for young children. Like the early childhood education experts, the early childhood physical activity experts selected had at least five years of teaching experience in early childhood physical activity.

Data Collection

This study employed three methods to collect data. First, a literature review was conducted to clarify the

research topic and goals, develop and structure the Delphi survey questions, and establish a theoretical and conceptual framework for analyzing survey data. The literature analysis involved searching for relevant terms such as “physical activity education in a curriculum,” “teaching competency,” and “professionalism” to review policy documents, academic papers, research reports, statistical data, and theses from various perspectives over the past 10 years.

Through the literature review, this study structured the questionnaire to propose the teaching competencies necessary for preschool teachers to apply a curriculum in practical settings and to provide young children with the required physical activities. The questionnaire implemented an integrated approach to analyze various aspects, including different types of lessons, learners, educators, and environmental factors.

Second, a three-round Delphi survey was conducted. In the first round, open-ended opinions on teaching competencies related to ECPE were collected based on the literature review and inductively analyzed. The second round utilized the opinions from the first round to create a structured closed-ended questionnaire to investigate content validity. Additional opinions on teaching competency were also solicited. The third round presented the responses from the second round and each expert's responses, and each question's relevance was evaluated again to reach an expert consensus.

Third, meetings were held with five experts who have research experience in early childhood education and physical education. These meetings reviewed the literature review results and discussed the construction of the Delphi survey questionnaire. Subsequent meetings aimed to ensure the objectivity and reliability of the data analysis by minimizing errors that could arise during the inductive categorization analysis of the first Delphi survey results and the analysis of the second Delphi survey results.

Data Analysis

Data collected from the three-round Delphi survey were organized by assigning an order to the questionnaires, sorting them using Microsoft Excel, and then using SPSS 22.0 software to analyze the data. The data obtained from the first Delphi survey, which used open-ended questions, underwent content analysis to extract key competency elements. The content analysis revealed four categories: physical activity education, understanding learners, professional development, and environmental management, along with 17 sub-competencies. For the second and third Delphi surveys, which used closed-ended questions, the mean, standard deviation, and median of each item were derived. Additionally, a content validity ratio (CVR) was calculated to establish a consensus on the research content. In the Delphi method, CVR values were determined based on the number of participating experts. For instance, with 10 experts, the CVR value is set at 0.62; with 20 experts, it is 0.42; and with 25 experts, it is 0.37 (Lawshe, 1975). In this study, with a panel of 20 experts, content validity was considered to be present only if the CVR was 0.42 or higher. To assess the degree of convergence among expert panel opinions alongside CVR values, the Content Validity Index (CVI) was calculated to determine how well the opinions align, and the Coefficient of Variation (CV) was computed to measure stability. A CVI value of 0.75 or higher, and a CV value of less than 0.50, indicated that the panel's opinions had reached consensus (Chung

et al., 2007; English & Kernan, 1976).

Results

The First Delphi Survey

The first Delphi survey was conducted to identify the components of teaching competency and was administered as an open-ended questionnaire. The questionnaire included the goals and content of the physical movement and health domain from the 2019 Revised Nuri Curriculum, as well as the concepts and characteristics of teaching competency in the physical-motor domain, based on a literature review. The panelists were asked to freely identify the categories and subelements of teaching competency in ECPE.

The Delphi panel provided diverse opinions on teaching competency in ECPE, covering various aspects, such as content knowledge for teaching physical activity, class design, understanding children, teacher-student interaction, reflective practice for professional development, safety management, and more. This study categorized these opinions and analyzed previous studies to identify four core competency areas: physical activity education, understanding learners, professional development, and environmental management. These core competency areas were further divided into 17 subelements (see Table 1).

The responses to the physical activity education category emphasized various crucial elements of

Table 1. First Delphi survey results on teaching competency

Category	Summary of Open-Ended Survey Responses
Physical activity education	Performing physical exercise, content knowledge, understanding the Nuri Curriculum, class design, class development, utilizing teaching methods, and conducting and utilizing class evaluation
Understanding learners	Understanding children, interactions, and parental communication
Professional development	Physical exercise participation, critical reflection, developing a teacher's personality, and strengthening professionalism
Environmental management	Class management, safety management, and resource management and its utilization

teaching competency related to physical activity education. These elements included conducting physical exercises, possessing content knowledge, understanding the Nuri curriculum, designing classes, developing class activities, utilizing effective teaching methods, and conducting class evaluations.

In the understanding learners category, the focus was on understanding young children as learners and establishing positive interactions with them. Additionally, parental communication was identified as an essential aspect of teaching competency concerning understanding learners. The responses to the professional development category highlighted the importance of a teacher's own physical exercise participation as a role model, engaging in reflective practices for personal and professional growth, developing a positive, effective personality as a teacher, and strengthening professionalism in the ECPE context. The environmental management category emphasized competencies related to class management, safety management to ensure a secure environment for

children, and resource management and its utilization for effective teaching and learning.

The Second Delphi Survey

Building upon the results of the first Delphi survey on teaching competency, the second Delphi survey aimed to assess the suitability of each element. This study utilized the mean, standard deviation, median, content validity, content validity index, and content of variation to evaluate suitability (see Table 2). In the second Delphi survey, panelists' opinions on teaching competency averaged over 4.0 for all subcompetencies, except for the class development competency ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 0.92$) in the physical activity education category. Additionally, when examining content validity, a critical criterion for adoption in this study, all subcompetencies, except for parental communication competency ($CVR = 0.40$, $CVI = 0.65$) in the understanding learners category, and physical exercise participation ($CVR = 0.40$, $CVI = 0.68$) in the professional development

Table 2. Second Delphi survey results on teaching competency

No	Category	Subcompetencies	M	SD	Median	CVR	CVI	CV
1	Physical activity education	Performing physical exercise	4.05	1.07	4.00	0.50	0.78	0.26
2		Content knowledge	4.10	0.89	4.00	0.70	0.83	0.22
3		Understanding the curriculum	4.30	0.71	4.00	0.70	0.83	0.17
4		Class design	4.20	0.81	4.00	0.70	0.83	0.19
5		Class development	3.95	0.92	4.00	0.50	0.75	0.23
6		Utilizing teaching methods	4.15	1.01	4.00	0.70	0.90	0.24
7		Conducting and utilizing class evaluation	4.10	1.04	4.00	0.60	0.80	0.25
8	Understanding learners	Understanding children	4.35	0.96	5.00	0.70	0.90	0.22
9		Interactions	4.45	0.80	5.00	0.80	0.93	0.18
10		Parental communication	4.05	0.97	4.00	0.40	0.65	0.24
11	Professional development	Physical exercise participation	4.00	0.80	4.00	0.40	0.68	0.20
12		Critical reflection	4.28	1.04	4.50	0.80	0.93	0.24
13		Developing teacher's personality	4.25	0.96	5.00	0.80	0.93	0.23
14		Strengthening professionalism	4.35	1.11	5.00	0.70	0.83	0.26
15	Environmental management	Class management	4.35	0.79	5.00	0.70	0.83	0.18
16		Safety management	4.35	0.85	5.00	0.80	0.93	0.20
17		Resource management and utilization	4.20	0.75	4.00	0.80	0.93	0.18

category, reached a consensus rate of CVR = 0.50 and CVI = 0.75 or higher.

These results demonstrate high recognition and consensus among experts regarding teaching competency in the ECPE field. The identified core competencies are crucial for early childhood teachers to provide appropriate physical activities to young children and to effectively implement the Nuri Curriculum in educational settings.

The Third Delphi Survey

In the third Delphi survey, this study incorporated creative arts competency as a subelement in the professional development category, reflecting the opinions expressed in the second Delphi survey. The third Delphi survey was conducted to reassess the suitability of the revised and supplemented teaching competencies in ECPE.

The results presented in Table 3 show that the mean

values, CVRs, and CVIs for all subcompetencies in the third survey were either the same or slightly higher than those in the second survey. Notably, the parental communication competency in the understanding learners category, which had a relatively lower agreement rate in the second survey (CVR = 0.40, CVI = 0.65), increased to CVR = 0.50, CVI = 0.75 and was ultimately adopted. However, the CVRs for physical exercise participation competency and the newly added creative arts ability in the professional development category were 0.40, with CVIs of 0.68 and 0.65 leading to their exclusion from the final list.

Based on our three-round Delphi survey, this study categorized the core competencies of teaching competency regarding the physical-motor domain into four core competency categories and 16 subcompetencies. The final results are summarized in Table 4.

Table 3. Third Delphi survey results on teaching competency

No	Category	Subcompetencies	M	SD	Median	CVR	CVI	CV	Note
1		Performing physical exercise	4.15	0.96	4.00	0.60	0.80	0.23	
2		Content knowledge	4.15	0.79	4.00	0.70	0.83	0.19	
3	Physical activity education	Understanding the Nuri Curriculum	4.35	0.79	4.50	0.80	0.93	0.18	
4		Class design	4.30	0.78	4.00	0.80	0.93	0.18	
5		Class development	4.00	0.89	4.00	0.60	0.80	0.22	
6		Utilizing teaching methods	4.30	1.10	5.00	0.80	0.93	0.26	
7		Conducting and utilizing class evaluation	4.20	0.98	4.50	0.60	0.80	0.23	
8	Understanding learners	Understanding children	4.55	0.67	5.00	0.80	0.93	0.15	
9		Interactions	4.50	0.67	5.00	0.80	0.93	0.15	
10		Parental communication	4.05	0.80	4.00	0.50	0.75	0.20	Final adoption
11		Physical exercise participation	4.00	0.80	4.00	0.40	0.68	0.20	Final deleted
12	Professional development	Critical reflection	4.30	0.95	4.50	0.90	0.97	0.22	
13		Developing teacher's personality	4.45	0.97	5.00	0.90	0.97	0.22	
14		Strengthening professionalism	4.45	0.97	5.00	0.90	0.97	0.22	
Added		Creative arts ability	3.80	0.81	4.00	0.40	0.65	0.21	Final deleted
15	Environmental management	Class management	4.40	0.73	4.50	0.80	0.93	0.17	
16		Safety management	4.65	0.73	5.00	0.90	0.97	0.16	
17		Resource management and utilization	4.55	0.81	4.00	0.80	0.93	0.18	

Table 4. Final Delphi survey results on teaching competency

No	Category	Subcompetencies	Rationale
1	Physical activity education	Performing physical exercise	Competency to perform various activities related to physical–motor development in young children (movement function and skills) and to demonstrate them.
2		Content knowledge	Competency in possessing sufficient knowledge about physical activity for young children, including content knowledge about physical activity for young children, knowledge about learners, and learning and instructional theory, as well as pedagogy and teaching strategies.
3		Understanding the Nuri Curriculum	Competency in understanding and analyzing the 'physical movement and health domain within the early childhood education curriculum (Nuri Curriculum) to lead classes effectively.
4		Class design	Competency to systematically prepare and plan for physical activity lessons for young children, including goal setting, content selection, method design, and learning-activity composition in the physical movement and health domain of the early childhood education curriculum.
5		Class development	Competency to develop teaching materials, assessment plans, and instructional guidance to efficiently operate physical activity classes for young children.
6		Utilizing teaching methods	Competency to effectively utilize various educational models, teaching styles, and instructional strategies mentioned in ECPE in appropriate situations.
7		Conducting and utilizing class evaluation	Competency to perform appropriate evaluations based on observations of young children's physical activities and effectively utilize the evaluation results.
8	Understanding learners	Understanding children	Competency to understand the physical development characteristics of young children and their personal, social, and cultural developmental characteristics.
9		Interactions	Competency to listen to and respect the opinions of young children, provide positive and corrective feedback, and empathize and communicate while continuously interacting with them.
10		Parental communication	Competency to continuously communicate and reflect parents' opinions to promote children's participation in physical activity.
11	Professional development	Reflective reflection	Competency regarding a strong interest and passion for young children's physical activity and analyzing and reflecting on one's own lessons to improve the curriculum as it relates to young children's physical activity.
12		Developing teacher's personality	Competency to maintain and develop a sense of mission as a professional in early childhood physical activity education with a sense of responsibility and purpose regarding the profession.
13		Strengthening professionalism	Competency to continuously diagnose and strengthen one's own knowledge, skills, and attitudes as a physical activity educator for young children.
14	Environmental management	Class management	Competency to effectively implement class scheduling, group formation, equipment arrangement, and other related tasks to ensure efficient class operations.
15		Safety management	Competency to establish an accident prevention plan and create a safe environment to promote children's participation in physical activities.
16		Resource management and utilization	Competency to effectively manage and utilize resources (such as physical activity equipment, spaces, experts, programs, etc.) in kindergarten and the local community for the promotion of physical activity in young children.

Discussion

The primary objective of this study to identify the essential components of the teaching competency required for ECPE through a Delphi survey approach. In general, the responses to the Delphi survey offer a comprehensive perspective on the diverse aspects of teaching competency required for ECPE. From content knowledge and class design to understanding children's needs and ensuring a safe environment, these competencies play a crucial role in delivering meaningful, effective physical activity education to young children.

Building upon the research findings, the discussion on teaching competency in ECPE, which yielded significant implications, unfolded as follows. First, the identified teaching competency categories in this study represent a convergence of the competency categories typically associated with early childhood teachers and the specific competency category required for teaching ECPE.

While the categories of understanding learners, professional development, and environmental management align with the previously identified competency framework for early childhood teachers, the category of physical activity education represents a special competency required for teaching ECPE. This indicates that while there are competency elements required for teaching physical activity in early childhood education, regardless of the curriculum, there are specialized competency elements specific to the physical activity domain that are distinct from other subjects and domains. This finding supports previous studies (Barth et al., 2007; Lohmann et al., 2021) suggesting that specific teaching competencies are required depending on the subject and area.

Second, the subcompetencies of physical activity education include designing, executing, and managing physical activity classes, encompassing the entire process of teaching physical education classes, including pre-class planning, in-class execution, and

post-class management (Moston and Ashworth, 2002). In other words, teaching competency in the physical activity education category is not limited to the capacity to implement and conduct classes but is a comprehensive ability that governs all processes before and after a class. This suggests that the challenges early childhood education teachers face in teaching the physical-motor domain are not simply due to a lack of practical skills, such as excellent and precise demonstrations and explanations.

Rather, it can be inferred that a lack of comprehensive teaching abilities that encompass the entire instructional process, which is encouraged instead of relying solely on narrow competency that emphasizes knowledge transmission or instructional delivery, is a significant contributing factor. Therefore, it is necessary to cultivate a broad perspective of teaching abilities that includes all aspects of the instructional process rather than focusing narrowly on competency. The overall characteristics of physical activity education as a category of teaching competency in the field of early childhood education should also be considered.

Third, the Delphi survey indicated a strong consensus among the participants regarding all subcompetencies within the professional development category. This finding underscores the significance of critical reflection and continuous growth for educators involved in physical activity teaching. Educators should exhibit reflective professionalism by adopting a responsible, mission-driven approach as teachers, actively engaging in critical reflection and inquiry regarding their classes, and continuously acquiring knowledge and skills related to young children's physical activity (Parker et al., 2022).

Reflective professionalism is a concept widely discussed in various academic fields, emphasizing the importance of both technical competency and personal qualities such as attitudes, values, and ethics in an individual's professional practice (Pultorak, 2010). In the context of physical education, Pascual (2006) recognized the professional aspects of physical

education teachers' professionalism and highlighted the significance of personal aspects as well. Similarly, Hoffman (2009) proposed mechanical, market-driven professionalism and social trustee civic professionalism, demonstrating the importance of both the ability- and personality-based aspects of professionalism in physical education.

Teaching, unlike many other occupations, demands a sense of pride and responsibility. Early childhood teachers teaching young children should create an environment of respect and observation, adapting to children's ever-changing playfulness and enabling them to joyfully participate in physical activity (Harwood et al., 2013). In this sense, preschool teachers' professional development plays a crucial role in cultivating children's interest in physical activity and enabling them to find enjoyment in it, even if they may initially be hesitant or uninterested.

Fourth, it is important to highlight that safety management competency within the environmental management category also received a high CVR (0.90), like all the subcompetencies in the professional development category. This underscores the significance of prioritizing safety in ECPE. Previous studies have indicated that identifying safety concerns is one of the challenges early childhood teachers face when implementing physical activity with young children (Min & Kim, 2012), and safety is a fundamental aspect of physical activity education.

It is crucial to ensure safety when conducting physical activity classes for young children who may have immature motor coordination or judgment, and it is essential to encourage them to behave safely (Mackintosh et al., 2011). Children naturally have curiosity but tend to overestimate their physical abilities (Klevberg & Anderson, 2002), making it challenging for them to recognize and adapt to potentially dangerous situations. Therefore, competency in creating a safe physical activity environment and providing accident-prevention guidance are essential when teaching safe physical activity to young children.

Conclusions

This study identified the elements of teaching competency required for ECPE, including physical activity education, understanding learners, professional development, and environmental management. The study concluded that teaching competency in ECPE encompasses both the competency associated with physical education and the integration of early childhood educational perspectives. While ECPE is ultimately a subfield of physical education, some sub-competencies overlap with those of elementary or secondary physical education, but several sub-competencies (e.g., parental communication and safety management) were identified as particularly emphasized in ECPE, with a high level of consensus among experts. This indicates that teaching competency in ECPE is comprehensive, practical, and follows a specific structure.

The findings of this study can serve as valuable foundational material for developing and evaluating teacher education and professional development programs aimed at enhancing the teaching competency of early childhood teachers. For instance, it is possible to design education programs focusing on each teaching competency and to provide educators with direct experiences by simulating real ECPE environments during the training process. Additionally, research can be conducted to assess the effectiveness of these programs by measuring improvements in teachers' competencies and children's learning outcomes. Through such efforts, it will be possible to delve deeply into how to effectively integrate teaching competencies in ECPE settings in the future.

Conflict of Interest

The author declare no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Approval

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