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Practitioner research in professional development in physical education teaching: A scoping review

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ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION**Support** - Nothing to declare.**Review Stage at time of this submission** - Piloting of the study selection process.**Conflicts of interest** - None declared.**INPLASY registration number:** INPLASY202580004**Amendments** - This protocol was registered with the International Platform of Registered Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Protocols (INPLASY) on 1 August 2025 and was last updated on 1 August 2025.**INTRODUCTION**

Review question / Objective This review aims to: (1) Map how the notion of practitioner researcher has been conceptualised and applied in the context of Physical Education teachers' professional practice, both in initial education and in-service teaching; (2) Identify and characterize empirical studies that report on practitioner research carried out by Physical Education teachers; (3) Map the research methodologies employed in the main themes addressed in these studies; (4) Identify gaps in the existing literature and provide recommendations for future research.

Background Practitioner research is grounded in the principle that research and practice are mutually reinforcing research informs action, and the outcomes of action, in turn, inform further research. It typically involves the identification of a relevant problem, the review and critically synthesis of pertinent literature, the collection and

analysis of data, and the interpretation and discussion of findings in relation to practice. Increasingly, practitioner research is recognized as a valuable form of professional development for teachers, as it fosters critical reflection, collaborative inquiry, and pedagogical innovation. Despite its growing relevance, there is limited consolidated evidence on how practitioner research is being applied specifically within the field of Physical Education, particularly in terms of its implementation and impact on teacher development. This review seeks to address this gap by systematically mapping existing studies and identifying key trends, methodological approaches, and areas for future research.

Rationale There is a growing recognition of the value of practitioner research in promoting meaningful and context-sensitive professional development among Physical Education teachers. Practitioner researchers—educators who systematically investigate their own practice—play a vital role in bridging the gap between theory and

practice, cultivating a reflective professional culture, and enhancing pedagogical effectiveness within the PE context.

Despite increasing interest in this approach, the literature on practitioner-led research in Physical Education remains fragmented. Variations in terminology, methodological approaches, and underlying theoretical frameworks contribute to a lack of conceptual clarity and coherence. A comprehensive understanding of how practitioner research supports professional learning in Physical Education is crucial to inform future policies, training programmes, and school-based practices that aim to empower teachers as active agents of change.

A scoping review is particularly suited to this purpose, as it allows for a systematic mapping of the available evidence, clarification of key concepts, identification of knowledge gaps, and synthesis of the scope and diversity of existing research. This review aims to provide an overview of the scope, nature, and characteristics of studies involving practitioner researchers in Physical Education professional development, thereby laying the groundwork for future empirical studies or systematic reviews.

METHODS

Strategy of data synthesis A comprehensive computerized search will be carried out across the following electronic databases: B-On, Scopus and Web of Science, Eric and SPORTDiscuss. Boolean operators will be applied to all searchable fields using the following search string: (“physical education”) AND (“practitioner research*” OR “practitioner inquiry” OR “research to practice in physical education” OR “teacher-led research” OR “school-based research”).

In addition to the electronic search, a manual search will be undertaken to identify relevant studies that may not be retrieved through the electronic search alone. Experts in the field will also be contacted to recommend any additional or unpublished studies that may meet the inclusion criteria.

To enhance the trustworthiness and rigour of the review process, two researchers (first and third author) will independently conduct the screening and selection of studies. Any discrepancies will be discussed and resolved through consensus, and where necessary, the second author will be consulted to adjudicate.

Furthermore, a library specialist will be involved in refining with the research strategy, including the development of appropriate keywords, selection of up to three relevant databases, and validation of the overall approach. Reasons for exclusion will be

clearly recorded for each full-text article assessed, and further information may be requested by contacting the first author, if needed.

Eligibility criteria In line with the recommendations of the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) for the conduct of scoping reviews, the PCC (Population, Concept, Context) framework was used to define the inclusion criteria and guide the formulation of the research question.

Participants:

This review will include studies involving Physical Education teachers engaged in research focused on their own professional development. Participants may comprise both pre-service and in-service PE teachers working in primary, secondary, or higher education contexts.

Concept:

Of the core concept of interest is practitioner research undertaken by Physical Education professionals as a means of enhancing their own pedagogical practice. This includes, but is not limited to, practitioner inquiry, teacher-led research, action research, and school-based research – any form of systematic, self-initiated investigation carried out by educators with the aim of improving their teaching and learning processes.

Context:

Eligible studies must be situated where Physical Education is delivered, such as schools, universities, or community-based education programmes. Studies from all geographical regions and institutional contexts will be considered.

Other criteria:

No limitations will be applied regarding the date or language of publication.

Source of evidence screening and selection All retrieved records will be imported into reference management software (EndNote) to facilitate the removal duplicates. In the same software, the screening and selection process will be conducted in three stages: (1) title screening, (2) abstract screening, and (3) full-text review.

The first and third authors will independently screen titles and abstracts using the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Any study identified as potentially relevant by at least one reviewer will be advanced to the full-text screening stage. During the full-text review, both reviewers will independently assess each article for eligibility, again based on the same set of criteria.

Disagreements at any stage of the selection process will be resolved through discussion. If consensus cannot be achieved, the second author will be consulted to reach a final decision. All decisions, including the reasons for excluding studies at the full-text stage, will be documented in

detail. The overall selection process will be reported and illustrated using a PRISMA-ScR flow diagram, in accordance with the recognised best practices for scoping reviews.

Data management All search results will be imported into reference management software (EndNote) to facilitate the identification and removal of duplicate record. Following the de-duplication, the remaining references will be organised within the same software to support the screening and selection process.

Two reviewers will independently screen titles and abstracts against the established eligibility criteria. Full-text articles will be then retrieved and assessed for final inclusion.

A standardized data extraction form will be developed and piloted prior to formal use, to ensure clarity, consistency and reliability in data collection. The data to be extracted will include publication details (e.g., author year, country), study design, characteristics of the participants, educational context, type and features of practitioner research, and key findings relevant to professional development in Physical Education.

All extracted data will be stored in secure, password-protected digital files (e.g., Microsoft Excel), with regular backups performed. Data will be managed in accordance with institutional guidelines on confidentiality and data protection.

Language restriction No language restrictions were applied during the search process. Studies published in any language were considered for inclusion and, where necessary, translated to assess their eligibility and extract relevant data.

Country(ies) involved Portugal.

Keywords Physical education; Practitioner research; Research to practise; Practitioner Inquiry; Teacher-led research.

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