



## Physical Education Teachers' Opinions on Character Education and Its Practices \*

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### Abstract

This research paper has the objectives to shed light on the physical education (PE) teachers' views on the concept of character and character education, the content of elements that they call into play to promote the character education, the role of the PE teacher in character education, and to demonstrate the games, activities, and practices they apply in PE and sports courses to encourage and enhance good character in students. This study is built upon a qualitative phenomenological research design. The study population was selected based on criterion and snowball sampling, which are purposeful sampling methods in qualitative research. The present study recruited seven females, 15 males, and a total of 22 PE teachers employed in private and public schools, aged between 29–60 (Mean=44.09, SD=7.44), and having professional experience ranging from 5–35 years (Mean=20.68, SD=6.97). A personal information form along with a semi-structured interview form were used as data collection tools. Content analysis was employed to analyze the data. The five themes that emerged as a result of the analysis are "opinions on the concept of character", "opinions on the necessity of delivering character education", "opinions on the content of PE in character education", "opinions on the role of the PE teacher in character education " and "suggestions of PE teachers".

### Keywords

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## Introduction

The character is described as the ability to acquire personal aspects and virtues which may bring moral acts into existence in a constant manner (Shields & Bredemeier, 1995). The character should be deemed as a whole with regard to cognitive, affective and behavioral patterns and must conform to moral knowledge, sense, and activity (Lickona, 1999). According to Berkowitz (2002), character is a set of psychological characteristics that conditions one's ability and inclination to act in accordance with the moral prerequisites. The individual as a paragon of virtue is expected to seek and aspire to the good and to forge it as principal. Good character is constitutive of "knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good" (Lickona, 1999). Virtues, which are characterized by the features of good character, are objectively desirable human qualities and tendencies to behave morally well (Lickona, 2004).

Good character in the individual is not innate or spontaneous but cultivated through teaching, example, and practice (Arthur, 2008). Broadly speaking, the approaches adopted to foster good character in the individual are called *character education* (Lickona, 1996). Lickona (2001, pp. 4) conceptualizes character education as "deliberate efforts to cultivate virtue in its cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions". In that regard, two chief goals of character education are to make all young people lead a happy life and to minimize the undesirable behaviors tempting them to harm themselves or society (Davidson, Lickona, & Khmelkov, 2008).

### *Foundations of Character Education*

Character education is indeed a perennial concern dating back to as early as the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Among the key figures who have contributed substantially to theorizing its development are Rousseau, Dewey, Piaget, Erikson, Kohlberg, and Peters. Highly influential in the fields of philosophy and psychology, these figures proposed theories of individual development, relying on previous studies, about how children develop character (Arthur, 2003).

Rousseau hypothesized that man is born pure but corrupted by civilization, and divided the child's development into three stages. The first stage is the *Negative Period* up to the age of 12, where the child should be provided with sufficient opportunities to explore things on their own and the sensory experience should be prioritized. The second stage is the *Age of Intelligence*, beginning from the age 12, where the child continues to discover the life on his own with a more practical orientation. The final one is the *Education of the Sensibilities* stage, starting over the age of 15, at which the child should perform good deeds and avoid the evil as a part of socialization (Arthur, 2003).

Turning his attention to the question of how life should be lived, Dewey adopted a philosophy that explores the bridge between ethics and science (Arthur, 2003). He addressed issues such as moral education, character development, and values education in the last century (Mulkey, 1997). The ultimate goal of education, Dewey argues, is to achieve mental and moral development; in addition, an independent and strong character can be fostered in individuals through ethical and psychological principles (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977).

Piaget advocated the view that moral development goes through two phases termed *adherence to external rules* and *moral autonomy*. During the first period (*adherence to external rules*) covering the ages of 6-12, the rules are fixed and the child unconditionally conforms to the authority. In the *moral autonomy* phase beginning after the age of 12, children's moral standards begin to shift, with the realization that the rules can be changed when necessary (Senemoğlu, 2013). Piaget identified two types of morality. The first is *heteronomous morality* (non-autonomous), which occurs when rules are followed due to obedience to authority with the threat of coercive force. Individuals abide by external rules and obey them without questioning. The second is *autonomous morality*, described as self-regulation, in which rules are observed out of a sense of personal obligation. The individual builds an inner conviction that he needs to pay respect to others in his/her dealings with them. In this moral category, the child is predisposed to take a more self-confident, respectful, motivated, and cooperative attitude (Arthur, 2003).

Erikson is recognized for his theory of psychological emotional development, in which Freudian theory proposes that each psychosexual stage embodies a psychological modality (Arthur, 2003). Expanding on Freud's theory of development, Erikson created his *psychosocial theory*, in which human development allegedly goes through eight successive stages: infancy, early childhood, play age, school age, adolescence, young adulthood, adulthood, and old age. He further stated that at each stage, either a virtue develops or a developmental disorder occurs with two opposing psychological tendencies, either positive or negative (Orenstein & Lewis, 2020).

For Kohlberg, moral development refers to the transformation that unfolds in a person's frame of mind. He postulates that there are three progressive levels of moral development, with each level divided into two stages. Accordingly, moral development occurs at pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional levels. The progressive stages of moral development are "punishment and obedience orientation" and "instrumental-relativist orientation" at the pre-conventional level; "interpersonal concordance" or "good boy-nice girl orientation" and "law and order orientation" at the conventional level; "social contract, legalistic orientation" and "universal ethical principles orientation" at the post-conventional level (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977).

Criticizing Kohlberg, Peters maintained that moral development should incorporate the abilities to understand and apply moral principles, including moral reasoning and habituation of behavior. He put forward the theory of the four-phase model constitutive of *rationality*, *egocentricity*, *conventionality* (devotion to tradition), and *reasonableness*. The last phase *reasonableness* involves the ability to judge the morality of a decision and the intellectual understanding of complex moral ideas (Arthur, 2003).

Unlike the works of the aforementioned theorists, Edward Thorndike delved into the issue of character education through a series of research lasting from the mid-1920s to the late 1930s (Leming, 2008). The conclusion he drew from this research was that environment plays a decisive role in shaping one's character, and that a person's character is also measurable (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Hartshorne and May probed the role of character education in the delivery of religious education through comprehensive research (Leming, 2008). Raths, Harmin, and Simon's (as cited in Mulkey, 1997) Values Clarification Theory added to the growing interest in children's character development. With this renewed focus in character education, the relevant programs were devised for varied purposes by the Character Education Institute of San Antonio in 1968 and the Ethics Resource Center of the Chicago Foundation for Education in 1985 (Mulkey, 1997). Hosting a summit on character education in July 1992, Josephson Institute of Ethics published the eight-item Aspen Declaration at the end of the summit, which proclaimed the guiding principles for character education organizations and programs (Character Counts, 2022). In 1996, Boston University declared the Character Education Manifesto, establishing the basic tenets that should be at the center of the education reform planned to be initiated due to growing social unrest (Ryan, Bohlin, & Thayer, 2022).

There is undeniably a strong interaction between the character of individuals and social life, and social moral problems are indicative of the degeneration of the individual's good character (Lickona, 1992). Behaviors, such as violence, murder, suicide, extramarital birth, alcohol and substance abuse in the society (Wynne & Hess, 1992) as well as increasing moral ignorance and predisposition to harm themselves or their environment among the young (Lickona, 1996) can serve as concrete examples of deteriorating structure of morality. When the moral basis of a society is damaged, or when a society is unable to hand down the good character qualities to the next generation, the moral fabric of that society is inevitably corrupted, which is reflected on children's attitudes and behaviors in all spheres (Lickona, 2004).

Some educators advocate character education as a remedy for the above-mentioned problems faced by societies (Arthur, 2003). Since it plays a decisive role in shaping and strengthening the basic character traits, the primary task in character education falls upon schools (Arthur, 2003). Caring and well-functioning schools need to be established nationwide so that individuals enjoy purposeful, productive, and satisfying lives in the future and family structure remains strong and stable. In addition, exemplary role models in these schools should be able to instill core elements of good character in their students (Lickona, 2004).

Character education should be delivered calculatedly and regularly in schools by teachers. The approaches to this education may vary depending on the circumstances under which they are implemented. Some character education approaches can be listed as holistic approach, building of a caring community, integrating character education into the curriculum, classroom discussions, service learning, and explicit instruction in character and values (Elkind & Sweet, 2004). In addition, the four approaches recently adopted in values education as well as in character education are values inculcation, values clarification, values analysis, and moral reasoning (Edgington, 2002).

Character education is not simply an educational trend or the current interest of the school, but also the basic dimension of a decent education (Ryan et al., 2022). The aims within the scope of affective domain competencies in schools are achieved through educational activities, such as values education, character education, moral education, and citizenship education. Educational activities in this field have been named as *values education* since the 2005-2006 academic year in Türkiye, and ten core values identified in this context have been justice, friendship, honesty, self-control, patience, respect, love, responsibility, patriotism, and benevolence (Ekşi & Katılmış, 2020).

Though the concepts of values education, moral education, character education and citizenship education are used interchangeably, values education is favored as an inclusive concept that embraces all these notions in line with Taylor's (1994, 2006) research (as cited in Thornberg & Oğuz, 2013). Based on a comparative review of a survey conducted across 26 European countries in 1994, Taylor concludes that the scope of values education is often complex and encompasses a set of overlapping themes closely related to the historical and ideological evolution of each country. In this regard, the themes identified in values education can be exemplified as moral, religious, civic, democratic, national, pastoral, personal, and social goals and issues (Thornberg & Oğuz, 2013). Character education, on the other hand, is deemed to be a specific approach to moral education and concerns how a student will grow up as a person (Arthur, 2003). The focus of character education lies in basic ethical values, which are also the underlying theoretical principle of character education (Lickona, 1996). Because these ethical values affirm basic human value and dignity, they also constitute universal moral values and virtues that are binding on everyone everywhere (Lickona, 2001). In other words, values education embraces all kinds of values, such as aesthetic, democratic, social, economic, political and religious, and considers the ways an individual will act. Character education, on the other hand, seeks to introduce basic human values, such as honesty, kindness, courage, benevolence, freedom, equality and respect, and considers the type of personality individuals should be (Açıkalın, 2013). In addition, the goal of values education is to instill targeted behaviors, while character education aims to cultivate an individual's innate characteristics and ensure their permanence. The starting point of values education is to add value to the individual and fill them like an empty container, while the starting point of character education is to build upon the existing characteristics of the individual (Açıkalın, 2022).

#### *Place of Character Education in the PE Course*

PE and sports stands out as a course which affords a wide range of opportunities for the promotion and development of values and virtues in students within the framework of character education (Fisher, 1998). The PE and sports course can open up possibilities for the nurture of good character if the following conditions are met (Nash, 1933):

- Education should be a doing phenomenon
- The child should be interested in the acting,
- Participation in activities should be satisfying,
- Activities should provide the opportunity for full integration,
- Activities should offer possibilities for leadership and followership,
- Activities should pave the way for self-direction.

The PE course should be an all-encompassing one that teaches motor skills and virtues through enjoyable physical activities. Character education needs to be planned out by designing and implementing classes that teach and strengthen kindness, respect and sportsmanship by means of physical activities (Sullivan, 2006). In order to nurture character development in students, moral consequences of their behaviors should be addressed when problems arise spontaneously in the PE course. The classes then could feature dilemmas with moral implications by employing positive reinforcement (verbal appreciation) and modelling techniques (role modelling). Students can be provided with sufficient ground for creating activities (drills, exercises), dialogue, discussion, and agreement with their peers regarding the choice of activities. Parallels should be drawn between these activities and real life so that students can translate good character behaviors learned in PE courses into other settings, such as home and classroom (Solomon, 1997a). The PE course indeed offers rich potential to cultivate character education, but tapping this potential properly depends largely on leadership of teachers (Nash, 1933).

#### *Aims and Scope of the PE Course*

The overall objectives of the PE and sports curriculum in Türkiye are “to prepare students for the next stage of education by improving their self-management, social, and thinking skills as well as movement skills, active and healthy life skills, concepts and strategies to be utilized throughout their lives” (Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2017). The PE and sports course is aimed at contributing greatly to the psychomotor, cognitive, affective and social development of students through academic knowledge and physical activities. Besides, the nurture of some virtues in students is also among the specific objectives of this course. Some of the specific objectives of the secondary school PE and sports course are to leverage students’ skills of self-management, communication, cooperation, fair play, social responsibility, leadership, sensitivity to nature and respect for differences (MoNE, 2018a). Among the specific objectives of the high school PE and sports course are to tolerate the existence of others, act honestly, respectfully and with a sense of fair play towards them, and make this into a habit as well as to appreciate the meaning and prominence of national holidays and liberation days and volunteer to participate in these celebrations. (MoNE, 2018b).

#### *Character Education in the Relevant Literature*

A considerable amount of empirical research output signals the role of PE course in promoting good character in students. For instance, Romance, Weiss, and Bockoven (1986) suggest that a well-crafted PE curriculum potentially fosters students' moral reasoning development. Gibbons, Ebbeck, and Weiss (1995) state that the moral development of primary school students is favorably influenced by the “Fair Play for Kids” program in PE courses. Moreover, Solomon (1997b) posits that moral education should be embedded in the PE course to enhance students' social skills. Similarly, Ennis, Solmon, Satina, Loftus, Mensch, and McCauley (1999) report that the “Sport for Peace” program within the high school PE course helped to develop desirable character traits, such as confidence, respect, and responsibility. Balderson and Sharpe (2006) emphasize that the character education program reinforces positive interactions between students while reducing undesirable behaviors. For Firmansyah (2016), the PE course is capable of upgrading problem-solving skills, stimulating the development of language and verbal skills, making students manage their social skills and a container of emotional expressions, and teaching children to recognize and respect other people. Along similar lines, Warni and Rubianti (2018) propose that practices of character education are likely to enhance students’ discipline, diligence, thoroughness, passion, sportsmanship, honesty, responsibility, cooperation, tolerance, self-confidence, courage and appreciation. Prasetio, Yuniarti, and Nugraha (2019) maintain that employing sports games in the PE course can serve as an alternative method to develop a good character. Like Muhtar and Dallyono (2020), who argue for the effective role of PE in promoting character education, Marheni, Purnomo, and Jermaina (2020) conclude that character education is often carried out in schools through the PE course.

Considering the empirical and theoretical research on character education in the context of PE and sports courses in Türkiye, to date, only a limited number of studies have been identified. In one of these studies, Solmaz and Bayrak (2016) claim that, in addition to the subjects in the PE course, educational games aimed at character development exert a noticeable impact on students. Tutkun, Görgüt, and Erdemir (2017) propose that, though the current PE curriculum of the country is not conducive to character education, the PE course may yield comparatively better results in character education than other courses since it is a social course which requires communication and interaction. Adır (2017) likewise points out that physical activity games devised for character acquisition positively influence the character development of students.

More recently, literature has emerged that reports contradictory findings about whether PE courses actually promote good character in students. After comparing the control and experimental groups, Farrant (2013) came up with no evidence that a curriculum-based PE approach produced any effect on character elements in primary school children. Paradoxically, the program participants with high scores manifested lower self-efficacy, while those with low scores demonstrated increases in self-esteem, enjoyment of sports, and physical activity. Similarly, Yoon and Armour (2016) report that students may perform intended learning related to character development at both cognitive and behavioral levels, but they found little evidence of students' intention or understanding to transfer this beyond the PE course.

Some published work in the relevant literature either argues against the view that sports activities nurture good character in students or provides little or inconclusive evidence. Kleiber and Roberts (1981) strongly dispute the hypothesis that sports builds character. Reporting that students' participation in interscholastic sports activities significantly decreased the self-control and independence values, Rees, Howell, and Miracle (1990) find little evidence to subscribe to the view that sports builds character. Priest, Krause, and Beach (1999) suggest that intercollegiate athletes displayed lower value scores than their intramural counterparts, and that individual sport athletes initially scored higher than their team-sport equivalents but began to show more decrease over a four-year period. The same researchers also report an increase in "professional" attitudes and a decrease in "sportsmanship orientation" along with participation in sports. The findings released by Rudd and Stoll (2004) indicate that non-athletes scored significantly higher on the moral character index than team sports athletes, while the latter achieved significantly higher scores on the social character index than the former group. Confirming earlier studies performed in the same domain, Doty and Pim (2010) conclude that the character score tends to decrease as the level of sport increases.

Inconsistent research results reported by the literature lead to the idea of conducting further research on this theme. In Türkiye, although there has been a growing scholarly interest in PE courses and character education studies in recent years, these issues warrant further investigation. While the social skills, values and virtues intended to be cultivated within the scope of character education are laid down in the curriculum, it is not specified explicitly by which methods these elements will be promoted. This being the case, the implementation style of such an education is being left to the individual efforts and creativity of the PE teachers. It is of particular note to demystify the current perspectives of PE teachers and identify what sort of practices they follow in this regard. Based on the above-mentioned explanations, this study formulated five research questions:

1. What are the PE teachers' opinions on the concept of character and character education?
2. What are the opinions of PE teachers on the reasons for providing some space for character education in their classes?
3. What are the PE teachers' opinions on the approaches to character education, activities, and practices utilized in their classes as well as on the methods of evaluating the developing character virtues in students?
4. What are the PE teachers' opinions on the role that a PET plays in character education?
5. What are the PE teachers' suggestions regarding character education?

#### *Assumptions and Limitations of the Research*

This research assumed that the responses provided by the participating PE teachers were unaffected by the researchers, and that their answers concerning character education were reflective of true, sincere, and actual practices. Furthermore, this study may have suffered from a range of limitations. For instance, the dataset pooled in this study were limited to the experiences that the informants had accumulated throughout their professional life.

### **Method**

This qualitative study was built upon the phenomenological research design to have an in-depth and detailed understanding in line with the relevant purposes (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). The researchers tried to gain an insight into how PE teachers perceive the notion of character and character education, presenting examples and explanations about their lived experiences related to these perceptions.

#### *Participants*

The primary criterion in deciding on the study population was the selection of teachers who attached importance to character education in PE and sports courses, carried out activities and practices aimed at character education, and could mirror these activities and practices. It was decided in accordance with this goal that the participants should be people who could provide a rich source of information about the concept of character and character education, and that these participants were required to meet a set of predetermined criteria. For this reason, the study population was selected based on criterion sampling and snowball sampling, which are purposeful sampling methods utilized in qualitative research design. *Snowball sampling* "is particularly effective in identifying individuals or situations that can be a rich source of information about the research problem." The names of certain individuals come to the fore at the end of the process initiated with the question "Who can have the most information about this subject" (Patton, 1987, as cited in Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). On the other hand, *criterion sampling* is the formation of observation units consisting of people, events, objects or situations with specific attributes which meet the pre-established criteria (Büyüköztürk, Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, & Demirel, 2018). Accordingly, the first criterion established in selecting the study population in this research was the participant's professional knowledge and expertise, whereas the second was his or her sense of high competence in character education. To satisfy the first criterion, participant selection focused on the teachers who had attended national or international congresses, symposiums, or courses related to their field such as character education, PE, and sports sciences to pursue their professional development. The eligible teachers meeting the first criterion were accessed as a result of the interviews with the PE Teachers Association, the provincial coordinator, an academician who is an expert in the field of character education, and PE teachers. Turkish version of the Character Education Efficacy Belief Instrument (aka KEYIS in Türkiye) (Milson & Ekşi, 2003) was administered to 25 PE teachers agreeing to participate in the study, and 22 teachers who scored above the average (over 72 points) constituted the study population. The numbers and demographic characteristics of the informants are presented in Table 1. Each participating teacher was assigned a code (e.g., T1, T2). While the letter "T" (Teacher) in the codes indicates that the opinion belongs to the PET, and the numbers denote the order of the teacher's interviews.

**Table 1.** Demographic characteristics of the participants

Participant No	Gender	School Type		School Level	Age	Teaching Experience
		Private	Public			
T1	Male	X		High School	41	20
T2	Female		X	High School	38	17
T3	Male		X	High School	49	26
T4	Male	X		Coordinator	38	16
T5	Male	X		Secondary School	43	21
T6	Female	X		Primary School	29	5
T7	Male	X		Secondary School	44	22
T8	Male	X		Coordinator	42	22
T9	Male	X		Primary School	45	23
T10	Male		X	Secondary School	53	31
T11	Male	X		Primary School	49	22
T12	Male		X	Secondary School	60	35
T13	Male		X	High School	50	24
T14	Male	X		Primary School	42	19
T15	Female		X	High School	48	25
T16	Female	X		Primary School	29	7
T17	Male	X		Coordinator	50	26
T18	Male		X	Secondary School	39	16
T19	Male		X	Secondary School	49	20
T20	Female		X	High School	52	28
T21	Female		X	Secondary School	41	15
T22	Female		X	Secondary School	39	15
<b>Total</b>	15 male 7 female	11 Private School	11 Public School	Primary School 5 person, Secondary School 8 person, High School 6 person, Coordinator 3 person	M=44.09 SD= 7.44	M=20.68 SD= 6.97

As Table 1 illustrates, there are 22 informants in the current study. Table 2 below presents the congresses, symposiums, and seminars attended by the informants before as well as the course information.

**Table 2.** Congresses, symposiums, seminars and courses attended by the participants

Participant No	Congresses, symposiums, seminars and courses
T1	Teacher's kitchen, educademi seminars
T2	PE teachers' enlightenment seminars, personal development seminar, awareness of learning disability seminar
T3	Seminar on supporting adolescence with resilience skills, social, emotional and cognitive development seminar, development of affective skills in students, sign language seminar, teaching methods and techniques of courses in sports high schools, Turkish Football Federation (TFF) UEFA-B coaching
T4	Values education project seminars, educational games seminars
T5	Sports nutrition training, leadership course, volleyball, swimming coaching and refereeing seminars
T6	School counsellors' seminars (Doğan Cüceloğlu-Nurdağan Arkış-Polat Doğru-Yavuz Durmuş), educational game seminars



**Table 2.** Continued

<b>Participant No</b>	<b>Congresses, symposiums, seminars and courses</b>
T7	Personalized teaching model and teaching principles seminar; "How do children learn?" seminar, "Who is managing whom?" seminar, special education seminar, Turkish Basketball Federation (TBF) youth coaching courses and development seminars, 12 Dev Adam seminar, basketball referee seminar
T8	TBF coaching courses, TBF development seminars
T9	Communication and self-disclosure seminar, constructive discipline model seminar, sharing seminars, constructive discipline model, implementation and prevention strategies for teachers, communication styles seminar, exemplary practices in education symposium
T10	PE formator course, PE coordinator course, sports organization and management course, PE course, coordinator formatter development seminar, provincial coordinator seminar, PE development seminar, special education seminar, PE adaptation seminar
T11	2 times AAHPERD (The American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance) congress Tampa-USA, AAHPERD congress Seattle-USA, AAHPERD congress San Diego-USA, AAHPERD congress Boston-USA, AAHPERD congress Indianapolis-USA, PE teacher training programme, USA, international basketball coaching clinic
T12	TFF UEFA-A coaching courses and development courses, Acar Baltaş character education seminar
T13	National PE symposiums, sports science congresses, recreation symposium/panels; TFF UEFA-B coaching course and development seminars, University-MoNE collaborative learning project
T14	International teacher education seminars and courses, international trainings, webinars, international model PET blogs
T15	School improvement seminar
T16	Sabancı University education, Hacettepe University trainings, ERG symposiums, Sports Education Group symposiums
T17	Symposium on new and creative approaches in Physical Education and Sports Teaching, Education on creative problem solving techniques, entrepreneurship education, training science congress, TBF 4 <sup>th</sup> level coaching course, TBF National trainer development seminar, applied education congress, symposium on PE and sports teaching integrated with technology, 4 <sup>th</sup> Global PE pedagogy, teachers' symposium, physical activity workshop, Symposium of National healthy lifestyle and nutrition symposium
T18	National team coaching and development seminars, coaching seminars on basketball, volleyball, tennis, traditional children's games, refereeing seminars on basketball, volleyball
T19	TFF UEFA-B coaching courses, TFF football coach development seminar
T20	PE formator seminar, PE coordinator seminar, rhythmic gymnastics international refereeing seminars, rhythmic gymnastics national refereeing seminars, rhythmic gymnastics, folk dance coaching courses, swimming, folk dance refereeing courses
T21	Books and internet resources by the authors of Doğan Cüceloğlu, Engin Gençtan, Haluk Yavuzer, Ebru Albayrak Sıdar, Robert J. Mackenzie
T22	National team coaching and development seminars, coaching seminars on basketball, volleyball, tennis, traditional children's games, refereeing seminars on basketball, volleyball

The participants reported that character education was also mentioned, though superficially, in the coaching development seminars organized by the federations.

### ***Data Collection***

The current research was initiated after granting the approval from the Akdeniz University Clinical Research Ethics Committee (approval number: KAEK-375 and date: May 26, 2021). The research data were gathered through individual in-depth interviews. Having reviewed the relevant literature, the researchers designed an interview form with 20 questions by conferring with four academicians who are experts in their fields and teach in the Faculties of Sport Sciences. Some of the questions employed in the interview form are “what is character?” and “which character virtues can be gained through PE and sports courses?”.

Semi-structured interviews organized according to a specific schedule were conducted on 22 participants. These interviews were recorded on the Sony ICD-PX240 audio recorder after the participants had given their informed consent, and the audio recordings were later transcribed verbatim. Lasting one and half hours on average, each interview was held face-to-face with 11 participants in the PE Group Room in the participant's school, and with 11 participants over the *Zoom* platform due to pandemic conditions.

### ***Analysis of Data***

Content analysis was applied to interpret the concepts and relationships that would explain the collected data as well as revealing the experiences and meanings (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). At the end of the whole interviewing process, the researchers created a 321-page interview text as a *Microsoft Word* document with Times New Roman font, 12 font size, and 1.5 line spacing. The pooled dataset were then divided into meaningful parts, and their conceptual equivalents were coded. Themes and sub-themes (categories) were created considering the conceptual and theoretical framework, and the data were organized under specific codes and themes. Internal consistency was achieved by making sure that the data under the themes form a meaningful whole, while external consistency was ensured by paying attention to the fact that all emerging themes could explain the gathered data in a meaningful fashion. After conferring about the themes, categories, and codes with three academicians who are experts in character education and qualitative research methods, the final stage of the content analysis was initiated. At the final stage of the content analysis, the whole dataset was interpreted, and the research outcomes were revealed.

### ***Validity and Reliability***

Scholars propose different conceptual and theoretical approaches to *validity* and *reliability* in qualitative research. For instance, Lincoln and Guba (1985) came up with the concept of *trustworthiness*, rather than referring to the concepts of validity and reliability. The criteria and techniques enhancing the quality of qualitative research are generally described based on the concept of trustworthiness (Arastaman, Fidan, & Fidan, 2018). The four criteria addressed to elevate the trustworthiness of qualitative research are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1986, as cited in Arastaman et al., 2018). All these criteria were ensured in this qualitative research in the following ways:

*Credibility*: Credibility, which depends on the meaningfulness of reality, concerns the questions of how the research findings match the reality, to what extent the findings are compatible with reality, whether the findings reflect the realities, and whether the researchers measure what they think they measure (Merriam, 2009). The strategies applied for ensuring credibility in this research are as follows:

- ***Long-term interaction***: The validity of the data collected in long-lasting interviews is higher, as an environment of trust is created through the long-term interaction between the researcher and the data source so that the interviewee can be more sincere in his or her responses. Long-term interaction will boost the credibility of the research data (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). To this end, the duration of the interview in this study was kept long for long-term interaction, creating an atmosphere of trust and ensuring that the informants were sincere in their responses.

- **Depth-oriented information gathering:** What is expected from the qualitative researcher is to unearth the meaning of the events and phenomena learned in the field in terms of the research question, their relations with each other, and the patterns exhibited as a whole. The researcher should be able to critically evaluate the data he or she collects, question the adequacy of the data in addressing the research questions, and confirm the accuracy of the results (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 20188). In this research, the researcher deeply questioned, compared, interpreted, and conceptualized the results obtained to address the research questions.
- **Triangulation:** In qualitative research, the researcher should reveal different perspectives, meanings, indicators, sources about the event and phenomenon at issue, and the data sources should be diversified. Besides, participants with diverse characteristics should be included in the research, and multiple realities should be brought together (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). This research brought together the participating teachers with different characteristics, thereby presenting multiple perspectives, perceptions, experiences and livings.
- **Tactics to help ensure honesty in informants:** Persons requested to take part in the interview need to be given the opportunity to refuse to participate in the research. Interviews should involve informants who are genuinely willing to participate and ready to report data in a comfortable way. They ought to be encouraged to be frank right from the beginning of the process (Shenton, 2004). This research recruited PE teachers who agreed to participate in the research. In addition, the researchers told the informants that the audio recordings and interview texts would only be listened and viewed by the researchers and used for scientific purposes so that they provided honest and sincere information in their answers.
- **Expert review:** Individuals who possess general knowledge about the research topic as well as experts on qualitative research methods can evaluate the research with different dimensions, enhancing the credibility of the research (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). In this research, three academicians specializing in character education and two academicians with extensive expertise in qualitative research methods contributed substantially to enhancing the research quality by evaluating the research in various dimensions and providing constructive feedback and practical suggestions.
- **Inter-coder reliability:** Definitions become more precise when two researchers code the same dataset and discuss their initial difficulties. Disagreements suggest that the definition needs to be expanded or otherwise modified. Only in this way is it possible to reach a clear and common ground for what the codes mean and which data are most appropriate for a particular code. This method not only contributes to definitional clarity but is also an effective reliability check. The size of a codable data block and whether coders prefer similar codes for the same pieces of data are the fundamental questions of this technique. Even though intercoder reliability cannot be expected to surpass 70% initially, this percentage is close to 80%, and both the code and coder agreement should be within the range of 90%, depending on the size and spacing of the coding scheme (Miles & Huberman, 1994). For reliability calculation, this study applied the following reliability formula proposed by Miles & Huberman (1994):

$$\text{Reliability: } (\text{number of agreements}) / (\text{total number of agreements} + \text{disagreements})$$

As a result of the reliability calculations, the intercoder agreement was calculated as .88 in this study. Afterwards, the evaluations continued until a consensus was reached on all codes, and the analyses were terminated when a consensus was reached on all codes.

- **Background, qualifications and experience of the researchers:** The reliability of the researcher is an overriding factor in ensuring the credibility of qualitative research, since it is made up of data collection, analysis and interpretation functions in qualitative research (Patton, 2002). Since the qualitative researcher functions as a data collection and measurement tool, it is of profound significance to report personal and professional information about the investigated phenomenon (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). In line with these explanations, the background, qualifications, and experiences of the researchers are as follows:

**First author:** I have been teaching the PE course for 17 years. I attempt to promote and nurture good character in my students by constantly producing solutions for many problems encountered by students during the activities and games. Since not every method creates the same effect on each student, this leads me to come up with new solutions for students with different personalities. In line with this effort, I keep up with both national and international literature and also exchange ideas with my colleagues. Although I have come across genuine examples in the international literature, I could not observe the same richness in the national literature. I have also realized that some PE teachers in Turkey do not have solid background in teaching character education, while others provide smart solutions to different problems and are knowledgeable in character education. As a PE teacher from within the field, such reasons led me to re-define the concept of character and to research about what kind of approaches, activities and practices can help to nurture virtues in students. One of my priorities is to share the information I have obtained by reviewing the literature and the results of this research with other PE teachers and to contribute to the existing literature.

**Second author:** I have been serving as an academician for 11 years. Prior to my academic career, I taught PE courses for 10 years. The problems related to our research topic caught my attention throughout my teaching life. During my doctoral education, I took courses on this subject, performed some research, and began to follow national and international resources. Presently I am still visiting schools within the scope of the practice teaching course and observing the enduring problems concerning character education. I made the adaptation of scales on sports ethics and character, published articles, and directed numerous dissertations. I am currently lecturing on character education and values at both undergraduate and graduate levels. I am of the opinion that I have a good command of the theoretical knowledge and problems in this field.

**Transferability:** In qualitative research terms, transferability refers to forming tentative judgements on the applicability of research results to similar environments, constructing testable hypotheses (Erlandson et al., 1993, as cited in Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018), and understanding to what extent the findings can be adapted to similar contexts (Shenton, 2004). What was done for the sake of transferability in this research are:

- **Detailed description:** The transferability of qualitative research results depends on the adequate description of the data on which they are predicated (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). The data gathered in this research were orchestrated according to concepts and themes, reported through direct quotations without adding comments, and presented in a detailed manner.
- **Purposeful sampling:** Researchers intend to increase transferability by employing the purposeful sampling method in order to uncover the events and phenomena typically encountered in qualitative research and their varying features (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). The purposeful sampling method was adopted in this study to enhance transferability. The study population was selected based on criterion sampling and snowball sampling, which are purposeful sampling methods in qualitative research.

*Dependability:* Dependability means that the findings and interpretations of the research are the product of a consistent process, and that the process in which the findings are obtained is clear and repeatable (Guba, 1981, as cited in Arastaman et al., 2018). The efforts aimed at achieving dependability in this research are as follows:

- All the steps of the researching process were elucidated in detail. In the semi-structured interviews, the questions were asked through the interview form and recorded. During the coding process, the data were split into meaningful parts, and their conceptual equivalents were coded. Themes and sub-themes (categories) were created considering the conceptual and theoretical framework. After the data were organized under the specific codes and themes, the results were discussed and associated based on the findings.

*Confirmability:* Confirmability rests on the fact that the accuracy of findings extends to the data, and that the researcher must relate data, analytical processes, and findings to one another in such a way that the reader can confirm the adequacy of the findings (Morrow, 2005). It is important to reveal that the findings are not caused by the characteristics and choices of the researcher, but by the experiences and thoughts of the participants (Arastaman et al., 2018). The attempts by the researchers to achieve confirmability in this study include the following:

- Three academics specializing in the field of character education assessed whether the findings, conclusions, and recommendations reported by the current study were confirmed when the raw data were reviewed. In addition, the direct statements of the participants were included in the findings section, and the evidence was presented regarding the confirmability of the codes and themes.

## Findings

As a result of the analyses of the interviews with PE teachers, five themes emerged, as presented in Table 3. These themes will be elucidated in the relevant sections in order.

**Table 3.** Themes obtained at the end of the interviews

No	Name of the themes
1	Opinions on the Concept of Character <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perspectives on the character and factors impacting character development</li> <li>• Desirable character traits</li> <li>• Undesirable character traits</li> </ul>
2	Opinions on the Necessity of Delivering Character Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The role and importance of character education</li> <li>• The role and importance of PE course in character education</li> </ul>
3	Opinions on the Content of PE in Character Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approaches to character education</li> <li>• Activities for character education</li> <li>• Methods of understanding the development of character virtues</li> </ul>
4	Opinions on the Role of the PE Teacher in Character Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The teacher's necessity to be a role model</li> <li>• Role of presenting character education through in-class activities</li> </ul>
5	Suggestions of PE teachers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suggestions for student education</li> <li>• Suggestions for teacher education</li> <li>• Suggestions for character education resources</li> </ul>

### *Opinions on the Concept of Character*

This theme concerns the ways the informants perceive the notion of character and their perspectives towards good and bad character traits. Their views on this issue are presented under three sub-themes, such as perception of character and determinants of character development, features of good character, and bad character traits.

The sub-theme of perception of character and determinants of character development encompasses the definition of the character in addition to the factors playing a pivotal role in the character development. The participants described character as individuals' values, personality, achievements, and cognitive-affective-behavioral phenomena, and firmly believed that the development of character is impacted by family life, school setting, and environmental factors. T9, T12 and T20 expressed their views on this issue as such:

*T9: Character... are the behaviors and discourses that start with the family and develop the child as the school and the external environment.*

*T12: In character education, it is necessary to manage the function in the triangle of environment, school and family very well.*

*T20: We can say that character is people's stance, attitude, speech, thoughts, actions that they do, ... behavior or facts.*

Based on the participants' comments, character is regarded as the possession of a certain concept, and character development is influenced by certain elements. Cognitive, affective and behavioral aspects of the character are highlighted, and external factors play a critical role in the development of the individual's character.

The sub-theme of good character traits identifies the virtues of possessing virtues along with the virtues that can be nurtured by means of PE courses. When questioned about the constituents of good character traits, the participants listed a wide array of characteristics, such as trueness, honesty, love, respect, empathy, benevolence, cooperation, communication, tolerance, sensitivity, patience, self-discipline, fair-play, perseverance, harmony, hard work, innovation, equality, justice, curiosity, transcendence, self-confidence, patriotism, responsibility, compassion, kindness, compassion, flexibility and problem-solving skills. T11 voiced his opinion on this issue by cataloguing a range of character features:

*T11: Curiosity, being assertive, being independent, being respectful, being honest, being free, being able to express oneself well, being clear, being fair, being flexible, being optimistic, being forgiving are good character traits.*

When it comes to the character virtues that can be nurtured through PE courses, the informants put forward a long list of character traits, including empathy, honesty, leadership, fair-play, love, respect, helpfulness, courtesy, judgment, self-control, harmony, perseverance, responsibility, communication, self-discipline, patience, commitment, self-control, diligence, dedication, self-confidence, tolerance, accuracy, sensitivity, justice, curiosity, creativity, cooperation. T14 touched upon this issue by stating:

*T14: PE courses help to develop fair play... responsibility, helpfulness, empathy, communication, being healthy individuals, that is, being balanced individuals... honesty....*

As for the changes in student behaviors as a result of character education practices, the participants pointed to the favorable differences and shifts in student behaviors. T11 shared his experience related to the subject:

*T11: After doing "thank you" and "you're welcome" activities I observe that the student picks up his friend from the ground.... Like not pushing each other while drinking water after doing "respect for your juniors" and "taking lines" activities... I observe these during break time when I have them practiced in lesson.*

In relation to the question "Can students transfer the virtues developed through character education practices in PE courses into their daily lives?", the informants affirmed the question by exemplifying the situations in which the targeted virtues were nurtured in students and transferred to their daily lives. T2 and T12 dwelled on their experiences on this topic:

*T2: Since children learn to wait in line, I observe that they warn each other when they need to queue up in the canteen. When someone gets sick(...). in the name of sharing and helping, at school... a student has given the right position and is at the head of the child... It was among the children who gave first aid to the epilepsy crisis on the bus; ... With the physical fitness test, I would like to tell them that the weight, height and the health-related aspects of a person should not be mocked.*

*T12: When his friend is injured in the field ... he is trying to help. Trying to help means that he will not be injured anyone in the future. Once the child turns it into a behavior, he implements it, I know children who never let their parents throw the garbage on the ground.*

The comments by the participants signify the adoption of character virtues in students thanks to the character education activities implemented in PE courses. Moreover, the self-reports of the informants reveal the transfer of the adopted virtues beyond PE classes, substantiating the discourse of "sports builds character".

In the sub-theme of undesirable character traits, the researchers identified some negative characteristics that may develop in individuals. When asked to comment on the components of negative character traits, the participants' responses covered a wide spectrum of characteristics such as disrespect, egocentrism, lack of self-discipline, greed, lack of communication, injustice, laziness, disharmony, prejudice, acting contrary to fair play, intolerance, self-confidence, ruthlessness, incivility, impatience, insensitivity, inflexibility, inconsistency, dishonesty, unreliability, self-interest, and irresponsibility. T17 expressed his opinion as in the following:

*T17: I can say that injustice, lying, intolerance, irresponsibility, indiscipline and disrespect are bad character traits.*

#### ***Opinions on the Necessity of Delivering Character Education***

This theme reflects the participants' views on the role and merits of character education, the motives for integrating character education into their classes, the function and significance of PE courses in character education. Their perspectives were categorized under the two sub-themes, namely "role and merits of character education" and "function and significance of PE courses in character education".

The sub-theme of the role and merits of character education encapsulates the importance of character education and the motives for integrating character education into PE classes. Based on the participant responses, character education promotes positive behaviors by nurturing good character traits in students, which is a highly salient issue given that it curtails the development of bad character traits and thus the emergence of negative behaviors. With respect to the merits of cultivating children with good character and the motives for integrating character education into PE classes, the informants stated that, by cultivating good character in students, they intended to make them respected, loved, and successful individuals in society. They also pointed out that they wanted their students to lead happy and prosperous lives in the future, act as role models for the society, grow up to be individuals with universal virtues, upgrade the social life, and contribute to a more sustainable world. T4, T11 and T20 voiced their views on this issue by reporting:

*T4: The biggest advantage of a child's good character is that after a while, the number of individuals with good character is high, it will have such an impact on the society. This draws the framework of a good society, a good group of people and a good world as a whole.*

*T11: If you tell a child to be respectful at school, he will be respectful to the people around him when he goes out... the child transfers what he has learned to the outside. You should teach the child not to interfere with personal rights and freedoms, to stand in line, to thank, to request, to work together as a team. When you educate them on these issues, children will both hand them down to the next generation and better serve their families, friends and society.*

*T20: If he has good character, his problem-solving skills will be better. Children with good character do better in the art of managing life. The child with good character will be better at entrepreneurship and human relations. They can notice their mistakes and strengths, think positively, and take responsibility.*

By providing space for character education in their classes, the participants said they also intended to inhibit the emergence of bad character traits, harmful habits, and social and moral problems that might unfold in the family and society. T11 and T14 commented on this as such:

*T11: Especially the development of technology, children's ability to reach everything they want, and the games they play on the internet have started to push children towards a constant negativity. The rising tendencies of violence among children and their distancing from personal and social responsibilities have begun. Improving them is very important. The PE course is a very advantageous one for this task.*

*T14: The child is the building block of this society; they will grow up and then they will form the members of the society... The fact that a child is not cultivated well, he turns into an adult with a bad temper and character, and he gets some opportunities... It may even cause situations that will cause outrage in the society.*

From the participants' perspective, the role and merits of character education stem from the functional and instrumental nature of character education. They articulated some thoughts as to the function of character education in upgrading individual, social and universal life. The content and activities of the character education they implement in their classes, they argued, are valid in life, suit to achieve the goals they set, and contribute to the individual's own, social, and universal life. Based on these views, character education is functional in that it serves individual, social, and universal functions. On the other hand, the instrumental nature of character education enables and facilitates the individual's orientation towards the development of virtues and hinders the emergence of bad character traits. Given that it contributes to individual, social and universal life through these efforts, character education is instrumental in terms of achieving the established goals.

The sub-theme of the function and significance of PE courses in character education includes the opportunities offered by the PE course for character education and the ways its potential can be tapped for this purpose. In relation to how this course is capable of encouraging and nurturing good character, the informants reported that their classes were ripe with opportunities to deliver character education appropriately, and that the course could be turned into an efficient ground for character education when those opportunities were tapped accurately. These opportunities may include (1) learning by doing and experiencing through active participation in the lesson, (2) improving the leadership characteristics of team work, (3) boosting student motivation through appreciation, (4) learning from defeats, (5) cultivating commitment and responsibility through educational games and matches, (6) nurturing the virtue of self-management through responsibilities within the activities such as planning, team leadership, refereeing, and record keeping.

Some of the informants expressed their views on the function and significance of PE courses in character education by touching upon its various aspects: T11 dwelled on learning by doing, T20 on increased motivation through representation and appreciation, T17 on virtues of commitment and responsibility through activities such as matches, T16 on cultivation of character through defeats, T9 on virtues of leadership and humility, and T1 on the virtue of self-management by reporting:



T11: PE lesson is the only lesson that addresses all three areas, both visual, auditory and kinesthetic.

T20: We assign tasks in dance performances, folk dances, a sports event or small competitions... s/he represents, s/he adopts... we expand his/her self-confidence across the society.

T17: In an inactive lesson, values education is not as effective as in PE lesson... there is a game, there is a struggle, there are races and competitions. All these have some virtues.

T16: There is sadness, a sense of justice; PE lesson has everything. In our life in the game there are... how we can deal with our sadness, how we can plan the next step, how we can learn a lesson when we lose. So, when these are... combined with games... we can take them out of egocentrism and encourage to act fairly.

T9: You make small touches in the games... for example, a team that cooperates ...or you say lead your team... After a while, it starts to gain that characteristic. While practicing this, it is important to combine it with other given character traits. For example, you give the child the spirit of leadership, but if you do not teach tolerance, that child starts to lead his friends in another domain without tolerance.

T1: In the tournaments we have organized between classes, students form a team and at the same time take responsibility and become leaders. They lead the class, make the selection, draw the lots, we only guide.

The self-reports of the informants highlight the belief that the PE course fits well in with character education due to its course structure and opportunities it offers, while warning that this potential should be tapped appropriately so that the course performs its function effectively.

#### ***Opinions on the Content of PE in Character Education***

This theme is constitutive of three sub-themes, such as *approaches to character education*, *activities for character education*, and *methods of understanding the development of character virtues*. In relation to the questions “how do you teach your students the character virtues, for example, by integrating them into the curriculum or by focusing on specific virtues every week?” and “how do you establish the connection between the character and the game?”, various approaches were addressed by the participants. These approaches can be listed as integrate character education into the curriculum, classroom discussions, explicit instruction in character and values, holistic approach, service learning, and teachable moments. T6 referred to integrate character education into the curriculum, T2 to classroom discussions, T14 to explicit instruction in character and values, T4 to holistic approach, T9 to service learning, and T3 to teachable moments as in the following:

T6: Every week, there are topics such as cooperation and sense of responsibility related to character in our lesson plans, and I integrate them into the lesson plans.

T2: We usually evaluate the games at the end of the games. What we learned from this game, what we shared, what we felt, what we won, what we can do... They evaluate the game and brainstorm.

T14: Every week and in every lesson, I address the topics separately in planned activities. What will I observe in students, what will I evaluate? I need to know this beforehand so that I can proceed accordingly... I move on by sharing what I follow with the students.

T4: At the school where I work, we implement the PYP (Primary Years Program) education system, so we discuss values or issues that will elevate the child to a higher level in a good point, not week by week, but term by term. If we are talking about respect in PE, this topic is also taught in the English and the History course in the same week. Naturally, since the child does something related to this topic in the Visual Arts course, we provide reinforcement or holistic education.

*T9: Not just by telling, we also create environments where children can apply them. For example, if the topic is benevolence or tolerance or something else in that month. They prepare tables and boards, the children organize posters themselves, if there are internet studies related to this, they bring them and impart this to their teachers and friends during the class. If the topic is helping animals, they include it in that unit and give a presentation and do a food aid activity there.*

*T3: For example, when talking about benevolence... If there is an example of sharing or another virtue, I would like to focus on that virtue as well. During the game, the student shows all his characteristics, reveals his good or bad character traits, and is guided towards the good through relevant suggestions.*

Judging by the informants' responses and comments, they seemed to adopt miscellaneous approaches to character education. The behind-the-scenes reasons for these differences are likely to result from available facilities of the schools, different curriculum they follow due to the special status of the schools, and different trainings on character education that the participants received. While those working in public schools mostly make use of one or two approaches (teachable moments and curriculum-integrated character education), those employed in private schools which adopt the holistic approach often fall back upon more than one approach. The combination of various approaches in character education as well as the fact that this variety includes the holistic approach may mean that these methods are the most appropriate and effective means of implementing character education.

The sub-theme of activities for character education consists of games and practices used to support and nurture good character and the virtues assumed to be cultivated through these activities. With respect to the questions "which games do you play for character education and what are your implementations?", there emerged 52 different games and 15 different types of practices that they themselves designed or modified, in addition to traditional games. A sample game and the implementation of the virtues thought to be nurtured in students are provided in Appendix 1. In addition to the games and practices, there are also practices such as one-on-one meeting with the student, reflection break, calming corner, bench, time-out corner, and withdrawing the reward at the end of the lesson, in an attempt to turn negative incidents emerging during the lesson into positive. T11 expressed his thoughts related to this issue as follows:

*T11: There is a time-out corner when there is a problem in the lesson. It is the reflection corner. He watches his friends from the reflection corner, questions his behavior, then comes back and explains why.*

The sub-theme of methods of understanding the development of character virtues involves evaluation methods devised by PETs to assess whether they have achieved their goals for character education. On the issue of how to assess the differences in student behavior brought about by character education practices, the participants seemed to draw on a rich repertoire of evaluation methods, including oral feedback from students, families, colleagues and acquaintances, teachers' observations, behavior portal, treasure box, student portfolios, feedback from student surveys, and end-of-year grades. T14 and T17 elaborated on these methods by stating:

*T14: In the e-portfolios prepared by each student... Sometimes I also ask questions about what they pay attention to in the lesson or what they do in a match. They might provide verbal or written feedback here.*

*T17: We generally evaluate the student by means of surveys within the institutional structure of the school. They include questions pertaining this aspect of the course. I also think feedback from observations is of utmost value.*

The self-reports of the participants reveal that the most common evaluation methods turned out to be observations and interviews (feedback from families and colleagues). Further to this, the participants employed in private schools fall back upon different assessment methods both created by themselves and implemented by the school as a part of the program. This is of paramount importance in terms of carrying out a more systematic and permanent evaluation of the attainment of the goals for character education.

#### ***Opinions on the Role of the PE Teacher in Character Education***

This theme, which is reflective of the informants' perspectives towards the place of the PE teacher in character education, includes the sub-themes of the teacher's necessity to be a role model and the role of presenting character education through the activities in the classes. When it comes to the influence of the PE teacher upon the character development of students, the responses are indicative of their stance as an exemplary role model in the cultivation of good character traits in students. T13 and T17 explained their views on the necessity of being a role model by saying:

*T13: We share many things with the child. ...playing games, playing matches, training, and getting closer together. That's why, the PET is a very important role model for character and I think it is very effective.*

*T17: In character education, a child who adopts the proper behavior of the teacher repeats the proper behavior that the teacher is trying to teach. It is very important for this to turn into an attitude. Therefore, the role of the teacher is crucial here.*

As for the PETs' role in character education, teachers reportedly play a highly effective and remarkable role owing to allowing space for character education in their classes. T4 elaborated on the role of presenting character education through in-class activities as in the following:

*T4: I think that as PETs, we are trainers who assume an active and effective role in cultivating good character. By incorporating good character traits into the games, we enable [students] to reinforce this by adding these traits to the games for their cultivation or transformation into behaviors or involvement in the child's life.*

The comments by the informants underline the critical function of the PE teacher in character education. Because they are taken as role models by most students and cover character education in their classes spontaneously or in a planned manner and also due to the structure of the course, PE teachers assume an effective role and serve as a key element in character education.

#### ***Suggestions of PETs***

This theme includes the participants' statements about suggestions for character education methods and resources for character education which are categorized under three sub-themes, including *suggestions for student education*, *suggestions for teacher education* and *suggestions for character education resources*. In relation to the suggestions for student education, the informants shared their convictions, such as cultivating individuals with universal virtues, designing activities for social-emotional learning by establishing interdisciplinary connections, introducing curriculum-integrated character education through holistic approach by creating a caring and diligent community at school, and spreading character education across all age groups starting from kindergarten. T11 voiced his recommendations regarding student education by stating:

*T11: In the PE class, all disciplines can be connected... It is open to learning by doing... Many studies can be performed on social and emotional learning areas...*

The suggestions for teacher education cover such topics as introduction of must courses about character education in education faculties, professional development trainings for in-service teachers, development of specific resources for character education unique to the PE course, character education workshops, creation of a common program for character education in Türkiye, organization of character education symposiums, and delivery of drama and theatre courses aimed at character education. T2 articulated his suggestions concerning teacher education by saying:

*T2: Certainly, must courses teaching how important character education is in PE should be delivered at the university ... It should be made compulsory for all teacher candidates ... In-service training on character education should be provided to teachers, administrators, and the education community.*

With respect to suggestions for character education resources, the participants addressed a wide spectrum of materials, including written sources such as books, articles, visual and printed media, and biographies (i.e. Atatürk); online resources such as videos, webinars, foreign PE platforms, and blogs; events such as seminars, symposiums, in-service trainings, overseas trainings, congresses, and workshops; associations and societies such as Turkish Physical Education Teachers Association (TUBED) and Shape America; and other resources such as observations, experiences from sportsmanship and studentship period, and teachers and coaches in the immediate surroundings. T14 gave a detailed account of suggestions for resources as such:

*T14: I mostly use foreign sources. I follow the blogs created by PE teachers. I attend their webinars... Sometimes we have the chance to go abroad and attend these trainings there one-on-one... After translating the knowledge I gained into the field here, we organize webinars, online and face-to-face workshops to impart my own experiences to other friends.*

Of particular note, the participating teachers primarily underscored the role of teacher education in providing a successful character education. Moreover, they suggested that a proper and common character education program would be of great benefit. Based on these views, teachers seem to feel the absence of resource books on character education.

## Discussion

Our findings pertaining to the notion of character are reflective of the teachers' perspectives on perception of character, determinants of character development, features of good character, and bad character traits. Based on the results, the participants conceptualized character as possession of a specific traits, such as students' values, achievements, and cognitive-affective-behavioral phenomena. For the participating teachers, family life, school setting, and environmental factors are the main drivers impacting the development of character. Rudd and Mondello (2006) report that most coaches designate character as a combination of moral and social values (i.e. hard work, respect, and honesty). As the PE teachers in Tutkun et al.'s (2017) study argue, character is constitutive of the student's unique behaviors and values at school, is largely shaped within the family, and takes its final form as a result of his or her experiences in society. A comparative analysis of our results and those of other empirical investigations reveals that the PE teachers defined character with a wider range of virtues and traits in our study, and they also referred to the component of environment as well as the family and school elements in the character development. That leads us to conclude that the student is required to acquire multiple virtues and characteristics to be an individual with good character, and that family, school, and environment are integral elements of the individual's character development.

Another point deserving attention in our findings is that virtues such as love, respect, empathy, benevolence, and cooperation stand out as the components of good character traits to be acquired by the students and cultivated through PE courses. Our findings also reveal that students adopt virtues and translate them into their everyday lives thanks to the integration of character education into PE classes. While the PE teachers in Brodie's (2006) study describe the virtues of a good athlete as skilfulness, honesty, fairness, enthusiastic, respectfulness, cooperation, demonstrate effort and teamwork, those in

Denaro's (2010) research reportedly teach self-discipline, respect, honesty, and fairness as good character traits in their classes. Indeed, a large and growing number reports on the development of good character traits through curriculum-integrated character education in PE courses have been published thus far. These empirical works have reported the cultivation of numerous characteristics and virtues, such as levels of moral growth (Romance et al., 1986); altruistic tendencies and prosocial behaviors (Kleiber & Roberts, 1981); responsibility (Hellison, 1995); moral judgment, reasoning, and intention (Gibbons et al., 1995); trust, helping, and problem-solving (Solomon, 1997b); trust, respect, and responsibility (Ennis et al., 1999); self-regulation (Lakes & Hoyt, 2004); fair-play, autonomy, and intrinsic motivation (Hassandra, Goudas, Hatzigeorgiadis, & Theodorakis, 2007); trust, self-confidence, respect, and personal and social responsibility (Hansen & Parker, 2009); fairness and self-discipline (Denaro, 2010); trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and cooperation (MacCracken, 2011); enjoyment, leadership, confidence, and self-esteem (Farrant, 2013); problem-solving, respect, and container of emotional expressions (Firmansyah, 2016); honesty, fairness, helpfulness, responsibility, respect, and citizenship (Adır, 2017); competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring (Weiss, Kipp, Reichter, Espinoza, & Bolter, 2018); connection (Johnston, Marttinen, Fredrick, & Bhat, 2019); self-efficacy and responsibility (Pan, Huang, Lee, & Hsu, 2019). The cultivation of virtues through specially designed character education programs and the transference of these nurtured virtues into students' daily lives are also well-documented in the literature (Bean, Whitley, & Gould, 2014; Hellison, 1995; Weiss, Stuntz, Bhalla, Bolter, & Price, 2013; Weiss, Bolter, & Kipp, 2016; Yoon & Armour, 2016). In this regard, our findings broadly supports the work of other studies in that the incorporation of character education into PE courses enabled students to acquire character virtues and translate these virtues into other contexts.

Our findings also signify several bad character traits that may occur in individuals, such as disrespect, egocentrism, lack of self-discipline, rudeness, impatience, insensitivity, lack of communication, and injustice. Lickona (1992) lists undesirable character features as skepticism, despair, self-centeredness, loneliness, soft, and undisciplined. Note that our literature review yielded no other results as to the research on undesirable character traits in PE courses.

Our results favoring the delivery of character education in PE courses reveal that it plays a key role in nurturing good character traits while hindering the emergence of bad character traits, that it fulfils individual, social, and universal functions, and that it is instrumental in attaining the established goals. Besides, our findings also suggest that the PE course encompasses several essential elements for character education, and that the participants allow space for character education in their classes due to the aforementioned reasons. An overwhelming amount of research work addresses the cultivation of certain good character traits in students through PE programs or activities specially designed for character education (Adır, 2017; Bulach, 2001; Denaro, 2010; Destani, Hannon, Podlog, & Brusseau, 2014; Doty & Pim, 2010; Ennis et al., 1999; Farrant, 2013; Firmansyah, 2016; Gibbons et al., 1995; Hall, Livingston, & Becker, 2013; Hansen & Parker, 2009; Hassandra et al., 2007; Hellison, 1995; Johnston et al., 2019; Lakes & Hoyt 2004; MacCracken, 2011; Pan et al., 2019; Priest et al., 1999; Romance et al., 1986; Solomon, 1997b; Weiss et al., 2013; Weiss et al., 2016; Weiss et al., 2018). A close look at the relevant literature will also lead us into some investigations pursuing the goal of preventing individual and social problems with the help of PE programs specially tailored for character education. For instance, Hellison (1978) developed a PE program targeted at cultivating self-responsibility among the troubled high-school youth. In another investigation, Balderson and Sharpe (2006) proposed a model character education program for disadvantaged primary school children with a history of chronic disruptive, anti-social, and violent behavior. In a similar vein, Camiré and Trudel (2010) posit that schools should adopt a pro-active approach and launch character development initiatives in their curricula to minimize the gamesmanship incidents. As also identified by considerable number of reports, the PE course, by its very nature, embodies essential elements of character education. In this context, the results reported by Solmaz and Bayrak (2016), Adır (2017), Prasetio et al. (2019) all furnish convincing evidence that good character traits are nurtured in students though games in PE classes. So far, character education initiatives in PE courses have been shown to enhance skills such as connection and character

development (Johnston et al., 2019; Weiss et al., 2018), responsibility (Adır, 2017; MacCracken, 2011; Pan et al., 2019), and character and leadership (Hall et al., 2013). Brodie (2006) suggests that the participating teachers foreground the importance of character education in promoting joyful participation through the PE and sports course. Corroborating the previous research data on the role of character education in PE, our study indicates that character education carries a lot of weight in PE programs in terms of improvement of individual, social, and universal life by cultivating good character traits and prevention of individual and social challenges by hindering the emergence of bad character traits. Also in line with the earlier studies, the current study argues that the PE course apparently embodies some essential elements of character education.

As indicated by our findings, while delivering character education, PE teachers draw on a large repertoire of approaches, such as integrate character education into the curriculum, classroom discussions, explicit instruction of character and values, holistic approach, service learning, and teachable moments. In addition, our results unearth the games and activities employed in character education as well as the virtues reported to be cultivated through these games and activities. In order to nurture the virtue of fair-play in students, Yıldıran (2005) introduces approaches to guide PE teachers as diverse as talking about fair-play, dilemma stories, developing sympathy and empathy, accepting one's own emotions, learning experiences through fair play games, and PE teacher as a fair-play model. In an effort to nurture good character in students, numerous published reports address curriculum-integrated intervention programs for character education (Bulach, 2001; Ennis et al., 1999; Gibbons et al., 1995; Hassandra et al., 2007; Lakes & Hoyt, 2004; Pan et al., 2019), whereas many others investigate the effect of specially-tailored games and activities upon character education (Adır, 2017; Balderson & Sharpe, 2006; Brodie, 2006; Destani et al., 2014; Farrant, 2013; Hansen & Parker, 2009; Prasetio et al., 2019; Solmaz & Bayrak, 2016; Solomon, 1997b). Sulistiyono (2017) designs 20 football-specific games for the students' character and physical development, while Brodie (2006) maintains that out-of-school excursions and camping profoundly influence students' moral development as well as building a more accurate picture of their characters. When our results are compared with those in the literature, our participating PE teachers seem to draw on a wide assortment of approaches, games, and practices in character education. This suggests that the approaches, games, and activities in character education may manifest variations, depending on the available facilities and type of schools, as well as PE teachers' perspectives and the trainings on character education that they received.

Our informants also addressed the assessment tools they themselves developed to evaluate whether the character education goals were fulfilled. This toolbox includes many strategies, ranging from feedback provided by students, families, colleagues, and students' friends to feedback from practices such as teacher observations, behavior portal, treasure box, student portfolios, student surveys, and to end-of-year grades. To date scholars have assessed the effectiveness of PE curricula tailored for character education by means of different methods. For example, a widely-used method employed for this purpose seems to be the scales (Adır, 2017; Bulach 2001; Doty & Pim, 2010; Farrant, 2013; Gibbons et al., 1995; Hassandra et al., 2007; Kleiber & Roberts, 1981; Lakes & Hoyt, 2004; Pan et al., 2019; Priest et al., 1999; Rees et al., 1990; Solmaz & Bayrak, 2016; Solomon, 1997b; Weiss et al., 2016). The other popular means of assessment stands out as interviews (Camiré & Trudel, 2010; Denaro, 2010; Riciputi, McDonough, & Ullrich-French, 2016; Romance et al., 1986; Weiss et al., 2013). On the other hand, some other scholars measured the effectiveness of PE curricula tailored for character education by merging different assessment methods, such as observations and interviews (Ennis et al., 1999); quantitative and qualitative measures (Balderson & Sharpe, 2006); checklists (Hansen & Parker, 2009); checklists, rating scales, scoring rubric, observation, student journals, surveys, questionnaires, and interviews with students, teachers, and administrators (MacCracken, 2011); surveys (Hall et al., 2013); observations, surveys, documentation, and interviews with participants (Firmansyah, 2016); in-depth interviews and questionnaires (Lee et al., 2018); interviews and talking circles (Strachan, McHugh, & Mason, 2018); documentation, observations, and interviews (Johnston et al., 2019). Our research data reveal that, rather than drawing solely on scales to assess the fulfillment of character education goals, our participants made use of methods as diverse as feedback from students, families, teachers and students'

friends, observations, behavior portal, student portfolios, student surveys, and treasure box. In this context, the utilization of a method toolbox covering different types of assessment strategies is suggestive of a thorough evaluation of the effectiveness of character education practices.

Our findings on the PE teachers' place in character education demonstrate how effective and important their role is in delivering a decent character education, because PE teachers as a paragon of virtue promote good character qualities and allow space for character education in their classes. What also matters in character education is that teachers deploy positive reinforcement (verbal appreciation) and modelling (role modelling) methods to promote character development and the acquisition of good character behaviors (Solomon, 1997a). PE teachers assume a prominent and active role in character education since they are the teachers that students take as role models most frequently (through their words and behaviors) and merge physical and character education together in their classes.

### Conclusion

Broadly speaking, character can be conceptualized as students' possession of certain attributes, including values, achievements, and cognitive-affective-behavioral phenomena. Based on our research data, family, school, and environment are portrayed as the prime drivers determining the course of character development. The major constituents of good character traits students are expected to acquire over time are listed as love, respect, empathy, benevolence, and cooperation, all of which can be nurtured with carefully crafted and well-implemented PE programs. In contrast, bad character traits that may occur in individuals are reported as disrespect, egocentrism, lack of self-discipline, rudeness, inflexibility, lack of communication, and injustice. Our informants observed that students are capable of adopting and connecting good character traits to their everyday lives thanks to the character education activities embedded in the PE course.

Our findings confirm that character education is crucial to the development of good character qualities in students with its supportive function of positive behaviors and to the hindrance of bad character with its preventive function of negative behaviors. Additionally, since our participants firmly believed that the PE course already presupposes some core elements for character education, they tended to allocate enough space to character education in their classes.

The particular approaches geared towards delivering effective character education in PE classes by the informants are listed as integrate character education into the curriculum, classroom discussions, explicit instruction of character and values, holistic approach, service learning, and teachable moments. They also exemplified some games and activities performed in their classes to this end. In order to assess the character education goals and virtues cultivated through these approaches, they reportedly employed such assessment methods as interviews, observations, and treasure box.

Our participating PE teachers as role models for students made strenuous efforts to stimulate the development of good character traits, including self-discipline, responsibility, patience, diligence, self-confidence, flexibility, judgment, harmony, and fair play. As they accommodated character education in their classes, they assumed that teacher's role is potent, pivotal, and determinative of the quality of character education. They also came up with some resource recommendations for these issues and suggested that the provision of robust student and teacher education is key to carrying out an effective character education.

Taken en masse, these results would seem to suggest that a rigorous character education can open up further possibilities for improving individual, social, and universal life as well as for averting social and moral problems likely to arise in these domains. That being the case, PE courses, as our participants stressed strongly throughout, appear to provide a prime setting for character education. They unanimously agreed that the PE teacher is a key actor in a character education program on the grounds that he or she is an exemplary role model who devotes space to character education in his or her classes. Subscribing to the view that targeted character virtues can be nurtured in students by means of various approaches, activities, and evaluation methods in PE courses, our PE teachers postulated that students could internalize these virtues and translate them into other daily life contexts.

### Suggestions

Considering the overall results revealed in the present study, the following suggestions can be offered:

- PE teachers should add character education in their instructional agenda, contributing substantially to the improvement of individual, social, and universal life. They need to be aware that they are capable of minimizing social and moral problems that might come up both individually and collectively.
- To cultivate good character in students, PE teachers should introduce games and activities that will require the active participation of all students in PE activities, bring them a sense of representation and social appreciation, and boost their interest and motivation towards character education. They also ought to seize the opportunities for teachable moments that crop up during their classes.
- PE teachers should be able to instill good character in students through character education and act as a role model considered a paragon of good character qualities.

Divergences in character education approaches, activities, practices, and assessment methods are most likely reflective of the available facilities of the schools where PE teachers are employed and the different education that they receive. These findings suggest the following directions for future investigations:

- A key policy priority should be to develop a curriculum-driven education program to standardize character education in PE courses across the country.
- Further work needs to be performed to establish how the current approaches, methods, activities, and assessment methods are impacted by the existing facilities and types of the schools where PE teachers serve their duties, as well as perspectives and the character education they receive.
- Which instruction model-based practices are adopted by PE teachers while introducing good character traits in their classes should also be investigated thoroughly.
- The implications of character education in PE courses must be examined across different social contexts, and this information could be capitalized on to develop targeted interventions aimed at character education.
- By developing an intervention program, the upshots of the games and activities to be implemented in PE courses should be analyzed to consider how far good character qualities have developed in students.
- A character education scale for PE courses can be developed to assess the effectiveness of the program and the virtues that students should possess.



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## Appendix 1

### *Target Design Game*

Targeted virtues: Collaboration, problem solving, and creative thinking

It is a game with an interdisciplinary approach (painting-PE). Students are divided into four groups. There is a table located at a distance of 20 meters from each group. Crayons and a 30-second timer are placed on each table. Students start the game with the sound of the whistle. The first student runs towards the table with a stafet in his hand and scribbles on a piece of paper for 30 seconds about the given theme. When the time is up, he runs and takes the stafet to his teammate. Student groups try to complete the picture about the theme given to the team for 20 minutes. The paintings are displayed on the sports board the next day.

### *Snowball Event*

Targeted virtues: Gaining a different perspective, empathy, respect for different opinions

First, a motivational narrative is given to the children about the targeted virtue. Afterwards, a game is played about the targeted virtue and a snowball activity is done at the end of the lesson. Students do not write their names on the paper. The activity question is "what is the result of the game you played today". Everyone has a pen and a paper in their hands, they write down their thoughts and achievements, then they turn the paper into a ball. He/she applies the given instructions such as "throw the ball farthest, throw it into the air, take someone else's paper". At the end of the activity, all students open the paper in turn and read it loud.