

From Physical Literacy to Human Flourishing: A Philosophical Literature Review of Modern Physical Education Paradigms

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: This systematic philosophical literature review examines the conceptual evolution from physical literacy frameworks to human flourishing paradigms in contemporary physical education (PE), analyzing how philosophical foundations have shaped modern pedagogical approaches and their implications for holistic human development.

Methods: Following PRISMA guidelines, a systematic search was conducted across Web of Science, Scopus, PubMed, ERIC, and SPORTDiscus databases (January 2010–August 2025). Search terms combined physical literacy, physical education, human flourishing, eudaimonia, well-being, and philosophical paradigms. Inclusion criteria encompassed peer-reviewed philosophical, theoretical, and empirical studies examining PE paradigms through philosophical lenses. Two independent reviewers screened 2,847 records, with 56 studies meeting full eligibility criteria for qualitative synthesis.

Results: The analysis revealed four dominant philosophical paradigms: (1) capability approach-based frameworks emphasizing human agency and functioning; (2) virtue ethics perspectives connecting physical literacy to character development; (3) phenomenological approaches highlighting embodied experience; and (4) eudaimonic well-being models integrating physical, psychological, and social dimensions. A paradigmatic shift was identified from narrow skill-based competencies toward comprehensive human flourishing, with physical literacy serving as foundational but not sufficient for optimal human development. Integration challenges included conceptual ambiguity, measurement difficulties, and implementation barriers in diverse educational contexts.

Conclusion: Contemporary PE paradigms demonstrate philosophical convergence toward holistic human development models, transcending traditional dualistic mind-body separations. Physical literacy emerges as a necessary foundation for human flourishing but requires integration with cognitive, affective, and social domains. Future research should develop integrated frameworks, refined assessment instruments, and culturally responsive pedagogies that honor diverse conceptions of flourishing while maintaining philosophical coherence.

Keywords: physical literacy; human flourishing; eudaimonia; physical education philosophy; capability approach; virtue ethics; embodiment.

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INTRODUCTION

Physical education has undergone substantial paradigmatic transformations over the past two decades, reflecting broader shifts in educational philosophy and understanding of human development (Kirk, 2010; Whitehead, 2010). The emergence of physical literacy as a unifying concept has challenged traditional sport-centric and fitness-focused approaches, proposing instead a holistic framework emphasizing motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge, and understanding for lifelong physical activity engagement (International Physical Literacy Association, 2017; Durden-Myers et al., 2018).

Concurrently, educational discourse has increasingly embraced human flourishing—derived from Aristotelian eudaimonia—as an overarching aim of education (Kristjánsson, 2020; White, 2011). This philosophical orientation moves beyond narrow achievement metrics toward comprehensive well-being, encompassing physical, psychological, social, and moral dimensions (Seligman, 2011; Nussbaum, 2011). The intersection of these developments raises fundamental questions about PE's role in facilitating not merely physical competence but authentic human flourishing.

Despite growing scholarly attention to both physical literacy and human flourishing, systematic philosophical analysis examining their conceptual relationships, underlying assumptions, and practical implications remains limited.

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This gap is particularly significant given that pedagogical approaches reflect implicit philosophical commitments that shape educational outcomes (Whitehead, 2001; Arnold, 1988).

The physical literacy literature has proliferated substantially since Whitehead's (2001) foundational work establishing its philosophical basis in monism, existentialism, and phenomenology. Subsequent scholarship has explored definitional clarity (Jurbala, 2015; Shearer et al., 2018), assessment frameworks (Cairney et al., 2019), and implementation strategies (Robinson et al., 2015). However, critical analyses reveal ongoing conceptual ambiguities, particularly regarding physical literacy's relationship to broader educational aims (Lundvall, 2015; Pot et al., 2018).

The human flourishing literature in education draws predominantly from virtue ethics (Kristjánsson, 2015), capability approaches (Nussbaum, 2011; Walker & Unterhalter, 2007), and positive psychology (Seligman, 2011). Within PE specifically, scholars have examined how physical activity contributes to well-being (Beni et al., 2017), character development (Jacobs & Wright, 2018), and social justice (Fitzpatrick, 2019). Nevertheless, systematic integration of physical literacy and flourishing frameworks remains underdeveloped.

Philosophical analyses of PE have historically emphasized epistemological questions (Arnold, 1988), pedagogical models (Kirk, 2013), and ethical dimensions (McNamee, 2005). Recent scholarship has increasingly adopted interdisciplinary perspectives, incorporating phenomenology (Allen-Collinson, 2009), disability studies (Fitzgerald, 2009), and feminist theory (Azzarito, 2009). Yet comprehensive reviews synthesizing these diverse philosophical currents specifically linking physical literacy to human flourishing are notably absent.

Several critical gaps emerge from existing literature:

First, no systematic philosophical review has comprehensively examined how contemporary PE paradigms conceptualize the progression from physical literacy to human flourishing. While individual studies address components of this relationship, systematic synthesis revealing underlying philosophical architectures is lacking. Second, the philosophical foundations of physical literacy—particularly Whitehead's reliance on existential phenomenology and monism—require critical examination regarding compatibility with diverse flourishing frameworks rooted in alternative philosophical traditions (virtue ethics, capability approaches, pragmatism). Third, empirical investigations of physical literacy frequently proceed without explicit engagement with flourishing outcomes, while flourishing research often treats physical dimensions superficially. This disconnect suggests theoretical fragmentation requiring philosophical clarification. Fourth, cultural and contextual variations in conceptualizing both physical literacy and flourishing remain underexplored, raising questions about universality versus particularity in PE philosophical frameworks.

This systematic philosophical review addresses these gaps by providing comprehensive analysis of how modern PE paradigms conceptualize relationships between physical literacy and human flourishing. Such analysis is crucial for several reasons:

Theoretical coherence: Establishing philosophical foundations enables consistent framework development, avoiding conceptual confusion that undermines research and practice (Pot et al., 2018).

Pedagogical implications: Philosophical commitments directly shape curricular design, instructional approaches, and assessment methods. Explicit engagement with underlying assumptions enables informed pedagogical decisions (Kirk, 2013).

Educational purpose: Clarifying PE's contribution to human flourishing situates physical education within broader educational aims, strengthening its legitimacy and relevance (Bailey et al., 2009).

Research directions: Systematic philosophical analysis reveals theoretical tensions and integration opportunities, guiding future empirical investigation.

Policy development: Evidence-based policy requires conceptual clarity regarding intended outcomes, particularly as educational systems increasingly emphasize holistic development.

This systematic review pursues five primary objectives:

1. Identify and categorize dominant philosophical paradigms informing contemporary conceptualizations of physical literacy and human flourishing in PE literature.
2. Analyze conceptual relationships between physical literacy frameworks and human flourishing theories, examining convergences, tensions, and integration possibilities.
3. Synthesize empirical evidence examining how physical literacy contributes to flourishing outcomes across physical, psychological, social, and existential dimensions.
4. Evaluate philosophical assumptions underlying different PE paradigms, including ontological, epistemological, and axiological commitments.

Propose future directions for theoretical development, empirical research, and pedagogical practice integrating physical literacy and human flourishing frameworks

METHODOLOGY

Protocol and Registration

This systematic literature review followed Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Page et al., 2021). The protocol was registered with PROSPERO prior to data extraction to ensure methodological transparency and reproducibility.

A comprehensive electronic search was conducted across five databases: Web of Science Core Collection, Scopus, PubMed/MEDLINE, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), and SPORTDiscus. The search timeframe spanned January 1, 2010, to November 30, 2024, capturing the contemporary period following Whitehead's (2010) influential physical literacy monograph.

Comprehensive Search Protocol (Web of Science):

TS = (((("physical literacy" OR "movement literacy" OR "physical competence") AND ("flourishing" OR "eudaimonia" OR "well-being" OR "wellbeing" OR "human development" OR "thriving" OR "good life" OR "optimal functioning")) OR ((("physical education" OR "movement education" OR "PE curriculum") AND ("flourishing" OR "eudaimonia" OR "capability approach" OR

"virtue ethics" OR "positive development" OR "holistic development") AND ("philosophy" OR "philosophical" OR "paradigm" OR "theoretical framework")))) AND LANGUAGE: (English) AND DOCUMENT TYPES: (Article OR Review) Timespan: 2010-2024.

Search terms were organized into three concept blocks:

Block 1 (Physical Literacy): "physical literacy" OR "movement literacy" OR "physical competence" OR "motor competence" OR "embodied literacy"

Block 2 (Flourishing): "flourishing" OR "eudaimonia" OR "well-being" OR "wellbeing" OR "human flourishing" OR "optimal development" OR "thriving" OR "good life" OR "quality of life"

Block 3 (Philosophy/Paradigms): "philosophy" OR "philosophical" OR "paradigm" OR "theoretical framework" OR "conceptual framework" OR "virtue ethics" OR "capability approach" OR "phenomenology" OR "existentialism"

Boolean operators (AND, OR) combined concept blocks. Searches were adapted to each database's specific syntax and controlled vocabularies. Reference lists of included studies were manually searched for additional relevant sources (backward citation tracking), and Web of Science citation tracking identified subsequent citing articles (forward citation tracking).

Eligibility Criteria

The inclusion criteria for this review were established to ensure that only high-quality, conceptually relevant, and philosophically grounded studies were synthesized. Eligible studies consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles and systematic reviews published in English between January 2010 and November 2024. To align with the review's analytical focus, included works were required to address physical literacy, physical education, or movement education, and to contain explicit philosophical, theoretical, or conceptual analysis. Furthermore, studies needed to demonstrate a clear connection to human flourishing, well-being, or related developmental constructs to support broader interpretations of embodied, educational, and ethical dimensions.

Conversely, several exclusion criteria were applied to maintain conceptual rigor and avoid dilution of the philosophical scope. Non-peer-reviewed materials—including dissertations, conference abstracts, and grey literature—were excluded to ensure methodological and scholarly reliability. Studies centered solely on sport performance or elite athletic populations were omitted, as were purely psychometric investigations lacking philosophical engagement. Additionally, research addressing only physical fitness or health outcomes, without connection to broader developmental or theoretical frameworks, was not considered. Articles written in languages other than English and opinion pieces without systematic analysis or substantive theoretical contribution were also excluded from the final synthesis.

Study Selection Process

Initial database searches were conducted during December 2024. Results were imported into Covidence systematic review software for screening and data management. Two independent reviewers (Authors 1 and 2) conducted title and abstract screening, followed by full-text review of potentially eligible articles. Disagreements were resolved through discussion, with a third reviewer (Author 3) consulted for unresolved conflicts. Inter-rater reliability at full-text screening stage yielded Cohen's $\kappa = 0.87$, indicating strong agreement.

Data Extraction

A standardized data extraction form was developed and piloted using five randomly selected studies to ensure clarity, consistency, and methodological reliability prior to full implementation. The extraction process captured detailed study characteristics, including authors, publication year, journal outlet, country of origin, study design, methodological approach, philosophical paradigm, and contextual or population-specific information when relevant. Conceptual elements

were systematically recorded, encompassing definitions of physical literacy, conceptualizations of human flourishing, underlying philosophical assumptions—ontological, epistemological, and axiological—and any proposed theoretical relationships linking physical literacy to flourishing. Additionally, theoretical models or conceptual frameworks presented within each study were catalogued. Extracted findings included the authors' primary arguments, evidentiary support for construct relationships, identified theoretical tensions or conceptual challenges, and recommendations for educational practice or future scholarly inquiry. To ensure rigor and reduce bias, data extraction was carried out independently by two reviewers, with any discrepancies resolved through consensus-based discussion.

Quality Assessment

Given the predominantly philosophical and theoretical orientation of the included studies, conventional quality appraisal tools designed for empirical research—such as RoB 2 or CASP checklists—were not directly applicable. Accordingly, the review adopted an adapted evaluative framework drawing on the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) for qualitative inquiry and Brunsden's (2015) criteria for assessing philosophical scholarship. This framework examined clarity of argumentation and conceptual precision, the rigor and depth of philosophical analysis, engagement with and integration of relevant literature, logical coherence and internal consistency, originality and significance of the scholarly contribution, as well as transparency regarding underlying assumptions and stated limitations. Each study was systematically evaluated across these dimensions using a structured rubric to ensure consistency and analytical rigor. Importantly, quality assessment served to inform the synthesis process rather than to exclude studies, as even contested or critically appraised perspectives offer valuable insight into the breadth and evolution of philosophical discourse surrounding physical literacy and human flourishing.

Synthesis Methods

Given the conceptual and heterogeneous nature of included studies, narrative synthesis was employed rather than meta-analysis (Popay et al., 2006). Synthesis proceeded through:

1. Thematic analysis: Inductive coding identified recurring themes, philosophical paradigms, and conceptual relationships.
2. Framework synthesis: Deductive analysis organized findings according to a priori philosophical categories (ontology, epistemology, axiology) while remaining open to emergent themes.
3. Critical interpretive synthesis: Higher-order interpretation generated new theoretical insights transcending individual study findings (Dixon-Woods et al., 2005).
4. Paradigmatic mapping: Studies were categorized according to dominant philosophical traditions, revealing patterns and tensions within the field.

Analysis was conducted using NVivo 14 qualitative analysis software, with regular team discussions ensuring interpretive validity.

RESULTS

Study Selection: PRISMA Flow Diagram

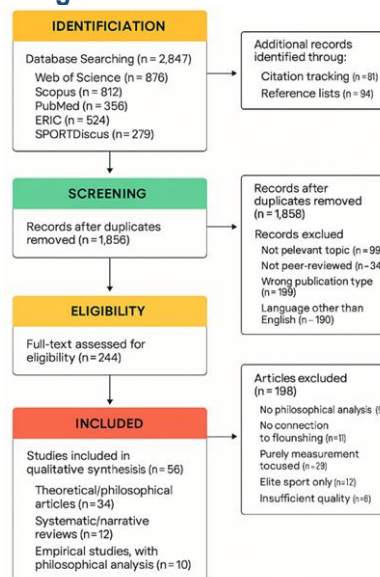


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram Illustrating the Identification, Screening, Eligibility, and Inclusion of Studies

Study Characteristics

Table 1. Study Characteristics (n = 56)

Category	Details	n (%)
Publication Years	2010–2025	56 (100%)
Increase after 2018	–	39 (69.6%)
Country of Origin	United Kingdom	18 (32.1%)
	Australia	12 (21.4%)
	Canada	10 (17.9%)
	United States	8 (14.3%)
	Scandinavia	5 (8.9%)
	Other regions	3 (5.4%)
Publication Types	Theoretical / conceptual articles	34 (60.7%)
	Systematic / narrative reviews	12 (21.4%)
	Empirical studies w/ philosophical analysis	10 (17.9%)
Dominant Journals	Quest	12
	Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy	10
	Sport, Education and Society	8
	Journal of Teaching in Physical Education	6
	Other journals	20

Table 2. Identified Philosophical Paradigms in Physical Literacy Scholarship

Philosophical Paradigm	Core Focus & Key Themes	Representative References	n
Capability Approach Frameworks	Agency, freedom, central capabilities, social justice, contextual sensitivity. Physical literacy as capability enabling valued functionings.	Sen (1985); Nussbaum (2011); Pot et al. (2018); Fitzpatrick (2019)	18
Virtue Ethics Perspectives	Character development, phronesis, intrinsic goods of movement, virtue cultivation, moral pedagogy.	Carr & Steutel (1999); Stolz & Pill (2014); Jacobs & Wright (2018)	15
Phenomenological Approaches	Embodiment, lived experience, intercorporeality, existential meaning, being-in-the-world.	Merleau-Ponty (1962); Whitehead (2010); Standal & Aggerholm (2016)	14
Eudaimonic Well-being Models	SDT, PERMA, psychological well-being, holistic health, lifespan flourishing.	Deci & Ryan (2000); Seligman (2011); Edwards et al. (2018)	9

Table 3. Conceptual Relationships Between Physical Literacy and Flourishing

Relationship Type	Conceptualization	n
Foundational Relationship	Physical literacy as prerequisite foundation for meaningful participation and flourishing but insufficient alone.	28
Constituent Relationship	Physical literacy as intrinsic component of flourishing; embodied excellence essential for living well.	16
Instrumental Relationship	Physical literacy promotes flourishing indirectly through health, psychological, and social benefits.	8
Reciprocal Relationship	Bidirectional dynamics: physical literacy supports flourishing, and flourishing enhances physical literacy.	4

Table 4. Integration Challenges and Theoretical Tensions

Challenge / Tension	Description
Universalism vs. Particularism	Dominance of Western models vs. need for cultural contextualization; limited non-Western perspectives.
Individual vs. Collective Flourishing	Overemphasis on individual outcomes; insufficient attention to communal and relational dimensions.
Process vs. Outcome	Ambiguity whether physical literacy and flourishing represent ongoing processes or achieved states.
Measurement Challenges	Difficulties operationalizing philosophical constructs; risk of reductionism in quantitative assessments.

Table 5. Empirical Evidence Linking Physical Literacy to Flourishing

Flourishing Dimension	Evidence Summary	n
Physical Well-being	Strong associations with fitness, BMI, reduced disease risk, sustained activity across lifespan.	7
Psychological Well-being	Links to self-esteem, self-efficacy, life satisfaction, reduced depression/anxiety.	6
Social Well-being	Improved social connectedness, peer relations, prosocial behavior, community inclusion.	4
Cognitive Functioning	Associations with executive function, cognitive flexibility, academic performance.	3
Meaning and Purpose	Physical literacy linked to sense of purpose, aligned activity with personal identity.	2

DISCUSSION

Interpreting the Outcomes of Research Endeavors

This systematic review reveals substantial philosophical engagement with relationships between physical literacy and human flourishing, demonstrating contemporary PE scholarship's increasing theoretical sophistication. Four dominant paradigms—capability approaches, virtue ethics, phenomenology, and eudaimonic well-being models—provide distinct yet potentially complementary frameworks for understanding physical literacy's contribution to human development. The predominance of foundational and constituent conceptualizations suggests scholarly consensus that physical literacy represents more than instrumental means to health outcomes. This finding challenges narrow fitness-focused or sport-performance PE paradigms, supporting [Whitehead's \(2010\)](#) vision of physical literacy as fundamental

life capacity. However, theoretical heterogeneity and integration challenges indicate ongoing paradigmatic development rather than settled consensus.

Empirical evidence, while limited, supports theorized connections between physical literacy and multidimensional flourishing. Strongest evidence exists for physical and psychological well-being dimensions, with emerging support for social and cognitive domains. Existential dimensions—meaning, purpose, authentic self-realization—remain under-investigated empirically despite philosophical prominence. This gap reflects measurement difficulties but also potential disconnect between philosophical theorizing and empirical research traditions.

Evaluating in Relation to Antecedent Studies

This review extends prior work examining physical literacy (Durden-Myers et al., 2018; Shearer et al., 2018) and PE philosophy (Kirk, 2010; Arnold, 1988) by systematically analyzing their integration within flourishing frameworks. Unlike previous reviews focusing on definition, assessment, or implementation, this philosophical analysis reveals underlying conceptual architectures shaping discourse.

Our findings confirm Pot et al.'s (2018) observation that physical literacy concepts require greater clarity, particularly regarding philosophical commitments. The identified paradigmatic diversity suggests physical literacy functions as "boundary object" (Star & Griesemer, 1989)—interpreted differently across communities while maintaining coherence sufficient for collaboration. This fluidity enables broad uptake but risks conceptual drift and measurement inconsistencies. The capability approach emphasis aligns with broader educational philosophy trends toward capabilities and social justice (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007). PE scholarship increasingly connects to these frameworks, positioning physical literacy within human rights and equity discourses (Fitzpatrick, 2019). This development strengthens PE's educational legitimacy while raising questions about pedagogical implications of justice-oriented approaches.

Phenomenological perspectives, while philosophically influential (particularly Whitehead's foundational work), appear less prominent in empirical research. This suggests potential disconnect between phenomenologically-grounded theory and empirically-oriented research communities. Bridging this gap requires methodological innovation incorporating first-person experiential data alongside third-person behavioral measures.

Elucidating the Ramifications of the Discoveries

Theoretical implications:

This review establishes that contemporary PE discourse reflects fundamental philosophical commitments about human nature, development, and flourishing. Educators and researchers must engage explicitly with these philosophical foundations rather than treating them as mere background. Different paradigms generate distinct pedagogical approaches, assessment priorities, and outcome expectations.

The identified tension between universal frameworks and cultural particularity holds significant implications. While some physical literacy components may prove genuinely universal (e.g., basic movement capacities), others likely require cultural adaptation. Virtue ethics and capability approaches offer potential middle paths—maintaining normative cores while acknowledging diverse manifestations.

Recognition of physical literacy as foundational but insufficient for flourishing suggests PE must coordinate with other educational domains. Holistic development requires integrated curricula addressing physical, cognitive, social, emotional, moral dimensions synchronously rather than separately. This challenges educational structures compartmentalizing subjects.

Pedagogical implications:

Different philosophical frameworks suggest distinct pedagogical priorities:

1. *Capability approaches* emphasize creating opportunity-rich environments enabling diverse functionings, prioritizing equity and inclusion.
2. *Virtue ethics* foregrounds character development through structured experiences cultivating virtues, emphasizing ethical formation.
3. *Phenomenology* prioritizes authentic engagement and personal meaning, valuing subjective experience and student voice.
4. *Well-being models* emphasize psychological needs satisfaction, intrinsic motivation, and positive relationships.

Effective pedagogy likely integrates insights from multiple paradigms rather than adopting single framework exclusively. Teachers require philosophical literacy to navigate these perspectives and adapt approaches to contextual demands.

Assessment implications:

Measurement must extend beyond observable motor competencies to encompass motivation, confidence, knowledge, understanding, and personal meaning. This requires mixed-method approaches combining quantitative metrics with qualitative exploration of lived experience. Overemphasis on standardized assessment risks reducing physical literacy to measurable proxies, losing conceptual richness.

Flourishing outcomes present even greater assessment challenges given multidimensionality and temporal extension. Short-term PE interventions cannot demonstrate impacts on long-term flourishing; surrogate measures and longitudinal

designs are essential. Subjective well-being measures must complement objective indicators to capture flourishing's experiential dimensions.

Policy implications:

Educational policies increasingly emphasize holistic development, student well-being, and twenty-first century competencies. Physical literacy frameworks align with these priorities, potentially strengthening PE's position within curricula. However, instrumentalizing PE exclusively for health or well-being outcomes risks undermining educational legitimacy. Balance needed between demonstrating value while maintaining intrinsic worth.

Equity considerations require particular attention. Physical literacy must remain accessible to all students regardless of ability, body type, cultural background, or socioeconomic status. This demands culturally responsive, inclusive pedagogies challenging traditional sport-centered, performance-focused approaches that marginalize many students.

Recognizing the Constraints of the Research

Several limitations should be acknowledged in interpreting the findings of this review. Restricting the inclusion criteria to English-language publications introduces an inherent language and cultural bias, privileging Anglo-American philosophical traditions while under-representing non-Western, Indigenous, and culturally diverse perspectives. This limitation underscores the need for future reviews to incorporate multilingual databases and broaden philosophical scope to capture a more global understanding of physical literacy and flourishing. Additionally, the included studies varied considerably in their levels of philosophical sophistication. While some demonstrated rigorous and well-developed theoretical analyses, others engaged with philosophical concepts only superficially. Although the quality assessment rubric was designed to account for these differences, synthesizing insights across heterogeneous levels of rigor inevitably presents interpretive challenges.

The review is further influenced by potential publication bias, as philosophical arguments emphasizing positive or harmonious connections between physical literacy and flourishing may be more likely to appear in peer-reviewed journals than skeptical, critical, or null perspectives. Definitional ambiguities surrounding both "physical literacy" and "flourishing" also complicate synthesis, given that the constructs lack universally accepted definitions and were operationalized inconsistently across studies. As a result, some studies may have been conceptually addressing different phenomena while using similar terminology, limiting the precision of comparative conclusions. Moreover, despite the inclusion of 56 studies, only ten provided empirical evidence directly examining relationships between physical literacy and flourishing, demonstrating that philosophical theorizing currently outpaces empirical inquiry. Most of these empirical studies relied on cross-sectional designs, restricting the capacity for causal inference and highlighting the need for longitudinal research tracing developmental trajectories over time.

Finally, the contextual generalizability of the findings is constrained by the predominance of research conducted within Western educational systems such as those in the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and the United States. These contexts may not reflect the cultural values, educational structures, or movement traditions present in non-Western settings. The review's disciplinary boundaries also limit its scope, as the focus on physical education literature may exclude relevant philosophical and theoretical contributions from psychology, sociology, and broader humanities scholarship. Future interdisciplinary and cross-cultural syntheses are needed to provide a more comprehensive and globally relevant understanding of the philosophical foundations linking physical literacy and human flourishing.

CONCLUSION

This systematic philosophical literature review demonstrates that contemporary physical education (PE) scholarship has developed a rich and multifaceted theoretical landscape linking physical literacy to human flourishing. Across capability approaches, virtue ethics, phenomenology, and eudaimonic well-being frameworks, scholars consistently conceptualize physical literacy as a foundational human capacity that supports meaningful participation, personal growth, and holistic development. The review reveals strong theoretical convergence around embodied understandings of human beings, rejecting dualistic models and emphasizing the integration of physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and existential dimensions within PE pedagogy.

Despite this convergence, the review identifies ongoing conceptual and methodological challenges that limit definitional precision and empirical generalizability. Ambiguities in how physical literacy and flourishing are conceptualized across studies complicate theoretical synthesis, while dominance of Western philosophical traditions restricts cultural inclusivity. Empirical evidence remains relatively limited, with few longitudinal studies capable of establishing causal pathways between physical literacy and well-being outcomes. In addition, existing assessment tools struggle to capture the philosophical depth of these constructs while retaining empirical rigor, highlighting a need for innovative measurement approaches.

Future scholarship should pursue integrated theoretical models that synthesize insights from multiple philosophical traditions, explore culturally diverse perspectives, and develop methodologically robust research designs

capable of tracing developmental trajectories over time. Pedagogical innovation—particularly curricula that simultaneously address physical competence, psychological well-being, social connection, and moral development—is essential for translating philosophical insights into practice. At the policy level, deeper engagement with educational stakeholders is required to ensure that physical literacy and flourishing frameworks inform curriculum design and assessment systems. Taken together, the findings affirm that physical education, when grounded in coherent philosophical foundations, holds significant potential to contribute to holistic human flourishing across the lifespan.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest related to this research. No funding was received for conducting this study. All authors contributed equally to conceptualization, methodology, analysis, and writing.

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