

ORIGINAL ARTICLE**Designing a Model of Moral Courage in Physical Education Teachers: Enhancing Ethical Decision-Making in the Face of Professional Challenges** **Javad Karimi^{1*}, Amir Montazeri²**

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Receive Date: 11/Dec/2024

Accept Date: 07/May/2025

Published Online: 29/Nov/2025

How to cite

Karimi, J., & Montazeri, A.
(2025). Designing a Model of
Moral Courage in Physical
Education Teachers: Enhancing
Ethical Decision-Making in the
Face of Professional Challenges.
*Applied Research of Sport
Management*, 14(2), 215-234.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT**Introduction**

In recent decades, management has shifted from traditional theories focused on control and efficiency toward approaches that value human dignity, ethics, and moral courage. This change reflects the growing understanding that the success and sustainability of organizations depend not only on systems and strategies but also on the psychological and moral strength of individuals. Among these human qualities, moral courage stands out as a central virtue—one that enables individuals to act ethically even in the face of fear, pressure, or personal risk.

In education, and especially in physical education, moral courage is of particular importance. Physical education teachers face unique moral and professional challenges because of the interpersonal and physical nature of their work. They must navigate complex interactions with students, colleagues, and parents while upholding fairness, respect, and integrity. These teachers play a crucial role not only in promoting students' physical health but also in shaping their moral and social development. However, the pressures of limited resources, ambiguous expectations, and institutional constraints can make it difficult to act ethically without courage and conviction.

Moral courage allows teachers to make ethical decisions even when such decisions might be unpopular or risky. It combines moral awareness, emotional resilience, and a sense of responsibility toward others. Teachers who demonstrate moral courage stand up against unfair treatment, resist unethical practices, and serve as positive moral role models for their students. In doing so, they help create learning environments based on trust, fairness, and empathy.

Despite its importance, moral courage among teachers—particularly in physical education—has received limited research attention. Most previous studies have examined moral courage in areas such as healthcare or business. Therefore, there is a need for a comprehensive model that explains how moral courage develops among physical education teachers and how it can be strengthened through organizational support and ethical education.

The present study aims to design such a model by integrating psychological, ethical, and organizational perspectives. Its goal is to help teachers make principled decisions, enhance their professional confidence, and promote an ethical culture in schools that supports both personal integrity and collective well-being.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach using thematic analysis to explore and interpret the patterns, meanings, and underlying concepts in physical education teachers' experiences of moral courage. The purpose of this method was to identify the core themes that describe how teachers understand, experience, and demonstrate moral courage in their professional practice. The participants consisted of 18 physical education teachers, selected through purposeful sampling based on criteria such as teaching experience, familiarity with ethical issues in education, and willingness to participate in the study. Sampling continued until data saturation was achieved—when no new insights or themes emerged during subsequent interviews. All interviews were then transcribed verbatim for detailed analysis. The collected data were analyzed using the thematic analysis method proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This process involved multiple readings of the transcripts to ensure familiarity with the data, followed by coding, identification of patterns, and the categorization of main themes and subthemes. To enhance the trustworthiness and reliability of the findings, triangulation techniques were employed. Two independent coders analyzed the data separately, and their results were compared and refined through discussion. Additionally, expert review and member checking were conducted; participants were invited to review and confirm the interpretations of their statements to ensure accuracy and credibility. Ultimately, this analytical process led to the identification of the key themes that reflect the nature and dimensions of moral courage among physical education teachers.

Findings

Based on the findings, the extracted themes reveal the multidimensional nature of moral courage among physical education teachers. The thematic map developed in this study is structured around the various dimensions of moral courage and organizes the influencing processes into five overarching domains. At the core of this framework lies the driving engine of moral courage, conceptualized as the antecedent of the model. This component encompasses the foundational factors that initiate and strengthen moral courage, including moral awareness, personal capabilities, and self-confidence in decision-making. These elements operate at cognitive, emotional, and motivational levels, preparing individuals to engage in ethical behavior. Without these foundations, the subsequent stages of moral courage development cannot be effectively realized. Therefore, this component is positioned as the antecedent, representing the essential preconditions that enable teachers to act courageously in professional situations. The remaining sections of the model are organized into processes and outcomes, reflecting their gradual and dynamic roles in shaping moral courage. The process dimension includes two interrelated mechanisms: reinforcing factors of moral courage, such as social support and ethical organizational culture, which sustain and encourage ethical behavior; and practical enablers of moral courage, including decision-making skills, emotional flexibility, and a sense of responsibility, which translate internal motivation into professional action. Finally, the outcome dimension emerges at both individual and social levels. Individually, moral courage leads to personal growth, enhanced ethical resilience, and improved moral judgment in complex situations. Socially, it fosters ethical commitment, strengthens interpersonal trust, and contributes to a culture of integrity within educational environments. Overall, this structure illustrates how the driving engine serves as the starting point of moral courage, while the processes and outcomes represent the progressive pathways through which moral courage is developed, expressed, and reinforced in the professional lives of physical education teachers.

Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the findings, the extracted themes reveal the multidimensional nature of moral courage among physical education teachers. The thematic map developed in this study is

structured around the various dimensions of moral courage and organizes the influencing processes into five overarching domains. At the core of this framework lies the driving engine of moral courage, conceptualized as the antecedent of the model. This component encompasses the foundational factors that initiate and strengthen moral courage, including moral awareness, personal capabilities, and self-confidence in decision-making. These elements operate at cognitive, emotional, and motivational levels, preparing individuals to engage in ethical behavior. Without these foundations, the subsequent stages of moral courage development cannot be effectively realized. Therefore, this component is positioned as the antecedent, representing the essential preconditions that enable teachers to act courageously in professional situations. The remaining sections of the model are organized into processes and outcomes, reflecting their gradual and dynamic roles in shaping moral courage. The process dimension includes two interrelated mechanisms: reinforcing factors of moral courage, such as social support and ethical organizational culture, which sustain and encourage ethical behavior; and practical enablers of moral courage, including decision-making skills, emotional flexibility, and a sense of responsibility, which translate internal motivation into professional action. Finally, the outcome dimension emerges at both individual and social levels. Individually, moral courage leads to personal growth, enhanced ethical resilience, and improved moral judgment in complex situations. Socially, it fosters ethical commitment, strengthens interpersonal trust, and contributes to a culture of integrity within educational environments. Overall, this structure illustrates how the driving engine serves as the starting point of moral courage, while the processes and outcomes represent the progressive pathways through which moral courage is developed, expressed, and reinforced in the professional lives of physical education teachers.

KEY WORDS

Moral Courage, Physical Education Teachers, Ethical Decision-Making, Professional Challenges, Professional Growth.

