

An exploration of implications for the development of Pilates instructor system through identification of instructors' difficulties

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This study is aimed at exploring ideas for the development of Pilates instructor qualification system by identifying a range of difficulties Pilates instructors are experiencing. Open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data before they were analyzed with inductive content analysis method. In consideration of the difficulties Pilates instructors experience during three qualification stages (before-during-after qualification education), three key categories were incorporated in the collected data: (1) lack of information on Pilates qualification system, (2) difficulties in understanding the human anatomy related with the diverse movements taught in Pilates classes and its application to Pilates practice, (3) need for professional develop-

ment through retraining. Based on these findings, a need for rethinking the monitoring and evaluation process for Pilates qualification system and Pilates education in Korea was identified. In addition, we need to summarize and offer information on a range of Pilates qualifications. And the quality of Pilates instructor education program should be improved as well by proving them a range of teaching methods including microteaching, discussion-based lessons as well as reading and writing sessions and other necessary teaching media.

Keywords: Pilates, Pilates qualification, Pilates instructor education


INTRODUCTION

Having achieved remarkable economic growth this century, Korea is about to enter the Gross Domestic Product \$30,000 era (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2014). However, the country is struggling with one of the highest incidences of adult diseases including diabetes among Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development nations owing to spread of sedentary life style and aging population (Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014). In an effort to solve such social dilemmas by resolving health-related issues at national level and thereby raising the country's happiness index and healthy span, the government is encouraging people to participate in physical activities on a regular basis under the motto of SMILE 100 Movement (enjoy sports every day until the age of 100), the campaign slogan for the government's sports for all initiative (Ministry of

Culture, Sport and Tourism, 2014).

In the wake of such sociocultural shift, the role and function of Pilates which values harmony between body and mind is being increasingly highlighted (Memmedova, 2015; Roh, 2016). Indeed, Pilates is now being firmly accepted as one of the key exercises that are critical in enjoying healthy life by fostering physical and mental wellness. In the United States, Pilates was voted a top 10 fitness exercise with the number of participants having exploded from 1.9 million in 2000 to 8.6 million in 2010 (American College and Sports Medicine, 2014). Pilates has consistently been popular everyday sports among all fitness exercises in Korea as well along with yoga (Hong, 2014).

With the growing popular interest in Pilates, the number of Pilates associations and centers is increasing in Korea and in other countries along with the rising demand for Pilates qualifications. Total of 50 different Pilates qualifications are being offered in Ko-

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rea, and countless aspiring Pilates instructors are being qualified after having completed various education and qualification tests before they start to teach Pilates (Choi et al., 2009). Given the explosive quantitative growth of Pilates instructors, there seems to exist no qualitative oversight system in place for Pilates instructor qualification. Considering that qualification is the first step of the Pilates instructor education process, the time is ripe for gaining deeper understanding on the Pilates instructor qualification process by analyzing it (Oh et al., 2013).

In the wake of the rising awareness of the Pilates and its importance beginning in the 2000s, studies on Pilates have been performed actively as well. Studies have been performed, in particular, on the importance of qualification and certification system in training Pilates professionals in relation to Pilates instructors and qualification courses (Hong, 2014), education behavioral patterns of Pilates instructors (Oh, 2011; Roh, 2015), and class contents (Oh et al., 2013). Majority of such studies, however, has focused only on verifying its functional aspects based on quantitative research, including such topics as effect of Pilates exercise, change in exercise capacity, and change in body composition (Barker et al., 2015; Goo, 2011; Bullo et al., 2015). Interest in the education of Pilates instructors, key element in maximizing its education performance in practice, has not been as high as those on the studies that attempted to verify the scientific effect of Pilates. Qualitative studies on the actual experiences instructors are exposed to during Pilates instructor qualification process, in particular, is absolutely necessary to understand the experiences of these novice instructors, and for the advancement of preliminary instructor education system.

Therefore, this study is aimed at examining the difficulties Pilates instructors experience while they are struggling to be qualified as instructors and thereby exploring potential means to advance the Pilates instructors qualification process. In this study, this researcher attempted to understand the Pilates instructor qualification process better based on their own voices and explored some practical ways to advance the qualification process. The re-

search methods will be introduced first, which is then followed by discussion of the difficulties of the instructor hopefuls experience along three parts: before, during and after the qualification process. Next, potential methods to improve the Pilates instructor qualification process will be proposed based on the aforementioned study results.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research design

This study analyzed the voices of those Pilates instructors who had struggled to be qualified as Pilates instructor to explore potential ways for the advancement of Pilates instructor qualification process. This study was performed beginning October 2015 until March 2016. In the early stage of the study (October to November 2015), the overall direction of the study was established by thoroughly reviewing advanced researches on Pilates instructors and by examining the Pilates instructor qualification processes both in Korean and in other countries. This researcher also focused on selecting research participants and formulating questions that are required to collect relevant data. And beginning in December 2015 to January 2016, the selected research subjects were questioned with open-ended questions while semistructured in-depth interviews were performed on them. And the collected data was then analyzed inductively beginning February 2016. Efforts were made on analyzing key areas and topics that were classified inductively from multiple perspectives with regard to the education and process of Pilates qualification.

Research participants

Those who are highly interested in the subject of this study and capable of providing relevant information were selectively sampled for this study (Table 1). Total of six participants were selected by considering key elements such as gender, age, experiences as an instructor, types of instructor certificates they acquired, and extent of rapport with this researcher. In an effort to build rapport with

Table 1. Research participants

Participant	Sex	Age (yr)	Experience (yr)	Type of instructor certificate
Instructor A	Male	44	10	Balanced body (International)
Instructor B	Female	43	10	Ellie Herman (International), Balanced body (International)
Instructor C	Female	34	11	Korea Pilates Federation (Korea), Ellie Herman (International), Balanced body (International)
Instructor D	Female	33	12	Korea Pilates Federation (Korea), Polestar (International), Ellie Herman (International), Balanced body (International)
Instructor E	Male	24	2	Balanced body (International)
Instructor F	Female	24	1	Balanced body (International)

this researcher, emails and phone calls were made to inform them study topic and purpose even before starting data collection, while also reducing their potentially negative attitude towards the study in the process.

Data gathering

Data was gathered mainly from open-ended survey questions and in-depth interview. And before starting the data gathering, consent forms containing brief overview, interview process, confidentiality clause on interviewees as well as those on open-ended questions and in-depth interview were given to the participants and signed by them. The open-ended questions included in the interview dealt with following issues: basic information of research participants; reason why they applied for Pilates qualification; difficulties and stresses they experienced while preparing for the qualification process; contents and levels of the education program; education methods; education hours and amount; capability of lecturers on Pilates qualification process; various difficulties including financial issues; utilization of Pilates instructor certificate; and potential improvement of Pilates instructor qualification system.

In addition, in-depth one-on-one interview was performed based on the result of the open-ended questions. The key questions in the in-depth interview were composed of those covering difficulties in qualification preparatory stage; successful qualification stage; and qualification utilization stage. Each interview that lasted from 30 min to 1 hr took place in a location that is most convenient for the interviewee. All interview sessions were recorded under the consent of each interviewee, and this researcher recorded each interview and transcribed it directly. Any issue this researcher deemed important has been written on the note during the interview and then asked afterwards.

Statistical analysis

The collected data was then analyzed via an inductive categorical analysis (Patton, 1990). The answers were categorized inductively according to their shared content and significance to deduce higher issues, lower issues and concepts, while topics and concepts were then interrelated and compared with each other (Berg, 2004) to interpret the difficulties they experienced during the Pilates instructor qualification process.

This researcher strove to come up with as precise and accurate interpretations as humanly possible by avoiding linear analysis but identifying the significance of collected data and analyzed domains repeatedly. Key higher issues that were deduced from the

analysis were: difficulties arising from information in the preparatory stage, those arising from education content, method and hours during the qualification stage and those arising from utilization of the instructor certificates after successful qualification.

The analyzed results were then put to another round of checking process by research participants and supplemented with additional second opinions in an effort to maximize veracity of the research. In addition, two Pilates professionals and one sport policy expert joined the research as peer reviewers to verify the adequacy of the categories classified by this researcher. And this researcher did its best to adhere to the research ethics including use of pseudonyms to protect the identity of research participants.

RESULTS

The research results can be analyzed by the difficulties that were exposed mainly along qualification preparation stage, qualification stage and qualification sustenance stage after the successful qualification.

Preparatory stage: lack of information and confusion on qualification process

In the preparatory stage, the majority of research participants answered that they obtained necessary information from recommendation by their teachers or acquaintances or gathered information from Pilates association and federation homepages via Internet search before confirming them by visiting their offices. The most prominent issue exposed here was the credibility of the available information on Pilates qualification process.

I chose a Pilates association after gathering information from teachers I know. Given that there is no clear information available on Pilates qualification process, it was a kind of adventure. (instructor E)

Many people I know would struggle to find which association to choose and on what ground since there are simply too many Pilates associations and qualifications. (instructor B)

It is not that there is some official process for Pilate instructor qualification but diverse competing associations are offering education according to different Pilate qualification path by relying on their individual network or information, it was revealed. Such dilemma is arising from the fact that there is no official sport for all instructor qualification at national level for Pilates instructors unlike as in aerobic or dance sports. As many competing associations are offering respective qualification ritual on their own without any professional-level consensus on the issue of Pilates instruc-

tor certificate, aspiring Pilates instructors are having difficulty regarding which association to choose, and they would often rely on word of mouth rather than objective and detailed information (Choi et al., 2009). Such breadth and variety of diverse associations may increase the number of available choices for aspiring instructors but overflowing amount of information on varying associations and qualifications would hinder them from telling accurate information, thereby creating confusion for those aspiring to apply for Pilates instructor qualification.

Since there are simply too many competing associations and qualifications, I believe it is necessary to provide more detailed guidance and instruction. I hope there is more detailed information I can use to make an objective and unbiased judgment such as introduction of individual association and certificate, overview of respective qualification process and vision. (instructor C)

As instructor A pointed that some associations only focus on providing 'nonessential and distorted information such as those on job placement or qualification process,' it would be desirable to focus on providing program goals and content that would be useful in cultivating capability and quality as instructors, rather than concentrate on job placement and qualification program. Those associations issuing Pilates instructor certificates should be providing information and contents covering diverse issues to help aspiring Pilates instructors overcome difficulties in obtaining information on Pilates instructor qualification. It would include information on various certificates entrusted with public confidence in Korea and in other countries as well as those on text books, detailed comparison of diverse associations and organizations linked with the issuing of certificate, vision on Pilates instructors and instructor education program and course expenses (Lee et al., 2006).

Qualification stage: difficulty of connecting dots between knowledge and practice

Education content

Many respondents singled out course on human anatomy and mat as their most challenging education content. In particular, they expressed frustration over human anatomy since they were required to understand strange terms and expression and link them with actual physical movements. However, given the fact that they consider human anatomy as the most essential program among the entire curriculum, accurate understanding of and practical utilization in Pilates session of the knowledge on human anatomy which is the key knowledge in Pilates has emerged as the most pertinent issue.

It seems to have become progressively uncomfortable and difficult to link anatomical knowledge with actual practices as I studied more. I know them theoretically but there are simply too many possible combinations and permutations when I apply them to actual practices, adding my confusion. (instructor C)

Given that Pilates has historically originated from medical rehabilitation, many research participants stressed that understanding numerous muscles and their working mechanism is key. This is because Pilates is an essential element of rehabilitation exercise as well as key component of exercise injury prevention and exercise skill improvement, thereby making the knowledge of human anatomy a prerequisite to understand body postures based on the understanding of human skeletal and muscular structure (Roh et al., 2015). Accordingly, more studies and interest are necessary on the differences that are arising when the knowledge of human anatomy is being matched with diverse Pilates moves and applied to matching contraption. And it is desirable to supplement theoretical explanation with diverse learning assistants including videos, illustrations, and animations in an effort to deliver key messages of anatomy classes to students in ways that are more compelling and fun (Oh et al., 2013)

Teaching method: lack of class hours and difficulty of picking up teaching knowhow

With regard to the class hours, research participants believed that overall qualification period should be extended while reducing the amount of daily classes. As the qualification process is being finished within a short period given the limited resources of Pilates association, excessive amount of education is being offered within limited period, thereby making it challenging for students to digest them sufficiently.

Eight hr per day lecture schedule would be perceived as compact and condensed learning experience by active Pilates instructors or those who have attended Pilates classes for many years but it was difficult to catch up even for me whom I believe is rather good at exercise. I believe overall class hours should be extended instead. (instructor A)

As classes on theory and practices are being offered simultaneously, not much time was allocated for overall exercise and for this reason those aspiring Pilates instructors with limited experience struggled physically while leaning theories and doing practices. For this reason, there were many respondents who suggested to shorten daily class hours but to extend entire program schedule. And some respondents confessed the difficulty of raising their ca-

pability to apply what they learned to practice rather than simply learning theories and techniques, stressing that the qualification process should be changed for this reason.

It is very difficult to apply what I learned to practice. Accordingly, it would be desirable to adopt a test method where aspiring instructors offer classes to general Pilates students during Pilates instructor qualification process. (instructor E)

As it is a qualification course for aspiring Pilates instructors that will teach general students, education programs that would improve their teaching skills in practice are required. Given that not sufficient feedback is given in the Pilates instructor qualification classes and level of interaction among aspiring instructors is low, the leaning motivation and performance of aspiring Pilates instructors should be raised (Oh, 2011). Furthermore, it would be necessary to promote positive atmosphere in Pilates training by adding an education component that allows use of silent feedback during classes.

I hope student instructors should be given time to teach and learn from each other as in real practice so that they can give feedback on areas in need of further improvement as well as on what they did well. And I hope I can experience diverse exercise methods and know-how that I can test to varying age groups and Pilates members. (instructor F)

As discussed earlier, separate time for practicing the theories and skills that were taught in classes in group or individually is required. And as many instructors are having difficulty teaching their own students after successful qualification, field-practice-centered classes that overcame simple leaning of theories and skills should be required. Pilates instructors are not passive being to whom given theories or skills are applied but active creators of knowledge who generate them by looking back at their teaching performance through microteaching and practices and by combining their own value with field experiences (Kirk, 1986). Therefore, aspiring Pilates instructors should actively utilize daily review, portfolio, discussion and presentation along with microteaching to raise reflective mediation capability for systematic preparation, implementation, analysis and improvement of their own Pilates classes.

Physical environment: lack of Pilates facility

The biggest difficulty ever with regard to environment conducive to successful qualification was the lack of Pilates facility. The place and exercise contraption where students can practice what they learned emerged as the most critical factor in terms of the

physical aspect of the education environment.

In the case of mat exercise, one can practice it anytime and anywhere but not so with other practices. And buying necessary equipment is not a viable option either since they are rather expensive. (instructor D)

As they were often required to share them with other instructors or use them in their given slots, many of the respondents confessed that they had to struggle to practice with the equipment. Buying Pilates equipment is not an option in Pilates instructor qualification process for its steep price and given that the effective use of diverse equipment is closely related with the expertise of Pilates instructors, issuing institutions of Pilates certificates may as well pay more attention to the preparation of necessary equipment.

Qualification sustenance stage: difficulties associated with the authority of certificate and improvement of instructor expertise

Majority of respondents had no difficulty in landing a job they want after their successful qualification but some expressed difficulties in their career path when compared with other jobs. First of all, they stressed that more stringent qualification criteria should be applied to Pilate instructors as they deal with human body and play an important role in raising the quality of life by helping people maintain right posture and balance their body.

Some organizations clueless about where I have my certificate issued from seem to be ignorant about what qualification I have and what level I am up to. (Instructor C)

Pilates is attractive in that it is necessary and anyone can learn but I believe no qualified person should be allowed to teach Pilates. (instructor A)

Respondents shared the idea that Pilates instructors should be qualified with an expertise commensurate with the position. Given that scores of issues including overflow of similar and duplicate certificates, quantitative growth of other sports-related certificates than Pilates along with increasingly dubious credibility of private associations are raising the ire of people (Jung, 2004), the credibility of Pilates certificates is being questioned with regard to its function to assess and indicate the capability of Pilates instructors.

In addition, the biggest concern of the respondents in the qualification sustenance stage was related with an opportunity to expand and maintain their expertise that would live up to the Pilates instructor qualification. Instructor B suggested that dedicated exercise facility for instructors shall be necessary even after their successful qualification, and that such exercise space should play the role of portal in which information and teaching methods on

Pilates are shared.

I hope there would be workshops where instructors can practice their teaching skills at general members after their successful qualification. In fact, everyone is qualified in the end but it takes a lot of skills to teach them in a class by using a variety of equipment and paraphernalia. (instructor B)

If the general level of Pilates education that is being implemented among diverse social classes and contexts is being upgraded by not only issuing certificates to instructors but also allowing them to offer special lectures in order to improve and maintain their expertise, positive perception on Pilates shall be expanded thereby pushing the growth of Pilates in Korea eventually. What is most important in this respect is to maintain and develop capability that lives up to certificates, respondents were unanimous in their answer. And to narrow the gap between theory and practice, the key issue that has been brought up in the Pilates instructor qualification process, diverse episodes and lessons Pilates instructors experienced while practicing Pilates should be shared in the remedial training that is offered after their successful qualification. Furthermore, each instructor will be given a chance to look back at one's classes and reflect on them from critical perspective (Kirk, 1986).

DISCUSSION

The Pilates instructor qualification process shows the qualification of Pilates instructors as well as the quality of associated education. The qualification of Pilates instructors should be verified in their first education process and they should foster professional skills, knowledge and attitude that are required to teach Pilates in the education process. This is because the quality of Pilates instructors is most important factor that is attracting Pilates participants to practice it continuously (Roh, 2015). Based on such understanding, following discussion topics for the advancement of Pilates instructor qualification program can be proposed.

Authority of Pilates instructor qualification system and provision of information

The authority and credibility of the Pilates instructor qualification system should be pushed up by providing related information to the public. The Pilates certificate should play the role of signaling the expertise on Pilates externally and the very possession of the certificate should be the foundation for displaying and recognizing the performance of Pilates learning (Lee et al., 2006), the reason being the possession of certain Pilates instructor certi-

cate would exert a critical influence on the credibility of Pilates instructors. Furthermore, some institutional review of the qualification title should be performed as well, since uncontrolled emergence of similar and duplicate certificates would confuse those aspiring to be qualified as certified Pilates instructors and be detrimental to the decision making process. In addition, false or exaggerated advertising of the Pilates qualification should be put under tighter scrutiny.

In addition, a foundation that would allow provision of accurate information on the type and characteristics of key Pilates instructor qualifications and utilization of certificates should be provided along with the information on objective, content, method and evaluation of the Pilates instructor qualification education program. Any significant variances in the education content and expense between different associations and qualifications would have a negative impact on the Pilate culture and training of Pilates instructors.

Enhancement of site-centric education method

In the Pilates instructor qualification process, pedagogical contents should be stressed more. As the Pilates 'instructor' qualification is one on teaching Pilates to others, as much attention should be paid to the proper way for teaching Pilates as to learning of the associated skills themselves. Regarding this issue, instructor F has hit the bull's eye.

In fact, I hope more time would be allocated for teaching "teaching method." Now that classes are dedicated to teaching understanding of key moves, use of equipment and exercise methods, I hope as much time would be dedicated to teaching 'teaching knowhow' and field practice. (instructor F)

Practical knowledge of the aspiring Pilates instructors should be improved as well in terms of teaching content and method. To this end, microteaching method may be used. Microteaching provides firsthand practices and exercise opportunity so that content of human anatomy, the key knowledge of Pilates, can be applied to actual space where Pilates is taught since it allows aspiring instructors to perform classes targeted at 20 to 30 peers that were assumed as Pilates students while the entire classes are being videotaped for systematic after-hour follow-up review (Jung, 2004). More than anything, such scheme allows instructors to be aware of the educational importance of Pilates classes, understand Pilates students, perform reflective practices and form desirable attitudes as a Pilates instructor.

Along with the introduction of microteaching, training program for Pilates instructors that are capable of teaching massive

knowledge and teaching skills of Pilates should be implemented by utilizing discussion-centric classes, narrative-based classes, diverse teaching materials and classes that are customized for students with varying accomplishment level. Students will be required to engage in discussion on some controversial issues during classes, and be supplied with various reading materials materials.

Remedial program designed to enhance expertise of Pilates instructors

What has been stressed by all respondents was the need for remedial education for students. Given that the effective period of Pilates qualification is not clear in reality, however, the participation of those actually qualified as instructor is inevitably low. Therefore, they are recommended to form spontaneous study group, and some international workshop may be organized to attract them. Institutional support for the qualification system is essential for the Pilates instructor certificates along with motivation.

Furthermore, the certificate issuing institutions should take a leadership in providing continuous and systematic remedial programs to enhance professional expertise of instructors after their successful qualification so that they can catch up with changing environment. Such quality as a leader cannot be developed within a short period but only through relentless effort of each individual, participation in diverse training sessions and seminars.

In conclusion, this study was aimed at exploring potential methods to improve the Pilates instructor qualification process by examining the difficulties aspiring instructors are experiencing while preparing for the qualification process. The quality of Pilates instructors is the most critical factor in Pilates. The unrivaled expertise and quality of Pilates instructors essentially decides the growth of Pilates students (Oh, 2011). Excellent instructors would make students to love Pilates and participate in the exercise more actively in the long term. The first step of this virtuous cycle is the Pilates instructor qualification process. Improvement in the qualification system is absolutely required to level up the status of Pilates, help participants enjoy a healthy and active life and allow them to enjoy the benefit of the Pilates education. The successful qualification as a Pilates instructor will symbolize expertise one has over the exercise, and the future of Pilates will be only brighter when the benefits offered to the Pilates qualification are strengthened. If the quality of Pilates instructors is not maintained and their expertise is degraded, social recognition of Pilates will drop as well, thereby lowering the public trust on the exercise. This is because the core value and significance of Pilates shall be threatened inevitably if anyone is allowed to teach Pilates freely.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No potential conflict of interest relevant to this article was reported.

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