

# Exploring The Challenges of the Physical Educators in Promoting Fitness Among Learners

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**Abstract:** Physical education (PE) teachers play a critical role in fostering lifelong fitness habits among learners, yet they often encounter substantial barriers in promoting physical activity within educational settings. This qualitative phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of licensed PE teachers at a Philippine state university, aiming to understand the challenges they face in delivering effective and engaging fitness programs. Using purposive sampling, the researchers conducted face-to-face interviews with experienced educators and analyzed the data through thematic analysis. Findings reveal three key thematic clusters: (1) Lived Experiences in PE Instruction, highlighting student engagement, participation barriers, curriculum flexibility, and the need for instructional adaptation; (2) Structural and Institutional Barriers, including limited facilities, insufficient time allocation, and the necessity for teacher adaptability; and (3) Proposed Engagement Frameworks, encompassing student-centered approaches, motivational and gamified strategies, and recommendations for program enhancement. Participant narratives emphasized that resource constraints and lack of institutional support hinder the full realization of inclusive and motivating fitness instruction. Despite these challenges, PE teachers exhibit resourcefulness and adaptability to maintain student interest. This study offers valuable insights into the intersection of pedagogy, policy, and practice within physical education. By highlighting the lived experiences of PE teachers, it underscores the urgent need for improved infrastructure, adequate time allocation within the curriculum, and ongoing professional development. These findings emphasize the importance of supporting educators in delivering inclusive and meaningful fitness instruction. Ultimately, the study serves as a guide for educational stakeholders in designing more equitable, engaging, and sustainable physical education programs—both within the Philippine educational system and in broader international contexts.

**Keywords:** fitness promotion, PE teachers, qualitative research, learner engagement

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Physical fitness plays a critical role in the holistic development of children and adolescents, influencing not only their physical health but also their mental well-being, academic performance, and social growth. However, despite the increasing awareness of its importance, physical inactivity remains a pressing global issue. According to the World Health Organization (2022), over 80% of adolescents around the world are not meeting the global recommendations on physical activity and the school environment is one of the few available contexts that reach all children. Physical educators are expected to be one of the key facilitators who initiate the promotion of fitness to learners. But a range of challenges often come in the way of the success of a fitness program.

Many countries face longstanding challenges in introducing fitness to schools. Some obstacles are limited teaching time, crowded curriculum, poor facilities, and no continuous in-service training for P.E. teachers. Tolla

et al. (2022) report a significant decline in the number of PE teachers and time allocated to PE classes. Therefore, about one in three students spends less than half an hour exercising each day. According to Van der Mars (2022), the same problems occur in all parts of the world. Similarly, physical education gets less attention and support in the school system like other subjects.

In Asia, there has been progress and ongoing struggle. Although many countries, such as China, have recently taken steps to prioritize physical education by increasing activity requirements and elevating the status of PE teachers, the region still faces common challenges. These include large class sizes, a shortage of trained educators, and lack of facilities, especially in rural or low-income areas. A scoping review of Southeast Asian countries highlights how these issues persist despite national policies that emphasize the role of PE in fostering lifelong health.

In the Philippines, the problem of physical inactivity is particularly concerning. The 2022 Philippine Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Adolescents have an "F" grade for overall physical activity levels, with more than 84% of learners failing to meet the daily recommended guidelines. While the K to 12 curriculum includes weekly PE sessions, implementation is inconsistent across schools due to limited resources, lack of training, and the low prioritization of physical education compared to academic subjects (Temblay, M. S. 2022). Teachers also struggle with insufficient equipment, lack of space, and inadequate support for promoting inclusive and engaging fitness programs.

Though studies consistently identify challenges like scarce resources, limited time, and weak institutional support, we still lack research that examines how these challenges combine and interact to influence the effectiveness of fitness programs run by physical educators across different school environments.

Given these challenges, it becomes crucial to examine the lived experiences of physical educators in promoting fitness within the Philippine school system. This study aims to explore the specific barriers they encounter, drawing insights from global and regional contexts, in order to inform more effective and sustainable fitness promotion strategies in schools.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

A qualitative phenomenological research design was employed in the present study to investigate the lived experiences of PE teachers when promoting fitness to learners. A phenomenological approach was adopted using semiformal face-to-face interviews enabling the researchers to capture rich description from the PE teachers concerned. This technique offered structured but open-ended prompts for educators to share their own experiences, teaching methods, roadblocks, and successes in promoting student fitness. Thematic analysis was used to code the data in search of common patterns and meaning in the participants' stories. This research design was selected as it is oriented towards comprehending how participants make meaning of their experiences. This theory helped researchers to further comprehend how PE teachers perceive their roles, overcome obstacles and keep students motivated by taking part in fitness routines. In addition, the approach was used to discern not only what educators do, but also how and why they do what they do—providing a valuable insight into the world of fitness teaching at the tertiary level in a state university.

### **Participants**

The respondents of this study were licensed and permanent teachers in Physical Education (PE) who are currently employed in a state university in Central Luzon, Philippines. All participants had more than 5 years teaching experience in order to have access to rich and relevant data. This may also be due to buff years of teaching other universities along aside their work in the university. The reason for this criterion was to engage educators who are highly professionally experienced in school-based physical education teaching and delivering health and fitness education to students.

The sampling was purposive sampling, a non-probability type of sampling approach by selecting candidate that fit on certain criteria. This purposive sampling was considered suitable for the nature of the phenomenon of interest, because it involves intentional selection of individuals who have faced firsthand the phenomenon under

study. Within this context, the chosen participants were well-informed and experienced in the approaches, problems and solutions concerning the promotion of physical fitness at school level.

Through examining experienced and qualified PE teachers, the study sought to collect rich and in-depth narratives that would assist in creating a more nuanced picture of the processes underpinning the establishment and ongoing provision of fitness programs at tertiary level.

### Research Locale

This study will be conducted at a state university located in the Central Luzon, Region 3, Philippines. The university is known for its strong academic programs, including physical education, agriculture, science, and engineering, and serves as a hub for higher education in the region. It provides a structured environment for implementing physical education programs at the tertiary level.

The university offers regular physical education courses as part of its general curriculum, handled by qualified and experienced PE faculty members. With a full-fledged academic system as well as the sports facilities and active students, it is an ideal place for investigating the lived experiences of PE teachers in enhancing fitness levels of learners. The arrangement of the study was done in a way to ensure that the atmosphere remained consistent throughout the study.

### Data Collection

This study will conduct a face-to-face interview of selected physical education (PE) teachers of state university. Teachers must have permanent status and have taught for at least five years. An open-ended interview guide prepared by the researcher will be used to find out the difficulties they face in physical fitness. Experts will evaluate the questions for clarity and relevance. The participant will select a convenient time for the in-person interview. These interviews will be audio-recorded with their consent to properly capture responses. The information will not be released and will be used only for this study.

### Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to comprehend qualitative data obtained from structured, face-to-face interviews of physical education teachers. Following Braun and Clarke (2006), this method was chosen for its flexibility and rigour in capturing the lived experiences, challenges, strategies of participants. The six-phase process helped to transform raw information into meaningful themes that represented the research aims.



**Figure 1.** Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6 phases of thematic analysis.

### Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

The ethical principles of the study were based on Belmont Report (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979), National Ethical Guidelines for Health and health-related research (Philippine Health Research Ethics Board, 2018) and the Philippine Data Privacy Act of 2012 (R.A. 10173). The researchers ensured that no participant will suffer any harm and that his preferences were fully respected and addressed. The participants were not restricted in voicing their opinions and were encouraged to share their opinions comfortably and without any hesitation. All the participants are provided full information and consent before taking part in the data collection conducted by the researchers. They also have the freedom

to withdraw the study at any given moment due to some personal reasons. According to national rules on privacy and confidentiality of information that individuals provide, the personal details of the participants were excluded in the final report. Informed consent was secured by provided each participant with a written consent document.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Lived Experiences of Physical Educators in Promoting Fitness

The findings of this study revealed three major themes that encapsulate the perspectives of PE teachers in fostering student fitness: (1) Experiences – Adaptable Pedagogical and Teaching Approaches, (2) Challenges – Instructional, Resource-Related, and Environmental Factors, and (3) Suggestions – Proposed Framework for Fitness Promotion. These themes provide a comprehensive understanding of how PE teachers at Central Luzon State University navigate their roles, address barriers, and propose strategies to enhance the promotion of physical fitness among learners.

#### 1. Experiences

##### Theme 1: Adaptable (Pedagogical and Teaching Approaches)

These responses indicate that PE teachers actively adjust their teaching strategies to address students' diverse readiness levels, abilities, and interests. Adaptability ensures that activities remain inclusive, motivating, and developmentally appropriate. This connection to the study's topic is crucial because promoting fitness requires sustained engagement, which can only be achieved if students feel capable and supported in participating. By modifying rules, adjusting intensity, and using varied teaching methods, PE teachers create an environment where all learners can achieve personal progress toward fitness goals.

*"Uses learner-centered learning; establish the readiness of students before activities; gradually increase complexity." (P1, P5)*

*"Integrating game-based activities and movement-based quizzes to maintain interest." (P2)*

*"Modified group activity so everyone could join regardless of ability." (P2)*

*"Uses variety of activities to cater to individual capabilities." (P7)*

The adaptive practices shared by respondents underscore the vital role of flexibility in PE instruction. This approach mirrors Siedentop's (2019) assertion that adaptive teaching strategies are essential for sustaining engagement in diverse classrooms. Similarly, Killian and Payne (2021) found that differentiated instruction leads to greater skill development, confidence, and participation. The alignment between the literature and the study's results shows that adaptability is not only a beneficial teaching method but a necessary element in promoting a lasting culture of fitness in schools.

##### Theme 2: Health Promotion

Teachers go beyond skill instruction by integrating health awareness into PE activities. The emphasis on BMI classification, physical fitness testing, and individualized health plans shows a proactive approach to educating students about their well-being. This connection to the research topic lies in the idea that fitness promotion is not solely about physical activity, it also involves equipping learners with knowledge and skills to maintain healthy lifestyles beyond the classroom. Health promotion in PE empowers students to set personal goals, monitor progress, and adopt sustainable fitness habits.

*"Discussing BMI classification and showing sample bodies in each category." (P4)*

*"Conducting physical fitness tests to know students' capabilities and limitations." (P6)*

*"Encouraging students to create individual programs to improve health." (P6)*

*"Promoting lifelong wellness regardless of performance." (P3, P7)*

The emphasis on health education found in these responses aligns strongly with research advocating for integrated wellness instruction in PE. Pate et al. (2011) reported that combining physical activity with health knowledge improves both physical outcomes and overall health literacy among students. Likewise, the World Health Organization (2020) emphasized that health promotion strategies embedded in education foster positive behavior change and lifelong wellness. In this study, the participants' focus on BMI awareness, personal fitness

assessments, and individualized programs directly reflects these best practices, demonstrating their relevance to achieving lasting fitness engagement.

## **2. Challenges**

### **Theme 1: Instructional**

The responses highlight the barriers posed by varying levels of student motivation, self-confidence, and physical competence. These issues hinder the effectiveness of PE programs aimed at promoting fitness. When students are hesitant or physically unprepared to engage, they are less likely to benefit from physical activities. This directly connects to the study's topic because PE teachers' role in fitness promotion becomes more challenging when foundational motivation and physical readiness are lacking.

*"Students are shy or lack confidence." (P2, P4, P7)*

*"Some students have low physical competence and are not active physically." (P5)*

*"Busy schedules, poor eating habits, and sedentary lifestyles." (P6)*

These challenges are consistent with literature indicating that psychological and lifestyle factors significantly affect student engagement in PE. Van der Mars (2022) identified self-efficacy, health habits, and personal motivation as crucial determinants of participation. Similarly, Chen, Kim, and Gao (2014) found that without targeted strategies to address motivational deficits, even high-quality PE programs may fail to deliver results. The findings in this study support these conclusions, underscoring the need for interventions that build both physical competence and confidence among learners.

### **Theme 2: Resources**

Insufficient facilities, equipment, and institutional support hinder the implementation of diverse and engaging PE activities. Without these resources, teachers cannot fully execute programs that cater to students' varied needs. This directly affects the promotion of fitness, as limited equipment restricts the scope of activities and opportunities for skill development.

*"Lack of facilities limits the activities we can offer." (P5, P7)*

*"Even the best-designed programs fail without proper equipment and policy." (P7)*

The lack of resources described by respondents mirrors global trends identified in educational research. Hardman and Marshall (2018) reported that insufficient facilities and equipment remain a persistent barrier to quality PE instruction worldwide. UNESCO (2015) also stressed that limited infrastructure reduces the variety of activities available, impacting skill acquisition and long-term engagement. In this study, such constraints are shown to hinder teachers' ability to implement diverse and engaging fitness activities, making resource improvement a key priority for effective fitness promotion.

### **Theme 3: Environment**

Environmental factors such as extreme heat, illnesses, and menstruation cycles significantly reduce student participation in PE classes. On the other hand, support from community stakeholders helps sustain interest through events and special programs. This shows that while environmental conditions can be barriers, external collaboration can mitigate their impact on fitness promotion.

*"Hot weather and illnesses discourage participation." (P4)*

*"Stakeholders support events like zumba, fun runs, and competitions." (P1, P4, P6)*

The influence of environmental factors on physical activity participation is well-documented in the literature. The World Health Organization (2020) recognized that seasonal conditions and health-related absences can significantly reduce activity levels. In contrast, Trudeau and Shephard (2008) demonstrated that community-supported events can counteract these effects by offering social motivation and alternative avenues for participation. The findings of this study reflect both perspectives, showing that while environmental barriers exist, proactive stakeholder involvement can mitigate their negative impact on student fitness engagement.

## **3. Suggestions for a Fitness Framework**

The proposed suggestions aim to build a student-centered, inclusive, and resource-supported fitness framework. By focusing on learners' needs, integrating technology, and making activities enjoyable, PE teachers can create sustainable engagement. Incentives and favorable scheduling can address motivational issues, while mental

health assessments ensure a holistic approach to fitness promotion. This connects to the study's topic by offering a practical roadmap to overcoming the challenges identified, ultimately leading to the development of a fit and health-conscious student population.

"Programs should be based on student needs with varied strategies and adequate resources." (P1, P5)

"Incorporate inclusive activities, integrate technology, and promote enjoyment over performance." (P2, P7)

"Provide incentives, schedule morning sessions, and assess mental health." (P4) "Set clear goals, use innovative activities, and give real-time feedback." (P6).

The suggestions provided by respondents resonate strongly with best-practice recommendations for effective PE program design. Chen and Hypnar (2015) found that student-centered, well-resourced programs significantly increase participation and promote positive attitudes toward fitness. Bailey et al. (2009) further argued that inclusive frameworks that address both physical and mental well-being are essential for fostering long-term engagement. In this study, the proposed strategies directly align with these principles, offering a practical blueprint for cultivating a supportive and sustainable school fitness culture.



**Figure 2.** Fitness Goal Concept Map

The concept map illustrates the thematic findings on the lived experiences of PE teachers in promoting fitness. At the core is the fitness goal, supported by three main dimensions: Experience, Challenges, and Suggestions. Teachers' experiences highlight adaptable health promotion, where flexible teaching approaches and integrated health education ensure inclusivity and sustained student engagement. However, fitness promotion is hindered by instructional barriers (low motivation, lack of confidence), resource limitations (insufficient facilities and equipment), and environmental factors (extreme heat, illnesses, environment), although community support can help mitigate these. To address these issues, teachers propose a fitness framework that is student-centered, inclusive, and well-resourced, featuring varied strategies, technology integration, enjoyable activities, incentives, favorable schedules, mental health checks, clear goals, and innovative delivery. Together, these interconnected elements form a practical roadmap toward fostering a fit and health-conscious student population.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences, challenges, and proposed solutions of physical educators in promoting fitness among learners. Through a detailed thematic analysis of teacher narratives, the research addressed three central questions and provided nuanced insights that complement existing survey-based and quantitative literature.



The first research question revealed the lived experiences of the first opportunity six predominant themes were noted: Student-Centered Instruction, Engagement Strategies, Lifelong Wellness Promotion, Health Education, Integrated Teaching Approaches and ongoing Teaching Constraints and Student Barriers. Teachers implemented learner-centered in addition to open classes on health and game-based contents to keep students motivated, sustain fitness as well as lifelong education.

The second research issue was concerned with general experiences and reflections. This found that teachers are responsive to the emergent student contexts, prioritize inclusive and creative activities, and experience great pleasure in their students' achievement and in the application of this learning beyond the classroom. Yet, obstacles such as poor facilities, inadequate resources, different student interests, etc., are still major challenges. Nevertheless, a comprehensive support from stakeholders and community collaboration were observed as key factors in the PE program success.

The third research question targeted relevant fitness framework strategies. Teachers suggested student-focused, inclusive, and comprehensive program planning facilitated through innovative pedagogy, provision of resources, and professional development, as well as incorporation of technology, systematic monitoring and community collaboration. They argued that physical education should be conducive to overall wellbeing—by meeting the students' physical, mental, and emotional health needs in order to help them develop healthy habits that last a lifetime.

In addressing these themes, this research highlights the importance of a flexible, inclusive and well-resourced PE provision. Valuing PE teachers' voices, experiences and the daily realities they face, can inform policy and action that address strategies for keeping students engaged, increasing equity in fitness opportunities, and empowering PE teachers to provide quality, meaningful physical education that leads to life-long, relevant, and transferable goals.

## 5. RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of the study Exploring the Challenges of the Physical Educators in Promoting Fitness Among Learners, the following recommendations are proposed:

**Improve PE Infrastructure.** Educational institutions should prioritize the development and maintenance of appropriate PE facilities and equipment. Investment in ventilated venues and multipurpose areas will provide conducive environments for physical activity.

**Promote Inclusive and Student-Centered Teaching.** PE teachers should continue using differentiated instruction and encourage student input in activity planning. This enhances motivation, engagement, and ownership of learning.

**Invest in Continuous Professional Development.** Regular training and workshops should be provided to PE teachers to update their knowledge and skills. Emphasis should be placed on inclusive education, blended learning strategies, and innovative fitness models.

**Integrate Innovative Teaching and Technology.** Schools should support the integration of technology and gamified strategies in PE instruction to enhance participation and align with learners' interests and trends.

**Embed Holistic Health Education.** Integrate mental, emotional, and social wellness topics into PE lessons. Programs should guide students to self-assess their fitness, understand healthy lifestyle choices, and build life skills for long-term well-being.

**Implement Data-Driven Practices.** Encourage the use of student fitness tracking, progress monitoring, and real-time feedback systems to personalize instruction and motivate learners with clear indicators of their improvements.

**Support Policy Implementation and Resource Mobilization.** School administrators and policymakers must support PE programs through adequate funding, curriculum review, and the inclusion of teacher voices in decision-making processes. Collaborative efforts with stakeholders can lead to sustainable improvements in fitness promotion.

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