

Developing Life Long Physical Activity Habit: Stories of Bachelor of Physical Education Student

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ABSTRACT:

Being physically active is one of the key components of a healthy lifestyle, especially among the Bachelor of Physical Education (BPEd) majors since they have to advocate the idea of being physically active throughout their entire professional career. This study focuses on the lived experience of BPEd students regarding the development and maintenance of their lifelong physical activity. Qualitative phenomenological research design has been used for this purpose. The data collection was done through the use of semi-structured interviews with twelve (12) BPEd students who were studying at a higher education institution in the Philippines. The interview transcripts were analyzed by using the method of thematic analysis developed by Braun & Clarke (2006). The following three main themes have been identified: (1) Journey toward Lifelong Physical Activity – the experiences, motivations and changes in physical activity of the students; (2) Experiences That Shape an Active Lifestyle – the positive PE and sports experiences, social support and barriers (lack of time, fatigue, differences in ability levels); and (3) Implications for the Physical Education Curriculum – student experience, diversity considerations and enjoyable practical and sustainable physical activity. This study recommends that Physical Education programs provide inclusive, enjoyable, and practical activities that also consider students' needs and interests and encourage physical activity beyond the classroom.

1. INTRODUCTION

Physical activity is more than just exercise, it is an important part of a healthy and meaningful life. For future Physical Education teachers, staying active is not only a personal responsibility but also a way to inspire students to develop healthy habits. The importance of physical activity to human health is well-documented being a significant factor in reducing the risks of cardiovascular diseases, developing type 2 diabetes, and depression, among other negative outcomes (World Health Organization 2020). Consequently, physical activity is considered a public health priority. By extension, physical activity becomes a personal priority for future Physical Education (PE) teachers who will promote health-related behavior change in their future students. As such, it is essential to recognize and understand the role of pre-service PE teachers who are expected to model and teach healthy behavior to their future students. Indeed, a study by Martin et al. (2016) demonstrates a clear correlation between PE teachers' levels of engagement in physical activity, their attitudes, and their efficacy in teaching and motivating their students.

While a broad understanding of the benefits derived from physical activity is necessary in developing long-term engagement, it is insufficient on its own. Developing physical literacy, which implies a lasting and comprehensive knowledge of physical activity, as well as confidence and competence in relation to it, requires meaningful experiences and motivation (Edwards et al., 2017). Additionally, positive reinforcement through familial, social, and professional networks plays a crucial role in ensuring long-term physical activity maintenance (Jaeschke et al., 2017). Nowhere is this more necessary than in health literacy in the Philippines, a

nation where the roots of Non-Communicable Diseases run deep and cast a shadow over national advancement (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2023). That is why teacher education programs should take it upon themselves to provide PE teachers who are physically literate, hold the proper attitudes and are motivated to teach their students about being active and engaging in healthier lifestyles. While there is a plethora of research that promotes the numerous benefits of being physically active, and many studies that attempt to measure how active students are or how effective PE teachers are at teaching PE, not much research has been done to understand how students develop their physical activity behavior over the long term.

But while these BPEd students are expected to be proponents of active living, there exists a considerable lack of empirical evidence describing the ways in which their personal experiences informed the development of their own long-term physical activity behaviors (Baligad et al., 2017). While we know a lot about how exercise can help you stay healthy and what physical educators should be doing in their classrooms (Martin et al., 2016), we know very little about the personal experiences and stories of how pre-service teachers take health knowledge and apply it to their lives on a long-term basis. These qualitative experiences can allow us to make connections between knowledge and long-term action and can be used to better PE teacher education programs. Collecting data on the lived experiences of BPEd students can help address this gap in literature and help us understand how we can better teach PE teachers. The purpose of this study is to understand how Bachelor of Physical Education (BPEd) students become and remain physically active. We aim to understand the lived experiences of our participants and what factors allow them to maintain their activity levels throughout the long term.

2. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A qualitative research design known as phenomenology will be used to investigate the experiences of BPEd students in relation to their development of lifelong physical activity practices. Phenomenology is an ideal research design since it involves investigating how a person experiences a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through the design, the researcher will be able to find out the experiences, motivations, and challenges that have influenced the participants' engagement in physical activities.

Participants

The participants consisted of twelve (12) college students currently enrolled in Physical Education courses at a higher education institution in the Philippines. The sample included four (4) first year students, four (4) second year students, and four (4) third year students.

Purposive sampling was used to choose participants who can share meaningful experiences in PE classes. They must be currently enrolled in PE courses and willing to share their experiences.

Data Collection

The researchers will collect data through semi-structured individual interviews with a selected number of Bachelor of Physical Education students. An interview guide with a set of open-ended questions will be prepared for participants to encourage them to share their personal experiences in developing and maintaining their physical activity habits. The questions will focus on their personal experiences, interest, challenges, and other factors that affected their motivation to continue doing physical activities.

Data Analysis

The study employed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework:

1. Familiarization with the data
2. Generation of initial codes

3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Producing the report

Interview transcripts were repeatedly reviewed to identify meaningful patterns and recurring concepts. Codes were grouped into categories and eventually organized into overarching themes that represented the participants' lived experiences.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers adhered to ethical principles in conducting this study involving human participants. Before the interview, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the interview procedures, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Written informed consent was obtained prior to data collection.

With the participants' permission, the interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accurate transcription and analysis. To protect participants' identities, each participant was assigned a unique code (e.g., P1, P2, P3) instead of using their real names. The interview recordings and transcripts were securely stored and were accessible only to the researchers. All information gathered was used solely for academic purposes, ensuring the privacy, dignity, and welfare of every participant throughout the study.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The responses of the twelve (12) BPED students were analyzed using the thematic analysis procedure of Braun and Clarke (2006). In this method, researchers identify themes by becoming familiar with the data, generating initial themes, reviewing the themes again, and developing definitions for all final themes. The analysis process led to the identification of three themes, namely: (1) Journey Toward Lifelong Physical Activity; (2) Experiences Influencing an Active Lifestyle; and (3) Implications for Physical Education Curriculum.

Theme 1: Journey Toward Lifelong Physical Activity

1.1. The BPED students' journey toward becoming active

The journey toward becoming active is realized through the process of adapting to a new environment and finding appropriate activities that students prefer to do. Some respondents noted that they became more active after enrolling in the BPED program while others had prior sports experience but engaged in a more comprehensive range of activities while in college. Therefore, the BPED program can help students discover activities they enjoy and develop intentions to remain physically active (Fernández-Espínola et al., 2022).

"My journey has been a process of discovering activities that I actually enjoy." (P1)

"I am now more open to participating in different activities and sports since I became a BPED student."

"Mas naging active ako simula nung naging BPED ako... ngayon mas willing nako sumubok ng iba't ibang activities at sports." (P4)

Others described the journey as one that involved the adjustment process due to increased activity levels in the BPED program. "When I joined the BPED program in college, I had to adjust to the increased level of activities as compared to high school" (P8)

"I realized that my journey toward an active lifestyle had become difficult since I lacked the necessary knowledge about physical activity" (P6)

From the above responses, it is evident that the journey toward an active lifestyle is different for every student. Some students may be more active already and only need to maintain their activity levels while others may need more adjustments to achieve an active lifestyle. Therefore, the BPED program can facilitate the process by helping students discover activities that they enjoy doing.

1.2. The motivating factors for sustained involvement in physical activity

These findings are supported by Wang L (2022), who found that motivation and psychological needs are associated with students' physical activity in PE. , it was evident that the respondents identified several intrinsic and extrinsic factors that motivate them to remain active. The factors included health and enjoyment, improved skills, improved appearance, and results, and responsibility.

"When I realize that I can perform an activity better than before, it motivates me to continue doing the activity" (P1)

"When I do physical activity, I feel energetic, and it also helps to lower my stress levels" (P3)

"I am motivated to be active because, as a future physical educator, I will be responsible for encouraging others to lead a healthy lifestyle" (P4) "I want to be healthy and active because physical activity is an integral part of my profession, and I will not be able to teach what I am not capable of doing" (P5)

"I am motivated to be physically active because of healthy social interactions such as playing games and competing with others and still gaining new skills" (P9)

From the above responses, it is evident that the motivating factors for physical activity differ from one person to another. While some people are motivated to be active for health reasons, others may desire to improve their skills or social interactions. Students may also be motivated to be active because of their responsibilities, for example, as future physical educators, they may be obliged to lead active lifestyles.

1.3. Students' perspective on the changes in physical activity throughout their life

From the responses provided, it is evident that the respondents have changed their perspectives on physical activity throughout their life. Some respondents indicated that they used to participate in physical activities for recreational purposes but currently, they are more health-conscious. This is consistent with Fernández-Espínola et al. (2022), who emphasized the role of PE experiences in encouraging continued physical activity beyond the classroom. Others noted that their activity levels depend on the time available and the purpose of the activity. For example, dance is recreational whereas online workouts are for improving health.

"Previously, I used to participate in most of my physical activities for academic purposes. Currently, I want to ensure that I am healthy, so I make sure that I am physically active even when alone" (P1)

Activities also change according to the goals of the individual. "When I want to be entertaining, I do dance because it is fun, but when I have specific fitness goals, I do online workouts" (P3)

"I used to engage in physical activities for fun when I was in high school, but after joining the BPED program, I have become health-conscious" (P5)

"I have become more active since my first year in BPED since the activities conducted in the course demand higher levels of physical activity" (P8)

"I used to be very active without realizing the significance of being active when I was young. I joined club activities in high school, and I would compete with others as a teenager. Currently, I have become more aware of the need for exercise, fitness, and healthy habits as an adult" (P9)

P11 and P12 also noted changes in their physical activity patterns throughout their life. According to P11, school and sports have encouraged him/her to remain active. However, he/she has become less active due to increased academic workload. On the other hand, P12 indicated that school and sports encourage him/her to be active, though academic workload and other responsibilities limit his/her physical activity levels.

From the above responses, it is evident that people tend to change their perspectives regarding physical activities at different stages of life. As people grow older, they are more likely to become conscious of the benefits of physical activity and may therefore purpose to be more active. The activities that people choose may also change depending on their purposes and available time.

Theme 2: Experiences Influencing an Active Lifestyle

2.1. Influence of positive experiences in PE and sports on students' interest and skills

According to the responses provided, students had several positive experiences in PE and sports that influenced their current interest and skill levels. This finding is supported by Tendinha et al. (2021) , who found that positive PE experiences can enhance students' motivation and enjoyment.

"I had a positive experience with PATHFIT, especially yoga, since I was able to express myself without feeling the pressure to compete with others" (P1)

"In swimming, I acquired new skills and received feedback to improve on certain aspects of the skill" (P3) The respondent also noted that the above experiences had influenced his/her current interest in swimming.

"I realized that activities that I used to find challenging were becoming easy as I continued to practice them. The experiences also helped me to develop social skills, good sportsmanship and respect for others" (P4)

"Physical Education and sports have helped me to develop new skills, master new activities and improve my confidence levels while having fun" (P5)

"I enjoy PE and sports activities because they allow us to interact with others while still mastering new skills and enjoying the process" (P6)

"The involvement in sports has also enabled me to interact with others, including teachers, where I have received encouragement and support" (P9)

"I have had positive experiences interacting with my classmates, where I was able to learn and play together" (P10)

From the above responses, it is evident that students can develop new skills and improve on existing skills through positive experiences in PE. The positive experiences may also encourage students to become more active and interested in participating in physical activities.

2.2. Influence of social support on students' social interactions and participation in physical activity

From the responses provided, it was evident that students received social support from friends, classmates, teachers, and family members which encouraged them to be more active. Social support enabled them to participate in physical activities as a group, making the activities more enjoyable. This finding is supported by

Wang et al. (2024), who found a significant relationship between social support and physical activity among university students.

“Having friends who encourage me to participate in physical activities helps because physical activities become more enjoyable when done together” (P1)

“Social support from teachers, classmates, and friends also helps because it reduces the fear and anxiety of making mistakes” (P9)

“Having teachers who encourage us to participate in sports activities is significant since it supports our need to be active” (P10)

“My friends, family, and classmates encourage me to be active and participate in physical activities” (P5)

“My friends also encourage me to jog while still engaging in other physical activities” (P8)

P11 and P12 also identified social support as a factor that influences their participation in physical activities. P11 and P12 noted teachers and family members encourage them to be active and participate in sports.

According to the responses provided, students can become more active by seeking social support from friends, family members, and teachers. Social support can increase their chances of participating in physical activities because they become more enjoyable when done together.

2.3. Influence of lack of time, fatigue, and diverse ability levels

Although students identified several factors that support an active lifestyle, they also noted several barriers that reduce their likelihood to participate in physical activities. The barriers included time constraints, fatigue, and diverse levels of ability. The respondents indicated that they faced time constraints due to increased academic workload which reduced their time to be active. Similarly, Ferreira Silva et al. (2022) identified lack of time and other barriers as factors affecting students' participation in physical activity.

“Sometimes, I feel that I do not have enough time to be physically active due to the increased workload” (P1)

“Sometimes I want to be physically active, but academic work, and other responsibilities do not allow me” (P5)

“The summer classes are very challenging since they involve very strenuous activities such as aquatics, athletics, and exercise on the same day” (P6)

“Sometimes I feel that I do not have the ability to perform certain activities compared to my colleagues” (P3)

“It would be better if the activities were more simplified because not everyone has the same level of activity or even the same interest” (P8)

P11 and P12 also indicated that they face the challenge of time constraints, fatigue, and diverse levels of ability.

From the above responses, it is evident that time constraints, fatigue, and diverse levels of ability are significant barriers to physical activity among students. The challenges are brought about by heavy academic workloads and the fact that physical activities differ in terms of difficulty levels. In order to be more active, students need to make time for physical activities despite the increased workload. Teachers should also consider the fact that activities are not equal in terms of difficulty levels and design them in a manner that accommodates the diverse levels of ability among students.

Theme 3: Implications for the PE Curriculum

3.1. Need to consider students' feedback on the PE curriculum

This finding is consistent with Howley and O'Sullivan (2021), who highlighted the importance of student voice in creating meaningful PE experiences. All respondents agreed that student feedback is vital in making improvements to the PE curriculum. Since students interact directly with the PE curriculum, their feedback provides very useful information on what works and what needs to be adjusted.

"Student feedback helps to indicate to the teachers whether an activity is effective and enjoyable" (P1)

"I think student feedback should be considered in making changes to the PE curriculum because students' opinions and experiences can help to improve learning, participation, and overall satisfaction" (P3) "Student feedback would be more helpful because, as a student, I can tell the teacher what needs to be changed or even what is lacking in the PE curriculum" (P4)

"A student can provide feedback on what is working, what is not working, and what requires improvement based on the experiences that the student has had while interacting with the PE curriculum" (P5)

"The teacher should read students' feedback on the PE program so that he/she can make the necessary adjustments to improve teaching and student-teacher relationships" (P7)

"The teachers should consider the feedback provided by students because it shows what is lacking and what needs to be changed in the class" (P8)

"Student feedback is very significant in improving the PE classes because it helps to increase the level of interaction between the students and the teachers, thus making the class more enjoyable" (P9)

P11 and P12 also argued that student feedback should be considered because it enables the teachers to understand the students' experiences.

From the responses provided, it is evident that student feedback provides valuable information to the teachers. The information can then be used to make appropriate adjustments to the PE curriculum. Therefore, the feedback is vital in making PE classes more effective.

3.2. Need to consider students' diverse backgrounds

According to the responses provided, the respondents believed that it was very important to consider their diverse backgrounds when designing the PE curriculum. The need was necessitated by the fact that each student was different in terms of skills, interests, and level of experience. This is consistent with Lourenço et al. (2025), who emphasized the importance of flexible and inclusive approaches in PE.

"It would be good to consider students' diverse backgrounds by providing them with a variety of activities and allowing them to decide which activities to do based on their skill levels" (P1)

"Activities should take into account the differences in students' abilities" (P4)

"Teachers should consider each student's background while encouraging individual improvement rather than focusing on general improvement for all students" (P6)

“The teachers should also give alternative activities to students who are unable to perform certain activities” (P7)

“It would be better to make the activities simple since each student does not have the same level of activity” (P8)

“Teachers must consider students’ experiences when designing the PE activities in order for the activities to meet the students’ needs” (P3)

“PE activities should be designed in a manner that makes them simple, interesting, and appropriate for the different abilities and interests of the students while still giving them options” (P5)

P11 and P12 also believed that the teachers should consider students’ diverse backgrounds when designing the PE activities. They argued that the activities should be designed in a manner that accommodates the different needs of the students while making them interesting.

According to the responses, the teachers should consider the diverse backgrounds of the students when designing the PE curriculum. It is only then that they will be able to address the different needs and wants of the students. The teachers should also consider the fact that the students differ in terms of skills and abilities and design activities that would encourage improvement rather than focusing on general improvement for all students.

3.3. Need to make PE activities more enjoyable, practical, and sustainable

This finding is supported by Fernández-Espínola et al. (2022), who found that motivational approaches in PE can encourage students’ intention to remain physically active. Finally, the students felt that the PE activities should be made more enjoyable, practical, and sustainable so that they could be encouraged to participate in physical activities on a continuous basis. The following quotes illustrate their rationale:

“Ideally, PE should help students to discover physical activities that they can continue doing in the future” (P1)
“Activities should be developed in a manner that they are simple, interesting, and appropriate for the different abilities and interests of the students while still giving them options” (P5) “I would like to see more interactive activities because they make the class more interesting” (P8)

“Besides sports, PE should also focus on promoting healthy lifestyles, camaraderie, and social interactions among students” (P10)

“Lessons should start with simple activities so that we develop the interest and confidence to engage in physical activities” (P4) “I think it would be important to structure activities based on individual experiences since this will make PE more practical and appropriate for everyone” (P3)

P11 and P12 also requested for more interesting, practical, and sustainable activities to be developed. They argued that activities should be made simple, safe, and enjoyable for everyone.

From the above responses, it is evident that students are requesting for PE activities that are more interesting, practical, and sustainable. By making these changes, teachers stand a better chance of encouraging more students to participate in physical activities.

4. CONCLUSION

The discussion above highlighted the experiences of the twelve (12) BPED students in regards to their journey toward lifelong physical activity. From the discussion, it is evident that the journey was different for every student as some had to adjust to higher levels of activity during the BPED program whereas others became active due to the program. The participants became active due to various motivating factors, including health and enjoyment, improved skills, improved appearance, and results, and responsibility. Although they identified several barriers to a more active lifestyle, including time constraints, fatigue, and diverse levels of ability, they also noted several factors that could help in addressing them, including social support and student feedback. The discussion also revealed that student feedback, inclusive activities, and practical PE activities were very significant in improving the PE program.

Ultimately, the study suggests that Physical Education should not be viewed as a performance-based activity where the focus is on sports and meeting performance expectations. Instead, teachers should encourage students to discover new activities that they are interested in doing while still helping them to develop important values, skills, and abilities. By making PE more practical, students will be encouraged to become more active outside school while still enjoying the activities.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based to the results, the Physical Education teachers should provide fun, practical, and flexible PE activities considering students' interests, abilities, prior knowledge, and experiences. Furthermore, the teachers should consider students' suggestions while planning PE activities to make students learn more meaningful and enjoyable things during their education. Having many choices and modifications in PE activities might help the students be involved regardless of the variations in ability, time, and experience. Moreover, it is also important to encourage the students to get support from their teachers, peers, friends, and family members in order to lead an active lifestyle. The BPED program should not concentrate only on the physical aspects but also should encourage students to identify enjoyable activities that they can continue after leaving school. In the future, other researchers may carry out similar studies among bigger and varied samples from various educational institutions

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