

## Challenges of teachers in implementing PATH-Fit as the new tertiary physical education in the Philippines

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### ABSTRACT

This research aimed to comprehensively investigate the challenges faced by physical education teachers in implementing physical activities towards health and fitness (PATH-Fit) as the new tertiary physical education curriculum in the Philippines. Employing a qualitative research design, the study engaged five physical education teachers from a leading State University in the Southern Philippines as the main source of data. The research participants were actively involved in focus group discussions and in-depth interviews using an open-ended guide questionnaire validated by experts in the field. The triangulation of results revealed five essential themes capturing the significant challenges faced by these educators in the implementation of the new curriculum: inadequate instructional references, insufficient instructional time for PATH-Fit, lack of training and retooling for teachers, unavailability of equipment and materials, and shortfall on administrative support and guidance. As this research contributes critical insights into the multifaceted challenges associated with PATH-Fit implementation, it emphasizes the necessity for strategic interventions to enhance the effectiveness of the new tertiary physical education curriculum in the Philippines.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Tertiary physical education is an essential component of the educational system in the Philippines, emphasizing the comprehensive development of students encompassing physical, social, emotional, and mental aspects [1]. Its overarching objective is to create an all-encompassing and inclusive educational experience that fosters health, well-being, and lifelong physical fitness. This program's primary aim is to accommodate every student's varied interest and demands, regardless of their previous experience with physical activity [2]. The

program envisions to develop essential motor skills, improve general physical fitness, and cultivate virtues including discipline, teamwork, and an optimistic outlook on an active way of life [3].

Although the main objective of fostering an active and healthy lifestyle via the physical education program, its successful implementation in higher institutions is impeded by challenges. These problems comprise a variety of issues, including concerns regarding the credentials and training of teachers and limitations on resources, such as inadequate facilities and equipment [4]. Ybanez [5] explained that these obstacles constitute a systemic barrier that impedes the delivery of physical education. Further complicating the task of guaranteeing an inclusive and influential physical education experience at the tertiary level are concerns about curriculum alignment, student participation, and socioeconomic circumstances. Hence, Angulo *et al.* [6] highlighted that it is critical to pay attention to these complex obstacles to maximize the benefits of the physical education curriculum, promote the comprehensive growth of students, and establish a climate of health and wellness in higher education institutions (HEIs).

To address the challenges mentioned above and prioritize improving student learning outcomes in physical education, the Philippine Commission on Higher Education released Memorandum Order (CMO) 39 series of 2021. This directive functions as a proactive measure in response to the concerns that have been highlighted, indicating a dedication to enhancing the general standard of physical education throughout institutions of higher learning [7]. HEIs are required by this order to establish and execute a comprehensive quality assurance procedure uniquely customized for physical education courses. Selecting a structure that permits continual monitoring and evaluation is the goal; this will ensure that learning objectives are efficiently realized. Through the utilization of approaches highlighted by Segerholm *et al.* [8], this memorandum order underscores the significance of a holistic quality assurance strategy in advancing the caliber of physical education programs in higher education.

While the implementation of the new tertiary physical education program represents a significant shift in the landscape of physical education in the country, there is now the potential to be more responsive to the needs and interests of Filipino college students. Nonetheless, challenges have emerged that impede Filipino teachers during the transition and implementation of the new tertiary physical education curriculum [9]. Rosa and Abad [10] explained that these challenges include adjusting teaching methodologies, adapting to the updated curriculum structure, and aligning instructional approaches with students' changing needs. The effective resolution of these barriers is critical to ensuring the new program's smooth and successful implementation, fostering an environment in which Filipino teachers can confidently navigate the changes and deliver high-quality physical education that resonates with the diverse needs of college students.

Though there are numerous studies concerning physical education implementation in the Philippines, there is a notable insufficiency of studies that specifically investigate the challenges teachers face in implementing physical activities towards health and fitness (PATH-Fit) as the new tertiary physical education curriculum. Although the implementation began in 2021, there is a significant literature gap, with few research studies addressing this critical aspect. Recognizing this gap, the primary goal of this study is to add to the existing knowledge by thoroughly investigating the challenges physical education teachers encounter in implementing the curriculum. This study aims to fill a gap in the literature by providing valuable insights into the unique challenges and opportunities that educators face in the context of PATH-Fit, with the ultimate goal of informing improvements in the implementation and effectiveness of the new tertiary physical education curriculum.

This research stands out for its novelty, as it directly addresses the pressing challenges faced by physical education teachers in implementing PATH-Fit, a newly introduced tertiary physical education curriculum. Unlike previous studies that focus on general physical education concerns, this study provides real-time insights that are immediately applicable, offering a crucial foundation for refining instructional strategies and policy decisions. By highlighting the specific struggles of teachers, it serves as a valuable resource for educational leaders, enabling them to identify areas requiring additional support, training, or resource allocation. Moreover, the study's findings offer curriculum experts practical feedback on the effectiveness of PATH-Fit's design and implementation, paving the way for necessary modifications to enhance its relevance and impact. This timely and context-specific research fills a critical gap in existing literature and contributes to the broader goal of improving physical education instruction at the tertiary level.

## 2. METHOD

### 2.1. Research design

A qualitative research design, specifically employing a descriptive approach, was utilized to examine the challenges faced by physical education teachers in implementing the PATH-Fit courses within the new tertiary physical education curriculum for Philippine HEIs. A qualitative approach in research is a method used to explore and understand people's experiences, behaviors, and interactions in depth [11]. This approach is often used when researchers aim to explore complex phenomena, understand the meaning behind

certain behaviors, or capture the nuances of a particular social or cultural context [12]. Further, Turale [13] explained that the descriptive approach in qualitative research focuses on providing a detailed, accurate account of the characteristics and phenomena being studied.

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to provide an in-depth exploration of the challenges faced by physical education teachers in implementing PATH-Fit. This method was selected to capture detailed insights into teachers' lived experiences, perspectives, and contextual difficulties, which may not be fully represented through quantitative methods. While a mixed-methods approach could enhance generalizability, the study prioritizes depth over breadth to uncover challenges that may otherwise be overlooked. However, the limitations of qualitative research, such as subjectivity and restricted generalizability, are acknowledged. Future research may benefit from incorporating quantitative surveys to complement qualitative findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges associated with PATH-Fit implementation.

## 2.2. Research participants and materials

Fifteen physical education teachers from one of the leading state universities in Southern Mindanao participated in this study. These teachers are currently holding PATH-Fit classes and have been teaching the courses in for four semesters. Using a purposeful sampling technique, each participant has been selected to provide specific information about the challenges they face in implementing PATH-Fit as the new tertiary physical education curriculum in Philippine HEIs. The research instrument used in this study consisted of a set of guide questions that were meticulously reviewed and validated by experts in physical education and qualitative research. This validation process involved assessing each question for clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives, ensuring that they effectively captured the intended information while minimizing ambiguity.

To further enhance reliability, the researchers used multiple data collection tools, including voice recorders, cameras, and memo pads, which provided a comprehensive record of each interview. This multi-tool approach enabled cross-referencing between audio recordings, visual cues, and written notes, ensuring consistency and accuracy in data transcription and analysis. Together, these steps established a rigorous data collection process, supporting both the validity and reliability of the findings in capturing the real challenges and experiences of physical education teachers.

## 2.3. Data analysis and interpretation

This study analyzed and interpreted the qualitative data using the framework Miles and Huberman [14] described: data reduction, data display, and conclusion formulation and verification. Coding, lowering the codes, and translating the generated data into figures or discussions were referred to as data reduction. The required information was acquired by categorizing the participants' responses and extracting the essential and pertinent information. Thematic analysis was a data sorting technique used to classify qualitative data. On the other hand, data display was the presentation of ordered data. This step allowed the flow of information, leading to the formulation of conclusions. After analyzing the responses to the questions, a conclusion was drawn and verified to reflect the study's key findings.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents the essential themes, categories, and core ideas identified in this study regarding the challenges faced by physical education teachers in implementing PATH-Fit as the new tertiary physical education curriculum in the Philippines. This Table 1 provides a structured overview of the key obstacles impacting effective instruction and student engagement. Each theme reflects insights drawn from the teachers' experiences, highlighting areas for potential improvement in PATH-Fit implementation.

### 3.1. Theme 1: inadequate instructional references

This theme delves into physical education teachers' difficulties when looking for appropriate instructional references for PATH-Fit courses. According to the feedback of the research participants, they have difficulty finding reliable, easily accessible, and cost-free educational materials to supplement their teaching methods. Their typical approach entails conducting thorough searches across multiple search engines on the internet but doing this frequently feels like attempting to solve a complex puzzle with missing pieces. This lack of instructional references is a significant issue that significantly impacts their effectiveness and the overall quality of their PATH-Fit instruction. According to the participants:

*"Although some contents are the same as the old Physical Education, there are new topics, and I initially struggled to find references."* - Jem

*“We don’t know where to find references because the references sent to us are incomplete. It’s like searching for missing puzzle pieces, trying to figure out where they belong...” - Joan*

This implies that without reliable and accessible materials, teachers are unable to provide well-rounded, evidence-based instruction, leading to gaps in students’ understanding and engagement. This limitation can result in a fragmented learning experience, where students may not fully grasp key concepts or develop essential skills. The absence of high-quality instructional references places additional strain on teachers, forcing them to spend excessive time and effort searching for suitable materials, which could otherwise be used to enhance lesson planning and student interaction. This deficiency hinders the overall effectiveness of the PATH-Fit curriculum, affecting student outcomes and the long-term success of the program. Having adequate learning materials in tertiary physical education is essential because it gives students a thorough understanding of theoretical concepts, practical skills, and current trends in the field [15]. They are crucial for instructors to facilitate effective teaching and encourage deeper engagement with the subject matter [16]. Furthermore, O’Keefe *et al.* [17] explained that current and relevant learning materials contribute to overall educational quality by providing students with the most up-to-date information and methodologies in class. Ample resources also support a variety of learning styles, allowing students to grasp complex concepts through various mediums. Moreover, Rodríguez *et al.* [18] emphasized that these materials are essential in fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, and knowledge application, preparing students for real-world scenarios in their chosen professions.

Table 1. Essential themes, category, and core ideas on the challenges of physical education teachers in implementing PATH-Fit as the new tertiary physical education courses in the Philippines

Essential themes	Description	Core ideas
Inadequate instructional references	Teachers struggle with a lack of reliable and accessible materials, hindering the delivery of PATH-Fit courses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– I initially struggled to find references.</li> <li>– Some references weren’t available online, and others were for sale, making it hard to find solid sources.</li> <li>– We had a shortage of references.</li> </ul>
Insufficient instructional time for PATH-Fit	Limited class time restricts students’ participation in physical activities, compromising the overall effectiveness of the PATH-Fit program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Even if I make it one hour for each session, it’s sometimes not enough because they’re not continuous.</li> <li>– We can’t implement the whole topic because of time constraints.</li> <li>– We are already close to midterm and there are topics I haven’t been able to teach them yet.</li> </ul>
Lack of training and retooling for teachers	The absence of ongoing professional development opportunities leaves teachers ill-prepared to adapt to the demands of the new PATH-Fit curriculum.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The main problem is the lack of training for teachers, especially during the first semester when the PATH-Fit curriculum was introduced.</li> <li>– My main concern is the broad range of topics given to us without proper organization.</li> <li>– The delivery or how you teach the topic is also a big problem.</li> </ul>
Unavailability of equipment and materials	The shortage of essential equipment and materials forces teachers and students to improvise, affecting the quality of physical education instruction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– One of the most pressing issues is the lack of facilities and equipment.</li> <li>– In terms of equipment, since I was asked to teach pickleball unexpectedly, I didn’t have the necessary equipment.</li> <li>– One major issue is the lack of facilities and equipment needed to teach these subjects.</li> </ul>
Shortfall on administrative support and guidance	Insufficient support and guidance from school administrators create challenges for teachers in effectively implementing the PATH-Fit curriculum.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– When it comes to our supervisors, there are instances where they rely on us, the newcomers, for ideas and concepts.</li> <li>– They expect to develop solutions, but deep inside, we lack knowledge because we are new.</li> <li>– The lack of support regarding facilities could be related to our department’s urge and management skills.</li> </ul>

### 3.2. Theme 2: insufficient instructional time for PATH-Fit

The second theme discusses the physical education teachers’ concerns about a lack of instructional time in PATH-Fit. According to them, physical education class time should be increased to allow students to participate in activities fully. Such delays occur before and after classes because some subjects and teachers do not allow students to wear their physical education uniform. As a result, students spend at least 15 minutes of their physical education period changing clothes. Furthermore, students’ involvement in many extracurricular activities can significantly impact physical education instructional time. Specifically, some participants explained:

*“Some teachers don’t allow students to wear their physical education uniforms to class, so students must change 10 minutes before the next class. Even if I manage to make it one hour for each session, it’s sometimes not enough because they’re not continuous.” - Jom*

*“Honestly, we are already close to midterm exams, and there are topics I haven’t been able to teach them yet because we’re running behind schedule due to the delay...” - Mary*

This theme implies that when students have limited time to engage in physical activities, they miss out on the full benefits of the curriculum, including skill development, physical fitness, and overall well-being. This constraint not only reduces the opportunity for meaningful participation but also forces teachers to rush through lessons, compromising the depth and quality of instruction. The cumulative effect of these time limitations can lead to students feeling disengaged and less motivated, ultimately diminishing the impact of physical education on their overall educational experience.

In physical education, adequate instructional time is essential for providing students with a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the subject [19]. This extra time allows for a more in-depth examination of theoretical concepts, practical skills, and critical analyses of various aspects of physical education and sports. Barba-Martín *et al.* [20] further highlighted that adequate instructional time allows students to participate in meaningful, practical experiences such as hands-on activities, sports, and fitness training, which helps them develop their practical skills and competencies. It also allows instructors to cover various topics, address individual learning needs, and foster a greater appreciation for the importance of physical activity and health [21].

### 3.3. Theme 3: lack of training and retooling for teachers

This theme examines physical education teachers’ concerns about a lack of training and retooling activities. Given that the PATH-Fit curriculum is new to the country, teachers should be retooled to equip them with the prescribed content, pedagogy, competence, and values for implementing the curriculum. According to the research participants, they are having severe problems due to their lack of training or retooling initiatives as they could have delivered the curriculum more efficiently if adequately trained. Schools frequently send selected teachers for training, but there is no cascading or reechoing of learning. As a result, it is more efficient to invite experts to retool teachers rather than sending only a few pieces of training for issues like this. As the research participants said:

*“First and foremost, the main problem is the lack of teacher training, especially during the first semester when the PATH-Fit curriculum was introduced...” - Kim*

*“...What we should teach is a bit confusing because it starts with fitness, then transitions to health-related skills, skills related to fitness, and health-related fitness...” - Jom*

This denotes that without proper preparation, teachers may struggle to deliver the curriculum effectively, leading to inconsistencies in instruction and a possible disconnect between the curriculum’s goals and its actual implementation. This gap can result in students receiving a suboptimal education, where they may not fully develop the intended skills or knowledge. Moreover, teachers who are not well-equipped may feel less confident and motivated, further diminishing the overall educational experience for students. Ensuring that all teachers are properly trained is essential for maintaining high standards in physical education and for fostering a productive learning environment.

Muller [22] outlined that, educational leaders and administrators must design responsive retooling for teachers to ensure that educators remain equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to navigate the evolving landscape of physical education. As the educational environment continuously changes, incorporating new technologies, methodologies, and pedagogical approaches, teachers must regularly retool to stay current and effective in their roles [23]. Atuhaire and Turyagyenda [24] further explained that responsive retooling acknowledges the dynamic nature of education and provides tailored training that addresses specific challenges and opportunities within the institution. This proactive approach not only enhances teacher performance but also contributes to improved student learning outcomes [25]. It empowers educators to adapt to diverse student needs, integrate innovative teaching strategies, and align their practices with emerging educational trends [26].

### 3.4. Theme 4: lack of instructional equipment and materials

The fourth theme delves into the concerns voiced by research participants regarding the inadequacy of instructional equipment and materials essential for the successful implementation of PATH-Fit. Teachers underscore the substantial impact of this shortage on students’ overall experience and performance in physical education, often necessitating innovative solutions to compensate for the lack of resources. While acknowledging the commendable resourcefulness demonstrated by teachers and students, it is imperative not to romanticize this aspect. Instead, schools should prioritize using adequate instructional equipment and materials to optimize teaching and learning experiences. Additionally, relying on students to provide their

learning materials is highlighted as a potential burden. As expressed by the research participants, there is a clear call for institutions to proactively address these challenges and ensure that teachers have the necessary tools to deliver high-quality PATH-Fit instruction, as mentioned:

*“...when it comes to physical education challenges, one major issue is the lack of facilities and equipment needed to teach these subjects. It’s a significant problem regarding the delivery of content in PATH-Fit...”* - Joan

*“How can I transfer the skills if we don’t have the tools to use, sir? So, I might end up requiring the students to provide their Frisbees within a week or two, and these students are quite impoverished...”* - Kim

This suggests that without the proper tools, teachers are unable to fully engage students in meaningful physical activities, leading to a diminished educational experience. This shortage not only limits the variety and effectiveness of exercises but also places undue pressure on both teachers and students to improvise, which can result in subpar outcomes. The overall learning process becomes fragmented, and students may miss out on essential skills and knowledge, ultimately affecting their physical development and enthusiasm for the subject. Schools must invest in instructional equipment and facilities in tertiary physical education as adequate and modern equipment improves educational quality by allowing students to engage in practical applications of theoretical concepts [27]. This hands-on experience is critical for developing the practical skills and competencies required in various physical education and sports-related fields [28]. Further, modern facilities provide a safe and conducive learning environment, fostering a positive and enriching educational experience. Investing in instructional equipment demonstrates a commitment to staying current with field advancements, ensuring students are well-prepared for real-world scenarios. Cojocarú *et al.* [29] explained that these investments help improve tertiary physical education’s overall effectiveness by providing students with the knowledge, skills, and experiences they need to succeed in their future careers in physical education and sports.

### 3.5. Theme 5: lack of administrative support and guidance

This theme focuses on tertiary physical education teachers’ difficulties, specifically a lack of administrative support and guidance. According to research participants’ feedback, there is a perceived need for greater recognition of the importance of tertiary physical education in the overall school curriculum, emphasizing the importance of prioritizing it within the institutional framework. Although younger teachers are frequently more active, their effectiveness can significantly improve with proper administrative support and guidance. This assistance is regarded as essential, as a guiding framework for these teachers as they navigate their roles and strive to become responsive physical education educators. In essence, the theme emphasizes the critical role of institutional support and guidance in empowering educators, particularly those in their early careers, to contribute effectively to tertiary physical education. To wit:

*“...They expect us to develop solutions, but deep inside, we also lack knowledge because we are relatively new. How are we going to deliver it? We hope for support from our leaders...”* - Jem

*“I believe the issue starts with the lack of support. The lack of support regarding facilities could be related to our department’s urge and management skills. ...”* - Jom

The absence of administrative support and guidance can have a negative impact on teachers’ morale and confidence, impairing their ability to perform at their best. Educators may struggle to navigate challenges without clear guidance and support, potentially leading to frustration and burnout. The lack of a supportive administrative framework may result in a lack of consistency in curriculum delivery, potentially affecting the quality and uniformity of instruction. Further, without adequate guidance, teachers may find it challenging to innovate and adapt teaching methods, limiting the evolution and improvement of the teaching-learning process.

Educational leaders’ and administrators’ guidance is critical because it provides a structured framework for younger educators to navigate their roles effectively [30]. Administrative assistance helps new teachers comprehend institutional policies, curriculum expectations, and professional development opportunities [31]. It acts as a mentorship channel, providing insights and advice that contribute to their professional development. This guidance is essential in the dynamic field of education, as it assists younger teachers in staying current on best practices, innovative teaching methods, and evolving educational trends [32]. Administrative support promotes a positive work environment, which boosts the confidence and job satisfaction of younger teachers, improving their overall effectiveness in the classroom [33].

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study has systematically examined tertiary physical education's challenges, shedding light on various dimensions that influence the teaching-learning process. A comprehensive understanding of the obstacles has emerged, ranging from the inadequacy of instructional references to insufficient time for PATH-Fit, a lack of teacher training, a lack of equipment and materials, and a lack of administrative support and guidance. These challenges highlight the importance of systemic reforms within tertiary education institutions and the need to strengthen the partnerships between universities and government agencies for resource allocation or the development of localized teacher training modules. Addressing these issues will necessitate the collaboration of educators, administrators, and policymakers. Prioritizing instructional resource investments, providing adequate teacher training, and reevaluating administrative policies are critical steps toward improving the overall quality of physical education in tertiary settings. Furthermore, recognizing PATH-Fit's critical role in the curriculum and creating a supportive environment for teachers and students is critical for fostering a holistic and practical educational experience. This research provides a solid foundation for informed decision-making and strategic interventions to raise tertiary physical education standards. For future research, studies could explore the long-term effects of these challenges on student outcomes in physical education, specifically looking at academic performance, physical health, and engagement. Additionally, research into innovative instructional methods, resource allocation models, and administrative frameworks could offer practical solutions to address these challenges. Expanding studies to include diverse regions and institutions would also provide a broader understanding of the unique needs across different educational settings.

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#### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

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C : Conceptualization

M : Methodology

So : Software

Va : Validation

Fo : Formal analysis

I : Investigation

R : Resources

D : Data Curation

O : Writing - Original Draft

E : Writing - Review & Editing

Vi : Visualization

Su : Supervision

P : Project administration

Fu : Funding acquisition

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Authors state no conflict of interest.

## INFORMED CONSENT

We have obtained informed consent from all individuals included in this study.

## ETHICAL APPROVAL

The research related to human use has been complied with all the relevant national regulations and institutional policies in accordance with the tenets of the Helsinki Declaration and has been approved by the authors' institutional review board or equivalent committee.

## DATA AVAILABILITY

The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article.

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