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## Probing the delivery of tertiary physical education among the generation Z students in the transition years of Philippine K to 12

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### Abstract

Higher Education Institutions in the Philippines are currently under transition due to the implementation of Republic Act 10533, also known as Enhanced Basic Education Act, which aims to strengthen the curriculum content and increase the number of years of basic education in the country. Since its implementation in 2013, Physical Education researchers have been examining the initial impact of this transition yet, investigations to determine the problems in tertiary Physical Education were barely sufficient. Hence, this research was conducted to probe the challenges of generation Z Students in the delivery of tertiary Physical Education in one of the leading state universities in the Philippines using a qualitative phenomenology research design. A total of 110 research participants were involved in focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, and extensive field observations. Five (5) significant concerns transpired during the triangulation of the results. These were: duplication of activities from senior high school Physical Education, stress due to very high Physical Fitness Test standards, very time-consuming take-home tasks in Physical Education that affect their time for other matters, very high teachers' expectations, and teachers' absenteeism. These concerns were, for them, the leading factors that affect their interests and experiences in tertiary Physical Education. The findings served as crucial elements in drawing recommendations to better implement and contextualize the learning experiences for tertiary Physical Education adequate for generation Z Students.

**Keywords:** RA10533, probing tertiary physical education, phenomenology research, generation Z students, problems in K to 12 transition

### Introduction

Strengthening the Philippine education system is a comprehensive strategy for enhancing the whole nation. The 1987 constitution of the Republic of the Philippines constantly reminds people to give importance to the role of education as a reliable tool for accelerating social progress, developing patriotism, and promoting total community development. The following are excerpts that serve as the fundamental framework for valuing and prioritizing education as a basic right of every Filipino citizen:

“The State shall give priority to education, science and technology, arts, culture, and sports to foster patriotism and nationalism, accelerate social progress, and promote total human liberation and development” (Section 17, Article 2).

“The State shall protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels, and shall take appropriate steps to make such education accessible to all” (Section 1, Article 14).

“The State recognizes the complementary roles of public and private institutions in the educational system and shall exercise reasonable supervision and regulation of all educational institutions” (Section 4, Article 14).

“The State shall assign the highest budgetary priority to education and ensure that teaching will attract and retain its rightful share of the best available talents through adequate remuneration and other means of job satisfaction and fulfillment” (Section 5, Article 14).

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Despite having a strong determination to provide quality education, various indicators reveal that Philippine education has been under severe threat of deterioration. These indicators include students' performance in international comparative tests and an inadequate matching of Filipino graduates' skills and competencies that Philippine education has been under severe threat of deterioration. These indicators include students' performance in the global industry needs. These indicators are the result of insufficient political support for fundamental reforms, a weak institutional environment for change, and a rapid increase in student population, making classrooms overpopulated. Scholars also revealed that it is the whole system that needs to be enhanced [7].

To provide a comprehensive solution to this problem, the legislative branch approved the implementation of Republic Act 10533, also known as the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, which aims to enhance the offering of basic education in the country by strengthening its curriculum and increasing the number of years for basic education. With this, all courses in the school curricula have undergone thorough revision and enhancement to align their aims and objectives to the needs of today's generation of Students. Physical Education and Health, being one of the subjects taught in the basic education program, has also undergone necessary curriculum enhancement to better cater the Students' needs [9]. As a result of this educational reform, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the Philippines were also redirected to shift and offer the new tertiary Physical Education course as preparation to accommodate the new wave of Students known as generation Z or gen Z. Generation Z Students are known to be digital natives born in a highly advanced environment, competitive, and tolerant to diverse cultures. Scholars found out that the generation Z Students' distinct and unique qualities are a challenge in the traditional classroom structure, and educators nowadays are realizing that the classic teaching-learning method is no longer effective and applicable to these Students [8].

On the other hand, tertiary Physical Education is considered the culminating course before a learner finishes all Physical Education courses in the educational curriculum. In this stage, students must clearly understand the importance of participation and movement for lifelong health. Completing Physical Education in college means the end of activity where they are obliged to participate as grades and graduation are at stake. This means that activities in college must be perceived not only to be the end but a beginning of a personal conviction for continuous participation and engagement in Physical Education.

Presently, Higher Education Institutions are under transition because of this significant educational reform. Since the implementation of the Enhanced Basic Education Act of the Philippines in 2013, researchers studied the problems and prospects of K – 12 educational reform. They found pressing issues in the implementation, such as curriculum designing, retooling of teachers at the beginning of the program, ensuring the sustainability of the program, and meeting the needed infrastructure [7]. However, researches determining the problems and issues in tertiary Physical Education in the transition years of Philippine K – 12 program is barely sufficient. With this, this investigation was made to deeply examine the problems in the implementation of tertiary Physical Education among generation Z Students. This research was deemed very significant as this provided an avenue for the research participants to express themselves to the problems they have experienced and served as a basis for

creating feasible recommendations that can serve as intervention to better deliver Physical Education in Philippine Higher Education Institutions.

## Methodology

### Research Design

This research employed a qualitative research design, specifically applying the steps of phenomenology approach. To realize the outcomes of this research, the experiences of generation Z Students in their tertiary Physical Education classes were explored through various data gathering procedures to create an accurate portrait of how they behave, think, and talk. Phenomenology is an objective explanation of the situation, classically transcribed in the third-person point of view, and writing empirically on the information learned from participants at a field site [1].

In this study, the researcher spent adequate time in the research participants' actual location for focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, non-obtrusive participants observations, journal writing, and field notes to adequately capture the needed data for the completion of this research.

### Research Procedures

At the onset, asking permission from the head of the schools and securing an informed consent contract to the research participants were the essential requirements in conducting qualitative phenomenology research. After securing the necessary documents, the researcher conducted series of orientations to explain the undertakings of the study and expounded the risks and benefits of the participants' involvement.

Fieldwork is considered to be the heart of qualitative research. After the preliminaries, immersion commenced in the actual research environment to provide a more profound and more precise portrait of the experiences of generation Z Students in their tertiary Physical Education classes. Further, an interview is said to be a very imperative method in doing phenomenology research. Hence, series of Focus Group Discussions and In-depth Interviews were done as primary tools in collecting the essential data. Non-obtrusive participants observation and journal writing were also performed to supplement the primary data. The participants' responses were documented with the aid of voice recorders, video-camera recorders, and journal writing. Observing them in their comfort zone to express their feelings freely were the best tool that authentically captured the behaviors and thoughts of the research participants.

Further, in conducting the interviews, informal and semi-structured interviews were common types used in this research. These techniques seem to be casual conversations, but they have a specific and implicit plan to discover how the generation Z Students conceptualize their experiences and organize them into meaningful categories.

### Research Participants

Since there is a massive number of Generation Zs in the research environment, the purposive sampling method was done to identify the participants of the study. A total of 110 generation Z Students with age range of 17-21 years old from one of the leading universities in the Philippines were selected to be the main participants for this study.

### Research Instrument

Since informal and semi-structured interviews were primarily used, this research utilized open-ended guide questions to

better capture the participants' responses. The guide questions have undergone ethics examination to ensure that no offensive statements were used that might cause emotional harm to the research participants.

### Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data analysis and interpretation were made through word analysis, coding, and thematization of concepts. Open codes were generated to identify the essential and repetitive terms and ideas that the research participants mentioned. After generating open codes, axial coding was done to determine the connection of concepts and eliminate outlier ideas and phrases. By then, essential themes were produced. Trustworthiness and reliability of data were also ensured through the conduct of validation and triangulation.

### Results and Discussions

The generation Z Students expressed their observations on the curriculum content of the existing Physical Education program offering in one of the leading state universities in the Philippines. Based on their responses, the emerging thoughts were "duplication of activities from senior high school Physical Education", "stress due to very high Physical Fitness Test standards", "very time-consuming take-home tasks in Physical Education that affect their time for other matters", "very high teachers' expectations", and "teachers' absenteeism" are the issues that Generation Z Students have observed to be the imperfections of the existing curriculum in Tertiary Physical Education. Below were the discussions and excerpts of their observations:

#### Duplication of activities from senior high school Physical Education

Generation Z Students noticed replication of activities and learning experiences from senior high school Physical Education to their tertiary Physical Education. They claimed that they get bored with and reluctant to do most of the Physical Education activities since these have been undertaken in senior high school Physical education. The following responses are proofs of the Students' claim for the duplication of senior high school Physical Education activities to their tertiary Physical Education:

"...the activities in our PE subject that we already went through in senior high were repeated in Physical Education 1. For me, upgrading our subject must be done and include activities that can be useful for us in the future. There is a duplication of PE activities during our senior high school to that of our PE1. We have gone through it already." (Participant 12)

"I suggest that they should upgrade the activities in PE1 because what we have now is just similar when we were in senior high like the Zumba and aerobic activities." (Participant 20)

"... actually, the Physical Education in Senior High School is just the same as the Physical Education 1 in college. That is why we can just conclude that it is effortless because the experiences were just the same..." (Participant 83)

"There is a huge duplication between the PE1 and PE in Senior High School. We are already done with the activities that we also did during our PE1. I hope that they will also give students the chance to choose based on their preferences..." (Participant 21)

One of the reasons why Generation Z Students observed replication of senior high school Physical Education with their tertiary Physical Education is that their University offers Physical Fitness and Self-Testing Activities instead of Physical Activity Towards Health and Fitness (PATH – Fit). This means that the Physical Fitness Tests and Zumba in their Physical Education classes were already taken at the senior high school level. This problem occurs because the Commission on Higher Education did not approve the school to offer PATH-Fit. The excerpt below shows the reason why the Commission disapproved the PATH – Fit offering by the school:

"When we went there with the proposed new curriculum for PATH-Fit, the Commission disapproved that we would offer the because the Memorandum Order for PATH – Fit is still unavailable. That's why the Physical Fitness and Self Testing Activities is offered instead because the national office is still finalizing the PATH – Fit. (an excerpt from the interview to the former Dean of Institute of Sports, Physical Education, and Recreation)

#### Stress due to very high Physical Fitness Test standards

Current literature unveils that generation Z Students are very conscious about their academic performance and are willing to trade anything to obtain high grades (Josuweit, 2018). Hence, one of the flaws the Students observed in the current tertiary Physical Education curriculum was the scoring system in the Physical Fitness Test that the school is presently using. As for them, the components and criteria are very high compared to their actual abilities. This made them apprehensive and upset as points and grades are at stake if they will not meet the minimum or passing score in the Physical Fitness Test. The responses below show that the generation Z Students suggest a revisit and reexamination of the scoring standard for the Physical Fitness Test.

"...the standard of Physical Fitness Test is too high, if possible, lower the standard so I can reach it even a little..." (Participant 9)

"...we have criteria and scoring that we need to follow in Physical Fitness Test. Can we lower the standards because it's too high?" (Participant 2)

"...in the standard scoring of Physical Fitness Test, we are struggling so much to reach the minimum points for us to gain better grades. It is very unfair for us who are not strong enough to perform those tests because some of our classmates are athletes, but most of us are not..." (Participant 4)

Generation Z Students brought about this concern because Physical Education teachers give grades equivalent to the students' score in the different fitness tests. Various literature highlighted that the Physical Fitness Test is a form of a diagnostic test to assess the fitness status of Students so teachers can design appropriate exercises and activities to improve their fitness level <sup>[5]</sup>. Considering the competitive nature of generation Z Students, they will do their best and be willing to trade anything to get high marks to earn better grades.

#### Very time-consuming take-home tasks in Physical Education that affect their time for other matters

Performance practicums and other related academic tasks in Physical Education are considered stressful by generation Z

Students. This apprehension is manifested in their academic performance by obtaining high grades but sacrificing their spare time for family, rest, and recreation to comply with all the requirements and tasks for their graded performance in Physical Education. Such issues and concerns are evident in their responses below:

“... Physical Education is very tiring because it consumes most of our times even during weekends, making us restless and tired...” (Participant 35)

“For me, it’s better if Physical Education is not time-consuming or there should be a properly allocated time that is more considerate to the schedule of the students. I suggest there should be no activities on the weekends...” (Participant 84)

“... I suggest Physical Education must not give too many activities so it will not become time-consuming and time-eater. Sometimes, we sacrifice our time for our other major subjects just to comply with the graded performance tasks in Physical Education” (Participant 29)

The bulk of performance tasks that teachers assign them leave the generation Z Students more stressed than ever. These Students suggest lessening the activities in Physical Education so they could rest during weekends, spend time on personal errands, and have time for their other subjects.

### Very high teachers’ expectations

In this study, the research participants expressed their observation on having very high expectations from their teachers. They claim that this adds pressure and stress to them because their grades are at stake if they fail to reach their teachers’ expectations. Their responses below show how teachers’ expectations add a burden to them:

“...Our teacher’s expectations are too high making us push ourselves even more which makes us pressured and stressed... She told us too that she will fail us if she’s unsatisfied with our performance.” (Participant 3)

“... for us, we are pressured because our teacher is expecting too much from us with the task that she is giving.” (Participant 4)

“Actually, activities in Physical Education must help us to relieve our stress in our major subjects. That’s why our PE teacher must understand us and not to set so many expectations from us because sometimes, it becomes unachievable because we are not good in that field...” (Participant 14)

“As Gen Z, the activities in PE are fine; however, there are teachers who will push you to your limits to the point that you are no longer enjoying because you are no longer okay. What I want is that teachers must also see the capacity of students if they could meet their standards so that students can feel enjoyment and fun rather than stress and pressure...” (Participant 26)

Teachers’ expectations can serve as positive motivation. However, if taken wrongly, it leads to discouragement on the Students’ side. Literature suggests that for the teachers to develop and maintain a positive climate inside the classroom, they should avoid forming differential expectations from their students’ gender, ethnic groups, and parents’ backgrounds [6]. This was confirmed by Good and Brophy (2007), adding that teachers must not form expectations based on Students’

records, information from other teachers, or even the family’s reputation and colleagues [4].

### Teachers’ Absenteeism

In the context of the research participants, they also noticed that one leading problem in the offering of tertiary Physical Education is the absenteeism of their teachers. According to them, they have minimal classroom encounters, and they are losing their interests in the subject because of this issue, as reflected in the excerpts of the participants’ responses below:

“...our teacher is always absent that is why some of the activities needed to be done were not performed. And sometimes, we have a short time to prepare because he will just schedule the graded performance if he arrives, so it made us very stressed” (Participant 47)

“... our teacher is always absent as well as there is always a conflict in our schedules. Also, some teachers do not allow us to enter their class if we are wearing PE uniforms, so we need to change our clothes first, making it very time-consuming on our part” (Participant 50)

“... PE1 is very tiring because we are directed to proceed immediately in Zumba because we only have very few class meetings in Physical Education. Our teacher is always on leave...” (Participant 97)

Finlayson (2019) studied the impact of teacher’s absenteeism on student performance and revealed that teachers’ absenteeism disrupts students’ learning. The more days teachers are not around, the lower the score of students in a standardized test. The investigation of Finlayson also revealed that absenteeism causes Students’ motivation and interests to decline over time [3]. Further, Obeng-Denteh, *et al.* (2011) explored the impact of student and teacher absenteeism on student performance at the junior high school. They disclosed that teachers’ absenteeism is a significant contributory factor in Students’ performance in a standardized exam [2].

To be fair with the teachers’, they were also asked about their reasons regarding this issue. The teachers expressed that they were bombarded with designations and extra functions that cause them to be absent from their classes. Most of the time, Physical Education teachers were given so many school-related activities and off-campus competitions.

### Conclusions

This research was commenced to investigate the drawbacks in the delivery of instruction in tertiary Physical Education during the transition years of K to 12 because of the implementation of the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 in the Philippines. Based on the discussions, the following conclusions were drawn:

The duplication of activities in senior high school Physical Education and Physical Fitness and Self-Testing Activities caused boredom to the students, which later led to their loss of interest in the subject. Eventually, it became the reason for the increase in drop-out Students and the non-participative students in Physical Education classes. This made the students less appreciate the essence of doing their activities in tertiary Physical Education and less develop their conviction for continuous engagement in Physical Activities as a tool to promote lifelong wellness.

Also, the practice of giving equivalent grades to the students’ scores in Physical Fitness Test and giving too many take-home tasks in Physical Education classes cause additional stress and pressure to the students because they feel

threatened that failing to get higher score in Physical Fitness Test or failing to comply with all the tasks will result to a low grade in Physical Education. These additional burdens contradict the purpose of Physical Education, which is to help Students become well-rounded and healthy individuals by having the Physical Education subjects neutralize the students' academic stress.

Furthermore, teachers' high expectations cause students to push themselves beyond their limits, bringing more anxiety. This also creates competition inside the class as everyone is determined to get better marks and grades in Physical Education. On the other hand, teachers' absenteeism demotivates students to learn in Physical Education. This causes additional stress, too, as lessons are rushed by their teachers every time, they fail to meet in one session. With this, their learning was compromised, for they will just do their Physical Education tasks for the sake of compliance.

Finally, this study concludes that generation Z Students are active and keen observers. They noticed the drawbacks in delivering tertiary Physical Education during the transition years of K – 12.

### Recommendations

1. To eliminate the replication in students' learning experiences in tertiary Physical Education, Higher Education Institutions in the Philippines need to shift their Physical Education courses from Physical Fitness and Self-Testing Activities to PATH – Fit (Physical Activity Towards Health and Fitness). This study can be used as a strong document to support the shift of the curriculum as mentioned above. It revealed the duplication of senior high school Physical Education to Physical Fitness and Self-Testing Activities. This study can be an attachment to the proposal to shift to the new tertiary Physical Education curriculum because learning content and activities were repeated;
2. Physical Education instructors must not give equivalent grades to the students' scores on Physical Fitness Test. The test must only serve as a diagnostic assessment activity to evaluate the physical fitness status of Students as a basis for designing appropriate fitness activity to improve their fitness level;
3. All instructors must observe a course map of activities to not overload students, which can cause unnecessary stress. If possible, students should not be given too many take-home tasks during weekends so they will have time for rest and other matters. Also, Teachers must not set unrealistic expectations to students so it will not add stress and burden for the students;
4. Teachers must avoid being absent in Physical Education classes to help students develop their interest and personal conviction for lifelong engagement in physical activity as a tool to promote wellness;
5. Administrators and Human Resource Management managers must deload Physical Education teachers with the unnecessary designation so they can focus more on delivering quality instruction and conducting research to make Physical Education classes more enticing and responsive to the needs of generation Z Students;
6. Further study may be conducted to deeply explore the reasons behind teachers' absenteeism in Physical Education classes; and
7. Further study is recommended to determine the drawbacks on the delivery of instruction in tertiary Physical Education from the teachers' perspectives.

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