

Challenges Encountered by Bachelor of Physical Education Students in Conducting Research in Physical Education in The New Normal Set-Up

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Abstract

Conducting research is a complex process, and with the new normal changes, everything becomes constrained and drastically different from the normal. This study investigates the challenges encountered and coping strategies of Physical Education students in conducting Research in Physical Education in the newnormal set-up. This study used a qualitative case study design to provide a comprehensive and in-depth description of the bounded phenomena as experienced by physical education students. A semi-structured interview was used to collect relevant data for the study, which was then processed qualitatively using thematic analysis. Purposive sampling was used in selecting the participants for this study. Consequently, the results of the study revealed that the emerging challenges encountered by physical education students in conducting research in the new normal set-up are unstable internet connection, participants poor level of cooperation towards the researchers, and poor level of cooperation between research partners. This study shows that in response to these circumstances, individuals created individual coping mechanisms to handle the difficulties that made their research experience more challenging. Participants find that acceptance on the current situation, making alternative solutions, and researchers working cooperatively help them modify and address unforeseen issues during the entire research process. As a result, several of these tactics are recommended to prospective students who may do research under the new normal setup. They are advised to be flexible, work with your groupmates, have patience, and do not be afraid to ask for help.

Keywords: Physical Education; Students; Challenges; Coping Mechanism; Physical Education; Case Study; New Normal

A. Introduction

The community has reached a breaking point since the onset of the COVID-19 outbreak. Borders have been closed, economies have suffered, and people have been living in fear of viral transmission. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted all levels of education around the world. Educational institutions have either temporarily halted or instituted localized closures affecting around 1.7 billion students. Since many schools and universities have suspended classroom instruction, a shift to online instruction for undergraduate and graduate students has been effective (Mahdy, 2020). In relation to this, conducting research had to go through

with this incident, while academic research activities have been considerably impeded, and data collection has been suspended.

Research, according to Creswell (2008), is a series of steps used to collect and analyze data to increase one's knowledge of the topic or phenomenon. What is more is that it is the development of trust through investigation, observation, comparison, and experimentation; it is the process of exploration through an objective and systematic approach to problem solving (Kothari, 2006).

Undergraduate students are required to conduct research as part of their degree requirements. A research proposal is a critical component of the thesis production process in all tertiary education institutions worldwide, and without a well-defined proposal, it is unlikely that students will be able to begin a comprehensive research or discussion of a problematic issue within their field of study (Botten, 2012).

Todd, Smith, and Bannister (2006) noted several significant challenges for students, including issues with time management and how to identify and then pinpoint a research topic. According to Dombek and Wells-Moran (2006), time management skills come down to organization, commitment, and awareness and can be applied in a wide variety of tasks in life. These skills can be a solid cornerstone towards writing a research paper it makes the researcher's time productive and valuable, hence will result to have a better manuscript.

The researchers are motivated to identify the difficulties encountered by these student researchers by a desire to experience intellectual fulfillment through creative work and a preference for confronting difficulties in solving unsolved problems, and sensitivity for practical concerns. As a result, not only will the research fill a knowledge gap, but it will also contribute to new discoveries.

B. Domain of Inquiry

According to the study's stated purpose and frame of reference, the research will look into the challenges and difficulties of the bachelor of physical education students in conducting research in physical education in the new normal set-up and its coping strategies by asking the following questions:

1. What are the challenges encountered by the students in conducting research in physical education in the new normal set-up?
2. How do the students adapt with the challenges encountered in conducting research in physical education in the new normal?
3. What suggestions that these students can give to the aspiring physical education students who can possibly have the same experience?

C. Methodology

Research Design

This research used a qualitative case study design. A qualitative case study is a comprehensive exploration and explanation of a grounded phenomenon, such as a project, an organization, an individual, a technique, or a social unit (Merriam, 1998). Because this study will look into the difficulties and challenges of the physical education students conducting research in a new normal set-up, a single case study utilized in this research. A single case study is the optimal method for researching a specific subject by analyzing an individual from a certain group (Yin, 2003). Additionally, a single case study approach was able to aid the researchers in developing a more detailed understanding of the subject and phenomenon.

Research Setting

This research was carried out at a state university in Eastern Visayas. The researchers chose the target setting in order to know the difficulties and challenges of the physical education students in conducting research in the new normal set-up. Furthermore, only those students who are enrolled in the current school year of research one (1) and two (2) were able to participate.

Research Participants

The study's participants are fifteen (15) students from the chosen university. The participants were chosen purposefully by the researchers based on the following criteria: 1) He or she must be a 4th year student of the bachelor of physical education school year 2021-2022; 2) He or she must accomplish research in physical education in the school year 2021-2022; and 3) He or she must be willing to participate in the study.

Data Collection Procedure

The main instrument in this study was the interview guide schedule, which determined the challenges of the bachelor of physical education students in conducting research in physical education in the new normal set-up. There are three (3) main interview questions and three (3) sub-questions, one from the first main interview question, and two from the second main interview question. This interview technique will give them time to answer the questions and make them feel comfortable when answering.

Data Analysis

The data gathered from the online interview were analyzed using thematic analysis. This method of data analysis was utilized because the present study seeks to identify the challenges faced by the physical education students in conducting research in a new normal set-up. The first step was familiarization with the data that was gathered. This step also involved the transcription of the audios and taking down the key patterns. The second will be the coding, which involves re-checking and re-reading the transcripts and identifying repeated ideas to generate themes. After generating themes, researchers reviewed the themes and made sure that the themes were useful and accurate representation of the data. The last step was defining and naming themes, which involves formulating exactly what each theme means and figuring out how it helps to understand the data. Also, data saturation was used in this method.

D. Findings

Data sources pertinent to the study topics are used to analyses the research findings that have been presented. Furthermore, answers to interview questions covered more than one theme.

Theme 1: Challenges Encountered by the Bachelor of Physical Education Students in Conducting Research in the New Normal Set-Up

This theme is subdivided into three (3) sub-themes namely: unstable internet connection, cooperation of participants towards researchers, and cooperation between research partners.

Sub-theme 1.1 Unstable Internet Connection

This serves as a challenge to researchers as they vary in location and differ in internet accessibility. Students use internet connectivity as a reason for their inability to work with their research tasks. These were revealed in the answers of participants:

“So far, the challenges we have encountered are the poor internet connection and the distance between one groupmate and another. We have our group meetings and discussions through video call or Google Meet. The problem is the connection.” (P5)

“The main problem is the internet connection. The unstable internet connection greatly affects

conducting research. Since everything happened in the new normal set-up (online), another challenge was the availability of the respondents and the devices used to conduct the research.” (P9)

“No stable internet also is one of the challenges that we encounter when we are doing our research in physical education.” (P10)

Students who do not have access to the internet cannot communicate with teachers or classmates, conduct independent research, or seek online homework assistance. Remote working, e-teaching, online collaboration, gaming, video streaming, and other activities have benefited from the Internet (Favale, Soro, Trevisan, Drago, & Mellia, 2020).

Most of the participants considered internet connection a challenge in conducting research in the new normal set-up. The absence or poor internet connection greatly affects continuity of research. Since research members were restricted in having face-to-face interaction, communication happens through virtual and unstable internet connections, bringing them difficulty in communication and research progress.

Sub-theme 1.2 Participants Poor Level of Cooperation towards Researchers

Due to the current situation wherein, face-to-face interaction is still restricted, communication between researchers and participants is through online platforms. Cooperation from participants becomes a challenge and is poor as they are restricted in gathering data related to their study. This issue is revealed from the answers of participants.

“It's really hard for us to communicate with the people involved in the study because they are not online all the time.” (P4)

“Finding respondents who are responsive and cooperative because it can affect the time bound in making our research.” P8

“There are some instances that we cannot conduct an interview due to some reasons and we are obliged to wait for their spare time since everything should be done in an online set-up.” P9

Gaining cooperation is important because individuals who are chosen to be included in the study but do not participate (e.g., because they refused to cooperate) may differ in important ways from those who do participate, jeopardizing the integrity of the data which can lower or even undermine the credibility of the qualitative study (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015).

It is evident that researchers find it challenging to find and to seek cooperation from respondents as they are restricted in conducting interviews in a face-to-face manner due to pandemic. Online communication between them is hindered by some reasons like internet connection access, availability, and lack of money to buy load. These reasons resulted in rejection and delay of the study as participants are reluctant to fulfill previously agreed upon appointments and become unresponsive.

Sub-theme 1.3 Poor Level of Cooperation between Research Partners

Cooperation is one of the most significant influences on productivity, particularly in a team-based environment. When everyone relies on the input or fulfilment of tasks from others, the process runs smoothly; yet, when one individual is uncooperative, the entire process slows down. Whether the inability to cooperate is a result of a lack of time, skills, or resources, the result is the same: production suffers (Hamlin, 2017). The following are some of the participants' experiences to this issue:

“It was somehow difficult to be working as a group in the new normal, especially those assigned part of the research because there are still a lot of errors to be fixed by the leader.” (P6)

“How will you interact with your group members? Some of them are not always present. You will wait for them to go online so that you can discuss techniques and strategies to complete your research.” (P14)

“My group mates are from other places and sometimes it’s difficult for them to show up to our face-to-face group meetings and discussions, there are times that I’m working with one or two members from our group.” (P15)

Limited interaction was identified from the answers as a problem in conducting research. Researchers find it hard to connect with research partners. They expressed having difficulties engaging in immediate interactions with or receiving immediate feedback from research partners, and they were not comfortable to have discussions online.

Theme 2. Bachelor of Physical Education Students’ Coping Strategies in Overcoming Challenges

It is important for students to develop different coping strategies in order to encounter and manage stressful conditions. If not handled well, it will affect students’ ability to perform in class (Guevarra and Cimanes, 2017). This theme is subdivided into three (3) sub-themes namely: acceptance on the current situation, making alternative solutions, and researchers working cooperatively.

Sub-theme 2.1 Acceptance on the Current Situation

As conducting research offers multiple challenges, researchers learn to accept the circumstances while overcoming the unanticipated events. The concept of acceptance is understood as a self-regulation strategy based on an open and welcoming attitude toward one’s own emotions, thoughts, or external occurrences (Williams and Lynn, 2010). This coping strategy is disclosed through their responses.

“I was able to adapt to those challenges I had encountered by accepting the fact that this new normal set up will somehow help us to be more practical and continue learning while we face this kind of situation and get used to it even though it hinders us to learn in a classroom set up.” (P3)

“I just embraced the situation because we have nothing to do to change this new normal set up of conducting research because our safety is the most important thing during the pandemic.” (P4)

“By just accepting the circumstances. We can’t control the situation, especially during the time of Covid. All I need to do is to continue working on that and make progress.” (P14)

Participants include acceptance as one of the student’s coping strategies to overcome challenges in conducting research. Students come to acknowledge that conducting research comes with various challenges and that it needs not to be avoided but to be resolved to enable them to pass their paper. By doing this, they understood that they can’t control the situations given that they’re still in time of pandemic while conducting research, and such challenges are unavoidable. And so along, with acceptance, students continue to work for their research progress.

Sub-theme 2.2 Making Alternative Solutions.

Challenges in conducting research led the participants to create alternative solutions to adapt to these. The phenomenon of improvisation describes actions performed in the context of such situations that require people to find new, appropriate solutions in which no pre-planned actions or routines can be carried out (Bottaro,

2021). Making alternative solutions is uniquely effective for strengthening the capacity to cope with uncertainty, manage anxiety and, boost the creative thinking that is so essential to navigating an increasingly complex world (Wolff, 2018). This allows researchers to be flexible as they are eager to complete their paper. This strategy is revealed in participants' responses.

"In order to adapt to the challenges, I encountered, I improvise some alternative solutions like I send the questions to the respondents, and they will answer it as to what is convenient for them like they can type their answers in messenger and send it back to me afterwards." (P1)

"I learned new things and some alternatives to the problems I had encountered." (P3)

"Even if it's hard we find other ways just for us to be able to surpass those challenges" (P8)

"With those challenges that I have encountered, eventually I'm learning to live with it by finding ways on how to overcome a certain issue that came along within the conduct of our research." (P14)

Researchers, through making alternative solutions, learned to adjust with the challenges presented in conducting research. They become resourceful as they find ways and come up with new ideas on the spot to solve the given uncertainties. Nisula and Kianto (2016) state that improvisation skills help people cope because they can react promptly to such circumstances. Hence, this coping strategy enables them to identify effective solutions that deal with the unanticipated events that occur in conducting research.

Sub-theme 2.3 Researchers Working Cooperatively

As participants identify their challenges in cooperation between respondents and their co-researchers respectively, the study reveals that researchers working cooperatively is one of their coping strategies to overcome these challenges. It has been proven that when team members understand their roles, the roles of others and their expectations, they can focus more on their work. With improved communication, team members will be better able to rely on each other. You will not have one team member feel as though they have to carry the entire group. This improved division of labor will encourage positive feelings and relationships between the team members (Portland Community College, 2019). The findings of this study disclose this strategy through their responses.

"We adapt to the challenges by working together while conducting research. Everyone is being assisted. If one has an unstable connection, we will assist in finding a methodology. For example, if someone in our group cannot do the task because of a weak connection, we will find someone in our group to take over the task. If there is someone who's available in our group, we will assign another task, such as related literature, state of the problem, and so on." (P12)

"With the help of my group mates, we didn't realize that we were little by little progressing our research." (P2)

"Working cooperatively could make your research a success." (P6)

This has revealed that cooperation allows researchers to encourage resource sharing, assist group members in complementing each other's advantages, and improve the efficiency of the study. Cooperation, indeed, is a vital key towards conducting research, since no one should have to carry all the burden and challenges in conducting research, especially when it is group-based. Through cooperation strategy team members will be able to work effectively together, make compromises, and reach agreement in decision-making as they assume

shared responsibility for collaborative work.

Theme 3. Bachelor of Physical Education Students' Suggestion to The Aspiring Physical Education Students who can Possible Experience Conducting Research in the New Normal Set-Up

We are still in the midst of a pandemic and conducting research is still a requisite requirement for our academic growth. There are suggestions that the respondents of this study want to convey to aspiring student researchers who will possibly conduct their research in the same era, given the parallel restrictions and situations. This theme is subdivided into four (4) sub-themes, namely: be flexible, work with your groupmates, have patience, and do not be afraid to ask for help.

Sub-theme 3.1 Be Flexible

Things do not go as we expected. Being flexible is probably one of the most important things about research. You have to be able to roll with whatever your project throws at you. Depending on how long it takes you to figure out the issue, you may realize that you have to amend your timeline for the project (Murthy, 2020). One should consider a research failure to a research opportunity and provide means that will alter the situation. This suggestion is disclosed in the participants' answers.

"I suggest that they must be open to cope and be flexible enough to craft alternate strategies that would be of a big help in the process of conducting research in PE, in the new normal set-up." (P1)

"If problems occur, they must make sure to find a solution to the problem immediately." (P5)

"I suggest not stop working on your paper and always think of possible solutions that will help you and your team finish it." (P15)

Aspiring students who will conduct research in the new normal set-up are advised by the participants to be flexible in whatever unanticipated events that possibly happen in their study. They are encouraged to be open and always be ready to create alternative solutions to have a better result. One must adapt towards the trials presented and improvise mechanisms appropriate to navigate complexities.

Sub-them 3.2 Work with your groupmates

No student deserves to carry all the challenges and perform processes in conducting research alone. Every individual in the research group should acknowledge their role and assume shared responsibility for a collaborative work so necessary towards the efficiency of their study. Collaboration is critical to conducting good research and designing good education or innovations. An individual cannot manage all tasks in an efficient or short amount of time (Monteiro, 2022). The following are some of the participants' suggestions for aspiring researchers.

"The only suggestion that I can give to aspiring BPED students who may encounter difficulties right now in conducting research in the new normal set- up is to work together with your group mates to overcome it and use the internet wisely because it might help you in conducting your research." (P2)

"Future BPED researchers will surely experience various problems, but the secret there is teamwork. They have to work as a group and no one should rely on a single member only." (P5)

"Everyone in the group or team should work together. And everyone should study every chapter or section of the research because the final defense panelist will ask everyone in the group at random, disregarding your individually assigned sections of the research." (P13)

Participants suggest to aspiring research students to work with their group members. The secret to success in conducting research is unity. One must be accountable to a given task and refrain from relying on others. Helping each other in the team makes the work a whole lot easier and it will encourage positive feelings and relationships between them. Moreover, one must remember that a great team requires an attitude of partnership—that we are all in this together and that being said, will allow them to accomplish great results.

Sub-theme 3.3 Have Patience

Patience needs to be cultivated by researchers who wait for the outcome of their studies. History is full of success stories of the science community showing both patience and persistence (Hill, 2022). This suggestion is seen from participants' responses.

*“Physical Education students who can possibly experience conducting research in physical education in the new normal set up, have a lot of patience because there are different challenges that you will encounter in doing your research that will test your *patience*.” (P4)*

*“Remember to be patient, hardworking, and take good care of *yourselves*.” (P9)*

*“Be patient with yourself, be patient with others. Be patient and know that what you are experiencing is valid and that others may be experiencing it differently. We are all doing the best we *can*.” (P14)*

One of the suggestions made by researchers to aspiring Bachelor of Physical Education students who can possibly experience conducting research in Physical Education in the new normal set-up is to be patient. As the research process is demanding and overwhelming, it requires several trials to achieve the desired outcomes. One must know how to be calm in the face of adversity and accept to overcome multiple revisions repeatedly.

Sub-theme 3.4 Do not be afraid to ask for a help.

Asking for help can be intimidating sometimes because it appears like you are admitting failure and incompetence. However, in such circumstances you have to realize and understand your strengths and weaknesses to acknowledge your extent of potential for a particular matter. Recognizing that you need help and asking for it indicates to yourself and others that it is okay to reach out when we need it. This normalizes that we all at some time or another require help and support. Asking for help can facilitate better performance for ourselves and others improving connections and culture (Gale, 2021). This suggestion is evident in participants' responses.

*“Do not hesitate to ask for help, instructions, and advice from your research advisers and professors for you to be guided in working on your *research*.” (P6)*

“Do not be afraid to ask questions for clarification because it will be really helpful.” (P9)

“Don't be afraid to ask for help. It is okay if you find yourself struggling to adjust to our new-normal.” (P14)

The participants suggested to aspiring students who will conduct research in the new normal set-up not to be afraid to ask for help from their advisers and professors. Asking for help allows for the possibility of fresh ideas and perhaps a new perspective. It is an opportunity to learn from someone

more experienced, improving our skill set and making us more productive and more successful overall (Gale, 2021). Furthermore, one should never hesitate to seek guidance from concerned experts, for it is not a sign of weakness; it is a display of strength.

E. Conclusion

Conducting research is a time-consuming process. It takes a lot of hustle and confusion to get to the end. Given the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is clear that Bachelor of Physical Education students faced numerous challenges in conducting research in physical education in the new normal setting. Despite the difficulties, students developed personal coping strategies to deal with the issues that hampered their research experience. Aspiring students who may conduct research in the new normal were advised on some of the strategies. They are encouraged to be adaptable, to collaborate with their peers, to be patient, and to not be afraid to ask for assistance. Overall, conducting research is an important stage in an academic journey, and one should be prepared to face the conflict that the research path will bring. Financial assistance could also be a huge help, allowing researchers to finance certain expenses associated with research production, verification, and implementation.

F. Recommendation

The following recommendations were drawn by the researchers according to the study's findings and discussion. First, researchers from this study recommend that the students devise and put into action acceptable tactics and strategies to fulfill the requirements of research procedures in the new normal setup. Second, teachers are recommended to be more understanding towards the students and realize the barriers that hinder the students' delays on research work. Third, for future researchers who want to conduct research on the challenges of conducting research in physical education in the new normal set-up, the result of this study can be a guide and additional references. Lastly, universities and other educational institutions are advised to extend help to researchers, which will somehow aid the students in the conduct of their research.

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