Remote Teaching Instruction Through The Lens of Physical Education Teachers: Challenges During The Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract. The COVID-19 pandemic, with its widespread transmission, has profoundly impacted the world. It led to millions falling ill, and a significant loss of lives. This unprecedented crisis resulted in global measures like school closures, home quarantine, and social distancing, compelling educators and employees to embrace remote work and technology. In Physical Education (PE), characterized by its hands-on approach, teachers faced the challenge of adapting to remote instruction without adequate training. While research on quality in-person PE instruction is well-established, there is still much to uncover about remote PE instruction. This study delves into teachers' experiences during remote learning amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Adopting a qualitative methodology, the study utilized an interview guide as the primary tool and applied a constant comparative approach for data analysis. Ten participants specializing in Physical Education, drawn from various colleges and universities in the southern Philippines, were purposefully selected for the study. Despite some having prior blended learning training, they faced challenges, including concerns about the authenticity of students' work, connectivity issues, assessing output, quality challenges, feedback delays, and difficulties in motor skill acquisition. The findings underscore the need for targeted training programs addressing these challenges, emphasizing the importance of ongoing support and professional development for PE educators navigating remote learning environments.

Key words: Remote learning; Performance Assessment; PE Pedagogy

INTRODUCTION

The global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has led to an unparalleled crisis, with over 511 million cases and 6.23 million fatalities reported worldwide (World Health Organization [WHO], 2022; Worldometer, 2022). In the Philippines, which ranks among the top nations in case numbers, with 3.68 million confirmed cases and 60,194 fatalities, extensive health regulations and containment measures, including lockdowns, stay-at-home directives, and business closures, have been implemented. The adoption of preventive guidelines has compelled the majority of workers and teachers to work from home, leading to a significant shift in instructional methods, particularly in the field of physical education (PE).

Educators, faced with the challenge of transitioning to online instruction, have grappled with redesigning PE classes and adapting the curriculum. This shift is noteworthy given the nature of PE, which traditionally involves physical body movements (Varea & González-Calvo, 2020; Yu & Jee, 2020). Creative methods to engage students in physical activities have been explored, considering the absence of sports facilities and the prioritization of health during the pandemic. PE instructors, historically undervalued and often lacking training for remote teaching, have resorted to 'trial-and-error' techniques (Richards et al., 2018; Jeong & So, 2020).

While previous research has focused on effective in-person PE instruction (Rink, 2013), there is a notable gap in understanding the challenges posed by remote PE instruction. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring the difficulties faced by PE teachers in a remote learning environment during the COVID-19

pandemic. The aim is to provide insights that can inform effective strategies for remote PE instruction amid the ongoing global crisis.

METHOD

Design and Participants

This qualitative study embraced a phenomenological design to delve into the challenges confronting physical education (PE) teachers during remote instruction. Participants were purposefully selected from four colleges and universities in Southern Philippines, ensuring a diverse representation to capture a comprehensive spectrum of experiences.

Procedure and Analysis

Data collection involved open-ended questions based on a set of predetermined guide questions, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of PE teachers' experiences in remote instruction. Interviews were done in various modes such as Zoom, Google Meet, and Messenger, providing flexibility and accommodating COVID-19 restrictions.

Interview transcripts underwent analysis using a descriptive phenomenology approach, employing the constant comparative method. The identification of recurring themes involved highlighting crucial quotes and phrases, coding categories, and organizing data in an Excel spreadsheet integrated with field notes. The refined themes provide a comprehensive understanding of challenges faced by PE teachers in the remote learning environment. Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were maintained throughout the study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study investigated the challenges encountered by physical education (PE) teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic, employing semi-structured interviews and analyzing the data through the constant comparative method with open coding. The analysis revealed distinct challenges faced by PE instructors, categorized into six themes.

Authenticity of Students' Work

The challenge of ensuring the authenticity of students' performance is a critical aspect highlighted by the participants, particularly in the context of remote learning. As noted by Participant A, the difficulty in verifying tasks, such as performing vital techniques in arnis, during online classes raises concerns about academic integrity. This aligns with broader literature emphasizing the unique struggles faced in maintaining academic honesty in virtual settings (Ahsan et al., 2021). The need for robust mechanisms to handle, restrain, and regulate potential dishonesty in students' submitted works becomes apparent, emphasizing institutions to design effective strategies to ensure the authenticity of output, not only during the pandemic but also in the current landscape of blended learning.

Connectivity Issues

Connectivity challenges emerge as pervasive hurdles, affecting individual participants (PE teachers - Participants C, D, J) and broader issues such as limited service providers and poor audio or video quality affecting educators and students in the online learning environment. These challenges underscore the digital divide, hindering equitable access to remote learning experiences (Haythornthwaite, 2019). The digital gap exacerbates existing inequalities, emphasizing the need for innovative solutions to address connectivity challenges. A proactive approach, such as pre-class surveys to identify students with varying connectivity levels, can enable teachers to tailor their methods to ensure inclusivity (Hodges et al., 2020).

Checking Student Output

The complexities of assessing individual outputs in remote settings, including issues of late submissions and a high volume of assessments, present a formidable challenge (Participant B, F, G, I). This aligns with broader challenges identified in online assessment, emphasizing time management and student responsibility (Hannafin et al., 2003; Beebe et al., 2010). The participants' experiences underscore the need for efficient strategies to manage the assessment process, considering the unique demands of remote teaching and large class sizes.

Quality of Output

The quality of students' video submissions emerges as a critical concern, with issues ranging from poor video resolution to inadequate adherence to instructions (Participants C, D, E, F, G, J). This resonates with broader discussions on the sudden transition to online teaching, where the choice of digital tools significantly influences instructional quality (Hodges et al., 2020). The challenges identified by participants highlight the importance of providing explicit work instructions, especially in performance tasks, to ensure fair evaluation and enhance the overall quality of student output.

Untimely Giving of Feedback

Providing timely feedback proves to be a substantial challenge for PE teachers in remote settings, attributed to issues of connectivity and the absence of face-to-face interactions (Participants A, B, E, F). This aligns with discussions on the pivotal role of timely feedback in enhancing student learning and motivation (Adarkwah, 2021). The findings underscore the importance of addressing these challenges to maintain effective feedback mechanisms, possibly through leveraging technology to streamline the feedback delivery process.

Motor Skill Acquisition

The unique nature of physical education, emphasizing motor skill development, poses a formidable challenge in remote settings (Participant C, E, H). This aligns with broader research indicating the inefficacy of online teaching in fostering motor skill acquisition and maintaining physical activity levels (Lau & Lee, 2020; Chan et al., 2021). PE teachers find themselves navigating uncharted territory, requiring innovative approaches to meet the demands of the curriculum and ensure students acquire the necessary motor skills. The findings suggest that a blended education experience, combining online and in-person elements, may present a more viable option for addressing these challenges in the PE profession (Chan et al., 2021).

Connectivity is a crucial aspect of various teaching and learning approaches, linking educators to students, and individuals to resources and ideas (Haythornthwaite, 2019). Perspectives like connectivism (Downes, 2012), seen in massive open online courses, and participatory culture (Jenkins et al., 2009), highlight its role in constructing learning pathways. This includes engaging with personal experiences, interests, and collaborative knowledge development (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2006).

In addressing internet connectivity challenges, the study identifies issues affecting students' learning. Physical education teachers face obstacles such as device scarcity, limited service providers, and subpar audio or video quality. Many students lack access to devices for distance learning, sharing with family or using low-quality devices, impacting output quality. The estimated 9 million students without connectivity face barriers due to high internet costs and limited access in rural areas (Bauer et al., 2020). To overcome these challenges, institutions must innovate, considering a pre-class survey to identify connectivity levels.

Additionally, evaluating student output becomes a significant concern, especially with late submissions, high workload, and connectivity issues. The study aligns with the literature emphasizing the challenges of transitioning traditional assessments online, focusing on time management and student responsibility (Hannafin & Kim, 2003). The sudden shift to online teaching challenges instructional quality, with physical education teachers facing unpreparedness and low-quality outputs. Emphasizing explicit instructions is crucial for fair assessment (Hodges et al., 2020). Providing effective and timely feedback is essential for student development, but challenges arise due to interaction and connectivity limitations. This aligns with existing literature, highlighting the vital role of timely feedback in enhancing self-efficacy and motivation (Adarkwah, 2021; Wang, 2008).

The unique nature of physical education, emphasizing motor skill development, poses a formidable challenge in remote settings. Challenges faced by PE teachers align with broader research indicating the ineffectiveness of online teaching in fostering motor skill acquisition and maintaining physical activity levels (Lau & Lee, 2020; Chan et al., 2021). While remote learning may be inefficient for motor skill acquisition, the blended education experience could positively impact the PE profession, fostering teacher adaptation to information and communication technology (ICT). In summary, these findings underscore the multifaceted challenges faced by PE teachers in the remote teaching landscape, emphasizing the necessity for tailored strategies and institutional support to enhance the quality of physical education in evolving educational contexts.

CONCLUSION

This qualitative exploration delves into the experiences of some physical education teachers in the southern Philippines as they navigated the challenges of remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite some having prior training in blended learning, the study uncovers persistent obstacles, including issues with the authenticity of student work, connectivity, assessment problems, output quality, delayed feedback, and hurdles in motor skills acquisition. These challenges collectively underscore the inequities inherent in online learning for students, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to address technological disparities and ensure a more inclusive educational experience.

The heart of the matter lies in the formidable task faced by PE educators during the pandemic—delivering effective lessons remotely and assessing whether students have acquired the essential skills for physical literacy and a healthy lifestyle. The study emphasizes the urgency of refining instructional strategies, considering the unique challenges of remote teaching, and advocating for substantial, focused, and long-term efforts. By shedding light on the intricacies of performance assessment in remote physical education, this research contributes significantly to the limited literature in this area, urging educators and policymakers to prioritize and enhance the quality of physical education in the evolving landscape of education.

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