

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Reflections of university students' experience under the online learning approach: A phenomenological study

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ABSTRACT

Background: The pandemic has reshaped the lives of everyone, including the way learning is delivered. Online learning in Physical Education (OLPE) is a form of distance learning where fundamental concepts of physical fitness are conducted remotely through the aid of technology.

Objectives: The study aimed to explore students' lived experiences in OLPE through the reflective narratives and photos generated from digital diary entries they made every other day for three weeks. The specific objective includes describing the students' feelings, processes, and realizations.

Methodology: Eight health professions students participated in this hermeneutic phenomenological study. The reflective accounts were analyzed following the interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach and revealed super-ordinate themes clustered into three categories: feelings, processes, and realizations.

Results: The first category is feelings evoked with super-ordinate themes, namely optimism with the course, appreciation of the teachers' attitude, empathy towards others, and desperation for a better set-up. The second category is processes experienced with super-ordinate themes, namely self-directed learning, awareness of the body, and dealing with heavy academic requirements. The third category is realizations with super-ordinate themes, namely experience of OLPE was a rollercoaster ride of successes and challenges, an experience that led to desires for improving self and the course, and finally, an opportunity for reflective learning.

Conclusion: Reflective accounts of feelings, processes, and realizations as students experience the sudden shift to OLPE are crucial in improving curricular policies and instructional designs for achieving quality outcomes.

Keywords: *online learning, digital diaries, reflections, phenomenology, physical education*

Introduction

Online learning is an educational approach under the classification of distance learning where teachers and students are physically apart, with all activities delivered through computer-mediated technology and the internet without physical interaction [2]. One of the many strategies under instructional reforms is exploiting the power of Information Technology (IT) for learning [15] and outcomes-based education (OBE) [34].

One of the online learning in Physical Education (OLPE) course offerings is PE1 Foundations of Physical Fitness, a health-related fitness course designed to teach students principles and concepts related to lifelong fitness, one that is most adaptable to an online format [2,11]. Reported

advantages of OLPE include greater flexibility, independence, convenience, and mastery [8,16,25], along with facilitating self-directed learning and self-management skills development, resulting in increased motivation to participate in physical activities [13,23], and improved ability to evaluate information related to health and training [29]. The literature is replete with quantitative studies conducted to contrast various delivery formats (purely online, blended, or face-to-face) specific to a health-related fitness course. The students' examination scores were compared, showing higher scores of students in the online mode, and affirming the online and blended formats as favorable for those living in remote areas, older, and working [36]. Investigating various delivery formats revealed no difference in exercise motivation based on course

format [36]. Findings were contrary to assumptions that students who enroll in an online format are less motivated to do physical activity. Students with higher perceived wellness were enrolled in online and blended course formats rather than face-to-face [24]. The students' wellness patterns would indicate better cardiovascular endurance if they were in the traditional or blended delivery format than if they completed the wellness course online [14].

Schools also benefit from online learning with less physical contact, saving on facilities and overhead costs associated with classroom learning, and reducing adverse environmental effects [38]. Even so, challenges to online learning emanating from the learner, the teacher, and the course have also been reported [25,31]. Communication is the key to successful online learning in course implementation, as effective communication with the students decreases students' confusion, promotes

independence [22], and encourages reflection which plays an important role in understanding by integrating current experiences with prior learnings [6]. Ideally, reflection leads to transformative learning which is viewed as the deepest level of reflection, or the kind of learning that leads to a major shift in perspective on how we view ourselves and others [35].

The process of reflection is anchored on Kolb's experiential learning theory as well as Gibbs' reflective cycle, which provides a structure that may guide the teacher in promoting reflection among learners. It is a framework consisting of questions focusing on learning from experiences by involving feelings, analysis and evaluation of the experience, and developing future actions [17]. The questions in this cycle were found to be suitable for this study in creating the semi-structured guidelines for learners' reflection. Figure 1 illustrates Gibbs's reflective cycle.



Figure 1. Gibbs' Reflective Cycle

Additionally, scenario-based learning (SBL) as a pedagogical approach to support reflection proves more interesting and meaningful for the students but may require complex preparations [19]. Reflection develops students' critical analysis, self-appraisal, metacognition, and recall of experiences or memory. Students are allowed to determine their progress in learning, acknowledging both positive and negative practice, allowing for recognition of self-worth and confidence, and enhanced relationship between the teacher and learner [20]. Reflection, therefore, plays a vital role in the learning process, for experience without reflection is meaningless [10].

Several barriers to reflection were reported, namely, difficulty reflecting if they have gotten used to not reflecting in their previous courses [27]; students' vulnerability [7,18]; and psychological stress linked to the process of reflection [28]; some students require assistance to reflect in a more meaningful way; and challenging for students who are not comfortable with expressing their thoughts in writing or who lack writing skills [21].

This study thus explored the students' lived OLPE experiences, specifically their feelings, processes, and realizations, through hermeneutic phenomenology to fill the gap.

Methodology

Study Design

This study used a hermeneutic phenomenology consistent with the researchers' constructivist philosophical worldview. Phenomenology is both a philosophy and a method of inquiry that focuses on the nature or essence of experience from the point of view of the person experiencing the phenomenon known as lived experiences. The goal of phenomenology is to describe the meaning of this experience in terms of what was experienced and how it was experienced through the analysis of their language as spoken or written [26]. Hermeneutic phenomenology allowed the students' experiences to be told and interpreted meaningfully [38]. The researchers believe that the reality about OLPE is complex and constructed personally by the students. The students' thoughts are also believed to be imaginative and developed out of experiences and social interactions.

Study Setting

The study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, where all teaching and learning activities were held online. Participants were students in a university committed to providing health science education, training, and research.

There are nine health science degree-granting units in the university, with one unit offering courses in the physical and social sciences, as well as the arts and humanities.

Participant Selection

The researchers recruited eight health professions students through a purposive sampling strategy after ethical clearance (2020-675-01) from the University of the Philippines Manila Research Ethics Board. The inclusion criteria include students who: (1) are officially enrolled in the online PE 1 course; (2) belong to a class section not handled by the researchers; (3) are regular, continuing, and enrolled in a health-related degree program; (4) can recount experiences, ideas, emotions, and reflections and be comfortable in expressing them; (5) committed to constructing reflection entries regularly (*i.e.*, every other day for three weeks); (6) have gadgets such as laptops, cameras, and video recording devices to create digital diaries; and (7) have stable internet connectivity for synchronous member checking of outputs.

Participants were recruited by disseminating a poster with accompanying short video clips through the learning management system. The content of the recruitment materials includes a call for study participants, an overview of what the study is about, expectations from participants, and the briefing schedule for interested participants. The briefing schedule ensued and all eight consenting participants attended. The briefing session allowed the participants to raise their questions about the study and submit their fully accomplished informed consent forms.

Data Collection

The unit of analysis for this study was the participants' reflections in digital diaries. The researcher provided the participants with an instructional packet containing salient points on reflection to guide them in creating and submitting digital diaries. Participants were guided on what reflection is, its aims, and the reflective process, which includes expressing (1) experience of OLPE in general; (2) feelings about this experience; (3) successes and failures; (4) overcoming these issues or challenges; (5) impact of the experience; and lastly (6) future actions. Participants' commitment to documenting their reflections regularly for three weeks was emphasized, and they may resume immediately in the event of a missed entry.

Instruction on the reflection entries in the digital diaries provided in the packet could be in any format, namely written narratives in English or Filipino, video clips, or photos. Participants were instructed to submit one, two, three, or a

combination of forms depending on which format they are most comfortable expressing their reflections. Participants were reminded that if they are to document through photos or video clips, these must be accompanied by reflective notes, and the need to edit for aesthetic appeal is unnecessary. Participants were reminded that the submissions would not affect their OLPE grades.

The researcher collected the digital diaries after three weeks through electronic submission. All participants completed the required frequency and duration of diary noting. All digital diaries are in narrative format, with some entries accompanied by photos. None of the participants submitted video reflections. By the end of digital diary creation, an online meeting was held for a debriefing session between the researcher and participants.

Process of Analysis

The reflective accounts were analyzed following the seven steps of the interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach, namely (1) reading and re-reading, (2) initial noting, (3) developing emergent themes, (4) searching for connections across emergent themes, (5) moving to the next case, (6) looking for patterns across cases, and (7) researchers' interpretations. This qualitative research approach is guided by three key philosophical areas: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography.

Step 1 involved familiarization and close attention to each of the students' descriptive accounts and meanings of essential details of their OLPE experience. The qualitative software NVivo, precisely word frequencies, and trees were utilized and generated terminologies such as exercise, space, videos, and workouts. These results aided the researchers in identifying commonly used terms and provided information on how these terms were used in specific contexts. IPA is

phenomenological because it is interested in lived experiences and aims to describe the meanings of experience in terms of what was experienced and how it was experienced. In step 2, the researcher noted some important keywords, phrases, or explanations by the participants and why they are important for the researcher. Step 3 followed where the volume of detail in the exploratory comments was reduced to emergent themes. Emergent themes are concise and descriptive interpretations of important comments. Evident in this step is the process of hermeneutic circle where the researcher interprets a part in relation to the whole and vice versa. Further reduction continued in Step 4, which involved searching for connections across emergent themes to produce super-ordinate themes that indicate the most interesting and vital reflections of the participants. Step 5 was a repetition of the steps earlier described in the following case until all reflections were accounted for. Researchers were aware of treating the case on its terms and think of IPA's idiographic commitment which is concerned with understanding the details and depth of phenomena as understood from the perspective of particular people in a specific context.

Patterns across all cases were then examined and presented through a table of recurrent themes (Table 1). Step 7 of the IPA approach involved the researcher's interpretation or the giving of explanation to the meanings of the reflections made by the participants. This last step was the juncture of participants' reflections and the researcher's hermeneutics to uncover experiences in OLPE. This is called the double hermeneutic when the researchers try to make sense of how participants make sense of what is happening to them. This involved a gradual moving away or weaning from the participants' interpretations to that of the researcher as super-ordinate themes are created. Participants checked these interpretations, and they agreed that the contents were accurate.

Table 1. *Participants Profile*

Pseudonym	Sex	Course	Location of residence	Type of residence
Kate	female	BS Public Health	NCR	owned
Carol	female	BS Public Health	Region VI	informal
Angela	female	Doctor of Dental Medicine	Region IV-A	owned
Maristel	female	Doctor of Dental Medicine	Region X	owned
Sally	female	Doctor of Dental Medicine	Region III	owned
Charles	male	Doctor of Dental Medicine	Region III	owned
Brian	male	Doctor of Dental Medicine	Region IV-A	owned
James	male	Doctor of Dental Medicine	NCR	owned

Rigor and Trustworthiness

Researchers employed several strategies following Guba's model of trustworthiness to enhance the rigor of this study. Strategies such as reflexivity, member and peer checking, structural coherence, referential adequacy, and dense description improved the study's credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The researcher used Srivastava's set of questions during data analysis as a guide to facilitate reflexivity during encounters with the reflective data. As reflective accounts were read, researchers' prior understandings were suspended, and attention was focused on what the participants were trying to say. The researcher's initial impressions, comments, and questions that came to mind while immersing with the data were written down to discriminate between personal noise and descriptions of participants' experiences of OLPE. Researchers carefully followed the IPA steps and allotted ample time for the analysis of each participant. Providing an unhurried manner to analyze each diary aided the researcher's rinsing process as new, and another set of reflections was analyzed. After data collection and initial analysis, researchers conducted virtual one-on-one member checking with the participants to validate interpretations further and extract the experiences' essence. Peer checking was a strategy similar to member checking where researchers sought colleagues' feedback on the interpretations, and objective criticisms were noted and addressed accordingly. Researchers requested colleagues to maintain confidentiality by accomplishing a personal agreement form at the end of the checking. Researchers ensured structural coherence by integrating outlying data in the description and interpretations. Referential materials such as participants' diaries and records

showing how researchers analyzed data were made available for audit. The researcher chose participants who could best share the OLPE experience with others. Participants were encouraged to provide rich experiences that would serve as data for dense interpretations to increase the chances of transferability in other contexts.

Results

Participants' Profile

Participants of this study were eight freshmen students consisting of five females and three males under the Public Health and Doctor of Dental Medicine programs in a state university in the Philippines. Two of the participants were from the National Capital Region (NCR), two from Region III, two from Region IV-A, and one each from Region VI and X. All participants reported moderate internet connectivity ranging from 5 to 10 mbps, and each declared possession of basic implements sufficient for online learning. The participants' profiles are presented in Table 2 with their corresponding sex, degree programs, location, and type of residence. Pseudonyms were used to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants.

Super-ordinate Themes

Analysis of students' experiences of OLPE revealed ten interrelated super-ordinate themes arranged in three clusters, namely, feelings that the students have perceived while studying online PE, processes that the students must go through while studying online PE, and realizations that the students have made (Table 3).

Table 2. *Recurrent Themes*

Super ordinate themes	Kate	Charles	Angela	Brian	James	Carol	Maristel	Sally	Present in over half of the participants?
Desperation for a better set-up	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Empathy towards others	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Appreciation for the teachers' attitude	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Optimism with the course	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Self-directed learning	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Awareness of the body	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Dealing with heavy academic requirements	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Rollercoaster ride	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Improving self and the course	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Reflective learning	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 3. Super-ordinate Themes, Emergent Themes, and Exploratory Codes

The feelings that the learners have perceived in the course of studying online PE were:
Super-ordinate theme 1: Optimism with the course Emergent theme 1: Appreciation for the significance of the course Emergent theme 2: Hopeful to adhering to healthier lifestyles
Super-ordinate theme 2: Appreciation for the professors' attitude Emergent theme 1: Considerate, understanding, and responsive teachers
Super-ordinate theme 3: Empathy towards others Emergent theme 1: "How about my other classmates?" Emergent theme 2: "How about my teachers?"
Super-ordinate theme 4: Desperation for a better setup Emergent theme 1: Online versus face-to-face modes Exploratory code 1: Online mode lacks feedback and guidance Exploratory code 2: Online mode is unfavorable and difficult Exploratory code 3: Online mode feels stuck and left with no choice Exploratory code 4: Online mode is unenjoyable Exploratory code 5: Online mode is expensive
The processes that the learners must go through while studying online PE were:
Super-ordinate theme 1: Self-directed learning Emergent theme 1: Zeal for outputs Exploratory code 1: Conscientiousness in outputs Exploratory code 2: Commitment to accomplish tasks Emergent theme 2: Autonomy over time Exploratory code 1: Learning at one's own pace Exploratory code 2: Time management
Super-ordinate theme 2: Awareness of the body Emergent theme 1: Body's state, strengths, limits, needs
Super-ordinate theme 3: Dealing with heavy academic requirements Emergent theme 1: Difficulties in resources Emergent theme 2: Competing academic requirements
The realizations that the learners have made were:
Super-ordinate theme 1: Rollercoaster ride of successes and challenges Emergent theme 1: "First was hard, now it is easier." Emergent theme 2: Adjustment period to successful OLPE
Super-ordinate theme 2: Experience of OLPE led to desires for improving self and the course Emergent theme 1: Improvements in OLPE implementation must be made Emergent theme 2: PE as a means for self-care
Super-ordinate theme 3: Experience of OLPE was an opportunity for reflective learning Emergent theme 1: Self-improvement Exploratory code 1: Avoiding procrastination Exploratory code 2: Asking for help is acceptable Exploratory code 3: Engaging one's self in the course Exploratory code 4: Use of prior knowledge

There are four super-ordinate themes under the first cluster, which is about feelings that the students have perceived while studying online PE. The first super-ordinate theme is optimism with the course. The participants felt happy and satisfied with the objectives and the activities of the course. Participants felt the course was significant in addressing their needs for physical activities where outdoor mobility is restricted, and all courses are held online. Kate, a female, Public Health student from NCR stated:

"...to be honest, doing those workouts was almost the only time I'm not in front of the computer, and I'm really glad that because of PE, I get to move. I know that online classes have really made me inactive as a person, and this changed how I really was. Before, I really liked walking long distances, jogging, and even playing sports. But because of the prolonged quarantine, the only activities that I could do to maintain my physique was to do workouts."

In a skills-based PE course, students are allowed to move only within the confines of their homes. Sports and other recreational activities typically held outdoors were prohibited as part of the health protocols to prevent people from contracting CoVID-19. The required activities in PE were an opportunity for most students to be physically active. The second super-ordinate theme is appreciation for the teachers' attitude. The students value empathetic teachers at a period of an instantaneous shift to fully online learning. Many disruptions were experienced that have affected teachers' delivery of lessons and students' keeping up with their learning. Teachers' desirable attitudes were important for students dealing with these disruptions and other new ways of doing. Sally, a female, Doctor of Dental Medicine student from Region III shared her reflections that resonate with others:

“I sincerely appreciate the empathy and compassion of our teacher. She has repeatedly expressed to our class that she understands what we are going through in terms of our different struggles and hardships. I am really thankful for her adjustments in giving the deadline of submissions.”

The third super-ordinate theme is empathy towards others. Participants were sensitive to what others are

feeling and experiencing which they can identify as seen in their reflections. Kate, Angela, James, and Maristel were concerned about their classmates and teachers as to how they overcame the challenges of online learning. One stated challenge is internet connectivity since not the entirety of the country has had its information and communications technology infrastructure set up, resulting in some places with weak to no connectivity. Maristel, a female Doctor of Dental Medicine student from Region X expressed her concern for others in her reflection entry:

“If my resources this pandemic have compromised a lot of things for me, what more of those who really did not have anything? I hope everything settles soon.”

The fourth super-ordinate theme is desperation for a better set-up. A face-to-face setting for most students is the better mode of learning in a subject such as PE that requires demonstrations of observable skills. Students' reflections were expressions of despondence attributed to the pandemic and feelings of desperation for a better setup as the peculiarities of face-to-face and online modes were contrasted. Carol is a female, Public Health student from Region VI who lives in an informal residence. Carol would like to go back to the traditional face-to-face classes because she struggled with the



Figure 2. Home Set-up for Exercising

current setting where recorded performances of exercises are required. Carol does not like the learning mode she is in and is hoping for a better one which, according to her, is still a face-to-face. Carol stated:

“I don't have a laptop... Our space at home is really small... I just hate the part where I have to film what I am doing...PE in a face-to-face situation is still better.” Central to Carol is her struggle with adjusting the space at home to carry out the required activities, so she included a photo of her home setup (Figure 2) in her diary.

The second cluster is about the processes that students must go through while studying online PE which has three super-ordinate themes. The first super-ordinate theme is self-directed learning. Notably, all the participants went through periods of self-directed learning where they had full autonomy to decide when and which type of exercises they should execute. Students were given general principles and other relevant resources that they could utilize to develop higher-order thinking tasks for conceptualizing their fitness plans. Sally's reflections manifest self-directed learning:

“The deadline of weekly tasks in PE is set on Sundays, so I am planning to work on week 1 workout for Wednesday and week 2 workout ideally on Friday or Saturday. I manage my time by plotting important dates and deadlines in the different subjects I am enrolled in.”

Sally's specific attributes and evidence of her independent learning were proper time management and zealotry. While Sally exhibited adequate time management and zealotry and felt optimistic about its effects on them, it was different for James and Brian. James and Brian are male, Doctor of Dental Medicine students from Region IV-A and NCR, respectively. There were unclear instructions on executing the activities and a lack of guidance on implementing their fitness plans for the two. In James's reflections, he wrote:

“Honestly, I don't know if the fitness plan I created is right because I didn't expect it will be hard when executing it, but it turns out it's a bit challenging and didn't match my capabilities that much. It is still better if we would have the guidance of our teacher or instructor just like in face-to-face classes.”

James would have wanted some kind of feedback on what happens in a face-to-face setting where students perform activities with their classmates under the teacher's supervision, and immediate feedback is possible. Feedback in an online learning setup may take a while due to the remote

conditions. Brian did manifest some form of independent learning but shared the same sentiment regarding the lack of clear instructions:

“Some made their routines a bit heavier, whereas some like me made it light. I hope whatever we did or how we made the routine doesn't reflect much on how we were graded since we weren't really given much clarification in doing so.”

The second super-ordinate theme is awareness of the body. Student participants journeyed OLPE with an awareness of how their bodies were feeling and thinking, as seen in their reflections. How their bodies felt towards the exercises at any point in time, whether it be at the start, middle, or end, were foremost in their reflections. Thought processes as a reaction to the physical tasks were articulated in their reflections. Physical activities and exercises are almost always difficult for most individuals. The participants are no exception to this, especially since they also face other obligations as a student. Students are aware of the need to improve physical health through exercise despite the challenges they experience. Carol vividly captures how she was aware of her body's reactions to inactivity brought by the pandemic:

“I need to stop this sedentary lifestyle because I've been feeling its negative effects already (especially on sleep). Last week, it was horrible. I skipped my workout session because things were just too much for me, and some necessary adjustments at home must be done.”

Carol stresses in her reflections that even if she wanted to lead a healthier lifestyle, she could not do so regularly because of the limitations at home. Given the chance and the motivation to execute the exercises, Carol wrote:

“Let's go to what I actually felt when I worked out again (after being a couch potato for more than a week). I was actually reluctant to do the activity today, but because of the deadline tomorrow, I felt compelled to do it right at that. Ah, the motivation. The reason for the reluctance was that I just felt too tired to actually do things. I recognized that as the wrong kind of tired, though. The kind of tired that made me feel really restless and unable to rest at the same time.”

Carol knew the state of her body and was in a quandary about whether to give in to her being tired and just rest or counteract the tiredness by exercising. Carol was reeling from the exhaustion that she felt and tried to rationalize the need for exercising. Carol was undoubtedly aware of what was happening to her body.

The last super-ordinate theme in the second cluster is dealing with heavy academic requirements. Students found it hard to achieve study-life balance because there were too many tasks at hand for most courses, including PE. There were competing priorities resulting in their physical activities in PE being compromised. The academic demands tend to be overwhelming as students are pleading for extension of deadlines which indicates students' inability to cope with submissions. Maristel can only say these words as a description of her status:

"There's a lot of requirements to pass...my backlogs? A river. My life? Dissipating."

Likened to a river, the requirements are never-ending, with a bulk of her time spent on doing academic requirements. Maristel could hardly join the family meals at home because she had to pass on these to work on her requirements. Maristel's predicament is nearly the same as Brian's:

"In addition, due to the continuous piling up of requirements that need to be accomplished, it doesn't really give much time for the students for reflection or a deeper understanding for any given topic. After we are done with one task, we have to move on to another."

The tasks given to Brian prevent him the opportunity to think about the learnings he had for a particular topic.

The last cluster is about realizations that the students have made which consists of three super-ordinate themes. The first super-ordinate theme is rollercoaster ride of successes and challenges. OLPE, for most students, has been a whirlwind of academic requirements, periods of sporadic academic breaks, and episodes of emotional ups and downs. Students dealt with overwhelming requirements and found it hard to cope with the seemingly endless submissions but later were pleased with their achievements. Students rode in the waves of their emotions to say things that they will later retract. James, at first, was lazy due to the class interruptions and demands of filming the workouts but later appreciated the effects of the activities on one's well-being. James's reflections follow:

"I was happy because we had a chance to share our thoughts on this subject. I told them that it somehow affected my mental health in a positive way because exercises or workouts became like a break from academics. Though it is tiring, I also realized how it can sometimes be fun and can ease my mind."

James later recognized that he went through a difficult time equivalent to an adjustment period towards success as

he shared:

"At first, it's hard to adjust, but as time goes by, it becomes better than what I thought."

The second super-ordinate is desires for improving self and the course. Participants pondered about improving themselves throughout the course, where they were encouraged to modify certain behaviors. Angela is female, Doctor of Dental Medicine student from Region IV-A. Her realizations contain constructs about sustaining what she has started:

"I hope that this continues even until the course has ended and that I find the discipline and perseverance necessary to keep on pushing until my fitness goals have been met."

Angela further added an appreciation for the course that brought to an awareness of the self:

"Thanks to this course, I'd also like to spend my January and February recalibrating my goals and modifying my fitness regimen. I'll try again this time since I strongly believe that I need to utilize the time between the 1st and 2nd sem to fix what I can fix with myself."

Sally had the same appreciation for what the course had taught her:

"I always feel perked up and energetic in the beginning of my exercises. In the middle of the exercise, it really gets hard, but I know that those parts will be truly beneficial in the long run... I know that through this course, I keep on improving with my exercise. Unlike before, I am not getting tired easily, and I get to finish the workout routines in accordance with the time allotments."

Sally had a positive attitude towards exercise that she believes had produced beneficial results. Sally's reflections reveal that she remained unfazed by the strains of exercise and kept her focus instead on how to improve herself in terms of exercising.

The last super-ordinate theme is opportunity for reflective learning. Reflective learning is a kind of process carried out by students to assess learning. There was evidence that OLPE paved the way for students to reflect on their health behaviors, ideas, and feelings, resulting in either a change of behavior, new perspectives on health, readiness for healthier lifestyles, or commitment to actions. Sally made explicit her thoughts about the process of reflection:

"I think that it is beneficial for me to be able to articulate these experiences and feelings because I recognize the

overall impact of the tasks I have worked on and eventually accomplished.”

Charles is a male, Doctor of Dental Medicine student from Region III and his diary was full of learnings gained through reflection. This excerpt was about procrastination:

“I kept on procrastinating instead of doing the exercise video that will be submitted for the last module in P.E., which resulted in having an unproductive day. For this, I must be more engaging in the future in order for me not to waste any time.”

Discussion

Exploring students' lived OLPE experiences through hermeneutic phenomenology revealed ten interrelated super-ordinate themes arranged in three clusters. The first cluster involves the feelings that the students have perceived while studying online PE. The four super-ordinate themes under this cluster are optimism with the course, appreciation for the professors' attitude, empathy towards others, and desperation for a better setup. The second cluster is processes that the learners must go through while studying online PE. The three super-ordinate themes under this cluster are self-directed learning, awareness of the body, and dealing with heavy academic requirements. The third cluster is the learners' realizations while studying online PE. The three super-ordinate themes under this cluster are a rollercoaster ride of successes and challenges, the experience of OLPE led to desires for improving self, and the course, and experience of OLPE was an opportunity for reflective learning.

Reflective accounts revealed that students' experience of OLPE evoked various emotions. Participants expressed appreciation of the course as important, timely, and meaningful since most academic work is desk-bound. The course gave the participants the venue to prioritize their health and opportunities to improve their well-being. More courses with particular significance to health should be promoted and enhanced because most students highly value them. It was not only the course that impacted the students but also attention to the human entities. The professor and their classmates were significant in their reflections as well. Participants were perceptive of how their professors related to them with kindness and compassion. Participants value nurturing teachers as they are faced with academic rigors compounded by the burdening effects of the pandemic. This appreciation for teachers validates one of the key aspects of interactivity believed to be crucial drivers for online learning to be successful

[32]. The participants thought of their professors and classmates as they realized their struggles. Participants were particularly concerned about how others, especially the resource-constrained, would find a way to thrive on the difficulties that they are facing. All these difficulties of accomplishing academic requirements, coupled with the need for electronic implements, stable internet connection, adjustments at home, and many other challenges taken altogether, gave rise to students' desire for a better learning setup. Some studies exploring students' narratives were similar to the reflections in terms of emotions evoked [1,9].

Participants in the journey of learning PE carried out various processes or a series of steps or actions as they accomplished the course. While most felt at ease learning independently, a few expressed the need for more precise instructions, more frequent feedback, and guidance from the teacher. Participants were attuned to the conditions of their bodies as to what their bodies need, how their bodies would react to specific stressors such as fatigue and lack of sleep, and even the threshold of their bodies when exercising. Participants experienced this awareness of how their bodies were during the course and articulated these bodily conditions in their reflections. The last process noted to be experienced by the participants was dealing with heavy academic requirements. Participants expressed that there was little time left to internalize what they had learned. They barely had the time to exercise due to competing demands of other academic subjects and attend to personal and familial matters. The draining mental tasks of the other academic subjects affected the physical strength needs of their PE activities. Indeed, all these processes are of significant concern to educationalists when formulating curricular or instructional designs in online learning. These processes were evident in earlier local studies done during the pandemic [4,5,30,33]. Practicing time management and self-awareness were notable similarities in terms of coping mechanisms.

Participants' realizations are associated with episodes of downs such as difficulties, frustrations, resistance, and aversion that later were coupled with bouts of ups such as accomplishment, happiness, acceptance, and fondness. It manifests here that there are events that are difficult at the onset but eventually become bearable. Teachers, then, are challenged to become a source of inspiration for students to carry on. Participants having experienced OLPE were made aware of their behaviors, specifically areas of self-improvement. Participants had clear fitness goals and articulated the opportunities to reach these goals. Moreover, participants were optimistic about how the behavior change could positively

impact themselves as they have learned in the course. The course itself also became the object of attention for participants. Participants expressed course improvements such as creating an effective and stimulating learning environment with frequent feedback and guidance from the faculty. One of the known significant factors for high attrition among online students is the feeling of isolation associated with little to no teacher feedback, which should be addressed [3]. Participants had the chance to reflect on their own experiences and the process of reflection. They realized the positive impact of their activities in OLPE in achieving their goals, such as avoiding procrastination, the need to take a break, the use of prior knowledge, seeking help, and proper time management. These realizations taken directly from the students may form the bases for enhancing OLPE implementation.

Strengths and Limitations

The study's strength was the unobtrusive nature of students' reflective accounts in their digital diaries. The varied formats such as written narratives and photos in which participants expressed their reflections were among the study's other strengths. The researchers' provision of semi-structured guidelines instead of fixed ones allowed the participants to express their reflections freely.

This study, however, has its limitations. The PE class delivered via the online learning mode in this study was just one of the many PE classes offered. The results may not be reflective of OLPE in general. Also, there were no videos received, something that could have provided more insights with its verbal and non-verbal cues.

Future studies should: (1) allot more time to increase participants' familiarization with the researcher and capture perspectives, ways, and norms that are close to the real to enhance credibility; (2) conduct longitudinal or follow-up studies to see themes in different contexts and times; (3) conduct studies that may be of different research methods that utilize other data sources to gain a complete picture of online learning; and (4) foster multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary research through collaboration with other researchers from different disciplines for a more comprehensive and innovative approach to investigating online learning.

Conclusion

OLPE has been the response to ensure that learners are reached and activities of learning PE are conducted amid a pandemic. This study explored the learners' experiences

through reflections in their digital diaries through the IPA approach and unearthed various feelings, processes, and realizations. School authorities must consider student domains of feelings, processes, and realizations in formulating policies, curricular and instructional designs for quality outcomes to be achieved.

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Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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