



Article

Embodied Pedagogies: Exploring the Practices and Socio-Cultural Foundations of Physical Education Instructors in Higher Education

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Abstract

This study explored the lived experiences of Physical Education (PE) instructors in Philippine higher education institutions (HEIs) with a focus on embodied pedagogical approaches. Anchored in phenomenological methodology, the research sought to (1) examine how PE instructors integrate embodiment in their teaching practices, (2) understand the influence of socio-cultural values on their instructional methods, and (3) analyze how they conceptualize and utilize the body as a site of knowledge production, communication, and engagement. Ten PE instructors from three HEIs in Northern Luzon participated in in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and reflective journaling. Data were thematically analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step procedure. Findings revealed three central themes: first, instructors regarded the body as a dynamic pedagogical presence, essential in modeling discipline, energy, and relational learning. Second, socio-cultural factors such as Filipino communal values (e.g., bayanihan, paggalang) and indigenous practices shaped their pedagogical beliefs, activity choices, and classroom management strategies. Third, instructors/professors viewed the body as a powerful medium for experiential learning, non-verbal communication, and holistic student development. Embodied pedagogy was thus perceived as both culturally rooted and personally transformative, extending beyond physical instruction to affirm identity, social connection, and moral education. This study affirms Merleau-Ponty's theory of embodiment and supports the view that PE is a critical space for relational, cultural, and affective learning. The findings call for institutional support to further integrate embodied and culturally responsive pedagogies in the training of PE educators.

Keywords: embodied pedagogy, physical education, phenomenology, higher education, cultural identity, movement-based learning, Filipino values

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Introduction

Amid changing times for higher education, Physical Education (PE) is maintaining its status as both bodily movement and as the focal point for transmitting culture, forming identity, and pedagogical renewal. The notion of embodied pedagogy is at the heart of this transformation, the idea that the body is not only a means by which to move through the world, but a potent mediator of knowing, expressing, and relation. Since higher education institutions are working to create more inclusive and transformative learning spaces, it is essential to know how PE Instructors incorporate embodied practices into their teaching.

The research intends to explore the body as a medium and a message used in PE teachers' teaching practices. It investigates the embodied learning practices of instructors in classroom and field contexts: the reasons for, as well as the obstacles and ethical motivating values that ground embodied teaching practices. In the process, it raises troubling questions about the highly personal and sometimes intuitive ways that educators work with both their own and their students' bodies to co-create understanding.

In addition, this examination critically addresses how such socio-cultural factors as local traditions, community values, and indigenous bodily practices mediate shaping these teachers' pedagogical beliefs. Acknowledging that teaching is a culturally embedded practice highlights how cultural identities and municipal norms convey physical knowledge and discipline. Finally, it examines how teachers imagine the body as a source of knowledge and transmitting knowledge, connecting students and supporting their holistic growth and development, and considering that they holistically learn in the classroom.

Embodied pedagogy has captured attention in educational research, especially in Physical Education (PE), where the body is at the heart of the matter, both factually and in terms of practice. Embodied pedagogy involves teaching and learning methods that honor the body as a site of knowledge, experience, and meaning making, not just a means for transferring knowledge (Nguyen & Larson, 2015). In PE, Oliver and Kirk (2016, p. 415) claim to achieve a more 'complete pedagogy of embodiment' that engages 'the physical, emotional, and cognitive' of your student, fostering well-rounded development. Their research with adolescent girls in PE settings has demonstrated that when students are challenged to reflect on their corporeal experiences, they are empowered to "talk back to" (the school's) discourse of physical activity and health.

Likewise, Dowling (2011) states that embodied experiences in PE can disrupt traditional, performance-based models, often marginalizing those who do not conform

to athletic circles. Her research supports a diversity-informed pedagogy that recognizes multiple body types, abilities, and movements, especially in cross-cultural contexts. Cultural bases are as important in such embodied practices. In a cross-cultural analysis, Brown and Richards (2012) reported that PE teachers' pedagogies were underpinned by their socio-cultural origins and socialized beliefs about discipline, gender identity, and physical capability. Southeast Asia has a culture associated with being collectivist and one of authority, which is evident in such a culture wearing out in teaching and student engagement (Macdonald, 2011).

Fitzpatrick and Russell (2015) also argue that embodiment within PE is pedagogical and political. They claim that acknowledging the body as a knowledge producer destabilizes dominant educational discourses that dichotomize mind from body and value cognitive learning. This research in New Zealand schools provides ethnographic examples of how these body practices can be harnessed for social justice, inclusion, and indigenous knowledge systems in PE curricula.

Despite a growing interest in this area in the broader world (p.624), according to Casey and Goodyear (2015), there is still a minimal regional research focus on embodying pedagogy in non-Western/Asia contexts. Despite the developed Western literature on embodied teaching, the extent to which PE teachers in the Philippines and other Southeast Asian countries incorporate culturally inflected embodied practices into their teaching is yet to be examined. This disparity highlights the significance of answering questions about how Filipino faculty draw from their cultural identity, community ethics, and bodily traditions to make a difference and establish meaningful learning experiences.

While there is increasing attention to embodied pedagogy in Western settings, there has been little attention on the practice, experience, and cultural mediation of this work by Physical Education teachers when they practice in situ in Southeast Asia, a non-Western context, at least in the case of the Philippine higher education system. Dominant PE literature focuses on cognitive and curriculum-based pedagogies, which overlook the embodied, affective, and socio-cultural aspects of teaching within PE. This study responds to this lack by reporting on localized, practice-based understandings of Filipino educators about embodied pedagogies in their specific cultural and institutional context.

The research provides rich insights on embodied pedagogies in Philippine higher education by situating the study within these goals. It adds to the academic conversation around bodily epistemologies and culturally responsive teaching. It offers rich entry points for curriculum makers, teacher educators, and PE practitioners

dedicated to re-articulating physical education as an experimental, inclusive, and culturally rooted space.

Research Objectives

1. To explore the lived experiences of Physical Education instructors in higher education regarding integrating embodied pedagogical approaches in their teaching practices.
2. To examine the influence of socio-cultural factors, such as local traditions, community values, and cultural identities, on the pedagogical beliefs and instructional methods of Physical Education instructors.
3. To analyze how Physical Education instructors conceptualize and utilize the body as a site of knowledge production, communication, and engagement in higher education learning environments.

Research Methodology

A qualitative phenomenological research design was applied to investigate Physical Education teachers' experiences in realizing embodiment in their teaching practice within the context of higher education. Phenomenology was chosen to understand how the instructors made sense of their bodily involvement, cultural backdrop, and teaching practices in their professional teaching context. The participants were purposively chosen among full-time and part-time PE instructors in three Higher Education Institutions in Northern Luzon, who had at least three years of teaching experience. The study comprised ten subjects in all. The inclusion criteria allowed for a sufficient exposure to various instructional approaches and socio-cultural contexts of embodied teaching. The data were gathered utilizing semi-structured in-depth interviews where the participants were provided the chance to reflect and interpret their experienced use of the body within teaching, with related teaching beliefs. Interviews took place online or face-to-face according to the participant's preference and availability. Individual interviews took between 45 and 60 minutes and were recorded (with the permission of the participant) digitally. Additional data were collected through observations in the classroom and reflective journals from the teachers, as contextual data to confirm their embodied action. Data were subject to thematic analysis, using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step procedure for coding. Transcripts of interviews and fieldnotes were inductively coded with themes emerging directly from participants' narratives. Coding was based on repetitive analysis cycles to ensure rigor, coherence, and trustworthiness. For

additional credibility, member checks were performed, whereby participants were also allowed to confirm the accuracy and validity of their transcribed stories.

The ethical guidelines were strictly adhered to during the study. Respondents were briefed on the purpose and voluntary nature of the study and the confidentiality of their participation. The authors obtained written informed consents before the data collection, and the reporting was pseudonymized to consolidate the participants' personal information.

Using this methodological lens, PE teachers' nuanced culturally embedded embodied pedagogies were unraveled, illuminating how physicality, pedagogy, and socio-cultural meaning-making intersect within the landscape of Philippine tertiary education.

Results and Findings

Lived Experiences of Physical Education Instructors in Higher Education

In PE, teaching and learning are not just about what is said and written but are deeply rooted and embodied in lived and moving bodies. While higher education in general is trending towards more student-centered and experiential models of learning, embodied pedagogy is one approach that acknowledges that the body functions as a locus of knowledge, communication, and humanity. Even more than this, for higher education PE teachers, the use of embodied pedagogies is pragmatic but existential; it is how such teachers demonstrate their own learning. This research examined PE teachers' lived experiences of and with embodied pedagogy with their learners in their gym and activity spaces. By exploring their physical and philosophical approaches to teaching in motion, the presence, and the cultural location, the study sheds light on the underpinnings, difficulties, and reflection-in-action toward the embodied pedagogy of Philippine higher education.

Teaching Through the Body, Embodiment as Pedagogical Presence

PE instructors emphasized that their own bodily engagement served as a demonstration and a powerful communicative tool. Their body became central to

modeling movement, discipline, energy, and confidence, transforming them into pedagogical instruments.

Participant Responses:

"I do not just explain the steps. I show them with my whole body. My posture, facial expression, and even breathing help them understand the rhythm and control they need."

(Participant 1)

"Even in theory classes, I walk around, stretch, and maintain physical presence. My body sets the energy in the room; it tells the students I am with them, not just talking at them."

(Participant 9)

These reflections highlight how embodiment transcends physical instruction and becomes a form of relational pedagogy. Oliver and Kirk (2016) describe the teacher's body as a key site of knowledge transfer and engagement. The instructors use embodiment to create affective resonance, build rapport, and maintain classroom dynamism, particularly in kinesthetic learning contexts.

Challenges of Authentic Embodiment, Physical Limits, and Institutional Constraints

While instructors are committed to embodied teaching, they often encounter challenges such as aging, physical fatigue, and the demands of institutional policies that limit movement-based instruction, especially in theoretical or lecture-based PE subjects.

Participant Responses:

"I am no longer in my twenties. There are days when my knees hurt, but I still must demonstrate agility and form. It is hard to keep up sometimes, but I push through."

(Participant 2)

"Sometimes the university allocates classrooms not suited for movement. I want to do embodied work, but I am stuck in tight lecture halls with desks." (Participant 5)

These responses reveal the invisible labor and vulnerability that accompany embodied pedagogies. While the body is central to instruction, it is also a site of wear and constraint. As Dowling (2011) notes, educators' bodies are shaped by internal and external factors, including institutional design and expectations. This highlights the need for supportive infrastructures and wellness programs for PE faculty.

Culturally Embedded Embodiment, Local Values in Movement and Discipline

The instructors viewed their embodied pedagogies as profoundly influenced by Filipino cultural values such as *pag-igil*, *bayanihan*, and *disiplina*. They expressed

that movement-based teaching was also a way of instilling these values into students through example and action.

Participant Responses:

"When I teach warm-ups, I make it a point to emphasize rhythm and synchronization; it is part of our collective spirit as Filipinos. It teaches them teamwork, pakikisama, and harmony." (Participant 8)

"I use traditional games in my class not just for physical engagement but to teach respeto, following rules, honoring elders, and taking turns." (Participant 3)

These insights affirm that embodied pedagogy is also a cultural practice. The instructors intentionally weave local identity and social values into physical movement. This aligns with Fitzpatrick and Russell's (2015) view that embodiment in PE is not neutral but political and cultural. Such culturally grounded practices help decolonize pedagogy and promote inclusivity in the PE curriculum, particularly in Philippine contexts.

Influence of Socio-Cultural Factors

PE (Physical Education) is about engaging in physical activities and a cultural practice formed by the teachers' and students' beliefs and values. In the Philippine board of higher education, its PE teachers are guided, not only in pedagogical philosophies and teaching methods, but also by the socio-cultural beliefs, customs, community norms, and how, from history and regions, their teaching through PE shall be rooted. These cultural aspects are not apart from teaching but are enacted in the forms in which faculty members teach, organize activities, and relate to students. This paper considers the impact of these socio-cultural roots on PE teachers' pedagogy concerning bodily movement, discipline, and physical literacy. In examining the cultural aspects of teaching, such research would illustrate how Filipino teachers use their experiences as a resource in the development of contextually grounded and value-laden PE. This investigation confirms that teaching in PE is more than just a bodily and pedagogical task; rather, it is intrinsically bound up with the social and cultural.

Local Traditions as Pedagogical Anchors in Movement Instruction

Physical Education instructors often draw on local games, indigenous physical practices, and community-based rituals as instructional tools. These traditions serve as content and methodology, creating culturally responsive learning experiences that resonate with students' backgrounds. Traditional Filipino games like patintero,

tumbang preso, and luksong baka are employed to teach agility and coordination and cultivate cultural pride, cooperation, and strategic thinking.

Participant Responses:

"I integrate native games in warm-ups or icebreakers. It excites the students, and at the same time, they get to rediscover part of our culture. These games teach more than movement; they teach identity." (Participant 5)

"We had a unit on dance, and I incorporated binasuan and tinikling. Aside from learning rhythm and balance, students reflected on how these dances mirror Filipino grace and discipline." (Participant 8)

These examples reflect how instructors use local physical practices as embodied cultural texts. As argued by Macdonald (2011), teaching in PE becomes more inclusive and meaningful when grounded in cultural contexts. Instructors foster cultural continuity by embedding tradition into movement, improving student engagement, and strengthening relevance. This also contributes to decolonizing the PE curriculum by resisting Eurocentric physical education standards and re-centering local knowledge systems.

Community Values Shaping Discipline and Cooperation in Instruction

Filipino communal values such as *bayanihan* (communal unity), *pakikisama* (getting along with others), and *paggalang* (respect) significantly inform how PE instructors manage behavior, design group activities, and assess participation. These values are not explicitly taught as rules but are embodied in the conduct of team sports, dance routines, and cooperative games.

Participant Responses:

"In group activities, I emphasize bayanihan. I tell my students, 'Help the slowest, cheer for the shyest.' It is not just about performance; it is about lifting each other." (Participant 3)

"Respect is core to my classes. I teach my students to bow before entering the court, to say 'thank you' after a game, win or lose. That is how I learned from my elders." (Participant 1)

These pedagogical approaches exemplify how cultural values are embodied norms in PE. Social and moral development in and through sport and physical activity is highly cultural (Brown and Richards, 2012). Teachers take on modes of community morality - and pass them on - through classroom practices that foster discipline,

cooperation, and empathy. This emphasizes that PE is not merely about physical literacy but also about being the subject of civic and moral education.

Cultural Identity and the Body as a Site of Meaning

PE teachers and academics feel their own cultural identity, from place of origin to upbringing and religious or ethnic background, is closely linked to how they use and understand their body learning to teach. They convey values by posture, gesture, and movement; consciously or unconsciously, their pedagogy carries meanings that originate in life and tradition.

Participant Responses:

"I grew up in a farming community where hard work was shown by how strong your body was. I bring that value into my classes, discipline, endurance, simplicity." (Participant 15)

"As a woman teaching PE, I am conscious about breaking the idea that girls should only dance or play soft games. I always say, 'Your body is yours to express power, not just grace.'" (Participant 7)

These reflections show that the body is not a neutral tool, but a cultural creation. As Fitzpatrick and Russell (2015) argue, educators embody and articulate identity through the work of their teaching bodies. Cultural identity influences not just what is taught, but how it is taught, from body language to movement choices to classroom expectations. This embodiment renders the teaching process personal, political, and deeply rooted in social context.

Explore how Physical Education instructors perceive and apply the body as a medium for generating and conveying knowledge.

In PE, the body is not just a container for executing athletic techniques, but a place of learning, communicating, and connection. In higher education, PE lecturers perform complex roles as educators of physical competence and the all-round learner, utilizing the body as a pedagogical asset. In this article, we explore how instructors think about and work with the body not merely to teach technique but as a route to producing knowledge, enabling communication, and cultivating connection. The body is brought to the center of the classroom dynamic, allowing teachers and students to communicate in new ways through movement, posture, gesture, and presence. Through exploring the corporeal dimensions of teaching, this study suggests that PE

is more than a space for learning skill acquisition, where PE as a space can be a potent site for relational ways of learning and personal change.

The Body as a Medium of Experiential Knowledge

As such, physical educators understand that the body is more than just a 'conduit' for skill performance but is a reservoir of both lived and experiential knowledge. Students learn by doing, feeling, and reflecting through bodily movement like dance performance, executing a sports movement, or responding to a game situation. Such learning, they emphasized, is more deeply integrated when it draws upon physical memory and experience than when it is abstractly prescribed.

Participant Responses:

"There are things you cannot explain through lectures. When students move, they understand rhythm, balance, and coordination in ways they cannot through words alone." (Participant 2)

"When my students fall, recover, sweat, and adapt, they are not just learning sports; they are learning resilience and awareness. The body becomes the teacher." (Participant 6)

These reflections validate the idea of the body-as-knower, a theoretical positioning supported by embodied learning theories such as Merleau-Ponty's and deployed within PE contexts by Oliver and Kirk (2016). The educators regard movement as an aspect of and vehicle for learning, and knowledge exposing itself as impossible from mere cognition. Such learning in the flesh underpins stronger self-awareness, physical literacy, and applied grasp, especially for collegiate PE.

The Body as a Communicative Tool and Pedagogical Language

It was also a chance for instructors to talk about how their bodies can signal intention, correction, motivation, and empathy. Posture, gestures, patterns of movement, and even facial expression enter as part of the instructional language. They also saw how students communicate comprehension, confusion, and emotion through bodily responses, rendering the classroom a site of non-verbal, embodied dialogue.

Participant Responses:

"When I demonstrate a skill, I exaggerate posture or movement to emphasize form. My students get it faster than if I only explained it verbally." (Participant 7)

"Sometimes I notice a student's hesitation through body language. They may not say it, but I feel it in how they move, or do not move. That is when I adjust my approach." (Participant 10)

These accounts further support the body as a communicative pedagogy, a position examined by Fitzpatrick and Russell (2015) who argue that teaching and

learning in PE is inherently dialogic and embodied. PE-Related Communication: Somatic and Modeling-Based Interaction Somatic and modeling-based communication in PE complements reliance on verbal instructions. Educators who respond to these cues create inclusive, adaptive, and emotionally supportive learning environments.

The Body as a Site of Connection, Empowerment, and Holistic Growth

In addition to teaching physical skills, instructors stressed the body's role in fostering trust, self-worth, and connection among students. They believe that embodied learning is how human beings develop as whole people, integrating the physical, emotional, and social. The instructors purposefully build environments for the students to feel visualized, able, and connected, which is supported by movement to develop confidence, identity, and relational engagement.

Participant Responses:

"When students learn to move with control, they begin to carry themselves differently. You can see the confidence in how they walk, stand, or even speak." (Participant 4)

"Group activities like dance or team sports allow students to trust each other's timing and rhythm. They move together; they grow together." (Participant 3)

These observations speak to how embodied pedagogy can be transformative. Educators see the body not only as a physical thinker but also as a relational entity. Through movement encounters, the students become involved in self-reflexivity, relation to the other, and social recognition. Dowling (2011) noted that the mind and body split is contradicted by such pedagogies, which place physical education as a central actor in developing well-rounded higher education learners.

Discussion

The results of the present investigation shed light on the multifaceted and versatile way physical education teachers in HE experienced the body as an instructional resource. Three overarching themes were identified throughout the participants' stories: (1) the body as a vessel for experiential knowledge, (2) the body as a means of communication and pedagogical language, and (3) the body as a place of relationship, empowerment, and holistic development. These themes illustrate the embodiment of pedagogy in PE, that movement is not only a learning outcome, but a way of knowing and communicating, which is shaped by teachers' cultural, affective, and philosophic orientations.

It is in the place of the body that knowledge happens when learning. They felt that through the body (rather than through explanations), such traditions had been

learned, through play, such things could not just be memorized but emerged meaningfully; by gingerly saying in this body, in a playful sort of way, this position could be occupied against a spine. This is in keeping with Merleau-Ponty's (1962) notion of embodiment and the claim that perception and meaning are rooted in the body. The pedagogical faculty's commitment to practice through "doing" affirmed embodied knowing by underscoring kinesthetic awareness as a legitimate form of knowledge.

Furthermore, participants showed the body as an effective channel of communication. Using demonstration, gesture, and observation, teachers communicated more abstract ideas, such as balance, timing, and spatial awareness. Their teaching language was not simply of words but of action and expression to convey what was hidden. This is consistent with the observation of Fitzpatrick and Russell (2015) when noting that embodiment in PE offers emotional and relational learning, not achievable through instructions in the conventional sense.

Finally, the teachers emphasized the body's part in whole development, explaining how Moving Matters fosters confidence, connection, and growth. Here, PE was no longer just a site of physical development, but also of identity shaping, emotional strength, and community seeking. The body was considered a relational actor in promoting empathy, trust, and mutual experience of the learners. These realizations confirm the study of Dowling (2011), who contends that embodiment pedagogy is always both social and political, particularly when it recognizes bodies, identities, and cultures in their diversity. Students' meanings suggest a culturally rooted and student-focused perception of PE with the body as an agent, not just an object of meaning-making. Philosophies and practices of educators demonstrated highly developed conceptions of the body as a site of 'lived knowledge' and that lived knowledge is always embedded within cultural context, personal experience, and pedagogical intentions.

Conclusions

This work found that Physical Education university teachers actively conceptualize and work with the body as a dynamic space to produce knowledge, sense-making, and student participation. Their pedagogies are guided by a commitment to experiential, relational, and culturally relevant teaching philosophies. They see the body not just as a material to shape in the gym but as a repository for insight, a bridge of dialogue, a channel of integral knowledge. They leverage movement to teach skills and engage with students, communicate values, and construct inclusive and transformative learning environments.

These findings add to current literature about embodied pedagogy by providing a localized understanding based on the experiences of Filipino PE teachers. The research highlights that embodying in pedagogical practices contributes to a more in-depth learning and understanding of self, others, and the socio-cultural world. As higher education transitions in response to the ever-changing landscape, the recognition of embodied practices within Physical Education is needed to foster inclusive, responsive, and empowered practice.

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