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Lived Experience of Pre-Service Physical and Health Education Teachers in Service-Learning: A Basis for Activity

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the lived experiences of pre-service Physical and Health Education teachers at Philippine Normal University, examining perceived benefits, implementation challenges, and improvements to service-learning activities. A qualitative phenomenological design involved 24 purposively selected fourth year Bachelor in Physical and Health Education students who had participated in at least three institute-facilitated activities. Data from semi-structured interviews were examined through thematic analysis. The most frequently reported benefits were personal and professional growth (17 thematic mentions), academic knowledge and skill application (14), classroom readiness (10), and teamwork (9). Unclear instructions were the leading challenge (15), followed by physical strain (6), financial constraints (5), and inadequate preparation (3). Students most frequently recommended earlier scheduling (17), clearer orientations (16), improved coordination (12), and recognition (11). The findings indicate that participants valued service-learning as practical teacher preparation but experienced organizational and resource-related barriers that complicated participation. The university should align activities with academic calendars, clarify responsibilities before events, provide logistical and faculty support, and use the 40-hour Service-Learning Passport to document participation. As a single-institution qualitative study based on self-reported experiences, the findings do not establish measured improvements in academic or teaching performance. The study offers context-specific guidance for more equitable, coordinated service-learning and may advance educational and institutional sustainability consistent with SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

Keywords: *Experiential Learning, Physical Education, Pre-Service Teachers, Professional Development, Service-Learning, Teacher Education, Thematic Analysis*

1. INTRODUCTION

Service-learning is an experiential educational approach that integrates academic knowledge with community engagement to develop students' practical competencies, social responsibility, and professional preparedness. In physical education teacher education, service-learning provides opportunities to strengthen communication, leadership, collaboration, and civic engagement through authentic experiences (Maravé-Vivas et al., 2022; Ayllón-Salas, 2024). However, its educational value depends on appropriate planning, institutional support, and meaningful student participation (Salvador-Garcia et al., 2023). At Philippine Normal University, pre-service Bachelor in Physical and Health Education (BPHED) teachers participate in service-learning activities involving event assistance, coordination, and other institutional responsibilities. These experiences are intended to complement academic preparation and develop competencies relevant to their future teaching careers. Nevertheless, students may encounter difficulties involving academic workload, scheduling, unclear instructions, physical demands, and financial limitations. Research in the Philippine context similarly emphasizes the importance of effective coordination, communication, and institutional support in service-learning implementation (Abenir et al., 2024). This study explores the lived experiences of pre-service Physical and Health Education teachers participating in service-learning activities, focusing on their perceived academic and professional benefits, encountered challenges, and recommendations for improvement. The findings provide a basis for proposing an intervention program that strengthens the implementation of service-learning activities.

Research Problem

Service-learning offers opportunities for pre-service teachers to apply academic knowledge in practical situations while developing professional competencies and community awareness. Previous research indicates that participation in physical education service-learning can support civic development and experiential learning (Maravé-Vivas et al., 2022). Nevertheless, implementation challenges involving organizational arrangements, logistics, participant preparedness, and instructional responsibilities may limit these benefits (Salvador-Garcia et al., 2023). For BPHED students, service-learning activities must be balanced with academic requirements and extracurricular responsibilities. Limited preparation, unclear task assignments, scheduling conflicts, and additional expenses may affect students' participation and perceived learning experiences. Bitton (2025) identified time, transportation, financial security, and personal responsibilities as important barriers to equitable student participation in community service opportunities. Despite the expanding literature on service-learning, a contextual understanding of how pre-service Physical and Health Education teachers experience institutionally facilitated service activities remains necessary. Specifically, the study examines how students perceive the relationship between their participation and academic and extracurricular performance, the difficulties they encounter, and the improvements needed to strengthen implementation. Addressing these concerns can inform the development of a structured and supportive service-learning intervention program.

Assumptions of the Study

The study assumes that pre-service Physical and Health Education teachers can provide meaningful accounts of their experiences in service-learning activities and that these experiences may involve both developmental opportunities and implementation challenges. Participation is assumed to offer opportunities for applying academic knowledge, strengthening interpersonal competencies, and developing professional readiness, although these outcomes may vary according to students' circumstances and the nature of their activities (Ayllón-Salas, 2024; Sánchez-Jiménez et al., 2025). It is further assumed that academic and extracurricular demands, psychological challenges, and institutional or logistical support influence students'

perceptions of service-learning participation. Effective communication, preparation, and coordination are considered important conditions for meaningful engagement (Salvador-Garcia et al., 2023; Abenir et al., 2024). These assumptions guide the qualitative exploration of participants' experiences rather than serve as hypotheses requiring statistical testing.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to explore the lived experiences of pre-service Physical and Health Education teachers participating in service-learning activities at Philippine Normal University. Specifically, it seeks to examine students' perceptions of how participation influences their academic performance and extracurricular activities; identify the challenges encountered during service-learning implementation; determine their recommendations for improving the planning, coordination, and delivery of service-learning activities; and propose an intervention program based on the findings. Through these objectives, the study intends to provide practical insights that may enhance student development, professional preparation, and institutional support for service-learning.

Theoretical or Conceptual Basis

The study is anchored in the principles of experiential and service-learning education, emphasizing the integration of academic knowledge, practical experience, community participation, and reflection. Service-learning differs from ordinary volunteer activities because meaningful educational experiences involve deliberate connections between academic objectives and community engagement (Filges et al., 2022). Within physical education teacher preparation, this approach provides opportunities to develop professional competencies and civic attitudes through practical participation (Maravé-Vivas et al., 2022; Ayllón-Salas, 2024). The conceptual framework places participation in service-learning at the center of the investigation. Students' experiences are examined in relation to three interconnected factors: academic and extracurricular activities, psychological challenges, and institutional or logistical support. These factors provide the context for understanding participants' perceived benefits and challenges, including professional development, academic application, time management, communication, and preparedness. Research on physical education teacher education similarly recognizes the interconnected pedagogical, organizational, and logistical challenges associated with service-learning (Salvador-Garcia et al., 2023). The framework culminates in the development of a proposed service-learning intervention program derived from students' experiences and recommendations. It provides a structured basis for understanding how participation and contextual factors inform practical improvements in service-learning implementation.

This study primarily aligns with SDG 4 – Quality Education, particularly through its focus on experiential learning, effective teacher preparation, and the development of professional competencies among pre-service Physical and Health Education teachers. By examining students' experiences and identifying opportunities for improving service-learning implementation, the research may contribute to more inclusive, relevant, and sustainable educational practices (Maravé-Vivas et al., 2022; Ayllón-Salas, 2024). The study also supports SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth, particularly its emphasis on developing work-relevant competencies. Service-learning offers opportunities to strengthen communication, adaptability, teamwork, and professional readiness, which are valuable for students transitioning into their future teaching careers (Sánchez-Jiménez et al., 2025). Furthermore, the study relates to SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals through the importance of collaboration among students, faculty members, institutional organizers, and community stakeholders. Zainuri and Huda (2023) emphasized the value of cooperative teamwork, shared responsibility, and community engagement in sustaining service-learning initiatives. Overall, the study

contributes to educational, socio-economic, community, and institutional sustainability by providing evidence-informed recommendations for strengthening student engagement, professional preparation, and the long-term implementation of service-learning activities. These contributions represent the study's potential practical implications rather than directly measured SDG outcomes.

2. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study utilized a qualitative research design employing a phenomenological approach to understand how pre-service Physical and Health Education teachers perceived and interpreted their service-learning experiences. This approach enabled an in-depth exploration of participants' academic, personal, and professional development, including the benefits and challenges encountered during service-learning activities. Emphasis was placed on understanding shared experiences and identifying meaningful themes from participants' narratives rather than measuring numerical outcomes.

Research Locale or Study Setting

The study was conducted at Philippine Normal University, located along Taft Avenue, Manila, Philippines. It focused on service-learning activities facilitated by the Institute of Creative Expressions and Human Movement Education (ICEHME), particularly those involving Bachelor in Physical and Health Education (BPHED) students. These activities provided opportunities for students to apply academic knowledge, develop practical competencies, and participate in institutional and community-related services.

Participants or Data Sources

The study involved 24 fourth year BPHED students selected through purposive sampling. Participants were required to be officially enrolled in the program, have participated in at least three ICHEME-organized service-learning activities, and be willing to share their experiences voluntarily. Potential participants were identified with assistance from institute coordinators and faculty members. Selection considered their relevant experiences, availability, and willingness to participate, ensuring that the collected narratives directly addressed the study's objectives.

Research Instruments or Materials

A researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide served as the primary data collection instrument. It consisted of open-ended questions examining students' service-learning experiences, perceived academic and professional benefits, challenges involving time management, resources, and unclear expectations, and recommendations for improving implementation. The instrument was validated by ICEHME faculty members to establish its clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives. Interviews were conducted in English or Filipino according to participants' preferences and were audio-recorded with their consent.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers initially secured institutional approval from the ICEHME office and the college research coordinator, followed by ethical clearance. Eligible participants were identified through purposive sampling and invited through messaging platforms. Each participant received information about the study, confidentiality safeguards, and voluntary participation before providing informed consent. Semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 10–15 minutes were conducted face-to-face or online, depending on participants' availability and preference. With their permission, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Participants

were allowed to review their transcripts and provide corrections or clarifications to ensure accurate documentation of their experiences. The collected information was subsequently organized, anonymized, and securely stored for analysis.

Data Analysis

The study employed thematic analysis to examine the qualitative data obtained from participants' interviews. Transcribed responses were systematically reviewed, organized, and coded to identify recurring patterns and meaningful themes related to the perceived benefits, effectiveness, and challenges of service-learning participation. The analysis also examined participants' recommendations for improving implementation. These themes were interpreted in relation to the research objectives to develop an understanding of students' experiences and provide a basis for the proposed service-learning intervention program.

Ethical Consideration

The study adhered to research ethics requirements before data collection. Participants were informed of the research objectives, procedures, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality measures, and their right to decline or withdraw without consequences. Written informed consent was obtained, including permission for audio recording. To protect participants' identities, pseudonyms were used, and personal information was accessible only to the researchers. Interview recordings, transcripts, and consent forms were securely stored and designated for appropriate disposal after study completion. Interviews were conducted respectfully, participants could decline uncomfortable questions, and all findings were reported accurately without deception or intentional manipulation.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Perceived Benefits of Service-Learning on Academic and Extracurricular Participation

3.1.1 Personal and Professional Growth

Personal and professional growth emerged as the most frequently reported benefit, with a thematic frequency of 17. Participants described increased self-confidence, improved communication and interpersonal skills, and greater personal development through service-learning participation. Their experiences provided opportunities to perform responsibilities beyond classroom instruction and develop competencies relevant to future professional roles. These findings are consistent with Lambert et al. (2022), who examined the development of professional competencies through service-learning. Similarly, Egan et al. (2023) found that service-learning provided pre-service physical education teachers with practical experiences that supported leadership development and professional confidence. Light et al. (2023) also reported perceived improvements in self-efficacy, interpersonal skills, and career confidence among college students participating in community-based educational activities. These studies support the participants' perceptions that service-learning can complement professional preparation.

3.1.2 Academic Learning and Practical Skill Application

Academic and skill application recorded a thematic frequency of 14. Participants reported that service-learning enabled them to apply classroom knowledge in practical situations, strengthen their understanding of academic concepts, and develop skills relevant to their educational preparation. They perceived these experiences as beneficial to their academic learning and ability to perform assigned responsibilities. Maravé-Vivas et al. (2022) demonstrated the relevance of service-learning in physical education teacher education, particularly in developing

competencies associated with civic and experiential learning. Similarly, Maravé-Vivas et al. (2023) found that service-learning provided future teachers with opportunities to apply educational knowledge in practical settings and develop competencies related to inclusive education. However, Filges et al. (2022) reported that evidence concerning the effects of service-learning on academic achievement in basic education remained inconclusive. Accordingly, the present findings reflect participants' perceived academic benefits rather than objectively measured improvements in academic performance.

3.1.3 Real-World Readiness and Classroom Preparedness

Real-world readiness and classroom preparedness obtained a thematic frequency of 10. Participants indicated that service-learning exposed them to practical responsibilities, event management, and situations resembling professional teaching environments. These experiences reportedly strengthened their problem-solving abilities, adaptability, and confidence in handling responsibilities outside conventional classroom activities. Shaver (2022) examined how international service-learning experiences contributed to graduates' perceived personal, professional, and civic readiness. Likewise, Chambers and Lavery (2022) found that pre-service teachers considered service-learning relevant to their professional and personal preparation. Egan et al. (2023) further demonstrated how practical service-learning experiences can develop leadership skills among future physical education teachers. These findings suggest that authentic experiences may support professional preparedness, although the present study did not independently assess participants' actual teaching performance.

3.1.4 Collaboration and Teamwork

Collaboration and teamwork registered a thematic frequency of nine. Participants emphasized the importance of cooperation, shared responsibilities, and effective communication when completing service-learning activities. Working with peers and other individuals enabled them to coordinate tasks, address challenges collectively, and strengthen interpersonal relationships. Zainuri and Huda (2023) emphasized the importance of cooperative teamwork, shared responsibility, and experiential learning in sustaining community service initiatives. Similarly, Lobo-de-Diego et al. (2024) identified opportunities for interpersonal development, social engagement, and university-community interaction through physical education service-learning. These findings reinforce the importance of collaboration as a component of students' professional and social development.

3.2 Challenges Encountered During Service-Learning Participation

3.2.1 Unclear Instructions and Task Expectations

Unclear instructions emerged as the most frequently identified challenge, with a thematic frequency of 15. Participants reported receiving last-minute instructions, insufficient task descriptions, and unclear assignments during service-learning activities. These circumstances resulted in confusion, disrupted preparation, and difficulties performing assigned duties effectively. Some participants indicated that specific responsibilities were communicated only on the day of an event. Salvador-Garcia et al. (2023) identified interconnected organizational, pedagogical, and logistical challenges in implementing service-learning within physical education teacher education. Similarly, Abenir et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of active communication and collaborative coordination in addressing service-learning implementation

barriers. The present findings indicate that unclear task expectations constitute an important organizational concern requiring more systematic communication and preparation.

3.2.2 Physical Strain and Extended Service Hours

Physical strain recorded a thematic frequency of six. Participants reported exhaustion, inadequate rest, and sleep deprivation associated with prolonged service hours and late-night activities. These experiences affected their perceived ability to manage academic responsibilities and personal well-being. Some participants described remaining at institutional events until the early morning despite having other academic obligations. These experiences reflect the complexity of service-learning implementation discussed by Salvador-Garcia et al. (2023), particularly the challenges associated with working conditions, logistical arrangements, and participant responsibilities. The findings emphasize the need to consider students' physical capacity and academic commitments when organizing service-learning activities. However, the study documented self-reported experiences and did not independently measure physical fatigue or health outcomes.

3.2.3 Financial Constraints

Financial constraints obtained a thematic frequency of five. Participants described difficulties covering transportation, meals, and other expenses associated with service-learning activities. These concerns were particularly evident when assignments were unpaid or communicated with limited preparation time. Participants also reported difficulties balancing financial limitations with academic and service responsibilities. Kahl, Atay, and Amundson (2022) emphasized the importance of addressing inequities and privilege within service-learning arrangements. Similarly, Bitton (2025) identified financial security, transportation, time, and personal responsibilities as barriers affecting students' access to community service opportunities. These studies highlight the importance of considering students' socioeconomic circumstances when planning service-learning activities to support more equitable participation.

3.2.4 Inadequate Preparation and Training

Inadequate preparation and training registered a thematic frequency of three. Participants reported receiving insufficient orientation, guidance, or prior briefing before undertaking assigned responsibilities. Some indicated that instructions were provided only during the activity itself, resulting in uncertainty regarding their roles and expected performance. Chambers and Lavery (2022) demonstrated that pre-service teachers' service-learning experiences involve developmental opportunities alongside challenges requiring appropriate preparation and support. Salvador-Garcia et al. (2023) also highlighted the importance of addressing pedagogical and organizational difficulties in service-learning implementation. These findings suggest that adequate orientation and clearly defined responsibilities are relevant to improving participants' preparedness and confidence.

3.3 Participants' Recommendations for Improving Service-Learning Implementation

3.3.1 Early Planning and Scheduling

Early planning and scheduling emerged as the most frequently recommended improvement, with a thematic frequency of 17. Participants requested advance announcements, organized activity schedules, and alignment with academic calendars. They emphasized that early notification would allow them to prepare for assigned responsibilities and minimize conflicts

between academic requirements and service-learning participation. Abenir et al. (2024) identified time management and coordination difficulties as important barriers to effective service-learning engagement in the Philippine context. Similarly, Adarlo et al. (2022) emphasized institutional readiness and organizational commitment in establishing sustainable service-learning practices. These findings support the importance of structured scheduling and institutional planning in addressing participants' concerns.

3.3.2 Clear Instructions and Orientation

Clear instructions and orientation recorded a thematic frequency of 16. Participants recommended conducting briefings before service-learning activities to explain specific tasks, responsibilities, and expectations. They emphasized that receiving adequate guidance in advance would improve their preparedness and reduce uncertainty during assigned activities. Salvador-Garcia et al. (2023) identified pedagogical and organizational challenges that require attention when implementing service-learning programs. Furthermore, Egan et al. (2023) demonstrated the importance of structured practical experiences in developing pre-service teachers' professional competencies. These studies provide support for improving instructional guidance and preparation, consistent with the participants' recommendations.

3.3.3 Communication and Coordination

Communication and coordination registered a thematic frequency of 12. Participants recommended improving communication among faculty members, event organizers, facilitators, and students. They emphasized the need for timely announcements, consistent instructions, and clear communication channels to prevent misunderstandings and facilitate the effective completion of service-learning responsibilities. Abenir et al. (2024) identified collaborative coordination, active communication, responsiveness, and engagement as important conditions supporting service-learning partnerships. Similarly, Adarlo et al. (2022) highlighted institutional commitment and organizational readiness in strengthening service-learning implementation. These studies reinforce the participants' recommendation for coordinated communication and clearly established responsibilities.

3.3.4 Incentives and Recognition

Incentives and recognition obtained a thematic frequency of 11. Participants suggested providing meals, small tokens, certificates, or academic incentives to acknowledge their contributions. They perceived these forms of recognition as possible sources of motivation and encouragement, particularly when service-learning activities required substantial time and personal resources. Bitton (2025) emphasized the importance of addressing practical barriers that limit students' access to community service opportunities. Kahl et al. (2022) likewise highlighted the need to consider equity in service-learning arrangements. While these studies do not directly establish the effectiveness of incentives, they support attention to the conditions under which students participate. The present findings reflect participants' expressed preferences for recognition and assistance rather than evidence that particular incentives would necessarily increase participation.

3.4 Service-Learning Intervention Program

3.4.1 Service-Learning Passport for the 40-Hour Requirement

The manuscript presents a Service-Learning Passport as an intervention for documenting pre-service Physical and Health Education teachers' participation in the institute's 40-hour service-learning requirement. Each student was issued a passport containing essential information about service-learning activities, including the event, schedule, rendered hours, and confirmation through the signature of the class president or event head. The passport provided a structured mechanism for recording completed activities and monitoring accumulated service hours. Lin et al. (2025) examined learning outcomes associated with mandatory academic service-learning and found that civic learning was particularly relevant to continued civic engagement after graduation. This underscores the importance of considering educational outcomes alongside participation requirements. In the present study, the Service-Learning Passport addresses activity documentation and monitoring; however, its effectiveness in improving academic learning, professional competencies, or service-learning satisfaction was not independently evaluated. The intervention therefore represents a practical institutional response to participants' reported experiences and recommendations.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that service-learning provides meaningful opportunities for the personal, academic, and professional development of pre-service Physical and Health Education teachers at Philippine Normal University. Participants perceived improvements in self-confidence, communication, teamwork, practical skill application, and readiness for future teaching responsibilities. However, these benefits were accompanied by challenges involving unclear instructions, scheduling conflicts, physical exhaustion, financial constraints, and inadequate preparation. These experiences highlight the importance of institutional planning, communication, and support in facilitating meaningful service-learning participation. Students' recommendations emphasized early scheduling, clear task assignments, appropriate orientation, and recognition of their contributions. The Service-Learning Passport provides a structured means of documenting participation in the 40-hour service requirement, although its effectiveness was not independently evaluated. Overall, the findings demonstrate that service-learning is perceived as a valuable component of teacher preparation, while its implementation requires improved coordination and support to address students' academic and personal responsibilities.

Based on the findings, University administrators should prioritize early planning and establish a centralized scheduling system that aligns service-learning activities with academic calendars to minimize conflicts and last-minute assignments. Faculty members and activity organizers should provide clear guidelines, defined responsibilities, advance announcements, and structured orientations before each activity. Time management workshops, peer mentoring, and faculty guidance should be strengthened to help students balance academic and service-learning commitments. Reflective journals and debriefing sessions should also be integrated to connect practical experiences with academic learning. Administrators should consider appropriate logistical assistance, reasonable activity schedules, and recognition mechanisms, including certificates and other available incentives, to address students' reported concerns. The Service-Learning Passport should be maintained as a documentation and monitoring tool for the 40-hour requirement, with recorded activities linked to meaningful learning experiences. These measures may improve organizational efficiency, student preparedness, and the overall delivery of service-learning activities.

This study was limited to 24 fourth year Bachelor in Physical and Health Education students from Philippine Normal University in Manila who had participated in service-learning activities. Purposive sampling excluded students who were inactive or not enrolled during data collection, restricting the transferability of the findings to other student populations and educational settings. The qualitative phenomenological approach relied on participants' interview-based perceptions rather than independently measured academic or professional outcomes. The study also acknowledged limitations in the availability of relevant local and international literature. Future studies may involve broader samples, other academic disciplines, and multiple universities to examine service-learning experiences across different institutional contexts.

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