
Original Research Article

Physical Education Instructors' Lived Experiences in Promoting Health Among Students Amid Personal Lifestyle Contradictions

Abnir T. Arilin¹, Alprince King A. Biri^{2*}, Nicole Christianne Vidal³, Fhadzmar S. Dammang⁴, Alkathani S. Tackong⁴, Jillamae S. Verano⁵

¹ Universidad de Zamboanga, Philippines.

² Stratworks Research Inc., Philippines.

³ Western Mindanao State University, Philippines.

⁴ Sulu State University, Philippines.

⁵ Father Saturnino Urios University, Philippines.

ORCID:  **ATA** 0009-0001-4027-8897¹,  **AKAB** 0000-0001-7569-6872²

Correspondence should be addressed to Alprince King A. Biri: alprincekingabdulabiri@gmail.com

Abstract: Physical education instructors are commonly expected to serve as visible advocates of health, fitness, and wellness within educational settings. However, little is known about how these educators navigate situations where their personal lifestyle realities conflict with the health ideals they are expected to promote. This study explored the lived experiences of physical education instructors in promoting health and wellness amid personal lifestyle incongruence and examined how these contradictions influenced their perceptions of professional credibility, wellness advocacy, and teaching practice. Guided by Cognitive Dissonance Theory, Role Theory, and Embodiment Theory, the study employed a descriptive qualitative research design. Twenty physical education instructors from selected universities across Mindanao participated in semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed that participants experienced questioned professional credibility, emotional pressure and self-doubt, institutional workload strain, and concerns regarding student and colleague judgment. These experiences often affected instructional confidence and created challenges in maintaining authentic wellness advocacy. Despite these difficulties, participants demonstrated resilience by redefining health advocacy beyond physical appearance and embracing more holistic, realistic, and compassionate understandings of wellness. The findings further revealed that professional credibility was increasingly grounded in authenticity, empathy, and meaningful teacher-student relationships rather than strict conformity to idealized fitness standards.

Keywords: Physical Education Instructors, Health Advocacy, Lifestyle Contradictions, Professional Credibility, Wellness Promotion

Introduction

Physical education has long been regarded as a critical component of school-based health promotion due to its role in shaping students' physical activity behaviors, wellness attitudes, and lifelong health practices. As health advocacy becomes increasingly emphasized within educational settings, physical education instructors are likewise expected to embody the principles of healthy living they promote to students. Recent international scholarship increasingly frames physical education teachers as embodied representatives of health and wellness rather than mere instructors of physical activity. Studies have shown that teachers who actively engage in health-promoting behaviors demonstrate stronger wellness advocacy and instructional effectiveness, although inconsistencies between professional expectations and personal lifestyle practices remain evident (Örs, 2024; Marques et al., 2023). Research further suggests that educators' beliefs, lived experiences, health literacy, and personal attitudes toward physical activity significantly influence the authenticity and credibility of health promotion within schools (Gomes et al., 2023; Sukys, Trinkuniene, & Tilindiene, 2024). Moreover, physical education teachers continuously negotiate competing understandings of health shaped by curriculum expectations, social discourses, and body image ideals (Korp et al., 2023). Existing studies also reveal that teachers' physical activity levels, wellness conditions, and lifestyle behaviors directly affect teaching performance, instructional quality, and professional legitimacy, particularly when educators are expected to model healthy living despite experiencing stress, sedentary routines, or inconsistent health practices themselves (Alhazmi et al., 2025; Vera, 2024). Consequently, scholars argue that health promotion in physical education has become closely intertwined with bodily authenticity, professional identity, and institutional expectations (Medina-Villanueva, 2025; Röger-Offergeld et al., 2025).

Contemporary literature further demonstrates that health advocacy in physical education extends beyond traditional pedagogy and is increasingly shaped by technological, relational, and sociocultural expectations. Digital health-promotion interventions, including fitness applications and online physical education platforms, remain dependent on teachers' capacity to authentically model healthy behaviors despite technologically mediated environments (Knoke, Woll, & Wagner, 2024). Similarly, studies on physical education pedagogy emphasize that wellness instruction involves relational teaching, emotional support, behavioral modeling, and the creation of meaningful wellness-oriented learning experiences (Ryan-Jean, 2022; Froiland, 2015). However, these expectations also intensify pressures placed upon physical educators to embody idealized standards of fitness and bodily discipline. Yager et al. (2019) found that pre-service teachers frequently associated professional credibility in health and physical education with slim and athletic appearances, while Lux and McCullick (2009) noted that PE teachers are widely perceived as institutional role models who are expected to consistently demonstrate active and healthy lifestyles. Supporting this, Fontana et al. (2013) revealed significant anti-fat biases among physical education teachers and majors, suggesting that bodily appearance and fitness are

often treated as indicators of instructional competence and legitimacy within physical education settings.

International research likewise highlights how broader sociocultural and technological discourses reinforce surveillance-oriented expectations surrounding health advocacy and bodily regulation in physical education. Williamson (2015) argued that contemporary health education has become increasingly “datafied” through wearable technologies, biometric monitoring, and personal analytics that encourage constant self-surveillance, bodily optimization, and behavioral accountability among educators and students. In addition, Green (2015) emphasized that participation in sports and physical activity is strongly shaped by social and institutional forces that normalize active lifestyles as symbols of discipline, success, and responsible citizenship. Collectively, these studies suggest that physical education instructors operate within highly regulated professional cultures where wellness advocacy, bodily representation, and physical activity are socially monitored and institutionally reinforced. As a result, physical education teachers may experience tensions when their personal lifestyle realities fail to align with idealized expectations of health, fitness, and professional authenticity.

Philippine literature similarly positions physical education instructors as central advocates of health, wellness, and lifelong physical activity within increasingly complex and demanding educational environments. Existing local studies revealed that teachers’ physical, emotional, and mental well-being significantly influence instructional effectiveness, classroom management, student engagement, and the overall quality of health promotion delivered in schools (Vera & Calixtro, 2023). Research further demonstrated that instructional competence, pedagogical adaptability, technological proficiency, and professional preparedness strongly shape students’ motivation and perceptions toward physical activity and wellness, even as many educators continue to face evolving educational demands, institutional pressures, and limited specialized preparation in physical education (Dato, 2025; Dantes, 2024; Magallanes et al., 2024). Moreover, studies emphasized that exercise adherence, wellness participation, and health advocacy among physical education teachers are significantly influenced by intrinsic motivation, institutional support, faculty readiness, and professional norms surrounding physical activity and discipline (Lorica & Ariza, 2026; Pineda et al., 2024; Tanucan et al., 2023). These findings collectively suggest that physical education instructors are increasingly expected to embody healthy lifestyles while simultaneously adapting to technologically mediated learning environments and maintaining professional credibility within schools.

Recent Philippine studies further reveal that physical education instructors continuously negotiate institutional expectations, occupational pressures, and personal wellness realities while sustaining their role as health advocates. Research found that flexible learning modalities, technological adaptation, burnout, occupational stress, workload pressures, and work-life imbalance negatively affect teachers’ ability to maintain healthy behaviors and professional wellness despite recognizing the importance of physical activity and health promotion (Cadiente et al., 2022; Relacion, 2023). Local studies also highlighted that insufficient preparation, inadequate training, limited institutional support,

administrative constraints, and gaps in injury preparedness continue to complicate effective physical education instruction and teachers' confidence in promoting health-related learning experiences (Ligawad, 2022; Lobo & Tolentino, 2022). Collectively, these studies indicate that physical education instructors in the Philippine context experience ongoing tensions between professional expectations of health advocacy and the institutional, personal, and occupational realities that shape their lived experiences as educators.

Despite the growing body of international and Philippine literature on health promotion, wellness advocacy, and physical education pedagogy, existing studies remain largely focused on instructional competence, behavioral outcomes, technological adaptation, and teachers' physical wellness conditions. While previous research has acknowledged the pressures experienced by physical education instructors in embodying healthy lifestyles, limited studies have explored how educators themselves meaningfully experience, negotiate, and interpret the contradictions between their professional role as health advocates and their personal lifestyle realities. Moreover, existing local studies predominantly employ descriptive and correlational approaches, leaving the lived, emotional, and identity-related dimensions of lifestyle incongruence among physical education instructors insufficiently examined. The present study sought to address this gap by (1) exploring the lived experiences of physical education instructors in promoting health and wellness amid personal lifestyle incongruence and (2) examining how these contradictions influence their perceptions of professional credibility, wellness advocacy, and teaching practice within the Philippine educational context.

The present study is anchored on Cognitive Dissonance Theory developed by Festinger (1957), which explains the psychological tension experienced when individuals' behaviors conflict with their beliefs, values, and professional roles; Role Theory advanced by Linton (1936) and further developed by Merton (1957), which emphasizes the social and institutional expectations attached to professional identities; and Embodiment Theory, rooted in the phenomenological works of Merleau-Ponty (1962), which highlights how bodily appearance and personal practices shape credibility, identity, and social perception. Collectively, these theories explain how physical education instructors may experience tensions between their professional responsibility to advocate health and their personal lifestyle realities. Furthermore, these theoretical perspectives provide a framework for understanding how lifestyle incongruence may influence physical education instructors' perceptions of professional credibility, wellness advocacy, and teaching practice.

Methodology

Research Design

A descriptive qualitative research design was used to explore the lived experiences of physical education instructors in promoting health and wellness amid personal lifestyle incongruence. Descriptive qualitative research is appropriate when the objective is to obtain rich and detailed accounts of participants' perspectives, meanings, and experiences concerning a particular phenomenon. The design enabled the researchers to gain a deeper understanding of how physical education instructors perceive and navigate the tensions

between their professional role as health advocates and their personal lifestyle realities. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative inquiry is particularly useful in examining socially and personally constructed experiences within natural settings.

Locale of the Study

The study was conducted among selected universities in Mindanao. The inclusion of institutions from different geographical regions of Mindanao allowed the researchers to gather diverse perspectives and experiences from physical education instructors working within varying educational and sociocultural contexts. The selected universities offered physical education and health-related courses, making them appropriate settings for investigating issues related to health advocacy, professional credibility, and lifestyle incongruence among physical education instructors.

Population and Sampling

The participants of the study consisted of twenty (20) physical education instructors from selected universities in the Philippines. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique commonly used in qualitative research to identify information-rich individuals who possess direct experience relevant to the phenomenon being investigated (Palinkas et al., 2015). To ensure diversity of perspectives, participants varied in terms of age, sex, and years of teaching experience. Inclusion criteria required participants to be currently employed as physical education instructors, possess at least one year of teaching experience, actively teach fitness-, wellness-, or health-related courses, and self-identify as experiencing challenges or perceived incongruence between their professional role as health advocates and their personal lifestyle practices or physical fitness conditions.

Research Instrument

Data were gathered using a researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide designed to elicit detailed narratives regarding participants' experiences in promoting health and wellness amid personal lifestyle contradictions. The instrument consisted of open-ended questions and probing questions aligned with the objectives of the study. To establish content validity, the interview guide was reviewed and evaluated by experts in qualitative research, educational research, and physical education. Revisions were incorporated based on their recommendations. The trustworthiness of the instrument was further strengthened through pilot testing, peer debriefing, and member checking procedures to ensure clarity, credibility, and consistency of the interview process.

Data Collection Procedure

First, formal permission was secured from the administrators of the participating universities. Eligible participants were identified and invited to participate in the study. Upon obtaining informed consent, face-to-face interviews were conducted using the validated semi-structured interview guide. Then, interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission and subsequently transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy of data. Finally, the researchers then organized, reviewed, and prepared the transcripts for coding

and thematic analysis. Throughout the data collection process, participants were encouraged to openly share their experiences while maintaining voluntary participation.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This qualitative analytical approach involves systematically identifying, organizing, and interpreting recurring patterns and themes within textual data. Interview transcripts were repeatedly reviewed, coded, categorized, and synthesized to generate meaningful themes that reflected participants' lived experiences. Thematic analysis enabled the researchers to examine how personal lifestyle contradictions influenced physical education instructors' professional credibility, wellness advocacy, and teaching practices.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical principles governing research involving human participants. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained through the use of pseudonyms and secure data storage procedures. Ethical practices were guided by the provisions of the Data Privacy Act of 2012, which safeguards the privacy and confidentiality of personal information, as well as the ethical standards established by the Philippine Health Research Ethics Board for research involving human participants. These measures ensured the protection of participants' rights, welfare, and dignity throughout the conduct of the study.

RESULTS

This section presents the findings related to the first research objective, *which explored the lived experiences of physical education instructors in promoting health and wellness amid personal lifestyle contradictions*.

Theme 1: Questioned Professional Credibility

A dominant theme that emerged from the participants' narratives was the struggle to maintain professional credibility while experiencing perceived inconsistencies between their role as health advocates and their personal physical conditions or lifestyle practices. Out of the twenty (20) participants, fourteen (14) expressed feelings of self-consciousness, internal pressure, or perceived judgment from students and colleagues regarding their physical appearance, fitness level, or lifestyle behaviors. Participants described how physical education instructors are often expected to visibly embody health, discipline, and physical fitness, causing some educators to question their legitimacy in teaching wellness-related concepts when they themselves struggle with weight management, exercise consistency, stress, or unhealthy habits. Despite these experiences, many participants emphasized that their professional competence, pedagogical knowledge, and genuine concern for students remained intact even when their bodies did not align with socially idealized expectations of fitness and wellness.

“There are times I feel super uncomfortable talking about fitness or healthy habits in front of my kids, just because I know they’re looking at my body and judging. You can just feel the hesitation or the silent judgment, especially when you’re trying to teach them about discipline or exercise. I remember this one time, a student jokingly asked me why I was teaching calorie control when I looked so tired and overweight. They were just messing around, so I laughed it off, but honestly, it really hurt.”

(Participant 7)

The findings suggest that physical education instructors experience ongoing tensions between professional expectations of health advocacy and their lived bodily realities, reflecting the concept of lifestyle incongruence emphasized in previous literature. Similar studies noted that physical educators are frequently viewed as embodied representatives of wellness, causing bodily appearance and lifestyle behaviors to become linked to perceptions of instructional authenticity and professional legitimacy (Yager et al., 2019; Lux & McCullick, 2009; Fontana et al., 2013). This finding also supports Cognitive Dissonance Theory, which explains the psychological discomfort experienced when professional expectations conflict with personal realities, as well as Embodiment Theory, which highlights how bodily representation influences social credibility and identity construction.

Theme 2: Emotional Pressure and Self-Doubt

Another prominent theme that emerged from the participants’ narratives was the emotional pressure associated with continuously promoting health and wellness while personally struggling with stress, fatigue, unhealthy routines, or inconsistent self-care practices. Twelve (12) out of the twenty (20) participants described feelings of guilt, frustration, and self-doubt whenever they discussed topics related to fitness, exercise discipline, or healthy living in class. Several participants shared that although they remained committed to encouraging students to become physically active, they often felt emotionally conflicted because they themselves struggled to consistently practice the behaviors they advocated. Participants further revealed that institutional expectations, workload pressures, and personal responsibilities frequently limited their ability to maintain healthy routines, contributing to feelings of inadequacy as physical education instructors.

“Honestly, there are moments when I feel like a hypocrite while teaching wellness topics because I know I am also struggling personally. I teach students about exercise consistency, proper rest, stress management, and healthy eating, but there are days when I barely sleep because of paperwork and deadlines... it becomes emotionally draining because students see you as someone who should already have everything balanced and healthy.”

(Participant 1)

The findings indicate that physical education instructors experience emotional dissonance when professional expectations of health advocacy conflict with their personal wellness realities. Similar studies reported that workload pressures, burnout, occupational

stress, and work-life imbalance negatively affect teachers' ability to sustain healthy lifestyle behaviors despite recognizing the importance of wellness promotion (Relacion, 2023).

Theme 3: Coping Through Professional Commitment

Despite experiencing personal struggles and lifestyle inconsistencies, many participants emphasized their continued commitment to promoting health and wellness among students. Eleven (11) out of the twenty (20) participants shared that they coped with feelings of pressure and perceived incongruence by focusing on their responsibility as educators, mentors, and sources of encouragement for students. Rather than viewing themselves as "perfect models" of fitness, participants described health advocacy as a continuous and realistic process involving personal growth, self-awareness, and resilience. Several instructors also explained that their own struggles with stress, weight management, and unhealthy routines made them more empathetic and understanding toward students experiencing similar challenges.

"Over time, I realized that being a PE instructor does not mean you always have to look perfect or have everything figured out physically. I also go through stress, exhaustion, and unhealthy phases, but I still try my best to encourage students to take care of themselves because I know how difficult it is." (Participant 4)

The findings suggest that physical education instructors cope with lifestyle incongruence by redefining health advocacy beyond physical appearance and idealized standards of fitness. This supports studies emphasizing that wellness instruction involves relational teaching, emotional support, authenticity, and meaningful engagement rather than purely bodily performance (Ryan-Jean, 2022; Froiland, 2015). The findings also align with Role Theory and Embodiment Theory, as participants negotiated institutional expectations while reconstructing their professional identities through empathy, authenticity, and lived experience.

Theme 4: Institutional Expectations and Workload Strain

Another recurring theme that emerged from the participants' responses was the difficulty of sustaining healthy lifestyle practices due to institutional demands, excessive workload, and professional responsibilities. Thirteen (13) out of the twenty (20) participants shared that administrative tasks, documentation requirements, extended teaching hours, and multiple institutional obligations significantly affected their ability to maintain regular exercise, healthy eating habits, and adequate rest. Participants explained that although they continuously encouraged students to prioritize wellness and physical activity, their own work conditions often made consistent self-care difficult. Several instructors also described feeling physically and emotionally exhausted from balancing instructional responsibilities alongside institutional expectations for productivity and performance.

"I teach the whole day, attend meetings after classes, and still need to finish reports at home. By the time I get home, I no longer have the energy to work

out or even prepare healthy meals. ...also, the pressure becomes frustrating because aside from teaching, the institution also expects us to perform well administratively and professionally, which eventually affects our own physical and emotional well-being.” (Participant 15)

The findings indicate that institutional and occupational pressures significantly contribute to the lifestyle incongruence experienced by physical education instructors. Similar studies found that workload demands, burnout, technological adaptation, and administrative responsibilities negatively affect teachers’ wellness behaviors and work-life balance (Cadiente et al., 2022). The findings further support Role Theory, which explains how conflicting professional expectations may create role strain and difficulty in fulfilling socially prescribed responsibilities.

Theme 5: Redefining Health Advocacy

A final theme that emerged from the participants’ narratives was the gradual redefinition of health advocacy from rigid physical standards toward more holistic, realistic, and compassionate understandings of wellness. Ten (10) out of the twenty (20) participants expressed that their experiences with stress, body image concerns, inconsistent routines, and personal struggles changed the way they approached health education and wellness promotion. Rather than emphasizing physical appearance or ideal fitness standards alone, participants highlighted the importance of balance, mental well-being, self-acceptance, and sustainable lifestyle practices when teaching students. Several instructors shared that their personal struggles allowed them to communicate health concepts more honestly and empathetically, making their teaching more relatable and meaningful to learners.

“Before, I used to think that being an effective PE teacher meant always looking athletic, energetic, and physically fit. Now, when I teach wellness, I no longer focus only on having the perfect body or following strict routines. I emphasize balance, mental health, self-discipline, and realistic progress because I know many students are also struggling silently.” (Participant 19)

The findings suggest that physical education instructors increasingly view health advocacy as a multidimensional and humanized process rather than a purely appearance-based standard of credibility. This supports previous literature emphasizing that wellness instruction involves authenticity, relational understanding, and meaningful engagement rather than idealized bodily performance alone (Korp et al., 2023; Ryan-Jean, 2022; Froiland, 15). The findings likewise align with Embodiment Theory by demonstrating how participants reconstructed professional identity beyond socially imposed bodily ideals.

This section presents the findings related to the second research question, *which examined how personal lifestyle contradictions influence physical education instructors’ perceptions of professional credibility, wellness advocacy, and teaching practice.*

Theme 1: Fear of Students' and Colleagues' Judgment

A recurring theme that emerged from the participants' experiences was the fear of being judged by students and fellow educators because of perceived inconsistencies between their professional role and personal physical condition. Sixteen (16) out of the twenty (20) participants admitted becoming highly self-conscious whenever their appearance, body weight, or lifestyle habits became noticeable within school environments. Participants shared that physical education instructors are often subjected to stronger scrutiny compared to teachers from other disciplines because they are expected to visibly represent fitness, discipline, and healthy living. Several instructors revealed that even subtle comments, jokes, comparisons, or nonverbal reactions from students and colleagues affected their confidence and heightened feelings of embarrassment, insecurity, and professional pressure.

"There were moments when students would make side comments about my weight or compare me to younger instructors who looked more athletic... even some colleagues would jokingly say things like, 'You should exercise more because you teach PE.' They may not mean harm, but repeated comments like that slowly affect your confidence. I became very conscious whenever I demonstrated exercises or discussed topics about fitness because I felt like people were questioning my credibility silently." (Participant 11)

The participants' narratives reveal how external judgment and social scrutiny significantly shape professional self-perception among physical education instructors. Similar studies found that physical educators are frequently associated with idealized standards of bodily fitness and health, causing physical appearance to become linked with assumptions regarding competence and legitimacy (Lux & McCullick, 2009; Yager et al., 2019). Likewise, Fontana et al. (2013) observed that anti-fat biases within physical education cultures contribute to negative perceptions toward educators who do not conform to socially accepted body ideals. Examined through Embodiment Theory and Role Theory, these experiences demonstrate how bodily appearance and institutional expectations intersect in shaping professional identity, emotional well-being, and perceived instructional credibility within physical education settings.

Theme 2: Reduced Instructional Confidence

Another theme that emerged from the participants' experiences was the gradual decline in instructional confidence caused by perceived lifestyle incongruence and fear of negative judgment from students and colleagues. Thirteen (13) out of the twenty (20) participants admitted that personal struggles related to body image, inconsistent wellness practices, or physical exhaustion affected the way they delivered lessons, demonstrated activities, and interacted during wellness discussions. Several instructors explained that they occasionally avoided certain health-related topics or felt hesitant demonstrating physical activities because they feared being perceived as "unqualified" or "inauthentic" due to their appearance or personal lifestyle realities. Participants further shared that

societal expectations surrounding physical education often intensified feelings of insecurity and professional self-consciousness.

“... I know I am knowledgeable about the subject, sometimes when your confidence weakens because you feel like people expect PE teachers to always look energetic, athletic, and perfectly healthy. What affected me most was not really the workload but the feeling that your body becomes part of how people measure your competence as an educator.” (Participant 6)

The participants' accounts reveal how bodily expectations and perceived lifestyle contradictions may influence instructional confidence and professional self-perception among physical education instructors. Comparable studies noted that PE teachers frequently experience pressures related to professional image, bodily legitimacy, and wellness expectations within educational environments (Lux & McCullick, 2009; Yager et al., 2019). In addition, Fontana et al. (2013) highlighted how anti-fat bias within physical education contexts may contribute to judgments regarding competence and professional suitability. Interpreted through Cognitive Dissonance Theory, these experiences reflect the discomfort that arises when professional expectations conflict with personal realities and self-perceptions.

Theme 3: Struggles with Authentic Advocacy

Another recurring theme centered on the difficulty of promoting health and wellness authentically while personally struggling to maintain consistent healthy behaviors. Ten (10) out of the twenty (20) participants shared that their lifestyle contradictions sometimes created feelings of discomfort, hesitation, or emotional conflict when advocating wellness practices to students. Participants explained that teaching concepts such as exercise discipline, balanced nutrition, stress management, and healthy living became emotionally challenging whenever they felt unable to fully practice these behaviors themselves. Despite this, many instructors emphasized that their struggles also deepened their understanding of students' difficulties, making their approach to health advocacy more compassionate and realistic.

“...I teach about exercise consistency and healthy eating even though I know I skipped workouts for weeks because of exhaustion and stress. Sometimes I ask myself if students still see me as credible when they notice those inconsistencies.” (Participant 14)

The participants' experiences illustrate how personal lifestyle contradictions influence not only professional self-perception but also the manner in which wellness advocacy is communicated within physical education settings. Related studies emphasized that physical education instructors are frequently expected to embody healthy lifestyles and function as visible models of wellness within schools (Sukys, Trinkuniene, & Tilindiene, 2024; Medina-Villanueva, 2025). Likewise, Korp et al. (2023) observed that physical educators continuously negotiate competing understandings of health shaped by social expectations, personal beliefs, and lived experiences. From the perspective of Role Theory,

participants experienced tension between institutional expectations attached to their professional role and the realities of their personal wellness practices.

Theme 4: Maintaining Students' Respect

Another significant theme that emerged from the participants' narratives was the effort to maintain students' respect despite experiencing personal lifestyle contradictions and perceived physical incongruence. Fourteen (14) out of the twenty (20) participants shared that they constantly felt the need to prove their competence, professionalism, and value as educators because they feared that students might associate physical appearance with teaching capability. Participants explained that respect within physical education settings often appeared connected not only to instructional knowledge but also to how closely instructors matched students' expectations of fitness, energy, and physical discipline. As a result, several instructors described becoming more intentional in demonstrating professionalism, preparedness, empathy, and classroom engagement to sustain students' trust and respect despite insecurities regarding their own bodies or wellness struggles.

"I felt pressured to work twice as hard just to maintain students' respect because I knew some of them were already judging me based on my appearance, so I may not look physically fit on their perspective at least they won't say I'm not a good teacher in terms of instruction" (Participant 5)

The participants' experiences indicate that maintaining students' respect within physical education involves continuous negotiation between professional competence and socially constructed expectations surrounding bodily appearance and wellness. Previous studies similarly emphasized that physical education instructors are frequently perceived as visible role models whose bodies become associated with authority, credibility, and professional legitimacy (Yager et al., 2019; Lux & McCullick, 2009). In addition, Ryan-Jean (2022) and Froiland (2015) highlighted that meaningful wellness instruction is strongly influenced by authenticity, relational engagement, and supportive teacher-student relationships rather than physical appearance alone. Through the lens of Role Theory, these narratives demonstrate how participants attempted to preserve instructional authority and students' respect while navigating conflicting expectations surrounding professionalism, wellness advocacy, and bodily representation within physical education settings.

Theme 5: Balancing Advocacy and Reality

A significant theme that emerged from the participants' narratives was the continuous effort to balance professional health advocacy with the realities of personal limitations, stress, and everyday responsibilities. Seven (7) out of the twenty (20) participants explained that while they remained committed to promoting wellness among students, maintaining the same standards within their own lives became increasingly difficult due to workload, family obligations, emotional stress, and physical exhaustion. Participants described feeling caught between institutional expectations to embody healthy living and the practical realities of adulthood and professional life. Many instructors also

shared that these experiences changed their perspective on wellness, making them advocate more sustainable and realistic approaches to health rather than rigid fitness ideals.

“...but eventually, I realized that health is not always about being physically ideal every single day. Sometimes, it is about trying your best despite the fact you’re also struggling internally. That realization helped me become more understanding toward both myself and my students because I know many of them are also struggling to balance wellness with their own realities.” (Participant 2)

These accounts demonstrate how physical education instructors constantly negotiate between professional expectations and lived personal realities while attempting to sustain credibility as wellness advocates. Comparable literature revealed that workload pressures, occupational stress, burnout, and institutional demands frequently affect educators’ ability to maintain healthy routines and consistent wellness behaviors (Relacion, 2023). Moreover, Williamson (2015) noted that contemporary health cultures increasingly reinforce expectations of bodily regulation and self-optimization, particularly within health-related professions. Viewed through Role Theory and Embodiment Theory, participants’ experiences reflect how professional roles and bodily expectations intersect in shaping perceptions of legitimacy, self-worth, and authenticity within physical education settings.

Conclusion

This study explored the lived experiences of physical education instructors in promoting health and wellness amid personal lifestyle incongruence and examined how these contradictions influenced their perceptions of professional credibility, wellness advocacy, and teaching practice. The findings revealed that physical education instructors operate within a professional culture that strongly associates health advocacy with bodily appearance, physical fitness, and visible wellness behaviors. Consequently, many participants experienced questioned credibility, emotional pressure, self-doubt, fear of judgment, and reduced instructional confidence when their personal realities did not align with socially constructed expectations of what a physical education instructor should look like. These experiences demonstrate that health promotion within physical education is not merely a pedagogical responsibility but also an embodied and identity-laden practice shaped by institutional, social, and interpersonal expectations.

At a deeper level, the findings revealed a nuanced reality often overlooked in existing literature. While participants experienced tensions arising from lifestyle contradictions, these inconsistencies did not necessarily diminish their commitment to health advocacy. Instead, many instructors responded by redefining wellness beyond physical appearance and embracing more compassionate, realistic, and holistic understandings of health. Their personal struggles became sources of empathy, authenticity, and stronger connections with students. Rather than positioning themselves as perfect models of fitness, participants increasingly viewed their role as guiding students through the complexities of achieving wellness within real-life circumstances. This suggests that

credibility in physical education may be grounded not only in bodily conformity but also in authenticity, lived experience, and meaningful teacher-student relationships.

More broadly, the study contributes to the growing discourse on embodiment, professional identity, and health promotion by illuminating how physical education instructors negotiate the intersection of personal realities and professional expectations. Unlike previous studies that predominantly focused on teachers' competencies, health behaviors, wellness outcomes, or instructional practices, this study foregrounded the lived experiences and meaning-making processes of educators who encounter lifestyle incongruence while serving as health advocates. In doing so, it addresses an important gap in the literature by providing a deeper understanding of the emotional, relational, and identity-related dimensions of health advocacy within physical education. Ultimately, the findings call for more human-centered and inclusive perspectives of wellness advocacy that recognize educators not as flawless embodiments of health but as individuals continually navigating their own wellness journeys while guiding others toward healthier lives.

References

1. Alhazmi A, Ali M, Dawria A, Narapureddy BR, Hawash MM (2025) Assessment of health behaviors of primary school teachers based on their nutritional knowledge and physical activity: A cross-sectional study in the Asir Region. *PLoS ONE* 20(1): e0318146. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0318146>
2. Cadiente, M. , Baloran, T. & Galicia, J. (2022). The Challenges of Teaching Physical and Health Education in the New Normal. *SALETTINIAN OPEN ACADEMIC REVIEW*, 4(1), 70-82.
3. Dantes, K. M. (2024). Pedagogical practices and teaching performance in Physical Activity Towards Health and Fitness (PATHFit) leading to a strategic teaching plan. *International Journal of Educational Theories, Approaches and Strategies*, 4(1), 78–95.
4. Dato, B. G. (2025). Teacher's Practices, Students' Motivation and Performance in Physical Education among Senior High School Students in the Division of Northern Samar. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, 3(8), 212–221. <https://doi.org/10.69569/jip.2025.381>
5. Festinger, L. (1957). *A theory of cognitive dissonance*. Stanford University Press.
6. Fontana, Fabio & Furtado JR, Ovande & Marston, Ripley & Mazzardo, Oldemar & Gallagher, Jere. (2013). Anti-fat bias among physical education teachers and majors. 70. 15-31.
7. Froiland, John. (2015). *Physical Education for Lifelong Fitness*.
8. Gomes, L., Martins, J., Ramos, M., & Carreiro da Costa, F. (2023). The impact of non-physical education teachers' perceptions on the promotion of active and healthy lifestyles: a cross-sectional qualitative study. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(3), Article 2026. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20032026>
9. Green, K., Thurston, M., Vaage, O., & Roberts, K. (2015). '[We're on the right track, baby], we were born this way'! Exploring sports participation in Norway. *Sport, Education and Society*, 20(3), 285–303. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2013.769947>
10. Knoke, C., Woll, A. & Wagner, I. Health promotion in physical education through digital media: a systematic literature review. *Ger J Exerc Sport Res* 54, 276–290 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12662-023-00932-4>
11. Korp P, Quennerstedt M, Barker D, Johansson A (2023), "Making sense of health in PE: conceptions of health among Swedish physical education teachers". *Health Education*, Vol. 123 No. 2 pp. 79–92, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1108/HE-11-2022-0086>
12. Ligawad Jr, Rodolfo. (2022). Fitting the Square Peg in a Round Hole: Teaching Experiences of Out-of-Field Physical Education Teachers in the Senior High School. *E-Dawa: An International Multidisciplinary Research Journal*. 2. 10.56901/RSLQ6891.
13. Linton, R. (1936). *The study of man*. Appleton-Century-Crofts.

14. Lobo, Joseph & Tolentino, Julius Ceazar. (2022). 1st Regional Research Conference on Physical Education.
15. Loric, Angela & Ariza, Virginia. (2026). Factors Influencing Exercise Adherence among Physical Education Teachers in the Philippines: Implications for Health Promotion Program. *International Journal of Research and Scientific Innovation*. 13. 1798-1811. 10.51244/IJRSI.2026.13010158.
16. Lux, K., & McCullick, B. A. (2009). Are physical education teachers physically active role models? Southern Illinois University Edwardsville and West Virginia University.
17. Magallanes, K. J. D., Carreon, M. B. C., Miclat, K. C., Salita, N. V. V., Sumilhig, G. A., Guevarra, R. C. C., & Miranda, J. P. P. (2024). Perceived importance of ICT proficiency for teaching, learning, and career progression among physical education teachers in Pampanga. *Puissant*, 5, 2336–2351. <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2407.11366>
18. Marques, A., Iglésias, B., Ramos, G. et al. Physical education teachers' knowledge of physical activity recommendations for health promotion in children and adolescents. *Sci Rep* 13, 21862 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-48522-6>
19. Medina-Villanueva, S., Ródenas, L., Morquecho Sánchez, R., Tristán, J., & Ramírez, R. (2025). Integral Well-Being: The Impact of the Physical Education Teacher. In *Education and Human Development*. IntechOpen. <https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.1006384>
20. Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962). *Phenomenology of perception* (C. Smith, Trans.). Routledge. (Original work published 1945).
21. Merton, R. K. (1957). The role-set: Problems in sociological theory. *British Journal of Sociology*, 8(2), 106–120.
22. Örs M. (2024). Healthy lifestyle behaviors among teachers working in public primary schools and affecting factors. *Frontiers in public health*, 12, 1382385. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2024.1382385>
23. Pineda, H. S. ., Andal, E. Z. ., & Hermosa, J. P. . (2024). Exploring The Faculty and Students' Readiness Level for The Effective Implementation of Physical Activity Toward Health and Fitness Courses (PATHFIT). *International Journal of Multidisciplinary: Applied Business and Education Research*, 5(1), 161-168. <https://doi.org/10.11594/ijmaber.05.01.16>
24. Relacion, P. (2023). Burnout and Attitude Towards Physical Activity of Public Junior High School Teachers: Basis for an Intervention Plan. *Psychology and Education: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 16(1), 91-122. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10441673>
25. Relacion, P. (2023). Burnout and Attitude Towards Physical Activity of Public Junior High School Teachers: Basis for an Intervention Plan. *Psychology and Education: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 16(1), 91-122. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10441673>
26. Röger-Offergeld, U., & Töpfer, C. (2025). Effects of Health-Related Physical Education Teacher Education on PE Student Teachers' Pedagogical Content Knowledge and on Female Pupils' Health-Related Knowledge and Understanding. *Quest*, 77(3), 344–363. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00336297.2024.2449371>
27. Ryan-Jean, C. (2022). *Pedagogies in physical education and wellness: How teachers promote secondary student engagement in physical education and wellness* (Master's project). Concordia University of Edmonton.
28. Sukys, S., Trinkuniene, L., & Tilindiene, I. (2024). Physical Education Teachers' Health Literacy: First Evidence from Lithuania. *Healthcare (Basel, Switzerland)*, 12(13), 1346. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare12131346>
29. Tanucan, Jem & Wider, Walton & Sofyan, Davi. (2023). Predictors of Filipino physical education teachers' intentions in the use of exercise as punishment. *Pedagogy of Physical Culture and Sports*. 27. 289-296. 10.15561/26649837.2023.0404.
30. Vera, M., & Jr, V. (2023). Health-Related Factors and Teaching Performance of Physical Education Teachers Amidst COVID-19 Pandemic. *ASEAN Journal of Physical Education and Sport Science*, 3(1), 17-26. Retrieved from <https://ejournal.bumipublikasinusantara.id/index.php/ajopess/article/view/484>

31. Williamson, B. (2015). Algorithmic skin: health-tracking technologies, personal analytics and the biopedagogies of digitized health and physical education. *Sport, Education and Society*, 20(1), 133–151. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2014.962494>
 32. Yager, Z., Gray, T., Curry, C., & McLean, S. A. (2020). Pre-service teachers' gendered attitudes towards role modelling in health and physical education. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 25(1), 67–78. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17408989.2019.1688774>
-



© 2026 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>).