

Lived-Experience of Non-Bodily Kinesthetics Students Enrolled in Sports and Exercise Related Programs

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Abstract

This study explored the lived experiences of non-bodily kinesthetic students enrolled in sports and exercise-related programs. It aimed to examine the circumstances leading to their enrollment, the challenges they encountered, and the coping mechanisms they developed despite limited backgrounds in physical and athletic activities. A qualitative research design was employed, using semi-structured interviews with nine (9) participants. Data were analyzed through thematic analysis. Findings revealed three major themes: (1) Circumstantial Entry into Sports Science, where students enrolled due to external factors such as limited course availability, financial constraints, parental influence, and failure in qualifying examinations; (2) Struggling to Cope Physically and Socially, which highlighted difficulties in performing physical tasks, low self-confidence, and experiences of social pressure and bullying; and (3) Learning to Cope and Grow, which demonstrated participants' resilience through observing peers, seeking guidance, and engaging in continuous practice to improve their abilities and confidence. The study concluded that although non-bodily kinesthetic students face significant physical and social challenges, they can adapt and succeed through persistence, peer support, and effective coping strategies. The findings emphasize the need for inclusive and supportive learning environments that accommodate diverse abilities and promote student well-being. It is recommended that educators adopt adaptive teaching strategies and strengthen support systems, while future

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1. Introduction

The education courses in sports sciences have become part of Philippine higher education. This was confirmed by the Commission of Higher Education (CHED) Memorandum No. 81 series of 2017, which aims to secure the approval of higher educational institutions to offer this course that can develop core competencies needed by future professionals in the field of sports and exercise industry in the country. This education program has two specializations: the Bachelor of Science in Exercise and Sports Science major in Fitness and Sport Coaching, and the major in Fitness and Sports Management. The first focuses on the training of future athletic and fitness coaches who are directly involved in the training of athletes and fitness enthusiasts, while the second focuses more on the management of organizations, events, and programs related to sports and fitness activities.

Many educational institutions offer these courses, including state universities, local government colleges, and private educational institutions. According to CHED (2024), 24 educational institutions are offering this course, 13 of which are state universities and colleges (SUC), 9 are private schools, and 2 are Local Government Colleges (LGC). The sports science course is expected to be taken by students who are interested and active in the field of sports and recreational activities. In a study by Spittle et al (2021), the reasons for choosing this course are involvement in sports associations, continual reasons such as love for sports and being continuously involved in it, and interpersonal reasons. This course is not just a matter of being good at sports and exercises, foundation courses such as anatomy, exercise physiology, biomechanics, and others (Kittel, et al, 2025) must be given time by students of this course, support systems are also important (Dos Santos, 2022) such as a proper curriculum and human and material resources to be helpful in full professional development. The quality of teaching, training, learning experiences, and support of the institution are also major factors in the employability of those who graduate from the sport science course (Sleap & Reed, 2006).

From the experience of researchers, there are many notable problems among students who enter this course. Many enrolled in this course have no involvement in sports or any recreational activities, although there is no published study yet on the

reasons why some students choose to study a sports science program that has no real connection to this field. Some students are called non-bodily kinesthetic (Belleza et al, 2024), who are included in this course; they are the ones who have little interest, confidence, and physical skills in the field of sports. How they perform in this course, what their problems are, and how they deal with them are some of the many questions regarding this matter. Specifically, what are the very reasons why the non-bodily kinesthetic students are in this program? How did they live this complex situation?

It is important to have a study on this issue, to better understand the reasons for their entry into this course, and what interventions or policies can be made by institutions offering sports science that have students who are not involved in physical activities but enroll in this course. This study is grounded in the need to understand the lived experiences of non-bodily kinesthetic students enrolled in sports and exercise-related programs. While existing research largely focuses on students with athletic abilities, there remains a gap in exploring how non-sporty students navigate these environments. Understanding their challenges, motivations, and coping strategies is crucial for creating inclusive and supportive learning environments.

Anchored on Social Cognitive Theory and Multiple Intelligences Theory, this research examines how observation, social interaction, and alternative learning styles influence students' adaptation to sports-related programs. These frameworks highlight the role of environmental factors, self-efficacy, and individual differences in shaping learning experiences.

Ultimately, this study aims to explore the experiences of non-bodily kinesthetic students in sports and exercise-related programs, focusing on their reasons for enrollment, challenges encountered, and strategies for overcoming limitations. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to improved teaching practices, curriculum design, and support mechanisms that promote inclusivity and holistic development among diverse student populations.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach using a narrative phenomenological design. Narrative research focuses on exploring and interpreting individuals' personal stories, while phenomenology aims to understand the essence of lived experiences. By combining these approaches, the study sought to capture and interpret the personal experiences of non-bodily kinesthetic students enrolled in sports and exercise-related programs, particularly how they make sense of their challenges and adaptation processes

2.2 Participants and Sampling Techniques

The participants of the study were non-bodily kinesthetic students enrolled in sports and exercise-related programs at Cavite State University, Main Campus. These students were identified based on their self-perception as individuals who struggle with physical activities and lack a natural inclination toward sports. The selection of participants was guided by specific criteria to ensure the relevance of the study. Participants were required to be currently enrolled in sports and exercise-related courses, identify themselves as non-bodily kinesthetic students, and have prior experience participating in sports or physical activity programs despite their perceived limitations. The study involved nine (9) participants. Three (3) were former Bachelor of Physical Education (BPED) students who failed qualifying examinations and subsequently shifted to Bachelor of Science in Exercise and Sports Science (BSESS); all were female. The remaining six (6) participants included one (1) male and five (5) females. Two participants reported experiences of bullying, while all participants shared that they eventually developed increased confidence and acquired knowledge while pursuing the program. The study utilized purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques. Purposive sampling allowed the researchers to intentionally select participants who met the specific criteria relevant to the study. Snowball sampling was also employed, wherein initial participants recommended other individuals who shared similar characteristics and experiences. This approach ensured a richer and more relevant dataset.

2.3 Research Instrument

The primary data collection tool used in this study was a semi-structured interview guide consisting of open-ended questions. This instrument allowed participants to freely express their experiences, perceptions, challenges, and coping strategies while ensuring that the discussion remained aligned with the research objectives. Before data collection, the researchers secured permission from the appropriate authorities and obtained informed consent from all participants. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews consisting of nine (9) open-ended questions. The interviews were conducted in a conducive and safe environment to encourage openness and honesty. With the participants' consent, digital recording devices were used to accurately capture their responses. The collected narratives were then transcribed for analysis.

2.4 Data Analysis

The data collected from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. This method involved identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns or themes within the data. The process included familiarization with the data, coding, theme development, and interpretation. This approach enabled the researchers to capture the depth and diversity of participants' experiences.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

The study strictly adhered to ethical research standards. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and their personal information was protected throughout the research process. Interviews were conducted respectfully to avoid emotional or psychological harm. Participation was voluntary, and participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The researchers also maintained honesty, transparency, and integrity in handling and reporting the data.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Circumstantial Entry into Sports Science

3.1.1 Lack of Available Slots

Participants reported that their preferred courses were unavailable due to limited slots, prompting them to enroll in sports-related programs. Financial constraints and parental influence further contributed to this decision.

Participants' narratives:

"I wanted to shift, but it turned out that the slot is full. (Participant 8, student, female)."

"I wanted to enroll at HM, Hospitality Management, because my parents said that it is expensive and we don't have the means to pursue the course, which is why I ended up in BSESS. (Participant 2, Student, Male)."

3.1.2 Failed in Qualifying Examination

Some participants initially pursued other programs but failed qualifying examinations, resulting in their transition to BSESS. This demonstrates how institutional requirements redirected their academic paths.

Sample participants' narratives:

"BPED was my course before, but I failed qualifying exams, so I became a BSESS student." Participant 1, student, female.

"Maybe one of the factors is we are not fortunate enough to pass BPED, so we had no choice but to take BSESS."

The theme Circumstantial Entry into Sports Science indicates that external factors such as limited opportunities, financial constraints, and academic barriers significantly influence students' program choices. This often results in low initial motivation and preparedness. The theme reflects how students' academic pathways are often shaped by structural and external constraints rather than intrinsic motivation. The lack of available slots in preferred programs and financial limitations highlight systemic issues in access to higher education, where students are compelled to adjust their aspirations based on availability and affordability. This supports the findings of studies on college choice, which suggest that socioeconomic status and institutional limitations significantly influence program selection (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2002). Additionally, parental influence, as reflected in the participants' narratives, aligns with literature emphasizing the role of family expectations in shaping students' academic decisions (Eccles, 2009).

Furthermore, failing qualifying examinations illustrates how institutional gatekeeping mechanisms redirect students into alternative programs. This is consistent with research indicating that academic performance and admission policies can constrain student agency and lead to unintended career paths (Roksa & Velez, 2012). As a result, students who enter programs circumstantially may initially exhibit lower motivation, identity misalignment, and reduced preparedness. This supports Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which posits that autonomy is a key driver of motivation; when autonomy is limited, students may struggle with engagement at the onset.

3.2 Struggling to Cope Physically and Socially

3.2.1 Physical and Performance Difficulties

Participants experienced difficulty in executing exercises, drills, and proper techniques due to a limited background in sports, leading to struggles in meeting academic and performance expectations.

Participants' narrative:

"I had a lot of experience, like sometimes I struggled a lot doing the tasks assigned by the professors, like executing the right forms for dumbbells, barbells, and other gym equipment." (Participant 9, female)

“Maybe doing stretching exercises, I guess we’re all struggling” (Participant 3, female)

3.2.2 Social Pressure and Emotional Strain

Participants reported feelings of inadequacy, low self-confidence, and experiences of bullying. Being surrounded by more skilled peers contributed to a diminished sense of belonging and increased stress.

The theme Struggling to Cope Physically and Socially underscores the dual burden faced by students. Physically, they struggle due to a lack of prior experience, while socially, they encounter pressure, comparison, and in some cases, bullying. These challenges negatively affect their confidence and adjustment. It also highlights the multidimensional challenges faced by non-bodily kinesthetic students, particularly in environments that prioritize physical competence. The physical difficulties experienced by participants reflect a lack of prior exposure and skill development, which aligns with literature emphasizing the importance of early sport participation in building motor competence and confidence (Stodden et al., 2008). Without this foundation, students may experience what Bandura (1997) describes as low self-efficacy, leading to avoidance behaviors and decreased performance.

Socially, the presence of more skilled peers creates a comparative environment that intensifies feelings of inadequacy and low self-worth. This is supported by Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954), which explains how individuals evaluate themselves relative to others, often resulting in negative self-perception when disparities are evident. Experiences of bullying and exclusion further compound these challenges, echoing research that links negative social environments in physical education settings to decreased participation and psychological distress (Bailey et al., 2009).

Moreover, the emotional strain described by participants reflects the intersection of physical and social pressures, which can hinder adjustment and persistence in the program. This aligns with Tinto’s (1993) theory of student integration, which emphasizes that both academic and social integration are critical for student retention and success. When students struggle in both domains, their overall educational experience is significantly affected.

3.3 Learning to Cope and Grow

3.3.1 Observation and Learning from Others

Participants improved by observing peers, asking questions, and seeking guidance from more experienced individuals, which enhanced their confidence and competence.

Participant narrative:

“What I do is I ask questions to the people who have more knowledge, for example is my friends who are players in CSPEAR, I ask them if I am doing the right thing or what, and they are the ones who guide me to do it right.” (Participant 5, female)

3.3.2 Improvement of Physical Skills and Strength

Through continuous practice and exposure to physical activities, participants gradually developed their physical skills and adapted to the program demands.

Participant narrative:

“Because of practice, it is easier to adjust, even though I am not sporty, as long as the things that need to be learned are taught and practiced.” (Participant 8, female)

Conversely, the theme Learning to Cope and Grow demonstrates the students’ capacity for resilience. Through peer support, observation, and consistent practice, participants gradually improved their performance and developed a stronger sense of belonging. This highlights the importance of supportive learning environments and adaptive teaching strategies.

Despite initial challenges, the theme Learning to Cope and Grow demonstrates the participants’ capacity for resilience, adaptation, and gradual development. The strategy of learning through observation and peer interaction reflects principles of Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), which posits that individuals acquire new behaviors and skills by observing others and modeling their actions. By seeking guidance from more experienced peers, students were able to bridge their skill gaps and build confidence.

The gradual improvement in physical skills through consistent practice aligns with the concept of deliberate practice (Ericsson et al., 1993), which emphasizes that repeated, effortful engagement in tasks leads to skill acquisition over time. This also reflects the development of a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006), where students begin to view abilities as improvable.

rather than fixed. As participants experienced small successes, their confidence and sense of belonging increased, reinforcing continued engagement.

Additionally, the importance of peer support and a supportive learning environment is consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, where learning is optimized through guidance and collaboration with more capable individuals. This suggests that inclusive and scaffolded teaching approaches can significantly enhance the experiences of non-bodily kinesthetic students.

The findings illustrate a clear developmental trajectory, from circumstantial entry to struggle, and ultimately to adaptation and growth. This progression reflects a transformative learning process, where initial barriers do not necessarily determine long-term outcomes. Instead, with adequate support, persistence, and adaptive strategies, students can overcome limitations and succeed.

These results reinforce existing literature that emphasizes the role of environment, support systems, and mindset in student success. While non-bodily kinesthetic students face significant disadvantages at the outset, their experiences demonstrate that competence in sports and exercise-related programs is not solely innate but can be developed through structured support and sustained effort.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

This study concluded that non-physical kinesthetic students in sports and exercise-related programs often enter the field due to external constraints rather than personal choice, but they demonstrate remarkable resilience in the face of physical, social, and emotional challenges. Through consistent practice, peer support, and adaptive learning strategies, they gradually build competence and confidence, proving that success in such programs is not solely dependent on innate physical ability but can be developed over time. The findings highlight the importance of inclusive and supportive learning environments that value effort, perseverance, and diverse abilities.

It is recommended that non-bodily kinesthetic students adopt a growth-oriented mindset, practice patience, and actively seek support from peers and instructors to enhance their learning. Educators and school personnel should implement inclusive teaching strategies, provide clear, structured instruction, and foster a safe, supportive environment that minimizes discrimination and encourages participation. For researchers, further studies with larger, more diverse populations and longitudinal approaches are encouraged to deepen the understanding of student development over time. Overall, educational institutions should strengthen inclusive policies, adaptive curricula, and support systems, such as mentorship and peer programs, to ensure that all students, regardless of physical ability, have equal opportunities to succeed.

However, the study is limited by its small sample size and reliance on self-reported data, which may not fully capture the breadth of experiences across contexts. The qualitative design limits the generalizability of the findings to a broader population. The use of a small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings to a broader population of students. Additionally, the study relied heavily on self-reported data through interviews, which may be subject to response bias, recall inaccuracies, or personal interpretations of experiences. The participants were also drawn from a specific context, which may not fully represent the diverse backgrounds, cultures, and institutional settings of other non-bodily kinesthetic students. Furthermore, the qualitative design, while rich in depth, does not allow for statistical generalization, and the absence of longitudinal data restricts the ability to examine changes in experiences over time.

Compliance with ethical standards

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