

# Activity Preferences of Generation Z Students for Tertiary Physical Education: Implications for Curriculum Enhancement

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## Abstract

This research aimed to look into Generation Z Students' preferred activities to enhance the curriculum content of Tertiary Physical Education in one of the leading Universities in the Philippines using the phenomenological research design due to the fact that a great number of students in Physical Education have dropped out. A total of 110 research participants were involved in focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, and extensive field observation. Results from focus group discussions, interviews, and extensive observations resulted to five concerns: less lectures, practical activities needed, minimal competition programs, and group activities. Findings from this study served as basis for a contextualized Physical Education program for Generation Z students in Southern Philippines.

**Keywords:** Activity Preference in Physical Education; Generation Z Students; Enhancing Tertiary Physical Education; Phenomenology Research

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## 1. Introduction

Generation Z students have gained a lot of interest because of their distinct characteristics and behaviors. One of their generation's significant distinctions is that they were born in a world where technology is pervasive. The biographies of these students consistently suggest that mentors in the academe must consider these new students' characteristics to cultivate them efficiently. Generation Z was born between 1995 and 2010 (Rothman, 2014), accounting for one-third of the Philippine population. Their age is thought to be remarkable in many respects since they did not see computers, the internet, and technology as merely weapons but as an essential part of their lives (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2019).

Generation Z students were seen as Digital Natives in the global culture, educated in a technologically advanced society, nurtured in various environments and terrorism issues, and linked globally in the virtual home. Despite being more innovative, more adaptable, and inclusive of different cultures, Generation Z Students face challenges and issues that will be significant concerns for many industries in the coming years. They are egocentric mammals who imagine themselves as CEOs and owners with their own companies rather than workers after college graduation. Generation Z Students are ready to get what they want right away, prematurely old, pampered, and risk-averse (Singh, 2014).

Researchers discovered that in the United States, most educators in the academe made appropriate changes to their instructional strategy to make it more immersive and experiential-based, considering the characteristics of Generation Z Students. They also discovered that Generation Z students' distinct and unusual characteristics pose a problem in conventional classroom structures. Educators now recognize that the traditional teaching-learning approach is no longer reliable and applicable for these students (Skiba and Barton, 2006).

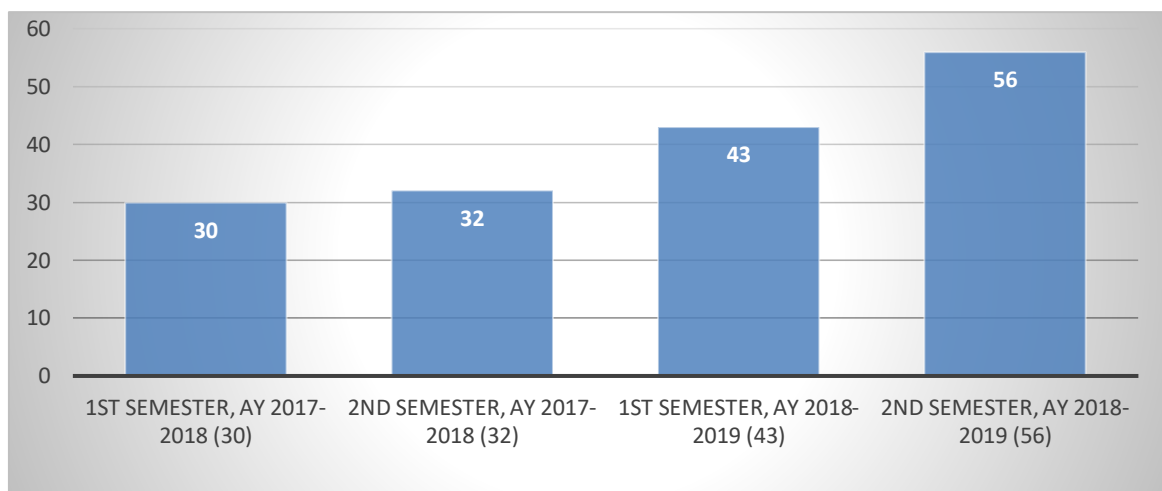
Since 2018, Philippine Higher Education Institutions have been welcoming pioneer Senior High School graduates, and research has shown that there is a need for new approaches in the teaching-learning phase, which would be a step toward permanently changing the landscape of Philippine education in irreversible ways. Generation Z students were extremely busy, creative, multi-taskers, digitally literate, and ethnically diverse. Scholars have identified this generation as

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self-assured, unique, under strain, team-oriented, and effective. Since they depend on good results to gain high scores and marks, academic competitions are intense and occur regularly to this generation (Debard, 2004).

Apart from non-participative students during class activities, the growing number of dropouts in Physical Education classes in one of the leading Universities in the Philippines is a significant concern.



**Table 1** Graph of the Total Number of Dropouts in Physical Education Classes in one of the leading State Universities in the Philippines (Information and Communication Technology Office, 2019).

In the year 2020, an inquiry was undertaken to find a clear solution to this issue by describing the flaws in the implementation of Tertiary Physical Education in the abovementioned school from the perspective of Generation Z students. The investigation revealed five (5) significant concerns that transpired during the triangulation of the results. These were: duplication of activities from senior high school Physical Education, stress due to very high Physical Fitness Test standards, very time-consuming take-home tasks in Physical Education that affect their time for other matters, very high teachers' expectations, and teachers' absenteeism. Apart from the students' problems, the program quality of the new Tertiary Physical Education of the University was one of the leading factors in the growing number of dropout Students. As a result of this analysis, it is proposed that the existing

curriculum be revisited and updated and suggest contextualizing the course material by adding the local notions and preferred activities of Generation Z Students (Tagare and Villaluz, 2019).

With the current problem found, this study aimed to look into the activity preferences of Generation Z students in their Tertiary Physical Education classes as a way to strengthen the course offering. This research shows how educational content can be enriched by integrating local knowledge and how learning environments can be strengthened by grasping native principles as a platform for enhancing a curriculum that is tailored to Students' generation patterns, preferences, and expectations.

This phenomenology investigation has created a venue for Generation Z students to express themselves by airing out their opinions and suggestions, which acted as the base principles for understanding their behavior interests in Tertiary Physical Education. Critical themes were generated and considered to improve the Physical Education curriculum content and offerings. This analysis should be used as a guide for program authors, instructors, and scholars to show that instructional improvement can be achieved by looking into Students' behavior to tailor learning environments to their preferences and interests. Considering the design of this study, a research question was formulated:

1. What are the preferred activities of Generation Z Learners for Tertiary Physical Education?

## **2. Methods and Materials**

### **2.1 Research Design**

This research employed a qualitative research design, specifically applying the steps of the Phenomenology approach. The experiences of generation Z Students in their Physical Education classes were analyzed through multiple data collection procedures to create a realistic portrait of how they behave, think, and talk to realize the outcomes of this study. Phenomenology is an analytical description of a scenario, traditionally written in the third person and empirically based on data gathered from researchers at a field site (Creswell, 2012). In this analysis, the researchers

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invested enough time in the actual locations of the research participants for focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, non-obtrusive participant observations, journal writing, and field notes to accurately gather the correct evidence needed to closely address Generation Z's preferred meaningful activities for Physical Education.

## 2.2 Research Procedures

To perform a qualitative phenomenology study, it was necessary first to seek approval from the head of the schools and acquire an informed consent contract from the research participants. Following the approval of the required information, the researcher performed a series of orientations to clarify the study's goals and the costs and advantages of the participants' participation.

The qualitative analysis relied heavily on fieldwork. Following the preliminaries, immersion in the actual study setting started to provide a more detailed and accurate image of generation Z students' experiences in Physical Education. In this phenomenological approach, in-depth interviews were conducted in sites where Generation Z students gather and spend their leisure hours. Primary sources were obtained through unobtrusive observations, journal writing, memoing, and focus group discussions. To complement the primary evidence, nonobtrusive participant observation and journal writing were used. Speech recorders, video camera recorders, and journal writing were used to collect the participants' responses. The best method for authentically capturing the attitudes and emotions of the study participants was to observe them in their natural environment, where they could easily share their feelings.

## 2.3 Research Participants

Since there are so many Generation Zs in the research setting, the sample participants were selected using a purposive sampling process. The key participants for this research were 110 Generation Z students who are born between 1995 - 2010. Students from the University Laboratory School, Kabacan National High School, and Tertiary Students from the University of Southern Mindanao served as primary participants for this research.

## 2.4 Research Instrument

In this study, casual and semi-structured dialogues were used to perform the interviews. Open-ended guide questions were used to help capture the participants' responses. The guide questions were subjected to an ethics review to ensure that no derogatory contents could affect the research participants' emotional well-being. These approaches seem to be informal discussions, but they have a clear and implicit goal: to understand how generation Z students conceptualize and arrange their interactions into concrete categories.

## 2.5 Data Analysis and Interpretation

Word analysis, coding, and thematization of concepts were used to analyze and interpret the data. Open codes were generated to classify the most important and recurring words and ideas mentioned by the research participants. After the open coding, axial coding was performed to build the relationship between concepts and exclude outlier ideas and phrases. After the coding, essential themes have been established. Validation and triangulation were also used to ensure the trustworthiness and reliability of gathered data.

## 3. Results and Discussions

**Research Question 1. What are the preferred activities of Generation Z Learners for Tertiary Physical Education?** As can be gleaned from the result, Generation Z Students unveiled “*Inclusion of Larong Pinoy (Filipino Recreational Activities)*,” “*Holistic Activities for Physical Education*,” “*Lessen the Lectures, Focus on Practical Activities*,” “*Minimize the Competition in Physical Education Classes*,” and “*Inclusion of Group Activities*” as their preferred activities that they wish to be integrated into their Tertiary Physical Education Classes. These ideas are noticeable in the following excerpts of their responses below:

### 1. *Inclusion of Larong Pinoy (Filipino Recreational Activities)*.

The “*larong Pinoy*,” or Filipino Recreational Games, was one of the top responses from Generation Z Students as an activity that they would like to be included in their Physical

Education classes. Apart from its nostalgic importance as a representation of Filipino culture, research participants clarified that *larong Pinoy* provides Filipino youths with entertainment, relaxation, and the growth of motor skills, strategic logic, social maturity, and problem-solving skills. They shared concern about preserving Filipino traditional games, as these traditions are increasingly losing their importance due to the threat of digital era. They agree that having *larong Pinoy* in Physical Education classes encourages nationalism and love for traditional Filipino games and pastimes. They still like conventional games because they experience less strain and tension while playing them, as reflected in the following responses:

*“I would prefer including the larong Pinoy (Filipino Recreational Games) to retain it, and so that we could have more physical activities rather than just using gadgets...” (Participant 70)*

*“...It would be better if the larong Pinoy (Filipino Recreational Games) including luksong baka and other games will be rekindled and played by the youth today as these games are entertaining and are boredom-busters.” (Participant 71)*

Existing studies have established a connection between participation in recreational activities and academic achievement. The researchers discovered that time spent outdoors and participating in recreational activities was a good predictor of academic grades, even when achievement test scores were taken into account in a sample of middle school and college students. They discovered that participation in recreational activities helped predict academic achievement even after gender, grade level, ethnic origin, free lunch eligibility, and level of adult supervision after school were statistically controlled (Barnett & Weber, 2008).

Further, Biddle & Asare (2011) and Eime et al. (2013), as cited by Alanazi (2020), demonstrated that those who participate actively in recreational activities experience less symptoms of anxiety than those who do not. Previous research findings indicate that active

involvement in recreation is a critical predictor of mental health (Biddle & Asare, 2011; Eime et al., 2013; Rafferty et al., 2016; Johnson, Connolly, & Tully, 2017).

Additionally, the literature demonstrates that involvement in leisure activities increases self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-concept, chance for social interaction, and decreases alienation and loneliness. Recreation has been shown to be beneficial in the treatment of different types of stress and anxiety (Goldstein, 2012; Paggi et al., 2016; Whitebread et al., 2017).

## 2. Holistic Activities for Physical Education.

Additionally, the Research Participants favored holistic exercises and emphasized that their Physical Education classes do not solely concentrate on physical development. For them, learning is more enjoyable and meaningful if they can participate in various activities that help them grow their whole selves. Additionally, it will boost their confidence and involvement, ultimately resulting in increased participation in Physical Education classes.

Physical Education is an essential part of the educational process since it helps develop and balance a growing individual's physical, academic, social, and emotional dimensions by professionally chosen physical activities. Physical Education subjects must take a comprehensive approach to cater to the development of each learner's well-being by providing diverse but appropriate learning experiences. The following excerpts from the Research Participants' answers indicate that they still tend to involve holistic activities:

*“...I hope for the inclusion of mental, emotional, and social activities to enjoy and to learn for greater participation. It should not only focus in physical trainings.” (Participant 35)*

*“...it should not only focus on physical activities, I want to have an activity that is beyond physical development because there are also students who are not kinesthetically inclined, so even if they try harder, but they will also take ample time to learn a specific skill. With that, I want to suggest for us to experience holistic*

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*activities that could bring development in physical, mental, and social..." (Participant P31)*

Numerous sources suggest that in the twenty-first century of teaching and learning, holistic education should be applied to new waves of Students to foster a more realistic worldview, encourage more holistic development and nurture the relationship between the different facets of the personality (intellectual, physical, moral, mental, social, and aesthetic) (Mahmoudi et al., 2012).

Bhardwaj (2016) reinforced this notion further in his inquiry into the value of holistic education in human life, revealing that education is not limited to acquiring knowledge. Fundamentally, it should be about instilling holistic ideals in all students to develop into responsible people. Additionally, his research indicates that in the educational program, it should be observed that values and holistic activities are integrated in an engaging manner such that students master them at any stage of their education. On the other side, the value must be emphasized equally since it is critical to students' holistic growth.

### **3. Lessen the lectures – Focus on Practical Activities**

Generation Z Students desire to reduce lecture time in Physical Education classes, stating that they spend most of their day exposed to other topics taught through the lecture process. The Research Participants stated that they were dissatisfied with Physical Education due to the excessive lectures. Additionally, the Generation Z Students recommend that teachers incorporate stress-relieving activities into their lessons rather than relying solely on lectures.

Additionally, Generation Z Students chose practical exercises in Physical Education over sitting and listening to their teachers' lecture to alleviate academic tension associated with applied and advanced courses. To help them appreciate Physical Education classes more, they should find enjoyment and enthusiasm in their learning activities to provide a brief respite from their stresses. As a result, their willingness to reduce the lectures is expressed in the following responses:

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*“...for it not to be boring, lectures should be lessened because other subjects are already doing lots of lectures. Physical Education should focus more on giving practical activities rather than lecturing the whole period” (Participant 81)*

*“...the teacher shouldn't focus merely on lectures; Physical Education should focus on stress-relieving activities...” (Participant 49)*

Previous research findings reveal that schools can develop 21st-century knowledge by incorporating practical activities into the curriculum (Morris, 2019). Several scholars demonstrated that one effective strategy for fostering behavioral improvement is to provide Students with dynamic and realistic experiences that train them for real-world jobs. As a result, multicomponent school-based interventions that typically provide enhanced practical activities are effective in students' physical activity (Voogt, 2013).

Additionally, Generation Z Students demonstrate an eagerness to participate effectively in the teaching–learning phase since they have a low attention period of about 20 minutes (Proctor & Prevatt 2009). Recent research findings indicate that Generation Z Students cannot sustain an excessive amount of lecture approaches because they get bored with the teacher-centered strategy, frustrated with the lack of opportunities for student activity, and disinterested in their passive involvement in the learning process (Marshall, 2016).

#### **4. Minimize the Competition in Physical Education Classes**

Prompted by the pressures of their applied and advanced courses, Generation Z Students chose to minimize the intensely competitive learning activities in their Physical Education classes to alleviate the strain. Additionally, they emphasized that making competitive group assignments is unjust because they do not share the same competencies;

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thus, some will receive a high grade due to their talent while others will not because it is not their field.

Further, providing highly competitive activities in Physical Education make them more grade-oriented, which contradicts the central aim of Physical Education in the school curriculum which is to provide students with enjoyable and meaningful interactions that will help them realize the conviction to engage in lifelong physical activity to promote fitness. The following are excerpts from respondents' answers about why they choose to avoid competitions in their Physical Education classes:

*“...competition should be minimized. Like groupings in dancing where you will be given grade as one group. I think it is not fair enough to depend the grade on it since the skills of each one differs from one another...”*  
(Participant 57)

*“For our Physical Education class, we prefer to lessen the highly competitive course works for us to have fun and enjoyment while learning. Because if thorough competitions are still integrated into this subject, we tend to focus on beating other groups to earn better grades, which adds too much pressure. Allocating so much time to prepare for competitions beyond class hours can ruin our schedules and add more stress to us...”* (Participant 69)

Scholars have shown that classroom competitions result in stress and anxiety, especially when they encourage academic competitiveness among individual students. This tension can cause students to prioritize academics over other interests and extracurricular activities, resulting in an unbalanced school experience. A less-than-perfect outcome will affect the child's feelings since they may be upset if they do not succeed, which will erode their trust and self-confidence (Bao, 2009).

Additionally, if a classroom competition does not have an attainable target for all students, the game becomes unbalanced, with certain students leaping forward and others falling behind. This is the kind of rivalry that can result in distress and a decreased motivation

to engage in similar activities. An unhealthy rivalry could be solely based on competing rather than honing a new talent or functioning cooperatively (Wilkins, 2012).

##### 5. *Inclusion of Group Activities.*

The last activity that Generation Z Students desire to incorporate into their Tertiary Physical Education courses is group activities. They prefer group collaborations over individual tasks because they believe that it fosters a more harmonious relationship with their peers and boosts their morale while completing an academic mission. It is much more beneficial to include community activities in Tertiary Physical Education to alleviate their shyness and produce high-quality outputs through their collective efforts.

Additionally, they prefer group practices in Tertiary Physical Education because they can share thoughts and inputs with their classmates. Their ability to incorporate community activities into their Physical Education class is shown in the following responses:

*“...if you have groupmates then you tend to blend with the group where you don't get shy compared to that of being alone where you get shy most of the time” (Participant 52)*

*“...it's better if it is with groups because you have each other in doing the activities...” (Participant 12)*

This viewpoint is consistent with LaFave's (2019) observations that group activities are recommended in the twenty-first-century teaching-learning phase because it fosters collaboration, strategic thought, enhances partnerships, broadens logical viewpoints, shakes things up, and increases self-confidence, both of which Generation Z Students need more in preparation for the world of work.

Choi & Yong (2015) elaborated on the benefits of group activities for Students, stating that they enable them to tackle more complex problems than they may on an individual assignment, practice delegating roles and responsibilities, share diverse

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perspectives, provide a pool of knowledge and skills, receive social support and encouragement to take risks, and develop new aptitudes.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings, this research concludes that Generation Z Students are under stress and pressure due to their academic pursuits, as shown by their responses during interviews. This involves academic course works and demands from their teachers and society, which urges their desire to eliminate intensely competitive academic activities in Physical Education to de-stress. They prefer to incorporate recreational activities that allow students to have fun and enjoy themselves while they learn. Generation Z Students also value friendship, as shown by their preference for social activities and the reduction of highly competitive academic tasks in Physical Education.

Additionally, this study concludes that Generation Z Students retain a sense of patriotism, as shown by their preference to include *Larong Pinoy* (Filipino Recreational Activities), which they fear would soon become extinct due to technological advancement. Additionally, this study concludes that students preferred to engage in various activities that focused on their holistic development.

Finally, this study concludes that the Research Participants are committed students, as shown by their enthusiasm for increased participation in their Physical Education classes. Generation Z students prefer fewer lecture lessons and more time for practical and valuable tasks over sitting and listening to their teachers.

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