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Student perspectives on effective teaching in online and hybrid physical education

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ABSTRACT

Online and hybrid physical education (OPE) has become a recurring instructional reality in many schools and universities, yet little is known about how students experience teaching quality in these settings. This study investigates how tertiary students characterize effective and ineffective teaching in OPE within a hybrid learning context, offering student-centered qualitative insights that remain underrepresented in the literature. Structured virtual interviews were conducted with 69 students from a State University in Pampanga, Philippines, all of whom had completed at least one semester of online or hybrid physical education (PE). Data were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis with independent dual coding and third-coder adjudication. Two dimensions consistently shaped student accounts across all thematic categories: instructional clarity and affective teacher presence. Students treated clear, step-by-step instruction not merely as a preference but as a basic condition for participation, while unclear directions were the most frequently cited undesirable trait. Similarly, teacher encouragement, energetic delivery, and supportive behavior were closely linked to motivation and engagement, while strictness and pressure were associated with withdrawal. Contextual barriers such as limited equipment, unstable internet, and emotional fatigue were also reported, though they appeared less often than teacher-related factors across student responses. These findings suggest that instructional clarity and affective teacher presence are the two central conditions for sustaining student participation in hybrid PE environments, and that OPE teachers who prioritize these qualities are better positioned to maintain engagement even in resource-constrained settings.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Online and hybrid learning arrangements have reshaped instructional delivery across disciplines, including physical education (PE). Unlike content-based subjects that primarily rely on text or lecture formats, PE requires movement demonstration, real-time feedback, and active participation. The transition to online and hybrid modes has therefore introduced unique instructional challenges that carry real consequences for students, including reduced physical activity, disengagement, and inequitable learning conditions for those with limited resources at home [1]. These challenges are particularly acute in disruption-

prone contexts such as the Philippines, where schools and universities regularly shift to online delivery in response to typhoons, flooding, and high heat index advisories, making hybrid PE not an exceptional arrangement but a recurring instructional reality.

Research examining online and hybrid physical education (OPE) has largely focused on implementation barriers, teacher experiences, and operational adjustments during emergency remote teaching [2], [3]. While such studies provide insight into structural and pedagogical constraints, they tend to center the teacher's perspective, leaving students' lived experiences of teaching quality largely unexamined. Comparatively fewer investigations have centered on students' qualitative descriptions of what they perceive as effective or ineffective teaching in OPE, and those that exist were conducted mostly during the COVID-19 pandemic under emergency conditions rather than in stable hybrid arrangements. Existing work in broader online learning literature emphasizes the importance of teacher presence, clarity of instruction, and motivational support in shaping student engagement [4], [5]. However, these constructs have not been critically examined through student-generated accounts within movement-based hybrid PE contexts where disruptions are environmental and ongoing rather than crisis-driven. This gap matters because instructional continuity in intermittent hybrid delivery depends not only on technological access but on how teaching practices are actually experienced by learners.

The contribution of this study lies in its focus on student-generated qualitative accounts of OPE teaching within a Philippine hybrid learning context, where online delivery is triggered by environmental conditions rather than by institutional design. Unlike prior studies that document teacher-reported challenges or structural barriers, this study centers the student voice as the primary source of evidence, offering a ground-level account of what instructional behaviors actually shape participation and motivation in movement-based hybrid classes. This focus addresses a gap that existing OPE literature has not yet fully explored.

The present study addresses this gap by exploring tertiary students' perceptions of desirable and undesirable characteristics of OPE teachers in a State University in Pampanga, Philippines, where online delivery is implemented in response to environmental conditions such as typhoons, flooding, and high heat index advisories. By centering student voice in a non-emergency hybrid context, this study contributes qualitative evidence that is distinct from pandemic-era research and more reflective of the ongoing instructional conditions many Filipino students face. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

- What characteristics do tertiary students perceive as desirable and undesirable in online PE teachers?
- What factors do students identify as sources of engagement and difficulty in hybrid PE classes?
- What do students describe as their primary motivators and sources of discouragement in online PE?

2. METHOD

An exploratory qualitative design was employed to investigate students' experiences of online and hybrid PE instruction. This approach was chosen because the study aimed to capture the depth and complexity of student perceptions rather than measure predefined variables, making qualitative inquiry more appropriate than quantitative or mixed-methods alternatives. Although frequency counts are reported to indicate the prevalence of themes across participants, these figures serve a descriptive rather than inferential purpose and do not alter the qualitative nature of the analysis. Data were collected virtually from students enrolled at a State University in Pampanga, Philippines, where onsite classes are intermittently converted to online delivery in response to environmental conditions such as typhoons, flooding, and high heat index advisories.

2.1. Participants

Participants were recruited through purposive sampling via class announcements and direct invitations coordinated through their respective PE instructors. Eligibility required completion of at least one semester of online or hybrid PE and a minimum age of 18 years. A total of 69 students met the inclusion criteria and were included in the study. The mean age was 19.91 years (range=18-24), and the sample consisted of 51 females (73.91%) and 18 males (26.09%). Participants came from multiple degree programs across the university, though year level and program distribution were not systematically recorded as the study prioritized PE experience over academic profile. Regarding equipment access at home, 18 students (26.09%) reported full access and 36 (52.17%) reported partial access, indicating that more than half of the participants experienced some degree of equipment limitation. While the sample was drawn from a single institution, the shared experience of environmentally disrupted hybrid PE among participants suggests that findings may be transferable to similar disruption-prone higher education contexts in the Philippines and comparable settings. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection.

No personally identifiable information was collected. All transcripts and coding records were stored in password-protected files accessible only to the research team. This was consistent with the data privacy requirements of the Philippine Data Privacy Act of 2012.

2.2. Interview protocol

Data were gathered through structured virtual interviews which lasted from 15 to 30 minutes. The protocol consisted of demographic questions covering age, gender, home equipment access, preferred learning platform, and self-rated fitness level. Four open-ended questions were included to capture students' experiences: i) characteristics liked in an online PE teacher and the reasons for these preferences; ii) characteristics disliked in an online PE teacher and the reasons for these concerns; iii) factors that made the class engaging or difficult; and iv) factors that motivated or discouraged participation in online PE.

Participants were permitted to respond in English, Filipino, or *Taglish*, a code-switched variety combining Filipino and English. Responses in Filipino or *Taglish* were translated into English by a qualified language instructor to ensure linguistic accuracy while preserving the intended meaning of each statement. All responses were transcribed verbatim prior to analysis. The interview guide underwent content validation by educators with at least five years of experience in online teaching, and questions were refined based on their feedback to ensure clarity and relevance to the hybrid PE context. Prior to full data collection, the protocol was reviewed for clarity and appropriateness through a preliminary review with two students who met the inclusion criteria but were not included in the final sample. Feedback from this review was used to refine question phrasing for clarity. Probing questions were used during interviews to encourage elaboration when responses were brief or ambiguous. Interviewer bias was minimized by following a standardized protocol and avoiding leading questions throughout all sessions. Given the exploratory nature of the study, formal psychometric validation was not conducted.

2.3. Data analysis

All transcripts were reviewed for completeness prior to analysis. Inductive thematic analysis was conducted following procedures outlined by [6], [7], which draw on the framework established by Braun and Clarke. Meaningful segments of text were assigned initial codes, which were subsequently grouped into broader thematic categories representing recurring patterns across participants. Two researchers coded all transcripts independently, and discrepancies were resolved by a third coder who made final categorization decisions. No formal reliability coefficient was computed, as disagreements were settled through discussion until consensus was reached, which is consistent with qualitative thematic analysis practice [8]. Each response could be assigned to multiple thematic categories, and frequencies and percentages were calculated to indicate the proportion of participants referencing each theme. Because categories were not mutually exclusive, cumulative percentages across themes exceed 100%.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Desirable characteristics of OPE teachers

Thematic analysis identified six recurring characteristics that students associated with effective OPE instruction, as shown in Table 1. Clarity of explanation and structured instruction was the most frequently reported theme (46.38%). Students consistently associated clear, step-by-step guidance with reduced confusion and greater confidence in task execution.

"*I like a teacher who explains the activity clearly and gives step-by-step instructions*." (1)
"*When instructions are clear, it is easier to follow and perform.*" (2)
"*Straight to the point explanations help me focus*." (3)

An energetic and engaging teaching style was the second most frequently reported theme (33.33%). Students described enthusiasm and an enjoyable class atmosphere as conditions that sustained their willingness to participate. Several students specifically mentioned that an energetic teacher helped them push through physical tiredness during online sessions.

"*An energetic teacher motivates me to move even if I feel tired*." (1)
"*I prefer a lively teacher who makes the class fun*." (2)

Supportive and encouraging behavior was reported by 20.29% of students. Responses in this category linked positive feedback and reassurance to sustained motivation. Students valued encouragement especially when they felt unsure about their ability to perform a given physical activity.

"*I like teachers who encourage us even if we are not good at the activity*." (1)
"*Support and positive feedback motivate me*." (2)

Patience and understanding were valued by 17.39% of students, particularly in relation to internet disruptions and physical limitations. The use of demonstrations and visual examples was reported by an equal proportion (17.39%), reflecting the importance students place on modeled instruction in movement-based tasks. Flexibility in workload and deadlines was mentioned by 15.94%, most frequently among students managing multiple academic demands.

Table 1. Desirable characteristics of OPE teachers

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Clear explanations/structured instruction	32	46.38
Energetic/engaging teaching style	23	33.33
Encouraging/supportive behavior	14	20.29
Patient/understanding	12	17.39
Use of demonstrations/videos	12	17.39
Flexible workload/deadlines	11	15.94

3.2. Undesirable characteristics of OPE teachers

Four themes emerged from students' descriptions of ineffective teaching practices, as shown in Table 2. Unclear instructions or confusing explanations were the most frequently cited concern (20.29%). The frequency of this theme directly mirrors the importance of clarity in the desirable characteristics category, reinforcing its role as a key instructional variable.

"*I dislike when the teacher explains in a confusing way*." (1)
"*If instructions are unclear, I feel lost*." (2)

Overly strict teaching practices or excessive pressure were reported by 8.70% of students, with responses frequently linking strictness to heightened stress and reduced willingness to participate. Students described strict teachers as creating an atmosphere where mistakes felt punishable rather than correctable. This made them hesitant to attempt activities they were not confident about.

"*Too strict teachers make the class stressful*." (1)

Monotonous or boring delivery was cited by 4.35% of students, and excessive workload was mentioned by a single respondent (1.45%). Students who cited boring delivery described classes that followed a repetitive format with little variation in activities. Those who mentioned excessive workload pointed to difficulty managing PE requirements alongside other academic demands.

Table 2. Undesirable characteristics of OPE teachers

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Unclear instruction	14	20.29
Overly strict/high pressure	6	8.70
Boring delivery	3	4.35
Excessive workload	1	1.45

3.3. Engagement and difficulty

Students attributed engagement and difficulty to both teacher behavior and contextual factors, as shown in Table 3. Teacher guidance and presence was the most frequently reported engagement factor (39.13%). Students described interaction, active involvement during exercises, and consistent teacher presence as conditions that increased participation.

"*The class is engaging when the teacher interacts with us*." (1)
"*Guidance during the activity makes it easier*." (2)

Fun and interactive activities were reported by 31.88% of students as contributing to engagement, with responses emphasizing activity variety and enjoyable class routines. Students noted that classes felt more manageable when activities changed from session to session. A predictable or repetitive format was seen as contributing to disengagement over time.

"*Fun activities make online PE enjoyable*." (1)

Among sources of difficulty, internet and technical issues were most frequently cited (18.84%), followed by limited equipment or space at home (8.70%) and unclear instructions (7.25%). Students reported that connectivity problems made it hard to follow demonstrations in real time. Limited home space and equipment further restricted their ability to perform certain physical activities as required.

Table 3. Engagement and difficulty factors

Factors	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Teacher guidance/presence	27	39.13
Fun/interactive activities	22	31.88
Internet/technical issues	13	18.84
Limited equipment/space	6	8.70
Unclear instructions	5	7.25

3.4. Motivation and discouragement

Teacher encouragement and feedback were identified by 59.42% of students as the primary source of motivation, as shown in Table 4. Students consistently connected praise and supportive communication with greater willingness to engage in physical tasks. Some students specifically noted that receiving feedback made them feel capable of completing activities they would otherwise avoid.

"*I feel motivated when the teacher gives positive feedback.*" (1)
"*Encouragement makes me try harder*." (2)

Low energy, stress, and diminished interest were reported by 40.58% of students as discouraging factors, reflecting the emotional and physical demands associated with sustained participation in online formats. Internet and equipment constraints were cited as additional sources of discouragement by 14.49% of respondents. Students described these challenges as compounding, where technical problems on top of physical fatigue made participation feel difficult to sustain.

"*Sometimes I feel too tired to participate*." (1)

Table 4. Motivation and discouragement factors

Factors	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Teacher encouragement/feedback	41	59.42
Low energy/stress	28	40.58
Internet/equipment constraints	10	14.49

4. DISCUSSION

The results of this study show that students' expectations in OPE are shaped less by the structure of physical tasks than by how teachers communicate and relate to them. Across all four thematic categories, instructional clarity and affective teacher presence stood out as the most frequently reported dimensions. This pattern suggests that students have a relatively clear idea of what good online PE teaching looks like, one that centers on the quality of human interaction rather than on the design of activities or assessment. What distinguishes these findings from prior work is that students did not describe clarity and encouragement merely as preferences. They described them as conditions, things that needed to be present before participation was even possible. This distinction has practical consequences for how OPE instruction is designed and evaluated.

The emphasis on instructional clarity is consistent with findings from studies on online PE. Jeong and So [1] identified limited feedback opportunities and difficulties in demonstrating movement-based tasks as primary teacher-reported challenges during online instruction, while Yu and Jee [9] found that feedback quality and instructional preparation were critical to the success of online practical PE classes. These studies document the consequences of unclear instruction from the teacher's side. The present findings add a student-centered view to this picture: students do not merely prefer clear instruction, they consistently described it as a condition for participation [10]–[12]. This distinction is theoretically meaningful.

In movement-based learning, verbal instructions must be translated into physical action, a process that places cognitive demands on learners beyond what text-based subjects require. When instructions are

unclear, students in OPE cannot simply reread a passage or pause a lecture. They are left without a viable entry point into the task itself [13], [14]. This suggests that instructional clarity in OPE functions as a cognitive scaffold, reducing uncertainty and enabling students to convert teacher communication into physical performance [15], [16]. Vo and Ho [17] similarly found that course clarity had significant indirect effects on students' behavioral, cognitive, and affective engagement in online learning, mediated through expectancy and task value beliefs, which supports this interpretation. OPE teachers therefore need to treat instructional communication as a primary concern rather than an incidental part of delivery [18].

The role of teacher affective presence in sustaining motivation is consistent with self-determination theory (SDT), which identifies competence and relatedness as core psychological needs underlying intrinsic motivation [4]. In PE contexts, White *et al.* [19] found through a systematic review that autonomy-supportive and competence-affirming practices consistently produce positive motivational outcomes [20], and specifically reported that perceived teacher support predicted autonomous motivation in online PE [21], [22]. The present data reflect the same pattern. Students who described encouraging, energetic, and supportive teachers reported greater willingness to participate, while those who described strict or pressuring teachers reported withdrawal [23]. Several studies [24], [25] found that controlling teaching styles produced amotivation and disengagement in PE students, reinforcing this finding [26]. What the present study adds to this body of work is a grounding in a non-emergency hybrid context. Most SDT-informed OPE studies were conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, when both teachers and students were navigating crisis conditions. The present findings suggest that the same motivational dynamics operate in routine hybrid delivery, indicating that affective teacher presence is not only a crisis response strategy but a sustained instructional requirement [27], [28]. OPE teachers and program designers should therefore treat motivational climate as a structural feature of course design, not an interpersonal variable left to individual teaching style.

Students also reported barriers related to internet instability, limited equipment, and restricted home space, which is consistent with documented constraints in the OPE literature [2], [14], [29], [30]. What is notable, however, is that these barriers appeared less often than teacher-related factors across engagement and motivation prompts. This does not suggest that structural inequities are unimportant as both [2], [29] have documented their impact on instructional delivery. Rather, it suggests that within the conditions students already face, teacher behavior remains a meaningful factor. Students appear to regard teacher clarity, flexibility, and encouragement as things that matter even when their learning conditions are difficult. This finding has direct implications for teacher training and professional development programs [13], [14], [28], which should equip OPE teachers with communication and motivational strategies that remain effective even when students lack ideal learning environments [31].

Emotional fatigue was reported by 40.58% of students as a discouraging factor, making it the second most frequently cited source of disengagement after teacher-related variables. Research by Frontzkowski *et al.* [32] found that prolonged use of video conferencing produced fatigue across emotional, motivational, and social dimensions. Studies have also established that digital fatigue is directly linked to academic disengagement and psychological burnout [33]–[35]. In PE, these demands intersect with the physical effort the subject requires, which may increase fatigue beyond what students experience in other online courses. OPE teachers and course designers may therefore need to consider pacing strategies, varied task formats, and recovery intervals not as optional additions but as necessary features for sustaining student participation. At the institutional level, acknowledging digital fatigue as a legitimate concern in OPE curriculum planning may help reduce dropout and disengagement in ways that purely technology-focused interventions cannot.

5. THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

This study refines how SDT applies to OPE by showing which specific teacher behaviors address each of its three psychological needs in a hybrid, movement-based setting. Instructional clarity supports competence, as students described it as the condition that made physical task execution feel possible. Affective teacher presence supports relatedness, while flexible and low-pressure teaching supports autonomy, with controlling styles directly working against both. These findings show how SDT needs are satisfied or blocked through concrete teaching behaviors in OPE, adding to what the existing SDT-in-PE literature has not yet examined from the student's perspective.

6. CONCLUSION

This study found that instructional clarity and affective teacher presence are the two dimensions that most consistently shape how students experience OPE. Students did not simply prefer teachers who explained things clearly and offered encouragement. They described these qualities as conditions that determined whether they could participate at all. This distinction is the study's core contribution.

Prior research has established that clarity and support matter in online learning broadly, but the present findings show that in movement-based subjects like PE, these qualities carry a more fundamental role. Without clear instruction, students cannot translate teacher communication into physical action. Without affective presence, students disengage before the task begins. These findings have direct implications for practice. OPE teachers should prioritize structured, step-by-step instructional delivery and maintain consistent motivational communication, particularly in hybrid arrangements where face-to-face cues are absent or intermittent. Teacher training programs should incorporate these competencies explicitly rather than treating them as incidental to PE instruction, and institutions operating in disruption-prone contexts like the Philippines should recognize that hybrid PE delivery requires deliberate pedagogical preparation, not just technological infrastructure. Emotional fatigue also emerged as a meaningful concern, and its intersection with the physical demands of PE suggests that course pacing and task variety deserve more attention in OPE design. Future research should examine whether students with different motivational profiles respond differently to these teaching qualities, and whether findings hold across different institutional contexts and levels of hybrid delivery. The sample is only from the Philippine context, which limits how broadly the findings can be applied. Data were based on student perceptions alone, and teacher perspectives were not included, so future studies that gather both accounts would give a more complete picture of OPE instructional quality.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

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C : **C**onceptualization
M : **M**ethodology
So : **So**ftware
Va : **Va**lidation
Fo : **Fo**rmal analysis
I : **I**nvestigation
R : **R**esources
D : **D**ata Curation
O : Writing - **O**riginal Draft
E : Writing - Review & **E**diting
Vi : **Vi**sualization
Su : **Su**pervision
P : **P**roject administration
Fu : **Fu**nding acquisition

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Authors state no conflict of interest.

INFORMED CONSENT

We have obtained informed consent from all individuals included in this study.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This research adhered to ethical guidelines including the Belmont Report, Helsinki Declaration, Philippine Data Privacy Act of 2012, and PCHRD's 2022 guidelines.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, [JPPM], upon reasonable request.

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