Research Experience through the Lens of Undergraduate Filipino Pre-Service Physical Educators: An Interpretative Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study

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Abstract. The preparation of pre-service teachers, particularly in conducting research, is an important aspect of teacher training in the Philippine context, where challenges in various dimensions of the academic milieu exist. This interpretative hermeneutic phenomenological (IHP) study delved into the experiences of undergraduate Filipino pre-service physical educators (PSPEs) about the intricacies of research and thesis writing. The study aimed to unravel the lived experiences of these students throughout the research process to clarify how they make sense of these experiences. Conducted at a teacher education institution in Pampanga, the Philippines, 10 PSPEs who had completed their theses participated in the study. Employing a qualitative design, the IHP study used face-to-face in-depth interviews guided by a semi-structured interview protocol guide. Rigorous IHP analytical protocols were utilized to illustrate meanings from the data transcripts, while ensuring trustworthiness and rigor. The findings revealed that research, for the PSPEs, is not merely a technical pursuit but a combination of emotions requiring coordinated actions. For them, research demands fortitude and courage, accompanied by multiple challenges that, when overcome, lead to a fulfilling pursuit. The PSPEs view research as an investment for their future personal and professional undertakings. Considering these findings, a general recommendation is made for teacher education institutions to incorporate holistic support mechanisms that address the technical facets of research and the socio-emotional dimensions, especially for pre-service teachers, to ensure resilience and confidence as they pursue this challenging, yet rewarding, endeavor.

Keywords: interpretative phenomenology; physical education; Philippines; thesis writing; qualitative approach

1. Introduction

In the Philippines, practical research is a required subject for senior high school students and for higher education institutions (HEIs), where most degree programs require the completion of a research paper. Research as a discipline focuses on acquiring and developing knowledge that can be used to describe, explain, evaluate, compare, correlate, predict, and control situations, phenomena, and other observations (Walliman, 2018). Academically, research is a project that students must complete to meet university policies and positively contribute to their development (Harris, 2019). As Paler-Calmorin and Calmorin (2007) stated, it is beneficial to the teaching and learning process that research improves instruction and enhances students' achievement. In higher education, research often culminates in a thesis, which serves as a tangible manifestation of the outcomes expected from undergraduate students at the end of a particular semester. A thesis plays a significant role in providing benefits to individuals and local, regional, national, and international communities involved in the education system. Rathnakar (2018) noted that research professionals help society and educational institutions adapt to the changing demands of modern life.

Students often find writing research papers intimidating and difficult. Campillan (2019) discovered that students struggle with developing research questions, writing literature reviews, selecting respondents, creating research instruments, transcribing interviews, and dealing with delays, among others. Safitri et al. (2021) identified numerous issues in research writing, including a lack of basic knowledge in writing a thesis, an inability to design research methodologies, and insufficient resources related to their topics. Sitompul and Anditasari (2022) found that students experience difficulties in three main areas: the introduction stage, the research methods section (e.g., finding appropriate methods, determining samples, and designing tools), and data processing, sorting, and finalizing results. Additional difficulties in research were identified by Lestari (2020), including challenges related to students' English proficiency, time management, issues with thesis advisers, research topics and methodologies, and students' motivation and attitudes. Ngoc and Ngoc (2021) found that writing literature reviews and using correct citation styles are major challenges for novice writers. Javed (2019) also noted that adherence to a particular referencing style, such as the American Psychological Association's (APA) rules for literature reviews, was a problematic task for student researchers.

Other major problems that students face when writing theses include psychological issues, sociocultural diversity, linguistic challenges, and critical thinking difficulties. To address these issues, Suyadi et al. (2020) emphasized the importance of establishing students' readiness and ability to write before starting research. Writing is a skill that graduate students need to master and refine throughout their studies (Rodriguez et al., 2017). Sariyanto et al. (2015) found that a lack of writing ability is a significant factor contributing to the difficulties faced by English postgraduate students at Pontianak University.

Chen et al. (2016) pointed out that linguistic challenges are not the primary reason for poor research but identifying issues plays a larger role, as "learning is not

merely a process of acquiring skills. Learning is a process of becoming" (Chen et al., 2016, p. 57). Rantala-Lehtola and Ruohotie-Lyhty (2022) added that research involves a balance of positive and negative emotions, which is essential for academic multiliteracy. Intrinsic or extrinsic factors can sometimes delay or hinder the completion of research studies (Bakhou & Bouhania, 2020).

Liu (2015) found that discrepancies between teachers' and students' opinions are a major cause of low-quality theses. Hey-Cunningham et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of feedback in research, describing it as the primary tool for teaching writing in postgraduate research. The process of repeated drafts, feedback, and revisions is highly complex and challenging to master (Coelho, 2020). Qasem and Zayid (2019) identified appropriate input from advisers or teachers as one of the main challenges in student research, along with the lack of a standard format, insufficient knowledge of literature reviews, and inadequate time frames for writing proposals. Personalized feedback and instruction from language experts can significantly influence students' writing and drafting processes (Huisman et al., 2019). These difficulties create feelings of anxiety among researchers.

Novice writers struggle not only with writing skills but also with the emotions associated with writing and the challenging process of developing an academic identity. Calimag (2021) highlighted that overcoming research anxiety is challenging but achievable with effort and determination. The impact of researchers' emotions on the study process is a topic of growing concern, as it is frequently overlooked in social scientific fields (Reed & Towers, 2021). Badenhorst et al. (2015) suggested that successful research writers need to become discourse analysts. Landicho (2020) claimed that research is crucial for developing critical thinking, solving global problems, and creating a sense of fulfillment. Teachers' expectations, their passion for growth, and the desire for high academic marks are key motivations for conducting research.

Many attempts have been made to address the constant challenges in research. Rapp and Kruse (2016) explored the use of electronic support in providing instruction and supervision to thesis writers through a web-based software called Thesis Writer, which was piloted in 2015. This software supports independent work and facilitates collaboration among peers, classmates, and teachers. Gonzalez-Lopez et al. (2016) experimented with the use of gamification, developing a web platform called TURET2.0, which is an intelligent tutoring system that incorporates gamification techniques to motivate students. Hassan and Banerjee (2021) found that using mind maps effectively helps new researchers structure their research paper content, reducing stress and anxiety. Liu (2015) restructured a graduate thesis writing course by doubling teaching hours and adding new content, such as the appreciation of high-prestige academic papers, resulting in improved student abilities in material collection and usage, as well as language and format.

The application of varied strategies in teaching research is highly encouraged. Paurillo (2019) emphasized the crucial role of teachers in explicitly motivating the

discussion of research through engaging classroom tasks. Castle (2017) proposed the use of freewriting, a strategy that encourages researchers to write creatively and openly, helping them develop their narratives.

This study is anchored on the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), which explores how individual differences and social contexts support various motivational styles, particularly controlled and autonomous motivation (Manninen et al., 2022). This theory is relevant due to the difficulties students face in writing research papers, such as time constraints and uncooperative group members. Mawere et al. (2016) stated that human behavior is driven by the desire to fulfill needs and, despite challenges, people can adapt by employing good communication and time management with group members.

The aforementioned studies confirm that students struggle with research and several interventions have been developed to assist them. However, the focus of existing studies has been on academic subjects. This study explored how research is conducted within the context of teacher education, specifically in pre-service physical education, in teacher education institutions. There is a need to understand how internal processes and factors interact within the grounds of research. Research is a crucial component of undergraduate students' professional development, particularly among pre-service physical education teachers, where the conduct and completion of a thesis is a part of the curriculum.

As a multifaceted process, thesis writing is influenced by personal, academic, and cultural contexts. Understanding the lived experiences and perceptions of students in the context of research is vital for improving academic and psychosocial support. Therefore, this phenomenological exploration aimed to study and understand the phenomenon of research among undergraduate Filipino physical education major students. Specifically, the study sought to answer its lone research question: How do pre-service physical educators (PSPEs) make sense of their lived experiences in research?

2. Methodology
2.1. Philosophical Stance and Research Design
The study was underpinned by a constructivist philosophical worldview, which believes that humans develop their knowledge and understanding of the world through personal experiences and reflections (Adom et al., 2016). A constructivist philosophy, as a paradigmatic anchor, posits that knowledge is not an objective reality that is to be discovered but it is actively constructed by individuals based on their experiences, perspectives, and ways they interact with the world. The research design employed was phenomenological, particularly the interpretative hermeneutic type.

Interpretative hermeneutic phenomenology (IHP) is a qualitative design used to explore lived experiences via an idiographic approach which means that a researcher may understand a phenomenon through individuals, to arrive at a general assertion (Paley, 2018). This design was particularly suitable for uncovering the meanings and essence that PSPEs attached to their experiences,

specifically when doing research. In the context of IPA, a constructivist approach underscores that informants create their interpretations and meanings of their lived experiences. It is, therefore, acknowledged that these meanings are subjective and can vary from one informant to another. In the context of PSPEs, this approach allows researchers to explore the unique perspectives of the informants, leading to the contextualization of experiences within their cultural nuances.

Hermeneutic phenomenology involves the process of phenomenological reduction, wherein researchers put aside their preconceptions to authentically engage with the informants' experiences. This methodological rigor aids researchers in remaining open to the richness and complexity of the informants' narratives, allowing for a more genuine exploration of their lived experiences.

2.2. Informants
The informants consisted of 10 undergraduate Filipino physical education major students (alternatively termed in this study as pre-service physical educators or PSPEs) who had completed their thesis writing course (N = 10). Purposive sampling was employed to select informants who could provide rich and meaningful insights into the phenomenon. They must have completed the entire research process, from conceptualization to completion stages. Within these processes, it was anticipated that PSPEs would have meaningful experiences and perspectives toward doing research. Their ages ranged from 20 to 22 years old (M = 21.33 ± 0.47), with men (n = 2) and women (n = 8). They were in their senior year at the time of the study. They completed their theses during the academic year 2022 to 2023 at a comprehensive institution of higher learning in the Province of Pampanga, the Philippines.

The informants, as required by their curriculum, were expected to complete and defend a thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Research 1: Research in Physical Education 1 (concept pitch and proposal development) and Research 2: Research in Physical Education 2 (final thesis paper completion and oral defense). The thesis is usually conducted in groups of four to five, with an assigned leader as the spokesperson and team facilitator.

The informants came from the Bachelor of Physical Education program under a teacher education institution recognized by the Philippine Commission on Higher Education (CHED) as a Center of Development for Teacher Education under CHED Memorandum Order Number 17, series of 2016 ("Designated Centers of Excellence [COEs] and Centers of Development [CODs] for Teacher Education Program"). A COD "refers to a department within a higher education institution, which demonstrates the potential to become a Center of Excellence (COE) in the future" (CHED, n.d., para. 1). Meanwhile, a COE "refers to a department within a higher education institution, which continuously demonstrates excellent performance in the areas of instruction, research and publication, extension and linkages and institutional qualifications" (CHED, n.d., para 1).

2.3. Instrument and Data Collection Procedures

A semi-structured interview was the primary source of data collection in exploring the lived experiences of the PSPEs during their research journey. An interview protocol guide, patterned after the guidelines provided by Krueger (2002), was followed to elicit credible and rich data about the experiences and perceptions of the informants. Additionally, a robotfoto was drafted to capture the demographic characteristics of the PSPEs. A total of five open-ended questions were crafted based on the objective of the study to allow the informants to express their thoughts and feelings freely. To ensure that the interview questions were aligned with the research question, they were subjected to a review with the help of a qualitative expert.

Initially, the informants were asked to describe their overall experience and motivation with the research process as undergraduate PE major students. Their challenges, background, and personal experiences that influenced their approach to research in the context of PE studies were also explored. Relative to this, the PSPEs were prompted to reflect on their own experiences by sharing their strategies and methodologies which made sense in their research journey. Lastly, they were requested to share how they integrated their personal experiences by stating what shaped their perspectives in the field of PE research.

The interviews started with opening questions, followed by different probing and prompting questions. Follow-up questions were also asked which culminated in the inquiry of meanings that the informants associated with the lived experiences of thesis writing. They were also asked if they wished to add or clarify anything further. The data collection was facilitated with on-site, face-to-face, in-depth interviews ranging from 45 to 60 minutes per informant. The language of interviewing was Filipino to better express the PSPEs' context, experience, or situation in research. The nature of the interviews was retrospective to elicit the PSPEs' lived experiences and make sense of their experiences in the year-round thesis writing journey. Subject to the informants' approval, the interviews were voice recorded via mobile phones, which facilitated the collection of data.

2.4. Data Analysis

Cognizant of the study's philosophical stance and the nature of IHP, guidelines laid by Heidegger (1996) and Patton (2002) were followed. The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and were confirmed by the informants before analysis. The researchers read these thoroughly multiple times to be fully immersed in the data (data familiarization). Afterward, significant statements were highlighted, particularly those that aligned with the research question. These statements were subsequently clustered into meaningful accounts, specifically those that generalized sense-making with the lived experiences of the informants regarding research. These meaningful constructs formed the sub-themes (generating initial codes), which were then revisited to form a general cluster of themes (searching for themes), based on the researchers' interpretation, and verified through qualitative protocols to ensure trustworthiness and rigor (reviewing themes). A final report was then completed with the general themes encompassing the meaning of research anchored on PSPEs lived experiences (defining and naming themes and final write-up).

To explicitly elaborate the process, a hermeneutic circle was utilized (a concept of hermeneutics), an iterative process of understanding in which a text can be facilitated by interpreting its parts with the whole and vice versa. The process began by gaining an understanding of the entire dataset, which were the interview transcripts from the PSPEs (understanding the whole). Second, the researchers delved into the individual components of the data, emphasizing specific quotes or incidents within the transcripts and analyzing them in detail to arrive at significant meanings (analyzing the parts). Third, the researchers moved back and forth between the parts and the whole while continuously refining the understanding of both which was essential as insights gained from such analysis may lead to new interpretations of the whole and the specificities (iterative process). Finally, the derived interpretations were situated within the broader context of the research question and aligned with the literature and context of the study where it was situated (contextualization). This hermeneutic loop facilitated the recursive processes to interpret the meanings of the PSPEs about their lived experiences in research meaningfully.

2.5. Ethical Considerations
Adhering to the fundamental principles of ethics in research, each informant was provided with an informed consent form, which contained an information sheet introducing the research, the purpose of the study, the nature of the research, how they were selected as informants, information about their voluntary participation, procedures, duration, risks (if any), benefits, confidentiality, sharing of the results, right to refuse or withdraw, and contact details. The second part of the informed consent form was a certificate of consent which the informants signed agreeing to their voluntary participation. It was further explained to them that their participation was within the tenets of voluntary participation and they had the freedom to withdraw at any time, for any reason, without citing any consequence (Philippine Health Research Ethics Board, 2017). The confidentiality of their identity and the information they provided was ensured by assigning pseudonyms.

2.6. Mechanisms to Ensure Trustworthiness and Rigor
Rigor, as articulated by Cypress (2017), pertains to the extent to which the findings are thorough and accurate in a manner that instills confidence in readers. With the provision of transparent descriptions of the research processes, readers were reassured of the robustness of the findings, while furnishing ample information about the nature of the informants facilitated the transferability of findings. Through this, readers can assess the relevance of such findings in their respective educational contexts. For this study, team-based analysis was employed to bolster the credibility and trustworthiness of the research further, in order to minimize inherent biases.

Aided by a reflective diary, reflexivity was likewise ensured to enhance transparency and rigor by critically examining the researchers' underlying assumptions that added to the enrichment of the insight, understanding, and rigor of the study. In the reflexive practice, the researchers became aware of their biases, assumptions, and influence on the research process and subsequent findings.

They critically examined their backgrounds, experiences, and values, so as not to allow them to shape the research process from data collection to analysis.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, member checking was facilitated by returning the initial findings to the PSPEs to verify accuracy and ensure alignment between the interpretations vis-a-vis their perspectives and experiences. This was explicitly done by presenting the transcribed data as a summary of the preliminary themes including the discussion so they could confirm, refute, or integrate additional insights. Moreover, peer debriefing was also employed by engaging with a qualitative research expert to reveal any prejudice or presumptions.

3. Findings and Discussion

Examining the informants' responses, five themes were explicated after a thorough analysis. The themes describe the embedded meanings of the undergraduate physical education majors' experiences in research within the context of their thesis. The five themes are:

1. Research entails a symphony of emotions.
2. Research is beyond technical rigors and requires orchestrated actions.
3. Research is a game of strength and courage.
4. Research is a challenging yet fulfilling pursuit.
5. Research is an investment for the future.

Theme 1: Research Entails a Symphony of Emotions

When the informants were asked about their overall experiences in doing research within the context of their thesis writing course, they regarded the process as a continuum of emotions. This means that, for them, doing research could involve an interplay of emotions, starting with fear, gradually developing into a profound sense of motivation while undertaking the process, and culminating in overflowing joy upon completion.

Generally, the informants articulated their 'rollercoaster of emotions' in the process of doing research. For them, fear and anxiety were the emotions they felt at the onset of the rigorous academic journey. According to Rai (2012), academic writing is hard to detach from emotion and any theory or body of knowledge can be related to the student writer's personal experience. These feelings were triggered by the reality that, despite being introduced to the concept of research at the basic education level, particularly through practical research in their senior high school years, they felt they still lacked the necessary knowledge and competencies required to complete a thesis at a higher education level. The fear of research enveloped most of the PSPEs in their classes at the beginning of the semester.

This is evidenced in the response of informant *Marga*:

> "*Ahm, yung experience ko po para siyang rollercoaster ride. Different kinds of emotions, feelings, kasi may time na sobrang exhausted ka na, kasi sa mga submission sa ibang subjects and… pinaka ahhh na-exhaust ako dito yung ano po, ahh… na-stress ako doon sa yung 'di po talaga ako magaling when it comes into writing. So 'yon po 'yung pinaka na-stress*

ako that time. So, 'yon po 'yung pinaka-worry ko that time. Kaya I think 'yun po 'yung pinaka-memorable that time." ("The experience is like a rollercoaster ride. There were different kinds of emotions or feelings. There will be times when you feel so exhausted because there are still submittals in other courses that coincide with thesis writing. That's when I got so tired and stressed. I am not really into writing, and I guess that's so memorable at that time.")

Further, *Kate* claimed that:

"*Kase po n'ung, senior high school po ako, yung research po namin, nilaro laro lang po ng mga teacher namin. N'ung 3rd year po nag-research kami, doon ko po talaga nalaman kung ano po ba talaga ang research. Yung mga misconceptions ko po about research na debunk po talaga silang lahat.*" ("…because when I was in my senior high school years, our research subject was not taken seriously by our teachers. It was only when I reached my third year in college that I knew what research was. My misconceptions about research were debunked.")

However, within the actual process of doing research, their initial fear shifted to a sudden sense of motivation, strengthened by the support they received from their mentors. According to Marshall et al. (2022). Whether a student is an undergraduate, graduate, or post-graduate, mentors are essential to their success. Having mentors or working alongside multiple mentors is a crucial strategy for students to grow their network, seize opportunities, and improve their readiness for further academic or professional endeavors An adviser's role plays a crucial part in shaping students' intrinsic desire to pursue their research (Marshall et al., 2022). Considering this, no matter how challenging the research process is, the fear that was initially felt gradually decreases, and a profound sense of enthusiasm fosters students' aspirations to complete their paper. Towards the completion of the PSPEs' theses, their fear at the onset and motivation during the process culminated in a sense of joy and pride they mutually shared with their fellow researchers. A deep sense of joy was triggered by the realization that the journey was never easy but they had overcome it. McLaughlin (2003) claimed that thought and emotion in research are inherently intertwined. As a result, it was revealed that joy was felt immediately after completing their work and presenting their papers before the panel members.

Inferring from this finding, research is generally regarded as a pursuit characterized by fear and anxiety, often triggered by limited prior knowledge and skills. In support of this, Calimag (2021) mentioned that students experience anxiety when writing their research papers, and even students who consider themselves "good writers" or "capable writers" experience writing anxiety. The students viewed the research experience as an enormous task, with emotions rising and falling. In the same study, four stages of anger and anxiety during research experiences were identified: paralysis; procrastination and progression; pinnacle and plateau; and the plunge (Calimag, 2021). Researchers may experience feelings of inaction, inadequacy, hopelessness, and sufficiency until they feel a sense of relief, release, and resoluteness. It is noteworthy to point out

that doing research could be a multitude of emotions, a fundamental phenomenon validly experienced by many novice researchers, including physical education major students.

Theme 2: Research is Beyond Technical Rigors and Requires Orchestrated Actions

Research presents several difficulties for students. Beyond various technical issues, limited vocabulary was also identified as a challenge by the informants. Lestari (2020) reported that difficulties in writing research stem from many reasons, including language vocabulary, difficulty understanding theory, determining an idea when first writing, reviewing theories, determining appropriate methodology, analyzing data, and making recommendations. The PSPEs shared corresponding methods to overcome their difficulties in writing research papers. Actions such as "creating a timeline" and knowing the steps to approach their research were some of the strategies they employed. This suggests that research demands not only technical and vocabulary skills but also organizational abilities.

Singh (2021) highlighted that the actions and procedures necessary to conduct research properly are referred to as the research process. Therefore, creating and adhering to a plan is crucial in the process. Finding relevant materials can sometimes lead researchers down unexpected paths, introducing them to new perspectives and ideas. It can also be challenging, especially when the subject is particularly complex, or the sources are behind paywalls. When researchers are unable to access the necessary information, they may feel frustrated.
This was reflected in the responses of the informants:

> "…*maging nervous kapag po nagi-start na ng research writing…lalo na po kung first time niyo po. Ang mahalaga po is alam niyo po kung paano siya i-approach.*" ("You'll be nervous when you start writing your research paper especially if it's your first time. What's important is, you should know how to approach it.") *(Bianca)*

> "*Nahirapan po sa paghahanap ng mga literature kasi merong instances na ang-hirap...like walang available o kaya naman may available kaso hindi siya pasok sa time frame, kaya kailangan munang maghanap ng iba.*" ("I had a hard time finding related literature because it needs to be recent. Sometimes I see something that doesn't fit in the timeline. So, I must look for another.") *(Lily)*

> "…*mahirap po sa una, dapat po talaga meron kayong timeline talaga sa pag-gawa ng research that this day ito po ang kailangang matapos niyo, and that day dapat ito po mismo yung matapos niyo.*" ("… hard at first, you need to create a timeline when you want to accomplish something on your research on this specific day, it should be done on that day…you need to plan and work according to the plan.") *(Matthew)*

Furthermore, effective communication is crucial to ensure agreement, coordinate efforts, and foster a collaborative environment. The informants considered

appropriate communication with co-researchers to be essential. One of the most beneficial strategies to overcome their struggles was fostering cooperation among members. Johnson et al. (2012) stated that research inherently involves collaboration. Most research publications have multiple authors making it essential for researchers to be adept at collaborative writing. Therefore, communication and collaboration between authors are vital in academic writing. Additionally, Kyvik and Reymert (2017) claimed that communication and collaboration among team members, the leader's role, research experience, and the size of groups are factors that affect group productivity.

> *"dapat alam niyo po kung paano makisalamuha po kung may mga member po kayo; ang pakikisama napaka-importante po."*
> ("...you should know how to get along with your members; cooperation is really important.") *(Bianca)*

> *"nagiging maayos po kapag may time management and sa pakikipag-communicate po sa mga ka-group."* ("It becomes better with time management and communication with your group members.") *(Belle)*

The informants shared the same experiences but had different feelings about their research journey, revealing various strategies they employed to complete their research. Conversely, research is both an artistic and scientific inquiry (Patel & Patel, 2019). Therefore, it is reasonable to say that adhering to a methodical approach to research helps in organizing ideas and investigations, ensuring that all essential aspects of research are addressed.

Theme 3: Research is a Game of Strength and Courage
In research, courage is crucial because it impacts not only the quality of the research but also the personal and academic growth of the researchers. Students employed various coping mechanisms, including adopting a positive outlook; demonstrating patience, consideration, and determination; seeking assistance from others; ensuring effective communication and teamwork; and taking breaks (Roxas, 2023). When asked about memorable turning points in their research journey, most informants highlighted their tenacity, and that they continued to strive until they reached their goals. Passing their final defense with minimal revisions was a particularly pleasant recollection of their research experiences.

From the students' perspective, writing is a tedious and laborious task that involves translating ideas onto paper (Defazio et al., 2010). The importance of strength and courage in research is significant, encompassing multiple aspects. Santisi et al. (2020) found that courage is associated with increased levels of contentment, confidence, optimism, openness to new ideas, determination, drive to achieve objectives, and appreciation, as well as decreased levels of stress, unease, and anxiety. Therefore, the expanding potential of courage is what makes it valuable for research. It empowers researchers to pursue knowledge fearlessly, to persevere in the face of difficulties, and to make significant contributions to both the academic community and society at large. Supporting this, Norman and Spencer (2005) found that pre-service teachers who received, affirmations such as

positive comments and good grades, could develop a more positive self-view as writers.

> *"… at the end of the day, nagawa ko po siya na ako lang ang nagfi-figure out na walang discussion. Nakaka-proud po."* ("At the end of the day, I was able to figure it out on my own without any discussion. I was really proud of it.") *(Kate)*

> *"…tinest ko po yung sarili ko kung hanggang saan ang kayo ko sa research. Kasi, more on self-doubt po kasi para sa akin yung research if kaya ko po ba talaga siya. Kaya ngayon po, nakita ko na kaya naman po talaga 'pag may tiyaga at patience."* ("… I tested myself to see how far I can go in research. Because at first, I really doubted myself if I can do it. Now, I realized that it's really possible if you have perseverance and patience.") *(Luke)*

Research frequently involves exploring new environments and tackling unresolved issues. Making significant contributions to knowledge requires the courage to face uncertainty and delve into the unknown. Sanchez et al. (2017) stated that even mustering the courage to begin writing a research paper can be difficult, let alone finishing it properly. Therefore, the bravery of the PSPEs to write distinctly affects their productivity and the completion of their research. Additionally, data collection was a challenging task for them. To ensure that their data-gathering procedures were as error-free, unbiased, and consistent as possible, PSPEs had to use techniques that promote quality assurance. Despite these challenging protocols, collecting field data is crucial for many research initiatives, especially those involving real-world applications, naturalistic observation, or experimental modification. Through proactive measures and the application of expertise and resilience, PSPEs overcame challenges and provided insightful results from their data collection procedures, all because of their strength and courage.

Theme 4: Research is a Challenging Yet Fulfilling Pursuit
Embarking on the journey of research was viewed as both challenging and fulfilling by the PSPEs. The complexity of immersing themselves in topic identification, searching scholarly literature, writing the thesis, collecting and analyzing data, and writing the final report justified the rigorous process, which could have initially been daunting for them. However, the informants perceived these challenges as inherent to research, viewing them as opportunities for personal and intellectual growth. As they navigated the intricacies of their specialization in physical education, they developed resilience and a profound understanding and appreciation of the complexities surrounding research in this field.

> *"Hindi po talaga ako magaling sa pagsusulat, pero ngayon napakasaya ko kasi na-overcome ko ang kahinaan na yun."* ("I am not really good at writing, but now I am very happy because I actually overcame my weakness.") *(Marga)*

> *"...struggles po namin na kulang sa time. Gano'n nga po kase, minsan po sumasabay po yung mga ibang acads namin, mga school works, so minsan*

po…. very fulfilling po siya na may nalalaman ka po talaga about research." (…the lack of time is a struggle, sometimes our acads and school work go along with research tasks…It's very fulfilling that you really learn something about research.") *(Kelly)*

"Marami ko po kasing mae-encounter na problems along the way. Kaya nasabi ko po siya na challenging. Fulfilling naman po yung 'pag may naririnig ka about sa paper niyo na maganda… Masarap sa feeling." (I encountered many problems along the way. That is why I said it's challenging. It's fulfilling when you hear something good about your paper. It feels good.") *(Luke)*

The fulfillment that PSPEs derived from research extends beyond the immediate academic context. They recognized that overcoming the challenges associated with research fosters a sense of accomplishment and equips them for their future professional endeavors. Additionally, they viewed the research process as a pathway to contributing invaluable insights to the broader body of knowledge in physical education. Corlett (2012) stated that emotional realizations in the research process can help individuals and groups make sense of and learn from their experiences. As PSPEs navigated the challenging journey of research, characterized by its complicated circumstances, they not only cultivated expertise but also achieved satisfaction, believing that they could contribute meaningfully to shaping the future of physical education. Thus, the arduous nature of research was seen as an integral part of a transformative journey that ultimately led to a profound sense of accomplishment.

Theme 5: Research is an Investment for the Future
For the informants, engaging in the research process was viewed as a strategic investment. They recognized the pivotal role that research plays in enhancing their understanding and developing practical skills, particularly in physical education. With the anticipation of conducting 'action research' in their fourth year, they acknowledged that systematic inquiry significantly contributes to their academic growth and empowers them to make informed decisions as prospective physical educators. By immersing themselves in research during their early college years, the informants laid the foundation for a comprehensive, yet detailed, understanding of the challenges and opportunities in physical education, setting up a meaningful action research project. For them, mastering the fundamentals of research facilitated their ability to conduct effective action research in the future.

"Kailangan ko po talagang gawin kasi part po siya ng requirement nga po. Kasi kung hindi ko po siya gagawin, hindi po ako magmo-move on to fourth year… kung magma-master's po ako, alam ko na po yung gagawin ko." ("I have to do it, I told myself before… if I don't do it, I wouldn't be able to move up to fourth year. I know what I'm going to do in research when I start with my master's.") *(Bianca)*

"Yung pinaka-memorable sa akin 'yung sa interview po sa mga participants. Kasi po parang sine-share po nila yung story nila tapos po may matututunan ka din po na pwede kong magamit kapag nagturo na

ako ng PE.″ ("The most memorable for me was when we interviewed participants, they shared their stories. I learned something that I can apply in teaching physical education in the future." *(Belle)*

("…*parang ginagawa lang po siya as part of the requirement sa course ganu'n po. Ta's ayun po, iniisip nalang po parang ginagawa nalang pong motivation if yung para sa akin din naman...like ngayong fourth year meron kaming action research, magagamit po namin ang lahat ng natutunan namin.″* ("I used to think that research was only done as part of the course requirements…I realized I will benefit from studying it…like now in our fourth year, we have action research, I can apply everything I learned in research.") *(Kelly)*

The students viewed research as a long-term investment, extending beyond merely fulfilling a thesis requirement. They recognized its relevance and practical value for their future graduate studies and anticipated that it would culminate with the completion of their thesis. Understanding that a solid foundation in research is crucial for conducting robust investigations, the PSPEs acknowledged research as a cyclical, iterative, and lifelong pursuit. By connecting to the power of early research engagement, they aimed to enhance their analytical and critical thinking skills, essential for tackling complex issues in physical education. The benefits of undergraduate research participation extend beyond academics; it fosters self-confidence and clarifies career paths (Petrella & Jung, 2008). Therefore, the PSPEs not only used research to excel in their current academic pursuits but also recognized its enduring value as an asset for their future endeavors in higher education and professional practice.

4. Conclusion
This study was conducted to enable PSPEs to articulate what research is based on their lived experiences. Their lens provided a glimpse into what research reasonably meant to them after their completion. The themes illuminated the multifaceted nature of this academic pursuit at the undergraduate level that could be used in reflecting on current practices in teaching research in an undergraduate teacher education program. In the exploration of the PSPEs' perspective, each explicated theme provided a nuanced perspective that emphasized not only the technical dimensions of the phenomenon but also the emotional and transformative aspects inherent in the process.

The first noteworthy finding underscores the emotional resonance that was embedded in research. Moreover, it is depicted as a symphony that harmonizes the interplay of the different sentiments that PSPEs go through during the research journey. This calls for attention to the emotional investment of the PSPEs during the research undertaking that acknowledges the highs and lows that contribute to the symphonic nature of the thesis writing process.

Transcending the technical rigors that are traditionally attributed to research, the second finding stresses the need for orchestrated actions. This claims the significance of strategic planning, collaboration, and a unified effort to produce a

meaningful research output. This also broadens the perspective on research, which positions it as a collective endeavor rather than a reclusive pursuit. Moreover, the PSPEs characterized thesis writing as a game of strength and courage. This metaphoric theme covers the challenges they encounter that require resilience and determination. Therefore, PSPEs must be acknowledged for their mental fortitude which would require them to navigate the complexities, uncertainties, and setbacks that are associated with the research journey.

The fourth finding concerns the juxtaposition of challenges and fulfillment at the core of the PSPEs' research process. It implies that research will always be characterized by challenges in the process and the obstacles are integral to attaining a profound sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. Such duality underscores the transformative power of engaging in research to potentially foster growth and self-discovery.

Ultimately, the last finding strengthens the forward-looking nature of doing research at the undergraduate level — that it is an investment for the future. This perspective positions research not merely as an academic pursuit and a contribution to the existing body of knowledge, but also as a milestone and a legacy that stretches beyond the immediate present. It provides a sense of purpose for pre-service teachers to be motivated to view their research endeavors as important contributions to the broader educational landscape.

5. Limitation of the Study
Despite the generated insights from the undergraduate Filipino PSPEs about the conduct of research, several limitations are acknowledged. First, the study utilized qualitative data taken from PSPEs within a limited geographic scope, a specific university from the Province of Pampanga, the Philippines. Therefore, it may not fully capture the varied experiences of all PSPEs across the Philippines, specifically those in more remote or different educational settings. Second, it is acknowledged that self-reported data gathered through in-depth interviews could potentially introduce bias because informants may provide socially desirable responses and may not utterly recall past research experiences as accurately as possible. Lastly, the study focused on the perspectives of PSPEs who completed their theses and it does not consider the experiences of those who have discontinued their studies and that certain peculiarities in their experiences may be worthy of exploration.

6. Recommendations and Future Implications
Recognizing that research could be a symphony of emotions, it is recommended that a comprehensive support program be crafted to address the emotional well-being of PSPEs. Colleges and universities may likewise consider integrating workshops and counseling programs to better acknowledge the emotional investment that can be manifested in the students' research journey. In this way, students will be ensured that they can navigate the emotions positively and respond appropriately. Moreover, to address the collaborative demands required of doing a thesis with group members, collaborative training and workshops may also be examined for integration. Given that orchestrated actions are integral for

pre-service physical educators' doing research, workshops may emphasize the value of teamwork and mutual support. By fostering a culture of collaboration, higher education institutions may potentially enhance the quality of the research outputs generated by students as a product of an environment conducive to learning and well-being.

Since research is about strength and courage, it is recommended that resilience-building initiatives are incorporated within the academic curriculum. Strategies to enhance resilience and foster strong mental and social health may be initiated by teacher education institutions. Capitalizing on the influence of master mentors, the organization of mentorship programs is also recommended. The PSPEs' connection with experienced researchers and educators should go beyond technical guidance, but also foster emotional support, encouragement, motivation, and insights into the personal and professional development derived from research.

Research promotion may be initiated by integrating it across courses in the curriculum whenever possible. In this way, research will be gradually introduced to students until such time that they are about to complete the actual research process. It is recommended that teachers should not only focus on technical skills but may also promote a positive and resilient attitude toward research. In addition, practical exercises may be provided to simulate real-world challenges so that research is not be an overwhelming pursuit. Ultimately, the importance of reflection and self-development is recommended and that reflective practices be fostered before, during, and after the conduct of research. PSPEs who are actively pursuing research should be taught how to be encouraged and regularly assess and document their emotional and intellectual progress to enable a profound understanding of the personal and transformative power of research and its implications for their career as teachers.

To address the limitations of the study, future research may broaden the geographic scope to include PSPEs from various regions across the Philippines. This will ensure that diverse experiences and regional differences may be understood better. Also, to reduce potential biases from self-reported data, the incorporation of multiple data collection methods, such as document analysis, focus group discussions, and open-ended surveys, could enhance the validity and reliability of findings. Moreover, it is recommended that future studies explore the perspectives of PSPEs who have discontinued their studies because understanding their peculiar challenges and reasons for discontinuation could provide important insights and inform targeted support mechanisms for current and future PSPEs.

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Appendix 1: Interview Questions

1. *Maaari mo bang ilarawan ang iyong pangkalahatang karanasan sa proseso ng pagsulat ng pananaliksik bilang di-gradwadong mag-aaral ng edukasyong pangkatawan?* (Can you describe your overall experience with the research writing process as an undergraduate PE major student?)

2. *Ano ang nag-udyok sa iyo na makibahagi sa pagsulat ng pananaliksik bilang bahagi ng iyong akademikong paglalakbay sa edukasyong pangkatawan?* (What motivated you to engage in research writing as part of your academic journey in physical education?)

3. *Maaari mo bang ibahagi ang mga partikular na hamon na naranasan mo sa proseso ng pagsulat ng pananaliksik?* (Could you share specific challenges you encountered during the research writing process?)

4. *Maaari mo bang banggitin ang anumang mga 'di malilimutang sandali o mahalagang punto sa iyong paglalakbay sa proseso ng pagsulat ng pananaliksik?* (Can you mention any memorable moment or turning point in your journey through the research writing process?)

5. *Maaari mo bang ibahagi ang anumang estratehiya o pamamaraan na ginamit mo upang maunawaan ang iyong mga karanasan sa proseso ng pagsulat ng pananaliksik?* (Can you share any strategy or method you used to make sense of your experiences during the research writing process?)

6. *Paano nakaimpluwensya ang iyong 'background' at mga personal na karanasan sa iyong pamamaraan sa pagsulat ng pananaliksik?* (How did your background and personal experiences influence your approach to research writing?)

7. *Paano mo isinama ang iyong personal na karanasan at pananaw sa iyong pagsulat ng pananaliksik?* (How did you integrate your personal experiences and perspectives into your research writing)

8. *Mayroon bang mga sandali o pananaw na nakatulong sa iyo na magkaroon ng mas malalim na pag-unawa sa iyong mga naranasan sa pagsulat ng pananaliksik?* (Were there moments or insights that helped you gain a deeper understanding of your lived experiences in research writing?)

9. *Sa anong mga paraan sa tingin mo nakaapekto ang iyong mga karanasan sa pagsulat ng pananaliksik sa iyong pananaw sa larangan ng edukasyong pangkatawan?* (In what ways do you think your experiences in research writing have shaped your perspective in the field of physical education?)

10. *Paano mo pinagninilayan ang iyong sariling mga karanasan sa pagsulat ng pananaliksik?* (How do you reflect on your lived experiences in research writing?