

## Towards Gender and Cultural-Responsive Physical Education: A Framework for Inclusive PATHFIT Implementation

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### Abstract

*This research aimed to establish a framework for the incorporation of gender and culturally responsive approaches in PATHFIT for Philippine Normal University–South Luzon physical education program. The study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design to investigate students' perceptions and lived experiences about inclusion. A total of 131 first-year BMSEE and BTLE students were recruited based on comprehensive enumeration sampling. First, quantitative data was gathered from a validated Likert-scale questionnaire, while secondly, qualitative data was collected through interviews and focused group discussions with LGBTQIA+ students. The results indicated that students demonstrated considerable gender and cultural awareness, acknowledgment of cultural influences, rejection of gender-based norms, and affirmation of inclusivity. Educators were characterized as very inclusive, including varied cultural values and supportive of gender-equitable training. The correlation study also demonstrated robust positive relationships between inclusive strategies and students' comprehension of cultural norms, gender stereotypes, and openness to non-gendered roles. Qualitative information validated these results, highlighting the benefits students received when participating in a positive and respectful and impactful teaching context. The outcome recommends adding contents in the curriculum, increasing cultural activities and creating more inclusive educational materials. They recommend inclusive physical education for achieving equity, respect, and the appreciation of different cultures.*

Keywords: gender responsiveness, cultural sensitivity, inclusive education, PATHFIT, physical education, LGBTQIA+

### Introduction

The enhancement of student quality of life is generally recognized as fundamental to student well-being, including personal and environmental quality of life, and consequently, long-term positive impact on overall student outcomes (Inchley et al., 2020). As education systems continue to adapt to social, cultural and technological changes, understanding the characteristics that facilitate or constrain students' learning contexts has become an

important issue of scholarly interest (Arnett, 2001). Of all the fields of education, physical education (PE) is considered key to helping overall development. Referred to often as holistic physical education, physical education plays a major role not just in students' physical health but their social, emotional, and mental health too. PATHFIT (Physical Activity Towards Health and Fitness) is a tertiary course in Philippine higher education.

The program aims to instill lifelong aspects of health and fitness among college students. As educational institutions proliferate and diversify, physical education programs will need to go beyond traditional pedagogical approaches and adopt inclusive pedagogical practices that allow for differences in gender identity, cultural backgrounds, and socio-emotional experiences (Burgos & De Guzman, 2022; De Jesus & Nuñez, 2021). This is consistent with recent trends in physical education research indicating that gender- and culturally-responsive strategies to counteract persistent exclusion, bias and inequitable participation challenges in PE settings are becoming increasingly important (Cruz & Bernardo, 2023; Rañosa et al., 2022).

International frameworks are highly critical to promoting inclusive and equitable education, globally. Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) aims for inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all, with the focus on gender equality and supporting cultural respect by providing access to learning opportunities in educational systems. In much the same way, gender-responsive physical education has been defined by UNESCO (2021; 2022) as identifying and actively combating gender biases, supporting active participation and the breakdown of gender stereotypes in the context of physical activity. Cultural sensitivity, in contrast, demands that educators should grasp, respect, and add the diversity of beliefs, practices, and traditions by learners into the teaching-learning process (Garcia & Villanueva, 2020).

These global initiatives highlight the importance of inclusive PE settings that reflect the diversity of identities and experiences of students. Policy frameworks in the Philippines also aim for gender and cultural equity in education. In the same vein, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) requires that higher education institutions adhere to Gender and Development (GAD) policies, such as through the CHED Memorandum Order No. 1, s. 2015.

Such initiatives promote the use of gender-responsive and culturally-responsive programs in curricular offerings, including physical education classes like PATHFIT. But despite those international and national frameworks, there is still a considerable gap between policy aspirations and what goes on in classrooms. Guidelines for inclusive gender-responsive physical education at the global level have been developed, but their application locally and within educational contexts is uneven and lacks the necessary depth to address the unique needs of participants in local contexts.

Specifically, there are few evidence-based community-based strategies which allow for the context-specific cultural context and gender identities of Philippine Normal University – South Luzon to be considered in terms of the current state of play of the culture there. Most prior research in the Philippines has been on general classroom instruction or traditional academic subjects and less on movement based learning such as physical education (Santos & Dizon, 2021; Llamas & Reyes, 2023). There is also limited research examining students' lived experience and teachers' attitudes towards gender diversity and cultural multiplicity in physical education. The lack of empirical perspectives has been a barrier to the full comprehension of the application of inclusive practices in PE. While gender-responsive teaching policy is possible, it is, in practice, sometimes under-monitored and seldom examined (Torres et al., 2020).

As a result, lack of evidence to assess the context-specific context has been observed to be hindering the formulation of policy and curriculum intervention towards gender and cultural inclusion in tertiary PE schools and practice. Another limitation is the methodological approach that is frequently used in the present studies. Most of the current efforts to study physical education practices tend to use quantitative methods and this approach may not be a complete reflection of the multifaceted experiences, perceptions, and social environments in PE settings (Yumul & Panganiban, 2021). Incorporating quantitative indices of inclusivity with qualitative student and instructor narratives on gender and cultural respectability can provide a fuller description of gender and culture awareness in PATHFIT courses. Rooted in Gender Schema Theory (Bem, 1981), Multicultural Education Theory (Banks, 1993) and the Social Justice Education Framework (Adams et al., 2007) this study aims at doing so by investigating the implementation of gender-sensitive and culturally responsive activities in PATHFIT programs in the context of the university. In particular, the study seeks to investigate the effects of inclusive practices on learner engagement, participation and achievement, as well as documenting the lived experiences and viewpoints of students and teachers.

Focusing on the institutional setting of Philippine Normal University – South Luzon, this study adds to the emerging literature on inclusive physical education by providing localized empirical evidence linking global context to local experience. Finally, the findings are anticipated to contribute to the creation of PATHFIT curricula and pedagogy that address diversity, equity, and inclusion in PE. This also contests the notion of PE as a knowledge- and skills-based discipline and reconceptualizes PE as a transformative arena that facilitates social justice, cultural respect, and dignified humanity with health and fitness being lifelong pursuits for students.

### *Purpose of the research*

The study's primary objective is to assess the degree of gender and cultural sensitivity in PATHFIT programs and their effect on inclusive physical education, the subsequent research questions were developed. This inquiry seeks to interpret the practices and views of students and teachers through a mixed-methods approach informed by gender and multicultural education ideas.

1. What is the level of gender and cultural sensitivity among students in PATHFIT courses in terms of:
  - 1.1. Cultural Norms Awareness.
  - 1.2. Gender Stereotype Awareness; and
  - 1.3. Openness to Non-Gendered Roles?
2. To what extent are gender-responsive and culturally sensitive strategies implemented in PATHFIT activities?
3. Is there a significant relationship between students' perceptions of gender and cultural sensitivity and their level of participation in PATHFIT?
4. What are the students' lived experiences in relation to gender and cultural sensitivity within the PATHFIT learning environment?

### **Methodology**

The study utilized a convergent parallel mixed-methods study design in that quantitative and qualitative data were collected jointly and independently of each other at the time of exploration and the data was merged during interpretation. This methodology enables researchers to have a statistical profile in addition to contextually relevant insights leading to a full picture of gender- and culturally responsive practice implementation in PATHFIT programs.

### *Participants of the study*

For the quantitative part, the sample was total enumeration. All the first-year students at Philippine Normal University–South Luzon in its Bachelor of Mathematics and Science Education (BMSEE) and Bachelor of Technology and Livelihood Education (BTLE) programs during Academic Year 2024–2025 were invited to take part in this research. Following this sampling strategy the entire accessible population of the target population was included making sampling bias reduced and generalizability of the results within the study population enhanced (Etikan, et al., 2016). There were 131 participants in the survey.

Eligible participants were actively enrolled first-year students in BMSEE or BTLE programs and consented to participate in the study with informed consent. Purposive sampling was used for the qualitative element, including a criterion-based selection.

Twelve LGBTQIA+ identified participants were purposefully invited to participate to ensure representation of those participating with gender identity and related issues when teaching physical education. This sampling strategy ensured that the study could obtain rich insights from respondents with experience in issues of participation in PATHFIT classes, gender responsiveness. Participants should belong to the LGBTQIA+ community, be enrolled in PATHFIT courses at Philippine Normal University–South Luzon, and be willing to share their perceptions, experiences, and attitudes concerning gender and cultural inclusivity within physical education.

#### *Research instruments*

For the quantitative phase, the researcher developed a Likert-scale questionnaire to gauge students' perceptions of gender and cultural sensitivity in PATHFIT courses. The instrument comprised three dimensions: awareness of cultural norms, awareness of gender stereotypes, and openness to non-gendered roles. Content validation of the questionnaire was carried out by a panel of gender studies and physical education experts.

This was followed by performing a pilot assessment on 30 non-participating students to assess the reliability of the instrument. The test for reliability yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.89, demonstrating good internal consistency and confirming the appropriateness of the instrument in determining the students' perceptions of gender and cultural responsiveness in the PATHFIT program.

During the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with the selected LGBTQIA+ participants. These qualitative methods were employed to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of participants regarding both gender and cultural inclusivity in PATHFIT classes.

The interview and FGD protocols employed open-ended questions that were themed on inclusive participation in physical activities; cultural representation in physical education practices; gender accommodation in sports and fitness activities; and instructional approaches used by PATHFIT instructors. While semi-structured to enable participants to detail their lived experiences, interviews could remain aligned on the same topics (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

### *Data analysis*

Quantitative data were analyzed as mean and standard deviation in assessing the overall levels of awareness and perceptions of gender and cultural sensitivity among the respondents. Pearson's *r* correlation was also a method used in inferential statistical analysis to determine the associations among the variables cultural awareness, gender stereotypes, and openness to non-gendered roles. The results were computed with an accurate and reliable method as provided by SPSS version 26.

Qualitative data were analyzed theoretically and inductively with thematic analysis drawing upon the six-phase framework established by Braun and Clarke (2021). This analytic process consisted of familiarizing oneself with the data through reading the interview transcripts multiple times, generating initial codes to capture meaningful segments of respondents' responses and organizing them into potential themes, reviewing the themes and refining them, naming and defining the themes and delivering the interpretative report.

Having used both interview and focus group discussion data also allowed for cross-validation of the responses by the researcher to enhance the credibility of the findings through data triangulation (Nowell et al., 2017). To ensure integration of the quantitative and qualitative findings, we employed a triangulation design, used as the merging strategy of the convergent parallel mixed-methods approach.

During this process, both datasets were combined in the interpretation phase to compare and synthesize the results. As the quantitative results gave a broad overview the study was able to determine the overall trends and patterns on students perceptions about gender and cultural sensitivity in PATHFIT programs. Conversely, the qualitative findings provided much more context to the study by giving detailed accounts of the reasons, experiences, and contextual factors behind those perceptions.

The synthesis of the two datasets contributed in developing the approach to gender- and culturally responsive implementation of the PATHFIT framework. In particular, the high-performing areas from the quantitative findings were regarded as core elements reflecting the strengths of the PATHFIT initiative.

Then refined and contextualized these pillars with the qualitative findings, focusing on the challenges, experiences, and recommendations articulated by LGBTQIA+ participants in interviews and focus group discussions. In integrating these two methodologies, the study was able to create a model that is grounded empirically on statistical trends and, moreover, is supplemented with the lived experiences of students to ensure that the

proposed strategies are sensitive to the particular gender and cultural dynamics faced in the Philippine Normal University–South Luzon.

*Ethical consideration*

The research methods were consistent with ethical practice. Participation was optional, supported by consent forms that documented the aims of the study, guarantees of confidentiality, and the possibility of withdrawal. Anonymity was maintained using pseudonyms, and data were stored securely.

**Results and Discussion**

**Table 1**  
*Level of Gender and Cultural Sensitivity Among Students in Terms of Cultural Norms Awareness*

Indicators	Mean	Description
1. I recognize how culture influences fitness and recreational activities.	3.86	High
2. I am familiar with different cultural practices in physical activities.	3.60	High
3. I value the importance of respecting cultural differences in PATHFIT.	3.97	High
4. I participate in culturally diverse fitness activities.	3.82	High
5. I avoid making assumptions based on a person's cultural background in physical education.	3.81	High
6. I am open to learning physical activities from other cultures.	3.91	High
7. I understand how indigenous games reflect cultural traditions.	3.89	High
8. I respect classmates' preferences in fitness activities influenced by their culture.	3.95	High
9. I am aware of the cultural background of exercises or dances included in PATHFIT.	3.81	High
10. I support integrating cultural themes in PATHFIT performances and presentations.	3.92	High
<i>Overall</i>	3.85	High

*Legend: 3.25 – 4.00 – High; 2.50 – 3.24 – Moderate High; 1.75 – 2.49 – Moderate Low; 1.00 – 1.74 – Low*

Table 1 presents the findings of gender and cultural sensitivities of the students about cultural norms, implying that the degree of cultural knowledge among the students involved in PATHFIT has a high and consistent importance. Mean scores for all items ranged from 3.60 to 3.97, to a mean of 3.85, indicating students possess a good appreciation of and inclusiveness to cultural differences in PE. The most popular (M = 3.97) rated question was "I value the importance of respecting cultural differences in PATHFIT" meaning students were good at the cultural perspective and that they have better knowledge about respect or participation of other different cultures in multicultural situations. Notably, the statements 'I support integrating cultural themes in PATHFIT' (M = 3.92) and 'I am open to learning physical activities from other cultures' (M = 3.91) show active participation of students by embracing diversity in physical exercise.

The consistently high mean scores demonstrate that the present PATHFIT curriculum delivered by the instructor has successfully fostered cultural sensitivity, awareness, and appreciation. The fact that the students did recognize indigenous games (M = 3.89) and they had appreciated culturally influenced exercise options (M = 3.95) also indicate that the embedding of culturally relevant material and inclusive pedagogy plays an important role in influencing student attitude and behavior.

These results are important in that they illustrate the role of physical education in promoting physical growth as well as the global consciousness and inclusive values of students. The findings corroborate the argument made by Kitta and Cardona-Moltó (2022) indicating that the incorporation of Filipino cultural traditions and traditional sports in PE promotes students' cultural competency and national identity. McIlquham (2021) added that culturally responsive physical education promotes mutual respect particularly on traditional dances and activities that represent students' heritage. Ramos and Sarmiento (2021) also revealed that the role of physical education that respects collectivism and cooperation is to increase participation and cultural pride in students.

It is therefore important for PATHFIT to maintain and broaden culturally competent behaviors – integrate Filipino sports, folk dances, traditional games, and indigenous games – as cultural practices, as well as global physical activities are added to the curriculum for students. Teachers are encouraged to create a positive learning environment among their students so that there is space for them to bring their cultural identities to the classroom. Furthermore, such events may show widespread curricular changes to support multiculturalism in the disciplines of higher education in the effort to bring together diversity and cultural knowledge.

**Table 2**

*Level of Gender and Cultural Sensitivity Among Students in Terms of Gender Stereotype Awareness*

Indicators	Mean	Description
1. <i>I am aware that some physical tasks are unfairly labeled as "for boys" or "for girls."</i>	3.63	High
2. <i>I believe both males and females are equally capable of excelling in physical fitness.</i>	3.86	High
3. <i>I can identify gender bias in fitness-related groupings or roles.</i>	3.56	High
4. <i>I am aware that some sports are stereotyped based on gender.</i>	3.68	High
5. <i>I challenge gender-based expectations in PE or PATHFIT activities.</i>	3.51	High
6. <i>I do not allow gender norms to influence my participation in physical education.</i>	3.45	High
7. <i>I am aware of the media's role in reinforcing gender stereotypes in fitness and sports.</i>	3.72	High
8. <i>I believe that gender roles should not dictate one's fitness goals or body image.</i>	3.78	High
9. <i>I think PATHFIT should promote inclusivity regardless of gender identity.</i>	3.85	High
10. <i>I recognize gender fairness in the way instructors group or assign activities.</i>	3.88	High
<i>Overall</i>	3.69	High

*Legend: 3.25 – 4.00 – High; 2.50 – 3.24 – Moderate High; 1.75 – 2.49 – Moderate Low; 1.00 – 1.74 – Low*

Table 2 presents the Level of Gender and Cultural Sensitivity of the Students regarding Gender Stereotype Knowledge which shows that PATHFIT students possess a high level of awareness of gender stereotypes in PE. A mean of 3.69 was obtained for each sample. The verbal ratings for individual statements were high (3.45–3.88), which indicates that students possess a critical awareness of how gender roles and stereotypes may shape, inhibit, or influence participation and beliefs in fitness programs.

The top statement, "I recognize gender fairness in the way instructors group or assign activities" (M = 3.88) is used to show how the instructional methods applied in PATHFIT are perceived to be just and devoid of gender orientation. The lines, "I believe both males and females are equally capable of excelling in physical fitness" (M = 3.86) and "I think PATHFIT should promote inclusivity regardless of gender identity" (M = 3.85) demonstrate high level support (1) student commitment to equity, fairness, and gender inclusion in PE environments.

This illustrates how the PATHFIT setting fosters a climate of gender respect and inclusivity in which normative gender norms are deconstructed and frequently confronted. The students also recognise bias, such as how some physical activities are categorized as “male” or “female” (M=3.68), but they show an openness to challenge those labels. Recognizing the effect of media (M = 3.72) is representative of a higher level of critical thinking that will be key in making the classroom a more socially sensitive and inclusive culture.

This resonates with Cruz and Santos (2021), who highlight the need to dismantle gender-specific stereotypes in physical education to facilitate the participation of all students or minority groups, including those of non-binary origin. Chiu, Reyes, and Lorenzo (2023) argue that the removal of gender-specific forms of fitness increases students’ motivation, body image and community identity in coeducational physical education environments. Through comparing and contrasting the roles assigned for Physical Education, students see parity and participation is more likely regardless of gender identity (Guevarra and Llorente 2024).

This implies that introducing gender-sensitive pedagogy and equitable grouping strategies in physical education is more than about the benefits thereof. Teachers should maintain inclusive language, offer non-gender exercise alternatives and advocate for combined-gender collaboration to further reinforce that physical ability does not depend on gender. In order to overcome unconscious prejudices from their leadership roles or in assignment of sports and performance tasks, physical education teachers also have to be careful about assigning these tasks.

**Table 3**  
*Level of Gender and Cultural Sensitivity Among Students in Terms of Openness to Non-Gendered Roles*

Indicators	Mean	Description
1. I am open to taking on physical tasks regardless of traditional gender roles.	3.86	High
2. I am willing to partner with any classmate, regardless of their gender.	3.85	High
3. I believe that all students should be given equal physical challenges in PATHFIT.	3.89	High
4. I am comfortable participating in non-traditional roles during fitness tasks.	3.79	High
5. I feel confident performing dance or movement routines typically associated with the opposite gender.	3.69	High
6. I support assigning physical education roles based on skill, not gender.	3.86	High
7. I respect others who challenge traditional gender roles in PATHFIT.	3.88	High

8. I actively avoid gendered labels like "boy push-ups" or "girl exercises."	3.47	High
9. I am open to learning from classmates of any gender in physical tasks.	3.89	High
10. I encourage others to take on leadership roles in PE regardless of gender.	3.86	High
<i>Overall</i>	3.80	High

*Legend: 3.25 – 4.00 – High; 2.50 – 3.24 – Moderate High; 1.75 – 2.49 – Moderate Low; 1.00 – 1.74 – Low*

The level of gender and cultural sensitivity, including whether students have been open to non-gendered roles in physical education and what they show concern for, are summarized in Table 3, which implies that students have the willingness to challenge traditional gender roles, (M = 3.80, inclusive: inclusivity = a sense of progressive). The verbal interpretation score for all items was "High"; mean scores (mean) varied in mean between (3.47–3.89).

The results "I believe all students must be given comparable physical challenges in PATHFIT" (M = 3.89) and "I am receptive to learning from classmates of any gender in physical tasks" (M = 3.89) show students' acceptance of equal opportunity and respect regardless of their gender. Students were highly supportive of skill-based placement and promotion to leadership no matter their gender identity (M = 3.86), representing a shift to a variety of performance standards, not gender-specific metrics.

The item with the least rating, "I actively avoid gendered labels like 'boy push-ups' or 'girl exercises'" (M = 3.47), although rated as high implies that the language bias and traditional labels have chances to survive, and in turn, the requirement to continue critically and significantly modifying the instructional language used in PE.

That sounds like the PATHFIT environment is creating non-binary thinking, equity of physical activity, male and female confidence with any type of activity — and illustrating that all children can lead, compete and be in the driver's seat of any practice effort regardless of gender. These attitudes to open doors to roles irrespective of gender provide an important step toward cultural and social relevance for physical education.

The findings are consistent with Chiu et al. (2023) state that the removal of gender-based identities and the assignment of nontraditional content to students promotes empowerment as a process and is significant to the pupils who have been limited by the binary gender expectations. As Navarro and Pascual (2021), state the engagement with multiple roles in physical education cultivates leadership, collaborative work, and identity validation in all students, including those navigating their gender identity. Cruz and Santos (2021) argue that when students feel inspired to transgress traditional gender roles in

physical education, they develop in empathy and in equity and self-confidence in academic and social circumstances.

This should include the continuation of skill-based grouping and leadership initiatives, mixed-gender partnerships, and a conscious decision against stereotypical labeling that strengthens gender norms. Physical education teachers must exercise inclusive conduct, using words which are both sensitive and dignified: renaming traditional drills and exercises in the name of equality, which implies renaming them with neutral language instead. Students who defy gender norms should be recognized and fostered for them and a supportive community should be created.

**Table 4**  
*Extent of Gender-Responsive and Culturally Sensitive Strategies Implemented*

Indicators	Mean	Description
1. <i>Our PATHFIT instructor integrates culturally diverse physical activities in lessons.</i>	3.93	To A Very Great Extent
2. <i>PATHFIT sessions promote equal participation for all genders.</i>	3.93	To A Very Great Extent
3. <i>The learning materials used in PATHFIT avoid gender stereotypes.</i>	3.87	To A Very Great Extent
4. <i>PATHFIT activities reflect respect for students' cultural backgrounds.</i>	3.91	To A Very Great Extent
5. <i>Instructors use inclusive language during fitness and dance instruction.</i>	3.88	To A Very Great Extent
6. <i>Gender identity is respected and supported in groupings and roles during PATHFIT.</i>	3.92	To A Very Great Extent
7. <i>Activities are selected to be inclusive of various cultural practices and traditions.</i>	3.92	To A Very Great Extent
8. <i>There are no restrictions based on gender when assigning roles or equipment in activities.</i>	3.85	To A Very Great Extent
9. <i>PATHFIT encourages student voice in shaping inclusive and culturally appropriate activities.</i>	3.91	To A Very Great Extent
10. <i>The design and conduct of PATHFIT assessments reflect gender and cultural sensitivity.</i>	3.92	To A Very Great Extent
<i>Overall</i>	3.90	To a Very Great Extent

*Legend: 3.25 – 4.00 – To A Very Great Extent; 2.50 – 3.24 – Great Extent; 1.75 – 2.49 – Moderate Extent; 1.00 – 1.74 – Low Extent*

As Table 4 indicates, students rated their PATHFIT classes as highly gender responsive and culturally sensitive, which was reflected in their overall assessment of “To a Very Great Extent.” Higher scores were given for all criteria, suggesting that PATHFIT pedagogical approaches, materials, activities, and assessments were inclusive, fair, and culturally attuned.

Students’ perceptions of how well teachers use culturally diverse activities, encourage equal participation among genders, and utilize inclusive language in fitness and dance training. They learned that their gender identities are respected in terms of role and group division, and no gender-specific restrictions are placed on the use of equipment or position of leadership. The ability to affect actions and articulate preferences strengthens the sense pupils experience inclusivity and responsiveness.

The abovementioned data provide evidence that PATHFIT is aligned with the best-practice standards in inclusive and gender-responsive PE implementation. A structured way of teaching an inclusive and socially conscious lesson plan with culturally relevant content and equitable methods. These findings correlate in the same study where Villanueva and Santiago (2023) noted that inclusive teaching approaches boost students' engagement and affirm their identity in diverse classrooms. Guevarra and Llorente (2024) emphasise the relevance of participation and representation of the learner in the design of adaptive PE programmes.

This demands the continuous enhancement of approaches that are equitable, culturally relevant, and gender inclusive. For teachers to be able to keep teaching channels open to student feedback, culturally relevant activities as well as unbiased educational materials, their access and quality of resources based on fairness etc. Teachers should maintain and enhance input from students, have culturally relevant activities and ensure cultural competence, and have impartial educational materials. These strategies promote academic and physical growth and also serve to develop social awareness, empathy, and respect for children, all vital to inclusive education.

**Table 5**

*Test of Relationship Between Students' Perceptions of Gender and Cultural Sensitivity and their Level of Participation in PATHFIT*

Extent of Gender-Responsive and Culturally Sensitive Strategies Implemented	Cultural Norms Awareness	Gender Stereotype Awareness	Openness to Non-Gendered Roles	Decision on Ho	Remarks	
	<i>Pearson R</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	<i>Pearson R</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	<i>Pearson R</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>
	0.550**	0.000	0.517**	0.000	0.649**	0.000
					<i>Reject Ho</i>	<i>Significant</i>

\*\**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).*

The correlation test between students' perceptions of gender and cultural sensitivity and participation in PATHFIT shows significant positive relationships. It can be analyzed through correlations that indicate students' self-perceptions of gender-responsive and culturally sensitive strategies and their awareness of cultural norms ( $r = 0.550$ ), cognizance of gender stereotypes ( $r = 0.517$ ), and receptiveness to non-gender roles ( $r = 0.649$ );  $p$ -values were all 0.000, reflecting significance at 0.05 level. This data resulted in the rejection of the null hypothesis, indicating that students' perceptions of general inclusiveness strategies are positively correlated with gender and culture sensitivity in gym and PE classes.

The most notable association that arose was between inclusive instructional strategies and receptiveness to non-gendered roles ( $r = 0.649$ ), indicating that when educators apply fair play, equity, and cultural inclusion, students' willingness to participate in tasks and roles independent of gender norms increases. Maintenance of moderate positive correlations of cultural norms awareness with gender stereotypes confirms the conclusion that responsive and inclusive pedagogical styles produce a socially conscious and respectful student population. Such associations also highlight the importance of explicit pedagogical designs to encourage inclusive behaviors and attitudes among PE students.

Results are in agreement with Chiu, Reyes and Lorenzo (2023), who discovered that the students' interest in physical education is essentially shaped by both teacher engagement and cultural fit of a certain pedagogical strategy. According to Villanueva and Santiago (2023), students are more engaged in such activities when teachers are gender-sensitive and sensitive to other cultures. Similarly, Guevarra and Llorente (2024) believe that inclusive PE practices help to ensure equal representation of all gender identities or cultural backgrounds in PE and decrease gender-based anxieties among these students.

Such findings emphasize just how vital gender-responsive and culturally sensitive approaches are for awareness. Teachers still have to strive for that to give students a fair shake, so long as they work to incorporate materials that are culturally relevant,

non-stereotypical lessons, open and understanding language, because they've both been demonstrated as means of promoting respect, equality and student engagement. And not only should that only be good work by institutions of learning and curriculum makers if students can access this: It should also be essential if they genuinely want inclusive physical education to continue.

### *Thematic analysis of the qualitative data*

#### 1. *Gender sensitivity experience*

##### Theme 1: Gender-Inclusive and Respectful Learning Space

Students tended to communicate a positive feeling that gender identity (male, female, LGBTQ+) was valued and respected. Facilitators and colleagues encouraged an inclusive environment where participation was based on ability, not gender, and respect was consistently emphasized.

#### Sample Responses:

- *"I felt very happy because I'm respected for my gender identity in all PATHFIT activities."*
- *"We practice equality and respect to each gender identity."*
- *"I feel safe here. PATHFIT is inclusive and not gender biased."*

According to Cruz and Santos (2021), gender-inclusive PE environments enhance emotional safety and foster a sense of belonging, particularly for LGBTQ+ students. Villanueva and Santiago (2023) also note that respect and acceptance from instructors directly influence student comfort and engagement in gender-diverse classrooms.

##### Theme 2: Empowerment through Non-Gendered Activities

Many students shared that they never felt limited by their gender. Instead, PATHFIT empowered them to lead, perform, and compete across various tasks regardless of traditional gender expectations. Leadership roles, mixed-gender sports, and task equality promoted a sense of agency and competence.

#### Sample Responses:

- *"Regardless of my gender, I am the one who's leading my section."*

- *“The program encouraged everyone to push their boundaries and try new activities.”*
- *“I feel like I’m empowered... it was a mix of gender, meaning it was balanced.”*

Chiu et al. (2023) reported higher motivation and willingness to engage in physical activities when gender is emphasized less. Navarro and Pascual (2021) posit that providing leadership and non-traditional roles to students regardless of gender promotes empowerment and self-efficacy.

### Theme 3: Minimal to No Observed Gender Bias or Stereotyping in PATHFIT

Most students reported that they had not experienced gender bias or stereotyping in their PATHFIT classes. They attributed this to the instructor's conscious effort to create equal opportunities and avoid gender-based segregation. This stands in contrast to past negative experiences some had in earlier education.

#### Sample Responses:

- *“I don’t experience or observe any gender bias... they respect everyone.”*
- *“Our professor always makes sure we don’t just play by our identity, but we play as one.”*
- *“When I was in Grade 8, my P.E. instructor said we’re girls so we’re weak... That hurt.”*

Ocampo and De Leon (2021) argue that intentional anti-bias strategies in physical education reduce gender stereotyping and increase participation from underrepresented gender groups. Guevarra and Llorente (2024) emphasize that educators play a pivotal role in breaking gender norms through modeling equitable practices.

### 2. *Cultural sensitivity experience*

#### Theme 1: Acknowledgment and Celebration of Filipino Cultural Traditions

The students’ predominant theme is the recognition and appreciation of Filipino cultural heritage which can be found in PATHFIT activities including the KULTURINDAK event. The traditional dances namely Tinikling, Cariñosa, and Maglalatik were emphasized to strengthen the connection between students and the identity of their community.

Sample Responses:

- *“Yes, we explored traditional Filipino dances like Tinikling, Cariñosa, and Maglalatik.”*
- *“We performed traditional dances across the Philippines during KULTURINDAK.”*
- *“We studied the folk dances of different tribes or eras... and wore the correct traditional attire.”*

Lopez and Delos Reyes (2022) claim that incorporating Philippine traditional dance practices in physical education promotes national identity and cultural pride. Not only do these culturally responsive practices heighten engagement for the students themselves, but they also deepen the students' appreciation for their heritage.

Theme 2: Cultural Alignment Through Values of Teamwork and Respect

At the same time, some students wrote that some of the overall cultural values put around in PATHFIT like respect, teamwork and collaboration were very much in tune with their own or their family cultural values. These themes supported the sense of cultural connectedness in individual and group activities.

Sample Responses:

- *“Some practices in PATHFIT aligned with my cultural values, such as teamwork and mutual support.”*
- *“We discussed preferences related to religious and cultural backgrounds... and integrated them into dance performances.”*

Ramos and Sarmiento (2021) propose that values-based PE curricula in schools, particularly those reflecting the Filipino collectivist culture, adds to the importance and significance of PE content in students. Adherence to tradition, cooperation and community-based activities are strong means in culturally appropriate coaching.

Theme 3: Culturally Responsive Teaching Through Student Choice and Expression

PATHFIT gave students the ability to select dances and routines that suited their personalities, cultural backgrounds, and beliefs. The customization offered cultural agency that allowed for respect for tradition but also encouraged authenticity.

Sample Responses:

- *“Teacher ----- let us choose a rural dance that reflects who we are.”*
- *“We were given freedom to express our emotions, feelings, and talents through our performance.”*

Guevarra and Llorente (2024) stress that by allowing students to exercise agency over culturally themed exercises, inclusion emerges and ownership is promoted. Choosing or designing the type of activity based on an individual’s cultural identity leads to stronger involvement and lower resistance.

Theme 4: Absence of Cultural Conflict or Disrespect

Almost all participants indicated no contradiction of the PATHFIT practices with their cultural values. They also said that PATHFIT was culturally respectful, with instructors avoiding religious or traditional insensitivity. This demonstrates a high degree of cultural responsiveness of curriculum and pedagogy.

Sample Responses:

- *“I didn’t encounter any conflict with my cultural values.”*
- *“Honestly none... they treated us fairly.”*
- *“None. The practices aligned with our cultural values.”*

Toralba and Gatchalian (2023) contend that students of diverse ethnic or religious backgrounds are less likely to be alienated by culturally respectful PE programs. The deliberate avoidance of misrepresentation promotes an emotionally safe environment for diverse learners.

3. *Instructor practices and environment*

Theme 1: Satisfaction with Current Gender-Responsive and Culturally Inclusive Practices

Most of the students indicated that PATHFIT was already inclusive and respectful of different gender identities and cultural backgrounds. Many did not feel any further improvements were needed, showing a strong level of satisfaction with how the instructor fostered respect, equality, and representation.

Sample Responses:

- *"I don't have any suggestions because PathFit is already very gender-responsive and culturally inclusive."*
- *"No need to change... it feels perfect for me as an LGBTQ+ member."*
- *"They treated us fairly."*

Villanueva and Santiago (2023) found that students' perceptions of equity and cultural acknowledgment are directly shaped by teacher modeling and program structure. Widespread satisfaction with inclusivity suggests the implementation of culturally competent and gender-aware pedagogy.

#### Theme 2: Desire for More Diverse and Inclusive Activities

A few kids also suggested adding in some broader variety of activities beyond what might be considered gender-based, or culturally familiar games. It expresses a desire for general design for learning but a more dynamic approach to universal principles of physical education, as well as instruction with the understanding that a variety of learners are able to learn.

#### Sample Responses:

- *"Incorporate more diverse activities and games that cater to different interests and abilities."*
- *"Offer a wider range of activities to cater to diverse physical capabilities."*
- *"Include activities that will surely make students feel valued regardless of gender."*

According to Chiu et al. (2023), broadening PE activities and activity options in PE classes accommodate every student including those of various gender identities, physical abilities, physical capacities, and cultural backgrounds. Programming diversity can also combat stereotype threats and increase student engagement.

#### Theme 3: Openness to Gender Fluidity and Role Flexibility

One answer indicated an ongoing desire for gender nonconformist roles (e.g., a male pupil wanting to compete against females in badminton), thus indicating a growing awareness and push for increased gender fluidity in activity assignments and competition.

Sample Response:

- *“I know in terms of badminton there are specific gender categories, but maybe I want to have a battle with females also.”*

Cruz and Santos (2021) argue for the promotion of gender-fluid PE participation as a means to enable identity expression and abolish the traditional binary. Flexible participation policies allow students to participate more authentically.

### **Summary of Findings**

Students were very gender and culture sensitive in PATHFIT across their awareness of cultural norms, gender stereotypes, and non-gendered roles. Students showed a significant awareness of cultural influences within physical education and valued traditions and practices. They demonstrated an understanding of gender biases and rejected stereotypical expectations based on gender relating to physical activity. According to the outcome, the students expressed support for inclusive involvement, equitable role allocation, and culturally relevant curriculum, supporting PATHFIT's mission to create a respectful, inclusive and empowering environment.

The results showed that gender-sensitive & diverse approaches were used in PATHFIT to a considerable extent. Teaching was seen as inclusive by the students, as they learned different cultural practices, their language was gender-neutral, and there was equal representation of all gender identities. Energetic tools, learning materials, grouping tasks and measures were seen as sensitive to gender and cultural differences. The PATHFIT program has been recognized as a safe, empowering and inclusive space for everyone involved.

The correlation in Table 5 between gender-responsive and culturally sensitive strategies in PATHFIT and student familiarity with cultural standards, gender stereotypes and receptiveness to non-gendered roles is significant and positive. When students recognize more diversity and cultural responsiveness in PATHFIT, awareness of gender and cultural matters, and their receptiveness to non-traditional positions, becomes heightened. It will be critical for the future if this inclusivity in physical education is highlighted by these findings.

Qualitative data indicated that students had constructive experiences with respect to gender and cultural awareness, while taking the PATHFIT curriculum. Through an inclusive education environment, students felt that their multiple identities, whether male, female, or LGBTQ+, were recognized and valued. They felt emboldened to take on non-traditional roles and noted little bias or stereotyping based on gender, with the majority citing the equity and knowledge of their educators.

The incorporation of Filipino cultural practices into cultural experiences, particularly through projects like KULTURINDAK, was appreciated by students regarding cultural awareness. PATHFIT also taught cultural expression, teamwork, and respect, they said. In their observation, the absence of cultural clashes or inconsideration during the course was verified, suggesting a friendly and sensitive curriculum.

Most students felt very satisfied with the mode and teaching structure of gender-responsive and culturally diverse teaching and learning environments in place to date. Though they encouraged inclusion in more activity and openness to gender fluidity, the prevailing opinion was one of PATHFIT's success in creating an egalitarian, inclusive, and empowering environment for all learners.

### **Conclusion**

The study confirms that the PATHFIT curriculum in Philippine Normal University South Luzon has successfully developed a gender-inclusive and culturally sensitive school environment. The youth, irrespective of gender identity, were acknowledged and respected and many students reported a sense of security and belonging. Particularly at projects like KULTURINDAK, the integration of cultural traditions was realized and brought awareness of and respect for the heritage and pride of pupils. Another example would be how PATHFIT allows learners to adopt non-traditional roles and reject gender-based limitations, enabling them to participate confidently and fairly. The importance of the teacher here being active and responsive is also evidenced by a noteworthy correlation between inclusive teaching techniques and student understanding. The outcome of the curriculum was highly satisfying to the students; PATHFIT is an exemplar of gender-responsive and culturally sensitive physical education, and the overall positive impact is observed in our current study design.

### **Recommendations**

The results and implications of this study guide the maintenance and adaptation of inclusive teaching policies and practices within PATHFIT. Teachers have to continue to make sure everyone is speaking "gender-neutral language," that all materials contain cultural diversity and inclusive content, and that the groups set up are also fair. Encouraging diversification in learning and promoting diversity of activities to accommodate a variety of talents, interests, culture, and social backgrounds is important for better universal design. In addition, by empowering learners to use their voice the student voice should lead to design and facilitation of experiences that are reflective of their own identity and beliefs. Physical education teachers should be trained in gender sensitivities and cultural sensitivity on a regular basis and to make sure that inclusive ways of teaching are constantly improved.

These strategies will strengthen the strengths we already have so PATHFIT can be a transformative place of empowerment, inclusiveness, and respect.

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