

Beyond Bias: Exploring The Developmental Challenges And Resilience Of Bped Students In The Face Of Discrimination

Hanzel Monika N. Saboren^{1*}, Dhovie Mae P. Fernando², Novette Rolande A. Madera³, Miguel Lemuel Emmanuel T. Dumas⁴, Leonard C. Picao⁵, Ponciano Brian Joseph I. Cruzata⁶, Mark Kim I. Herbon⁷, Christine Anne T. Juntilla⁸

^{1*}Leyte Normal University, Tacloban City, Leyte, Philippines 6500, hanzelsaboren@lnu.edu.ph

²Leyte Normal University, Tacloban City, Leyte, Philippines 6500, dhoviemae.fernando@lnu.edu.ph

³Leyte Normal University, Tacloban City, Leyte, Philippines 6500, novetter_madera@lnu.edu.ph

⁴Leyte Normal University, Tacloban City, Leyte, Philippines 6500, mlet.dumas@lnu.edu.ph

⁵Leyte Normal University, Tacloban City, Leyte, Philippines 6500, leonard.picao@lnu.edu.ph

⁶Leyte Normal University, Tacloban City, Leyte, Philippines 6500, poncianobrianjoseph.cruzata@lnu.edu.ph

⁷Leyte Normal University, Tacloban City, Leyte, Philippines 6500, markkim.herbon@lnu.edu.ph

⁸Leyte Normal University, Tacloban City, Leyte, Philippines 6500, cristinea.juntilla@lnu.edu.ph

Abstract

This study investigates the experiences of Bachelor of Physical Education (BPED) students facing discrimination and stereotyping in the university setting and explores the developmental, emotional, and academic impacts of such treatment. The study aims to understand how these experiences affect students' academic performance, self-esteem, and overall development. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with BPED students in their third and fourth years of study. Thematic analysis identified four major themes: instances of stereotyping and discrimination, challenges within the BPED curriculum, the development of determination and confidence, and the importance of support systems. Results indicate that students often face derogatory comments from both educators and peers, leading to reduced self-worth and hindered academic engagement. However, many students developed resilience, using discrimination as motivation for personal growth. The study also highlights the critical role of financial aid, mentorship, and peer support in helping BPED students overcome obstacles. These findings emphasize the need for educational institutions to implement cultural sensitivity training and create more inclusive support systems that address both academic and emotional needs. The research contributes to a broader understanding of the developmental challenges faced by students in specialized fields and calls for targeted interventions to ensure a supportive and equitable learning environment.

Keywords: discrimination, stereotyping, BPED, support systems, resilience, higher education

Introduction

In higher education, students encounter a wide range of experiences that shape not only their academic journey but also their personal, social, and emotional development. For Bachelor of Physical Education (BPED) students, the challenges are particularly unique, as they often face both academic rigor and societal biases related to their specialization. While all students experience difficulties, BPED students are frequently subjected to stereotyping and discrimination from peers and educators, who view physical education as less academically demanding compared to other disciplines. A study on discrimination and stereotype revealed that it significantly affects mental health and academic performance, with perceived discrimination leading to higher levels of anxiety and depression, and lower academic self-concept (Mayo & Le, 2021). This discrimination not only undermines their academic performance but also has a profound impact on their psychological development, self-esteem, and sense of belonging within the academic community.

Stereotyping and discrimination are well-documented issues within the educational system, often resulting in reduced motivation, diminished self-worth, and hindered learning. A study on secondary school students exposed to prejudice and stereotyping revealed that these students suffered from reduced self-esteem and decreased academic motivation, which further exacerbated feelings of isolation and marginalization (Guleryuz & Kilcan, 2023). In the context of BPED students, these biases manifest in derogatory comments, perceptions of inferiority, and the devaluation of their academic discipline. Such experiences can contribute to a discouraging classroom environment, which not only affects their immediate academic performance but also influences their long-term emotional and psychological well-being. These negative interactions often lead to students feeling isolated, marginalized, and unsupported in their academic pursuits.

However, according to Yeager & Dweck (2012), students who are taught to believe that personal characteristics, such as intellectual abilities, can be developed show greater resilience in the face of academic and social challenges. This mindset

enables them to overcome discrimination and other adversities to achieve success (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Despite these challenges, many BPED students display remarkable resilience. Rather than succumbing to the negative impacts of discrimination, they often use these experiences as motivation to excel. This determination to overcome societal biases reflects their inner strength and highlights the critical role of personal resilience in their development. Understanding how BPED students navigate these adversities provides valuable insights into the broader developmental impacts of discrimination within educational settings.

This study aims to explore the lived experiences of BPED students, focusing on how discrimination and stereotyping affect their academic, emotional, and psychological development. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, the research investigates the developmental challenges these students face and examines their responses to prejudice. Furthermore, the study highlights the role of support systems—both from educators and peers—in mitigating the negative effects of discrimination and fostering resilience. The findings contribute to the growing body of literature on developmental diversity in education and underscore the importance of creating inclusive and supportive academic environments that recognize and address the unique needs of students in specialized fields.

This research not only sheds light on the challenges faced by BPED students but also calls for institutional reforms that emphasize the development of culturally sensitive educational practices. By addressing both the systemic and developmental impacts of discrimination, educational institutions can promote a more equitable and supportive environment that nurtures the academic and personal growth of all students. In doing so, they can ensure that BPED students, like their peers in other disciplines, have the opportunity to thrive in a learning environment that values their contributions and supports their holistic development.

Statement of the Problem

This research delves into the challenges experienced by participants within their individual fields of specialization. This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What challenges did the participants face in their specific areas of expertise?
2. How did they address and navigate these challenges?
3. To what extent did mentor teachers contribute to the participants' success in overcoming these hurdles?

Theoretical Framework

The Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) forms the basis of this study, examining how BPED students derive identity and belonging from their academic group. This theory highlights the impact of in-group (BPED students) and out-group (students and educators in other disciplines) dynamics on self-concept, especially when facing stereotyping and discrimination. Negative perceptions from out-group members often lead to feelings of inferiority, affecting students' self-esteem, academic engagement, and emotional well-being.

However, Social Identity Theory also explains how BPED students can resist these pressures by embracing their in-group identity, building resilience through peer and mentor support. This study explores how discriminatory behaviors impact students' concentration and classroom engagement, emphasizing the importance of support systems in fostering resilience. By anchoring the research in Social Identity Theory, this study provides insight into the academic and emotional challenges BPED students face, advocating for institutional environments that promote positive identity development and inclusive learning experiences.

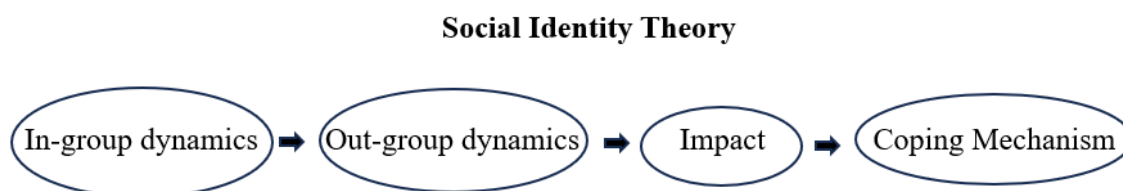


Figure 1. Social Identity Theory

Research Design and Method

Design

The selected qualitative research design, grounded in a phenomenological approach, proves to be optimal for this study due to its inherent alignment with the research questions and objectives. Phenomenology, crafted to delve into lived

experiences, is particularly well-suited for exploring the challenges faced by participants within their specific fields of expertise, as noted by Merriam (2002, p. 7) and referenced in Schuemann (2014). This method was employed in the study to uncover the meaning behind the human experience concerning a phenomenon or noteworthy collective occurrence, as highlighted by Creswell (2009). The focus of interest revolved around understanding the lived experiences of being a BPED student in the university.

Research Participants

The participants were purposively selected and the criteria of selection are the following;

1. Participants must be BPED students, with no restrictions based on gender, age, or marital status.
2. Eligible participants must be in their 3rd or 4th year, ensuring they have a minimum of two to three years of experience as BPED students and have gained a variety of experiences in their chosen specialization.
3. Participants should express a willingness to partake in individual in-depth interviews and actively engage in the Focus Group Discussion.

Method

The study utilized in-depth interviews as the main data collection method, employing a carefully crafted guide to explore participants' challenges, coping strategies, and the teacher's support on how the participants overcome the challenges and the support provided by teachers in overcoming these challenges.

During the data collection phase, data was gathered through in-depth interviews with BPED students. These interviews followed a semi-structured format, striking a balance between predetermined questions and allowing participants the flexibility to elaborate on their experiences. To complement this approach, focus group discussions were also conducted. These discussions fostered a supportive and open environment, encouraging participants to openly share their insights and experiences.

For data analysis, a phenomenological approach was employed. This included transcribing and organizing the interview data, followed by a process of open coding to identify significant statements and meanings within the narratives. Themes and patterns were extracted through thematic coding, allowing for the exploration of commonalities and variations in the experiences of BPED students. Constant comparison was applied to ensure a thorough examination of the data, with emerging themes refined and validated through ongoing comparison and analysis. The analysis focused on capturing the essence of the lived experiences, uncovering the nuances and underlying meanings that characterized the challenges faced by BPED students in the university context. This meticulous process contributed to a rich and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

Reflexivity

The researcher who has a PE teaching background, recognized and addressed personal biases. Reflexivity was maintained through thoughtful consideration during the design phase and the use of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Despite efforts to achieve objectivity, the researcher's influence was acknowledged as inevitable. Regular debriefing sessions with colleagues aimed to mitigate subjectivity. The transparent approach to reflexivity enhances the study's credibility, allowing readers to critically assess limitations and potential generalization.

Ethical Considerations

This study involves requesting sensitive information from participants, and as a result, participants were informed that their participation was voluntary, and they could withdraw from the research at any point. A careful and thorough examination of ethical issues was undertaken to uphold the credibility of the findings. The researcher took measures to maintain transparency by informing participants about the study's purpose and obtaining their consent through a Consent Agreement to prevent deception. Additionally, the use of anonymous names was employed to protect the real identities of participants, and assurances of confidentiality were provided to establish mutual trust.

Reliability and Validity of the Study

The data collection instrument underwent expert evaluation for both content validity and clarity. Based on their input, the final interview guide was developed and employed by the study participants. Following Creswell's (1998) recommendation, as cited by Cirkir (2012), peer assessment was utilized as a method to enhance the study's credibility. To ensure reliability, interview responses were systematically categorized, and independent researchers created themes from the data. Detailed reporting of research processes was undertaken to establish descriptive validity. Raw data were

diligently stored to facilitate future requests and potential use in subsequent studies, contributing to increased external validity. Additionally, adhering to Yildirim and Simsek's (2006) assertion that direct quotations are essential for reliability and validity, the study findings are substantiated with direct quotations.

Results and Discussion

Through data analysis, four key themes emerged: (1) instances of stereotyping and discrimination, (2) challenges encountered in BPED specialization, (3) development of determination and confidence, and (4) the need for an expanded support system. These themes collectively highlight not only the academic challenges but also the emotional, psychological, and developmental impacts on BPED students.

Theme 1: Instances of Stereotyping and Discrimination

Participants frequently reported experiences of stereotyping and discrimination, particularly from educators and peers, which negatively affected their self-esteem, academic performance, and sense of belonging. These experiences often led to feelings of marginalization and frustration, creating barriers to academic engagement and participation.

Subtheme A: Teachers' Perspectives

Participants noted that several teachers held and expressed derogatory views about BPED students, labeling them as less competent or academically inferior. This negative perception not only undermined students' confidence but also contributed to an environment where discriminatory beliefs were normalized.

Transcript 31-47, Informant MMJ 05:

"Some teachers degrade BPED students, saying we are not competent enough and only interested in fun activities. It hurts to hear these words, especially coming from our teachers, whose job is to cultivate knowledge. Instead, they put us down, making us feel like we don't belong."

This subtheme underscores how discrimination from teachers, as authority figures, can disrupt the developmental trajectory of students, leading to lower self-worth and reduced academic motivation. According to developmental psychology, such experiences can foster internalized inferiority and stress, which are detrimental to cognitive development and emotional well-being. The adverse impacts of these effects are not only immediate but can also have enduring repercussions, resulting in decreased academic performance, education accomplishments, and limited career opportunities (Shinkoff & Garner, 2012). This emphasize that the negative experiences may hinder students from taking advantage of future possibilities. Moreover, Damer (2018) cited that it is possible that frequent exposure to bias or discrimination in the classroom can impeded the development of critical cognitive abilities such as problem-solving, creativity, and adaptability, which all are essential for future success.

Subtheme B: Peer Perspectives

Similarly, participants reported being subjected to stereotyping by their peers, who trivialized the academic challenges of BPED. This external invalidation of their efforts and discipline led to feelings of isolation and frustration, further exacerbating their mental and emotional struggles

Transcript 37-42, Informant MMJ 02:

"People think we just dance and sing, but they don't understand how difficult it is to balance four major components. The pressure to excel is intense, and it's frustrating that others don't recognize our hard work."

These experiences reflect the profound psychological impact that peer discrimination can have on students, contributing to social isolation and a diminished sense of academic identity. This theme points to the need for interventions that cultivate empathy and mutual respect in educational environments. Thus, this suggests a pressing need for a cultural shift within the educational institution, emphasizing the importance of awareness and sensitivity training for educators Terrier (2016). Creating an environment that promotes respect and appreciation for diverse specializations can contribute to a more inclusive educational experience, fostering positive student-teacher relationships. In addition, Eden (2024) stated that cultural competency training for teachers is essential not only for reducing bias but for creating a learning environment where all students feel valued and understood.

Theme 2: Challenges Encountered in BPED Specialization

Participants revealed that the BPED program is perceived as more challenging than outsiders realize, requiring mastery in multiple disciplines, including physical education, health, music, and dance. Financial and academic struggles further compounded these challenges.

Transcript 18-26, Informant MMJ 05:

"I excel in some areas, but when it comes to dance, I really struggle. The pressure to be good at everything is overwhelming, and sometimes I push myself too hard, which affects my relationships with others."

Transcript 38-40, Informant MMJ 01:

"Financially, it's hard when we need to buy instruments or costumes for our recitals. Not everyone can afford it, and it puts a lot of pressure on us."

These challenges highlight the need for holistic support systems that address not just academic difficulties but also the emotional and financial barriers that students face. Developmentally, students in this specialization may experience heightened anxiety, pressure to perform, and financial stress, which can adversely affect their mental health and ability to thrive academically. Hence, these challenges underscore the necessity for targeted interventions, including financial aid programs and academic support tailored to address the difficulties faced in specific subjects. By addressing these challenges, institutions can ensure that BPED students receive the necessary resources and assistance to excel in all aspects of their specialization. Lahore (2017). This highlights the importance of institutions actively addressing the various challenges faced by the students. By providing interventions, institutions create a supportive environment that helps students succeed in all areas of their specialization.

Theme 3: Development of Determination and Confidence

Despite the discriminatory experiences, many participants demonstrated resilience and a determination to overcome the biases they faced. Discrimination, instead of demotivating them, often served as a catalyst for personal growth, as students worked to prove their capabilities.

Transcript 65-69, Informant MMJ 06:

"I've decided to focus on improving myself rather than letting the discriminatory comments get to me. I'm determined to show that BPED students can excel."

Transcript 52-59, Informant MMJ 05:

"I'm running for cum laude, and I balance my time between being a dancer and a student leader. I want to prove them wrong and show that BPED students can lead and excel academically."

This theme demonstrates the developmental trajectory toward self-empowerment and resilience. Participants used discrimination as motivation, driving their academic and personal success. This points to the importance of fostering environments that support students' emotional growth and resilience in the face of adversity. Developing a strong sense of identity and community can serve as a buffer against the negative impacts of discrimination (Rivas-Drake, 2019). In addition, students displayed an increased perseverance, self-efficacy, and adaptability as a result of the re-frame of discrimination as a challenge to overcome rather than take it as a barrier (Boyd-Grady, 2014). This emphasized that trajectory process is key to helping students not only cope with discrimination but to thrive in spite of it, achieving higher levels of personal and academic success.

Theme 4: The Need for an Expanded Support System

Participants emphasized the importance of supportive networks, including both financial and emotional support from educators and peers. Such networks were instrumental in helping them navigate academic pressures and personal challenges.

Transcript 92-99, Informant MMJ 01:

"My teachers helped me financially, giving me extra income when I needed it. They were always there when I had problems, which made a huge difference in my ability to stay in the program."

Transcript 62-67, Informant MMJ 06:

"Whenever I found dance too difficult, my teacher was there to encourage me. Their belief in me gave me confidence and pushed me to do better."

This theme highlights the crucial role of mentorship and peer support in the developmental process. Supportive educators and peers can provide the emotional and practical tools necessary for students to navigate the complex challenges of their academic journey. Strengthening these support networks is vital for fostering resilience and promoting mental well-being among BPED students. According to Blume's (2016) research, by actively engaging in addressing academic, personal, and financial concerns, institutions can create a supportive ecosystem that not only enhances the overall well-being of BPED students but also contributes to their academic success and future endeavors. In addition, Moody (2021) emphasized that institutions that provide organized mentorship programs and support groups can enhanced academic outcomes and students' satisfaction. These programs can foster not only academic guidance but also a sense of camaraderie and solidarity among students.

In summary, the analysis identifies four key themes in the experiences of BPED students. First, stereotyping and discrimination, particularly from educators, highlight the need for cultural sensitivity training to foster an inclusive learning environment. Second, specific academic and financial challenges require targeted interventions like academic support and financial aid. Third, despite facing discrimination, students demonstrate resilience, stressing the importance of confidence-building and leadership programs. Finally, mentorship and peer support play a crucial role in student success, underscoring the need for institutions to strengthen these support systems for the holistic development and well-being of BPED students.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The findings of this study underscore the urgent need for educational institutions to adopt a more inclusive and developmentally responsive approach to the BPED program. Using Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) as a lens, it becomes evident that BPED students face challenges due to the in-group and out-group dynamics present in higher education. BPED students, often perceived as belonging to a less prestigious or less academically rigorous "in-group," face discrimination and stereotyping from the "out-group" (educators and peers in other fields). These negative interactions not only impact students' social identity but also hinder their emotional and academic development.

The persistence of stereotyping and discrimination against BPED students highlights the importance of integrating cultural sensitivity into institutional frameworks. Addressing these issues requires more than just sensitivity training for educators; it demands an overarching institutional commitment to fostering respect, inclusion, and understanding across all levels of the educational system. Schools must ensure that BPED students feel valued as part of the academic community rather than being marginalized by societal biases.

The unique challenges that BPED students face—academic, financial, and emotional—reveal the necessity for targeted interventions that address both their academic and developmental needs. Social Identity Theory suggests that students' identification with their academic group (BPED) plays a role in how they navigate these challenges. Financial aid programs, mentorship, and peer support networks are critical in ensuring that BPED students maintain a positive group identity, which in turn helps them thrive academically and emotionally.

The resilience demonstrated by BPED students, who rise above societal biases, reflects a strength that institutions should nurture as a catalyst for positive developmental outcomes. With appropriate support, these students can build strong in-group identities and resist the negative effects of out-group discrimination. A supportive environment, where students feel understood and empowered, is crucial in promoting both academic success and emotional well-being.

In conclusion, a comprehensive approach is essential—one that not only addresses the systemic issues of stereotyping and discrimination but also fosters emotional resilience, personal growth, and developmental success for BPED students. By doing so, institutions can cultivate a more equitable, inclusive, and supportive educational experience for all learners. The following recommendations, guided by the principles of Social Identity Theory and the study's findings, aim to improve the academic and developmental experiences of BPED students:

1. Cultural Sensitivity Training for Teachers

The study found that teachers sometimes unintentionally contribute to the discrimination BPED students face, reinforcing harmful out-group stereotypes. To counter this, schools should require cultural sensitivity training for all staff. This training should focus on reducing bias and promoting respect for all academic disciplines, including physical education, ensuring that teachers appreciate BPED as a valuable field of study. Understanding the importance of social identity in student development can help teachers foster a more inclusive learning environment.

2. Inclusive School Policies

Schools should adopt policies that actively prevent discrimination and promote diversity. These policies must include clear guidelines for addressing stereotyping and discrimination complaints, ensuring that BPED students feel safe and supported in reporting their experiences. Universities should also develop initiatives that celebrate the achievements of BPED students, helping to strengthen their in-group identity and reduce negative perceptions from the broader academic community.

3. Targeted Academic and Financial Support

BPED students face unique challenges balancing multiple components (dance, music, health, and physical education) while also dealing with financial difficulties. Schools should provide targeted academic support programs to help students succeed in these demanding areas. Expanding financial aid programs will help students cover costs for materials like instruments and costumes, ensuring that financial barriers do not prevent success. By providing this support, institutions help BPED students maintain a positive sense of identity within their academic community.

4. Building Resilience and Leadership

Social Identity Theory suggests that students develop stronger in-group identities when they feel supported and confident. To promote resilience, schools should offer workshops that build self-confidence, emotional intelligence, and leadership skills. These programs will help BPED students manage time, handle stress, and overcome challenges, allowing them to combat negative stereotypes and assert their capabilities.

5. Mentorship and Peer Support Networks

Mentorship is essential for reinforcing positive in-group identification and helping students navigate challenges. Schools should establish mentorship programs where experienced BPED students or professionals guide and support current students. Mentors can offer both academic advice and emotional support, helping students build resilience. Peer support

groups should also be encouraged, enabling BPED students to share experiences, build strong social bonds, and strengthen their group identity.

6. Clear Communication Channels

BPED students need reliable ways to communicate their concerns and challenges to teachers and school leaders. Schools should create regular feedback sessions where students can express their issues openly, without fear of judgment or repercussion. Open communication fosters an inclusive environment, where BPED students feel heard and understood by both their educators and peers.

7. Monitoring and Evaluation

Schools should regularly assess the effectiveness of the support systems in place for BPED students. This can be done through surveys and feedback sessions to determine whether their needs are being met. Regular evaluations will allow schools to adjust their strategies based on student feedback, ensuring continuous improvement in addressing discrimination, promoting resilience, and supporting positive identity development.

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