

IA QUALITATIF PHENOMENOLOGY EXPERIENCE AND MEANING OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION OBESITY EDUCATION IN STUDENTS

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Abstract. This study explores the experiences and meanings of obesity education within physical education among students through a qualitative phenomenological approach. The research aims to uncover how students perceive, interpret, and internalize educational practices related to obesity prevention and health awareness. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observations involving students from various educational backgrounds. The analysis employed thematic coding to identify recurring patterns and significant themes regarding students' lived experiences. Findings reveal that students generally perceive obesity education not only as knowledge acquisition but also as a transformative process that shapes their attitudes toward lifestyle, body image, and long-term health behavior. Furthermore, students emphasized the role of supportive teaching methods, peer interaction, and cultural context in influencing their engagement and understanding of obesity education. This study concludes that phenomenological insights provide a deeper understanding of how physical education can be optimized to foster health awareness and positive behavioral change in students. The implications highlight the need for holistic, student-centered approaches that integrate psychological, social, and physical dimensions in obesity education.

Keywords: Phenomenology, Physical Education, Obesity Education, Student Experience, Health Awareness

I. INTRODUCTION

Obesity has become one of the most pressing global public health issues of the 21st century. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that the prevalence of obesity has nearly tripled since 1975, with more than 1.9 billion adults overweight in 2022 (Wittels & Mansfield, 2021), of which more than 650 million are categorized as obese (World Health Organization, 2023). This trend is not only limited to adults, but also increases significantly in children and adolescents, indicating the presence of a future generation of health crises. Obesity is seen as a major risk factor for various non-communicable diseases such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, and some types of cancer, thus placing it as a serious threat to the sustainability of health systems around the world (Hruby & Hu, 2015); (Leisterer & Jekauc, 2019; Asnur et al., 2024; Dewanto et al., 2023; Uluk et al., 2024).

Furthermore, obesity is not only a medical problem, but also a complex social and economic phenomenon. Factors such as urbanization, high-calorie diets, sedentary lifestyles, and lack of health education contribute to the increased prevalence of obesity (Ng et al., 2014). The impact of obesity includes decreased productivity, increased health cost burden, and reduced quality of life of individuals. Therefore, efforts to combat obesity require a multidimensional approach that involves educational interventions, health promotion, and

prevention-oriented public policies (Arroyo-Rojas & Hodge, 2024). In this context, physical education in schools plays an important role as a strategic means to increase health awareness, instill healthy living behaviors, and form positive attitudes towards the body and fitness from an early age (WHO, 2023); (Rugseth & Standal, 2015; Lindelof et al., 2010); Elfira & Santosa, 2023).

The prevalence of obesity in children and adolescents continues to increase alarmingly in various parts of the world. Based on a report by the *World Health Organization* (WHO), in 2020 more than 39 million children under the age of five were overweight or obese, while among children aged 5–19 years, the number reached more than 340 million (WHO, 2021); (Buxton & Snethen, 2013); (Garip & Yardley, 2011); (Muchlisin, 2020). This phenomenon shows that obesity is no longer only a problem for adults, but also for a population of children and adolescents who are in the growth and development phase (Crosby, 2018). Globally, the condition of obesity at school age has a serious impact on physical and psychosocial health, ranging from an increased risk of metabolic diseases to the emergence of self-confidence problems and social stigma (Reilly & Kelly, 2011). Similar conditions are also seen in the Southeast Asian region, including Indonesia, where the prevalence of obesity in children and adolescents shows an increasing trend. Data

from the 2018 Basic Health Research (Riskesdas) shows that the prevalence of obesity in children aged 5–12 years reaches 9.2%, while in adolescents aged 13–15 years it is recorded at 4.8% (Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia, 2019). This figure confirms that school as a second environment after the family has an important role in preventing obesity through the provision of physical education, promotion of balanced nutrition, and the formation of healthy living behaviors. Thus, school-based interventions are one of the main strategies that can reduce the rate of obesity increase among children and adolescents (Muchlisin, 2020; Yulianti, 2020).

Physical education has a strategic role in shaping students' health awareness from an early age, especially related to obesity prevention. Through structured physical activity, students not only acquire motor skills, but also understand the importance of maintaining physical fitness, a balanced diet, and an active lifestyle (Sallis et al., 2012). Exercise activities in schools have been shown to contribute significantly to increasing energy expenditure, reducing the risk of body fat accumulation, and improving cardiovascular and metabolic health (O'Donoghue et al., 2021). More than that, physical education is a forum to instill health values that can be internalized into daily life, thus forming a sustainable healthy lifestyle (Chen et al., 2020). In addition to physical benefits, physical education also plays an important role in increasing students' social and psychological awareness related to obesity. A learning environment that supports physical activity can encourage positive attitudes towards the body, reduce the stigma of obesity, and foster motivation to adopt a healthy lifestyle (Hills, Dengel, & Lubans, 2015). Schools as formal institutions have a great opportunity to integrate obesity education programs in the physical education curriculum, so that students can understand the relationship between physical activity, diet, and long-term health. Thus, physical education is not only a means of learning sports, but also a preventive instrument in facing global challenges related to obesity in children and adolescents (Clark et al., 2011; Fullagar, 2017); Street et al., 2016).

One of the main challenges in integrating obesity education into the physical education curriculum is the limited learning time available in schools. Physical education subjects generally have a relatively small portion of lesson hours compared to other academic subjects, so the space to discuss health issues in depth, including obesity, is limited (Trudeau & Shephard, 2008). In addition, many physical education teachers still focus more on sports skills and competitive achievement, so educational aspects of healthy living and obesity prevention are often overlooked (Cale & Harris, 2009). This creates a gap between the goals of physical education as a means of health promotion and implementation practices in the field (Crosby, 2018; Brown & Payne, 2009).

Another challenge is the lack of competencies and supporting resources in supporting the effective integration of obesity education. Some physical education teachers have not received special training in nutritional literacy (Ansah et al., 2020), obesity psychology, and inclusive pedagogical strategies for students with various body conditions (Webster

et al., 2015). In addition, limited school facilities, such as the lack of sports facilities and health program support, further narrow the space for movement to develop a comprehensive physical education curriculum (Hall et al., 2016). On the other hand, cultural and social factors, including stigma against students with obesity, are also barriers to creating a safe and supportive learning environment. Therefore, more responsive education policies and multi-sectoral support are needed so that physical education can truly function as an effective obesity prevention instrument (WHO, 2020).

Research by Hills et al. (2015) emphasizes that the integration of structured physical activity in physical education not only lowers the risk of obesity, but also improves students' overall health literacy. Meanwhile, research by Cale and Harris (2013) found that physical education that focuses on health promotion is able to improve students' understanding of the relationship between physical activity, diet, and weight control. The findings strengthen the argument that physical learning can be an effective forum for obesity education if designed with a holistic approach (Santos Pastor et al., 2021); (Ahmad et al., 2024; Utomo et al., 2023; Zulkifli et al., 2022; Zulyusri et al., 2023).

In addition, research with a qualitative approach also underscores the importance of understanding students' subjective experiences in obesity education. For example, Dyson (2014) examined students' experiences in health-focused physical education programs, and the results showed that students gained deep meaning related to body identity, motivation to live healthy, as well as awareness of the impact of obesity on their future. Similar findings were put forward by Lee and Richards (2021) who showed that positive experiences in physical education are closely related to long-term healthy behaviors and a decrease in obesity tendencies. Thus, phenomenological research becomes relevant because it can dig deeper into how students interpret the learning experience of obesity in physical education. Based on this, this study aims to find out A Qualitatif Phenomenology Experience and Meaning of Physical Education Obesity Education in Students.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with phenomenological methods, which aims to understand the subjective experiences and meanings experienced by students related to obesity education in the context of physical education. The phenomenological approach was chosen because it is able to explore students' personal perspectives, so that researchers can gain a deep understanding of how students interpret their learning experiences in relation to health awareness and obesity prevention (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research subjects were high school students who followed physical education subjects, selected using purposive sampling techniques to ensure that participants had hands-on experience related to the research theme.

Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews, *focus group* discussions, and participatory observation in

physical education classes. The data obtained were then analyzed using the phenomenological thematic analysis method according to Colaizzi, which includes the process of transcription, coding, theme identification, and interpretation of the meaning of student experiences (Moustakas, 1994). To maintain the validity of the data, this study applies the technique of triangulating sources and methods, member checking, and trail audits to ensure the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the research findings. Thus, this research method is expected to reveal a deeper meaning about the role of physical education in fostering health awareness and obesity prevention behavior in students.

III. RESULT AND METHODS

Students' Experience in Obesity-related Physical Education

The initial experience of students in participating in obesity material in physical education classes generally shows a diversity of perceptions and understandings. Some students consider obesity learning as a new thing that provides additional knowledge about the relationship between physical activity, nutrition, and body health. A study conducted by Hills et al. (2015) confirms that students' involvement in obesity learning in physical education can improve their health literacy from an early age. In the early stages, students tend to see obesity only as a physical or appearance problem, but after getting an explanation from the teacher, they begin to understand that obesity has serious consequences for long-term health (Randall-arell & Utley, 2014). Students' emotional responses to obesity learning also show diverse dynamics. Some students responded enthusiastically because they felt they were gaining new insights that were relevant to daily life, especially related to an active lifestyle and healthy diet. On the other hand, there are also students who feel anxiety, especially for those who are overweight and feel vulnerable to stigma from peers. According to Puhl and Latner (2007), the stigma of obesity in the school environment can affect students' self-esteem and cause anxiety when the topic of obesity is discussed openly. However, an inclusive teacher approach can minimize this anxiety and turn it into positive motivation (Stolz, 2014).

Students' motivation in participating in obesity learning is greatly influenced by the relevance of the material to their daily lives. Students who previously paid less attention to physical health showed increased motivation to participate in physical activity after understanding the risk of obesity. Research by Fairclough and Stratton (2005) reveals that students' involvement in physical education that integrates health issues can increase their active participation and intrinsic motivation. This shows that well-packaged obesity education is able to foster awareness as well as students' desire to change their behavior in a healthier direction (Okkenhaug, 2025). However, students also face various challenges while participating in obesity learning. One of the main challenges is the limited facilities that support physical activity in schools, so students find it difficult to practice the theories they have learned. In addition, some

students have difficulty internalizing health messages due to the influence of the social and family environment that does not support a healthy lifestyle. As stated by Story et al. (2009), the family and social environment play an important role in the formation of children's eating behavior and physical activity, so if they are not supportive, obesity prevention efforts in schools become less than optimal (Skogen & Høydal, 2021; Bombak, 2015).

In addition to external factors, internal challenges experienced by students include feelings of insecurity or lack of confidence when they have to do physical activities in front of peers. Overweight students often feel embarrassed or afraid of being ridiculed, thus reducing their participation in class activities. According to Greenleaf et al. (2006), negative experiences in physical education can decrease students' long-term participation in physical activity (Ogden et al., 2020). Therefore, students' experiences show that obesity learning in physical education classrooms must be designed in an inclusive, supportive, and stigma-free manner in order to build motivation and sustainable health awareness.

The role of physical education teachers in providing knowledge and motivation

Physical education teachers play a central role in providing relevant knowledge about health, fitness, and obesity prevention. They are not only in charge of teaching exercise skills, but also being facilitators in building students' understanding of the relationship between physical activity, nutrition, and long-term health. According to Siedentop (2009), physical education teachers play a role as agents of change that can shape students' healthy living habits from an early age through the integration of health knowledge in physical learning (Stankov et al., 2012). Thus, teachers are the main source of health literacy for students in the school environment. In addition to being a provider of knowledge, physical education teachers also have an important role in building students' intrinsic motivation to engage in physical activity. A study conducted by Deci and Ryan (2000) through *the theory of Self-Determination* shows that intrinsic motivation develops when students feel supported autonomously, competently, and have social attachment. Physical education teachers can foster this condition by creating an inclusive learning atmosphere, providing positive feedback, and adapting activities to students' abilities. This makes students more motivated to participate actively without feeling pressured (Ansah et al., 2020).

The motivation built by teachers also plays an important role in reducing students' anxiety related to obesity stigma. Some overweight students often feel anxious or insecure when participating in physical learning. According to Puhl and Latner (2007), the stigma of obesity in the educational environment can hinder student participation in physical activity. In this context, teachers play a role in creating a supportive classroom climate, emphasizing cooperation over competition, and rewarding students' efforts rather than just the end result. In this way, teachers help students feel accepted and motivated to stay active. Furthermore, physical education teachers also function as role

models for students. Teachers' behavior in maintaining their health, diet, and daily physical activity can provide positive examples that students imitate. Research by Bandura (1997) on *Social Learning Theory* shows that students tend to imitate the behavior of adults they admire, including teachers. Therefore, physical education teachers who consistently implement a healthy lifestyle are able to inspire students to adopt similar habits (Santos Pastor et al., 2021).

In addition, physical education teachers also have a responsibility to integrate obesity education into the curriculum with creative and contextual teaching methods. Dyson (2014) emphasizes the importance of a student-centered pedagogical approach, where teachers associate obesity material with students' daily experiences to make them easier to understand and meaningful. By using participatory learning methods, teachers can increase student engagement as well as ensure that the knowledge gained is not only understood cognitively, but also internalized in behavior. Finally, the role of physical education teachers in providing knowledge and motivation is closely related to the sustainability of students' healthy behavior in the future. Research by Ntoumanis et al. (2009) found that motivational support from teachers contributes to an increase in long-term physical activity outside of school. Thus, physical education teachers not only play a role in the academic context, but also in shaping a sustainable healthy lifestyle of students. This role confirms that physical education teachers are key actors in efforts to prevent obesity through continuous education and motivation (Randall-arell & Utley, 2014); (Oktarina et al., 2021; T. A. Santosa et al., 2025; Wantu et al., 2024).

Physical Education for Students

Physical education has a holistic meaning that goes beyond just mastering sports skills. For students, physical education is understood as a learning space that integrates physical, mental, and social aspects in daily life. Bailey et al. (2009) emphasized that physical education makes an important contribution to the overall development of students, ranging from physical health, emotional intelligence, to social interaction. Thus, physical education can be seen as a vehicle for character formation that supports the growth and development of students in a balanced manner (Edy Nurtamam et al., 2023; Luciana et al., 2024; Markiano Solissa et al., 2023).

One of the important meanings of physical education is to form students' self-awareness related to body conditions and healthy living habits. Through structured physical activity, students learn to recognize their own body's capabilities, limitations, and potential. According to Whitehead (2010), physical self-awareness obtained through physical education is the core of *physical literacy*, which is the ability to understand and appreciate the body as an asset in living a healthy life. This helps students develop a positive attitude towards themselves while encouraging the implementation of an active lifestyle outside the school environment (Ogden et al., 2020). (Wittels & Mansfield, 2021).

In addition to self-awareness, physical education also instills important disciplinary values in the formation of healthy behavior. Students learn to follow instructions, obey rules, and practice consistency in physical activity. Hardman and Green (2011) state that discipline instilled through physical education can be transferred to other aspects of life, including time management, self-control, and personal responsibility. Thus, physical education functions as a means of internalizing values that contribute to the development of students' character. Physical education also has a significant role in fostering student health awareness in a sustainable manner (O'Donoghue et al., 2021). Regular physical activity in school has been shown to increase students' knowledge of the benefits of exercise for heart health, weight control, and chronic disease prevention (Janssen & LeBlanc, 2010). Furthermore, the learning experience in physical education motivates students to bring healthy lifestyle practices into daily life, such as maintaining a balanced diet and reducing sedentary behaviors. Thus, physical education serves as a long-term investment in student health (Brown & Payne, 2009); (Ansah et al., 2020); (Okkenhaug, 2025).

Another holistic meaning is that physical education provides provisions for students to live a healthy and productive life in the future. Students who are used to physical activity since school will have a greater likelihood of maintaining the habit in adulthood (Telama et al., 2005). This provision not only has an impact on physical health, but also on quality of life, as students learn to respect their bodies, manage stress, and establish social relationships through physical activity. In other words, physical education helps instill a sustainable healthy lifestyle which is an important capital in facing the challenges of modern life (Skogen & Høydal, 2021; Bombak, 2015).

Finally, the holistic meaning of physical education for students can be seen from their ability to integrate the physical, psychological, and social dimensions simultaneously. Physical education not only improves motor skills, but also strengthens self-identity, builds confidence, and encourages prosocial behavior through teamwork (Dyson, 2014). With this holistic approach, physical education can be a strategic instrument to form a healthy, resilient, and able generation to face global lifestyle changes that increasingly demand health awareness (Dewanto et al., 2024; Santosa & Dwi, 2018; Leisterer & Jekauc, 2019).

IV. CONCLUSIONS

From this study, it can be concluded that students' experiences in physical education related to obesity are not only limited to aspects of knowledge about physical health, but also include emotional, social, and motivational dimensions. Students revealed that learning about obesity in physical education classes provides new awareness about the importance of a healthy lifestyle, physical activity, and proper weight management. In addition, the role of physical education teachers has proven to be very significant in providing comprehensive understanding, motivational

encouragement, and emotional support so that students can be more confident in internalizing health values. Furthermore, the holistic meaning of physical education for students is reflected in the understanding that exercise and physical activity not only function as physical skills, but also form attitudes of discipline, responsibility, and self-awareness towards long-term health. Physical education with a focus on obesity issues helps students to build a sustainable healthy living perspective that can be applied in daily life. Thus, students' phenomenological experiences confirm that physical education plays a strategic role in instilling health awareness, increasing motivation, and strengthening a commitment to a more meaningful healthy lifestyle.

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