

The Role of Physical Activity Towards Health and Fitness (PATHFit) In Enhancing Stress Management and Mental Well-Being of Tertiary Students

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ABSTRACT: This study explored the role of the Physical Activity Towards Health and Fitness (PATHFit) program in enhancing stress management and mental well-being among tertiary students. College life is a critical developmental stage characterized by academic pressures, social transitions, and personal challenges that often lead to increased stress. When unmanaged, stress negatively affects students' academic performance, emotional stability, and overall health. In response, higher education institutions have implemented holistic programs such as PATHFit, in line with Commission on Higher Education Memorandum Order No. 39, series of 2021, to promote lifelong fitness and well-being. A qualitative phenomenological exploratory design was used to examine the lived experiences of eight (8) purposively selected tertiary students from St. Vincent College of Cabuyao enrolled in PATHFit courses (PATHFit 1–4) during Academic Year 2025–2026. Participants were selected to obtain rich, in-depth narratives and reach data saturation, focusing on their experiences in fitness, dance, and sports-based activities. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed thematically to identify patterns related to stress management and mental well-being. Findings revealed that PATHFit significantly enhanced students' mood, motivation, emotional regulation, and resilience. Activities such as exercise, dance, and sports functioned as effective coping mechanisms by reducing stress and supporting psychological balance. Students reported feeling more relaxed, focused, and productive after participation. One participant stated, "Before PathFit, I often feel stressed and tired, but after sessions, I feel more relaxed and balanced." Additionally, social interaction and structured routines fostered confidence, teamwork, and self-efficacy. The study concludes that PATHFit extends beyond physical fitness and plays a vital role in holistic student development. It recommends integrating mindfulness and relaxation activities and strengthening wellness discussions to enhance its impact on mental well-being. Future implementations may expand mental health-focused activities to larger student populations for broader accessibility and effectiveness.

KEYWORDS: emotional regulation, mental well-being, physical activity, PATHFit, resilience, stress management, tertiary students

INTRODUCTION

College is widely recognized as a crucial stage in a person's development, because there are academic demands, social transitions, and all those personal adjustments that come with it. Even though it can be formative in a good way, these same challenges often put students under a lot of stress. Moreover, when that stress is not managed well, it can really mess with learning outcomes, emotional stability and even overall mental health. Because of that, studies keep pointing out that higher education institutions are being pushed more and more to offer holistic support systems, not just for grades but for students' psychological well-being too.

Lately, mental health support for tertiary students has been getting more attention, partly because stress related concerns are becoming more common (World Health Organization, 2020). Tertiary students have to handle deadlines, examinations, financial worries, and personal responsibilities all at the same time, and if nothing is put in place to help, that can lead to overwhelming stress levels.

To respond to these concerns, the Philippine higher education system rolled out the Physical Activity Towards Health and Fitness (PATHFit) program. This was mandated by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Memorandum Order No. 39 series of 2021. PATHFit is included in the General Education Curriculum, and it's supposed to support lifelong fitness and wellness. Compared with traditional physical education, PATHFit blends both theoretical and practical parts, so it becomes more than just "exercise" and instead it shows how physical activity connects with stress management and mental well-being (CHED, 2021).

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Therefore, the gap basically signals the need for more investigation on how PATHFit, as a formal academic requirement, affects tertiary students' ability to manage stress and sustain psychological health. Filling this gap can help strengthen the current literature and provide evidence-based guidance for improving physical education and student wellness programs in higher education institutions

Research Question

This study aimed to determine the role of PATHFit in enhancing stress management and mental well-being of tertiary students. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

Central question

What is the essence of the lived experiences of tertiary students with regard to the role of PATHFit in enhancing stress management and mental well-being?

Corollary Questions

1. How do tertiary students describe their most significant experiences as regards participation in PATHFIT classes?
2. What meanings may be formulated based on the most significant experiences of tertiary students in managing stress and enhancing their mental well-being through PATHFIT?
3. What themes emerged from the formulated meanings?
4. Based on the results of the study, what framework or intervention may be proposed to strengthen the role of PATHFIT in promoting stress management and mental well-being among tertiary students?

II. SCOPE AND LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This study focused on tertiary students enrolled in PATHFit courses. It examined how PATHFit 1–4 courses covering fitness testing and basic exercise prescription, exercise-based fitness activities, dance, recreation, physical activities, and fitness, health, and sports promotion contributed to students' stress management and mental well-being.

The study was limited to students of St. Vincent College of Cabuyao during the Academic Year 2025–2026. It did not consider non-academic stressors, including family, financial, or work-related challenges. Focusing exclusively on PATHFit-related factors allowed for a clearer understanding of the program's direct impact on students' stress management and mental well-being.

FRAMEWORK

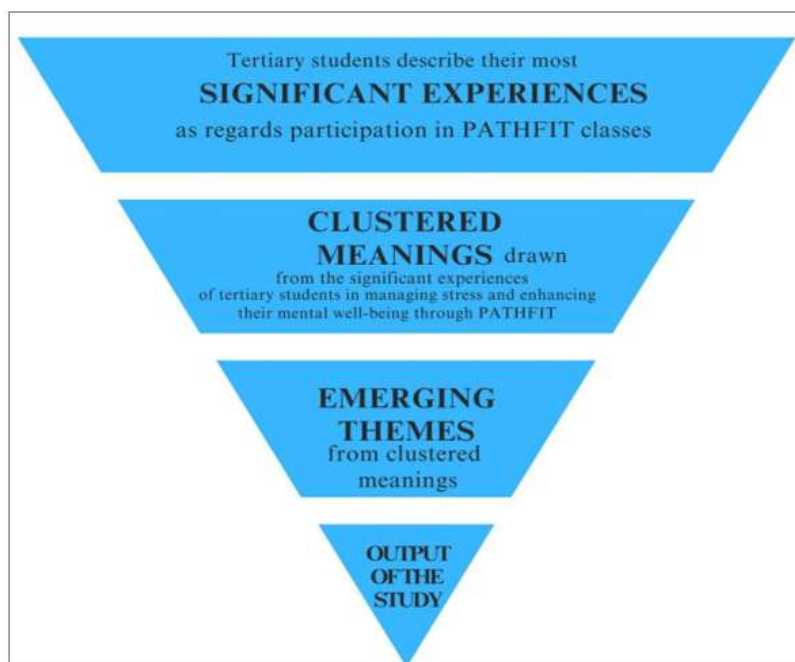


Figure 1. Research Paradigm

As shown in Figure 1, this study takes on an inverted pyramid style approach, starting pretty broad, then slowly narrowing down into something more practical, and it tightens as it goes. At the highest point of the pyramid, the investigation zooms in on the meaningful experiences of tertiary students when they take part in PATHFIT classes. More exactly, it looks at experiences across

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four categories: 1.1 Fitness for Wellness (PATHFit 1), 1.2 Exercise-based Fitness (PATHFit 2), 1.3 Dance-based Fitness (PATHFit 3), and 1.4 Sports-based Fitness (PATHFit 4). In this early stage, the study offers a wide view to make sense of how students understand and go through participation in the different physical fitness activities.

As you move down the pyramid, The next portion concentrates on the meanings that are formed from those lived experiences, especially how students cope with stress and improve their psychological comfort through PATHFIT. These meanings are arranged into three groupings: 2.1 Coping Strategies, 2.2 Resilience, and 2.3 Emotional Regulation. This part helps sort out similar insights, so it becomes easier to see recurring patterns on how physical activity is used to deal with stress while still keeping a steadier mental state.

Then, the third level surfaces the developing themes that emerge from the clustered meanings. These themes point to the deeper ideas, and also to shared student experiences, they include 3.1 Mood, 3.2 Motivation, and 3.3 Overall Psychological Health. By centering on these themes, the study highlights the more underlying effect of PATHFIT participation on students' mental and emotional well-being, not just the obvious or immediate responses.

Finally, right at the bottom of the pyramid, the practical output is presented. This proposes a framework or an intervention intended to reinforce how PATHFIT can support stress management and mental well-being among tertiary students. The last part also checks whether there is a significant relationship between the role of PATHFIT and the respondents' level of mental well-being, and from there it gives recommendations that are meant to be actionable, so the program can become more effective.

Research Design

The researcher employed a qualitative research design. According to John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell (2022), qualitative research design is an approach used to explore and understand individuals lived experiences, meanings, and perspectives within their natural settings, emphasizing the collection of rich and detailed data through methods such as interviews, observations, and document analysis to gain deeper insights into social and human experiences. This design was appropriate as it aimed to capture and describe the lived experiences of tertiary students participating in PATHFit courses Fitness for Wellness (PATHFit 1), Exercise-based Fitness (PATHFit 2), Dance-based Fitness (PATHFit 3), and Sports-based Fitness (PATHFit 4) while guided by phenomenological principles that focus on how students perceive, interpret, and make meaning of their experiences, and further strengthened by its exploratory nature, which allows the identification of emerging insights beyond existing theoretical explanations; overall, the combination of phenomenology and exploratory inquiry ensured that the study not only documented students' experiences in PATHFit courses but also uncovered deeper and more nuanced aspects of participation, including stress management, engagement, and well-being that may not be fully captured in structured or quantitative assessments. Qualitative phenomenological exploratory research was most suitable for this study because it valued the voices and perspectives of participants. The students served as key informants who provided rich and meaningful narratives about how participation in PATHFit classes affected their physical wellness, mood, motivation, and psychological health. By exploring their shared experiences, the researcher aimed to uncover patterns, themes, and insights that highlighted the relationship between participation in fitness activities and students' overall well-being.

Research Instrument

To explore the role of PATHFit in enhancing stress management and mental well-being among tertiary students, this study utilized a semi-structured interview guide as the primary research instrument. The instrument was designed to elicit in-depth responses while allowing flexibility to probe emerging ideas and experiences during the interview process. It consisted of an introductory question, core open-ended questions, and a concluding question, all aligned with the phenomenological nature of the study.

The introductory question established rapport and gathered baseline information by asking students to describe their PATHFit experiences, including the courses taken and duration of participation. This provided essential context for their responses. The main section focused on PATHFit 1 (Fitness for Wellness), PATHFit 2 (Exercise-based Fitness), PATHFit 3 (Dance-based Fitness), and PATHFit 4 (Sports-based Fitness), exploring how these activities influenced students' stress levels, mood, motivation, and overall mental well-being. Participants were also asked about coping strategies, emotional regulation, and resilience developed through physical activity, as well as challenges encountered such as fatigue, lack of motivation, and academic pressures, and how these were managed through PATHFit engagement.

In addition, the guide examined the social dimension of PATHFit, including peer interaction, teamwork, and instructor support, and how these contributed to students' psychological well-being. It also explored how participation influenced their daily routines, lifestyle choices, and ability to cope with academic and personal stressors, allowing for a more holistic understanding of its impact. The concluding question captured the essence of participants lived experiences by asking them to summarize their overall PATHFit

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experience and identify its most significant contribution to their stress management and mental well-being, which is central to phenomenological inquiry.

Data Gathering Procedure

The data collection in this study aimed to capture the richness and depth of the lived experiences of tertiary students regarding their participation in PATHFit courses, specifically PATHFit 1 (Fitness for Wellness), PATHFit 2 (Exercise-based Fitness), PATHFit 3 (Dance-based Fitness), and PATHFit 4 (Sports-based Fitness). The main method used was a semi-structured, in-depth interview, which allowed the eight participants to freely express their experiences, thoughts, and emotions while providing the researcher with structured and comparable data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2020, as cited in Saldaña & Omasta, 2022). This flexible approach enabled the researcher to ask follow-up questions to further explore emerging themes and clarify responses when needed. The interviews were guided by core research questions focused on how students perceive and experience the impact of PATHFit courses on their mood, motivation, and psychological health.

Each interview lasted approximately 40–60 minutes and was conducted in a quiet, comfortable setting within the campus. When in-person sessions were not feasible, virtual interviews were conducted through secure video conferencing platforms to ensure accessibility and confidentiality. The interview guide included open-ended, exploratory, and probing questions that allowed participants to elaborate on their experiences, challenges, and reflections in detail. Questions revolved around themes such as mood enhancement, motivation, stress management, mental well-being, and overall engagement in PATHFit activities.

All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' informed consent, and field notes were taken to record non-verbal cues, tone, and context. Reflective memos were also maintained by the researcher to capture personal insights and observations throughout the data gathering process. The collected data were transcribed verbatim to maintain accuracy and authenticity in representation (Saldaña & Omasta, 2022). This systematic and ethical approach ensured that the voices of the participants were truthfully and sensitively documented to reflect their lived realities in relation to PATHFit courses.

III. RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings of the qualitative study conducted to explore the experiences of tertiary students enrolled in PATHFit courses at St. Vincent College of Cabuyao. A phenomenological approach was used to capture the lived experiences of the participants. Eight (8) students were purposively selected based on their active participation in PATHFit courses, namely Fitness for Wellness (PATHFit 1), Exercise-based Fitness (PATHFit 2), Dance-based Fitness (PATHFit 3), and Sports-based Fitness (PATHFit 4). These courses aim to promote students' physical health and mental well-being.

Through in-depth interviews and reflective discussions, the study examined how students experienced PATHFit in terms of mood, motivation, psychological health, and personal development. Data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns that explain the role of PATHFit in stress management and overall student well-being.

Narrative No.	Age	Year Level	Course
Narrative No. 1	21	3rd	Psychology
Narrative No. 2	20	3rd	Psychology
Narrative No. 3	21	3rd	BSBA
Narrative No. 4	21	3rd	Accountancy
Narrative No. 5	21	3rd	Hospitality Management
Narrative No. 6	30	3rd	BSEd- English
Narrative No. 7	20	3rd	BSTM
Narrative No. 8	21	3rd	BSTM

The participants' demographic profiles provide context for understanding their experiences in PATHFit. All respondents were third-year college students, with ages ranging from 20 to 21 years old, except for one mature learner aged 30. Most participants belonged to the 21-year-old group, followed by those aged 20.

This distribution reflects a typical undergraduate population within the stage of emerging adulthood, where identity development, academic growth, and career preparation are prominent. Arnett (2021) and UNESCO (2022) noted that individuals aged 18–24 comprise the majority of higher education students and often share similar academic and social experiences. This consistency provides a stable basis for analyzing shared experiences in PATHFit.

Although the sample was largely composed of traditional-age students, the inclusion of a 30-year-old participant added a broader perspective. Mature learners often carry different motivations and life responsibilities shaped by work and family

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experiences. As emphasized by Merriam and Baumgartner (2021), adult learners contribute richer insights due to their lived and practical experiences, enhancing qualitative interpretation. Thus, the inclusion of both traditional and mature learners strengthened the depth and diversity of the findings.

Overall, the demographic profile shows two key characteristics: the predominance of traditional-age college students and the presence of a mature learner. This combination provided both consistency and variation in perspectives, enriching the analysis of PATHFit experiences.

SOP 1: How do tertiary students describe their most significant experiences as regards participation in PATHFIT Classes?

This section presented the significant experiences of tertiary students regarding their participation in PATHFit classes and how these experiences contributed to their stress management and mental well-being. Drawing on relevant perspectives in physical activity and psychological well-being, such as the principles of holistic development and self-regulation, the results highlighted how students engaged in various PATHFit activities including fitness exercises, dance routines, and sports participation to manage stress, improve mood, and enhance motivation.

Table 2a: Significant Experiences of no. R1

"What is your age and year level?"
("21 years old, 3 rd year")
"Which PATHFIT course(s) have you completed? (PATHFIT 1, 2, 3, or 4)"
("PATHFIT 1, 2, 3, and 4")
"How would you describe your general academic workload this semester?"
("Mabigat ang workload dahil sa research at major subjects")
"How would you describe your stress level as a tertiary student?"
("Madalas mataas ang stress level pero manageable")
"Can you describe your most significant experience in your PATHFIT class?"
("Ang pinaka significant kong experience ay yung gradual improvement ko mula PATHFIT 1 hanggang 4, lalo na sa confidence at stress handling.")
"What moments in PATHFIT stand out to you the most? Why?"
("Yung group activities at performances kasi doon ako naging mas comfortable makisalamuha")
"How did PATHFIT 1 (Movement Competency) influence your awareness of your body and physical abilities?"
("Sa PATHFIT 1, mas naging aware ako sa body movements at limitations ko.")
"Did mastering movement skills affect your confidence or stress levels? How?"
("Oo, nakatulong siya sa confidence ko kasi mas naging sure ako sa ginagawa ko.")
"How did participating in structured exercises (e.g., workouts, conditioning) affect your mood and stress?"
("Sa PATHFIT 2, napansin ko na bumababa stress ko after exercise sessions.")
"Can you describe how you felt before, during, and after exercise sessions?"
("Before: stressed; During: focused; After: relaxed and lighter ang feeling.")
"How did dance-based activities influence your emotional expression?"
("Sa PATHFIT 3, nakatulong ang dance para ma-express ko emotions ko.")
"Did dance activities help you release stress or negative emotions? Please explain."
("Oo, parang emotional release siya lalo na kapag pagod sa academics.")
"How did participating in sports activities influence your ability to handle pressure or competition?"
("Sa PATHFIT 4, mas natuto akong mag-handle ng pressure.")
"What did you learn from sports participation that helped you deal with academic or personal stress?"
("Natutunan ko ang teamwork at emotional control na nagagamit ko sa school.")
"In what ways has PATHFIT helped you cope with academic or personal stress?"
("Nakatulong ang PATHFIT bilang outlet ng stress ko.")
"Can you describe specific strategies you learned or developed through PATHFIT that help you manage stress?"
("Natutunan ko ang breathing techniques at pagiging consistent sa physical activity.")
"Did PATHFIT help you become more resilient when facing challenges? How?"
("Oo, mas naging resilient ako sa challenges.")
"Can you share an experience in PATHFIT where you overcame difficulty and what you learned from it?"
("May time na nahirapan ako sa activities pero natuto akong mag-push through")
"How has PATHFIT influenced your ability to manage emotions such as anxiety, frustration, or sadness?"
("Mas naging aware ako sa emotions ko dahil sa activities.")
"Do you notice any changes in how you react to stressful situations after participating in PATHFIT?"
("Oo, mas kalmado na ang reactions ko sa stressful situations.")
"How does attending PATHFIT classes affect your overall mood?"
("Nakaka-improve siya ng mood ko overall.")
"Do you feel emotionally different on days when you have PATHFIT? Please describe"
("Oo, mas positive ang pakiramdam ko kapag may PATHFIT")
"Has PATHFIT influenced your motivation toward academics or personal goals? How?"
("Yes, nakakadagdag siya ng motivation ko sa ibang subjects")
"Do physical activities in PATHFIT make you feel more energized or productive?"
("Oo, mas energetic at productive ako pagkatapos.")
"How would you describe your mental well-being before and after taking PATHFIT?"
("Before PATHFIT, mas stressed ako; after, mas balanced na.")
"In your own words, what role does PATHFIT play in maintaining your psychological health?"
("PATHFIT helps maintain my psychological health through movement and routine.")
"What aspects of PATHFIT contribute most to stress management?"
("Yung physical activities at social interaction ang pinaka nakakatulong")
"What improvements can be made to make PATHFIT more supportive of students' mental well-being?"
("Pwede magdagdag ng mental health discussions.")
"If you were to design a program to strengthen PATHFIT's role in mental health promotion, what would you include?"
("Maganda kung may relaxation or mindfulness activities.")
"Overall, how important is PATHFIT in helping tertiary students manage stress?"
("Very important siya sa stress management ng students.")
"Would you recommend PATHFIT as a tool for mental well-being? Why or why not?"
("Yes, because it supports both physical and mental health.")
"Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience?"
("Sana mas ma-appreciate pa siya ng ibang students")

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Significant Experiences of no. R1

R1, a 21-year-old third-year student who completed PATHFIT 1 through 4, shared a range of meaningful experiences that highlight the role of physical activity in managing stress and enhancing mental well-being. He described his academic workload as “mabigat... dahil sa research at major subjects,” and noted that while his stress levels are often high, they remain “manageable.” Despite these academic pressures, R1 identified PATHFIT as a significant contributor to his personal growth, particularly in terms of confidence and stress handling: “ang pinaka significant kong experience ay yung gradual improvement ko mula PATHFIT 1 hanggang 4.”

R1 emphasized how social engagement during PATHFIT activities played a vital role in his development. He shared that “yung group activities at performances... doon ako naging mas comfortable makisalamuha,” reflecting the importance of collaborative environments in fostering interpersonal confidence. In PATHFIT 1, he became more attuned to his physical self, stating that it helped him become “aware... sa body movements at limitations ko.” This awareness translated into increased self-assurance, as he explained, “nakatulong siya sa confidence ko kasi mas naging sure ako sa ginagawa ko.”

In conclusion, R1’s experiences demonstrate the powerful connection between physical activity, emotional regulation, and psychological resilience. His journey across PATHFIT courses illustrates how structured movement, social interaction, and consistent practice can significantly improve a student’s ability to cope with stress. His narrative affirms that PATHFIT is not merely a physical education program, but a vital component in promoting holistic well-being among tertiary students.

Table 2b: Significant Experiences of no. R2

<i>“What is your age and year level?”</i>
<i>“20 years old, 3rd year”</i>
<i>“Which PATHFIT course(s) have you completed? (PATHFIT 1, 2, 3, or 4)?”</i>
<i>“PATHFIT 1-4”</i>
<i>“How would you describe your general academic workload this semester?”</i>
<i>“Mabigat heavy ang workload”</i>
<i>“How would you describe your stress level as a tertiary student?”</i>
<i>“Stressed lala na pag exam week”</i>
<i>“Can you describe your most significant experience in your PATHFIT class?”</i>
<i>“Ang pinaka significant is nakita ko improvement ko from PATHFIT 1 to 4.”</i>
<i>“What moments in PATHFIT stand out to you the most? Why?”</i>
<i>“Yung bonding moments with classmates.”</i>
<i>“How did PATHFIT 1 (Movement Competency) influence your awareness of your body and physical abilities?”</i>
<i>“Mas naging aware ako sa katawan ko.”</i>
<i>“Did mastering movement skills affect your confidence or stress levels? How?”</i>
<i>“Oo, mas confident ako ngayon.”</i>
<i>“How did participating in structured exercises (e.g., workouts, conditioning) affect your mood and stress?”</i>
<i>“Nakita-good mood ang exercises.”</i>
<i>“Can you describe how you felt before, during, and after exercise sessions?”</i>
<i>“Before: pagod. During: active. After: masaya.”</i>
<i>“How did dance-based activities influence your emotional expression?”</i>
<i>“Dance helped me express emotions.”</i>
<i>“Did dance activities help you release stress or negative emotions? Please explain.”</i>
<i>“Oo, nakikilawala ng stress.”</i>
<i>“How did participating in sports activities influence your ability to handle pressure or competition?”</i>
<i>“Sports helped me deal with pressure.”</i>
<i>“What did you learn from sports participation that helped you deal with academic or personal stress?”</i>
<i>“Discipline at teamwork nakatutunan ko.”</i>
<i>“In what ways has PATHFIT helped you cope with academic or personal stress?”</i>
<i>“Nakikilawala ng stress mag-release ng stress.”</i>
<i>“Can you describe specific strategies you learned or developed through PATHFIT that help you manage stress?”</i>
<i>“Exercise at breathing techniques.”</i>
<i>“Did PATHFIT help you become more resilient when facing challenges? How?”</i>
<i>“Yes, mas matatag ako ngayon.”</i>
<i>“Can you share an experience in PATHFIT where you overcame difficulty and what you learned from it?”</i>
<i>“Hindi na ako afraid sumailap.”</i>
<i>“How has PATHFIT influenced your ability to manage emotions such as anxiety, frustration, or sadness?”</i>
<i>“Mas controlled emotions ko.”</i>
<i>“Do you notice any changes in how you react to stressful situations after participating in PATHFIT?”</i>
<i>“Hindi na ako iragular.”</i>
<i>“How does attending PATHFIT classes affect your overall mood?”</i>
<i>“Mas good mood ako.”</i>
<i>“Do you feel emotionally different on days when you have PATHFIT? Please describe.”</i>
<i>“Oo, mas happy ako.”</i>
<i>“Has PATHFIT influenced your motivation toward academics or personal goals? How?”</i>
<i>“Yes, mas motivated ako.”</i>
<i>“Do physical activities in PATHFIT make you feel more energized or productive?”</i>
<i>“Mas energetic ako.”</i>
<i>“How would you describe your mental well-being before and after taking PATHFIT?”</i>
<i>“Mas okay mental health ko ngayon.”</i>
<i>“In your own words, what role does PATHFIT play in maintaining your psychological health?”</i>
<i>“Maidung tulung ako sa well-being ko.”</i>
<i>“What aspects of PATHFIT contribute most to stress management?”</i>
<i>“Activities mismo ang helpful.”</i>
<i>“What improvements can be made to make PATHFIT more supportive of students’ mental well-being?”</i>
<i>“Less pressure zone.”</i>
<i>“If you were to design a program to strengthen PATHFIT’s role in mental health promotion, what would you include?”</i>
<i>“More fun and relaxing activities.”</i>
<i>“Overall, how important is PATHFIT in helping tertiary students manage stress?”</i>
<i>“Important sana.”</i>
<i>“Would you recommend PATHFIT as a tool for mental well-being? Why or why not?”</i>
<i>“Yes, recommended sana.”</i>
<i>“Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience?”</i>
<i>“Enjoy ako habang nasa school ngayon.”</i>

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Significant Experiences of no. R2

R2, a 20-year-old third-year student who completed PATHFIT 1–4, shared a range of meaningful experiences that highlight the significant role of PATHFIT in managing stress and enhancing overall well-being. Despite describing their academic workload as “medyo heavy ang workload” and admitting feeling “stressed lalo na pag exam week,” R2 found PATHFIT to be a consistent source of relief and personal growth. One of the most notable reflections was the observed improvement across all PATHFIT courses: “yung pinaka significant is nakita ko improvement ko from PATHFIT 1 to 4,” indicating a developmental progression not only in physical abilities but also in mental resilience.

From a mental health perspective, R2 clearly recognized the benefits of PATHFIT, stating that “mas okay mental health ko ngayon” and describing the program as “malaking tulong siya sa well-being ko.” The activities themselves were identified as the most helpful aspect in stress management “activities mismo ang helpful.” However, R2 also suggested improvements, such as reducing pressure and incorporating “more fun and relaxing activities,” indicating a preference for a more supportive and less performance-driven environment.

narrative illustrates how PATHFIT serves as a holistic platform for physical development, emotional regulation, and psychological resilience. Through structured activities, social interaction, and skill-building, PATHFIT becomes more than just a physical education course it evolves into a vital support system for tertiary students navigating academic stress and personal challenges.

Table 20c: Significant Experiences of no. R2

“What is your age and your level?”
(“21 years old, 3rd year”)
“Which PATHFIT course(s) have you completed? (PATHFIT 1, 2, 3, or 4)?”
(“PATHFIT 1–4”)
“How would you describe your general academic workload this semester?”
(“Mabigat dahil sa mga oras”)
“How would you describe your stress level as a tertiary student?”
(“High stress level”)
“Can you describe your most significant experience in your PATHFIT class?”
(“PATHFIT helped me manage stress habang busy sa studies”)
“What moments in PATHFIT stand out to you the most? Why?”
(“Competitive activities ang pinaka naramdaman”)
“How did PATHFIT 1 (Movement Competency) influence your awareness of your body and physical abilities?”
(“PATHFIT 1 improved my awareness.”)
“Did mastering movement skills affect your confidence or stress levels? How?”
(“Yes, it improved my confidence.”)
“How did participating in structured exercises (e.g., workouts, conditioning) affect your mood and stress?”
(“PATHFIT 2 helped reduce stress.”)
“Can you describe how you felt before, during, and after exercise sessions?”
(“Before: stressed; During: focused; After: refreshed.”)
“How did dance-based activities influence your emotional expression?”
(“PATHFIT 3 improved confidence.”)
“Did dance activities help you release stress or negative emotions? Please explain.”
(“Yes, it helped release stress.”)
“How did participating in sports activities influence your ability to handle pressure or competition?”
(“PATHFIT 4 improved pressure handling.”)
“What did you learn from sports participation that helped you deal with academic or personal stress?”
(“Time management and teamwork.”)
“In what ways has PATHFIT helped you cope with academic or personal stress?”
(“Stress outlet nito.”)
“Can you describe specific strategies you learned or developed through PATHFIT that help you manage stress?”
(“Routine exercise.”)
“Did PATHFIT help you become more resilient when facing challenges? How?”
(“Yes, mas resilient ako.”)
“Can you share an experience in PATHFIT where you overcame difficulty and what you learned from it?”
(“Naluto along magpapaligay.”)
“How has PATHFIT influenced your ability to manage emotions such as anxiety, frustration, or sadness?”
(“Mas controlled emotions.”)
“Do you notice any changes in how you react to stressful situations after participating in PATHFIT?”
(“Mas strategic reactions.”)
“How does attending PATHFIT classes affect your overall mood?”
(“Improves my mood.”)
“Do you feel emotionally different on days when you have PATHFIT? Please describe.”
(“Yes, mas relaxed ako.”)
“Has PATHFIT influenced your motivation toward academics or personal goals? How?”
(“Yes, mas motivated.”)
“Do physical activities in PATHFIT make you feel more energized or productive?”
(“Mas productive.”)
“How would you describe your mental well-being before and after taking PATHFIT?”
(“Improved mental health.”)
“In your own words, what role does PATHFIT play in maintaining your psychological health?”
(“Supports performance.”)
“What aspects of PATHFIT contribute most to stress management?”
(“Physical activity.”)
“What improvements can be made to make PATHFIT more supportive of students’ mental well-being?”
(“Add wellness programs.”)
“If you were to design a program to strengthen PATHFIT’s role in mental health promotion, what would you include?”
(“Include goal-setting.”)
“Overall, how important is PATHFIT in helping tertiary students manage stress?”
(“Very important.”)
“Would you recommend PATHFIT as a tool for mental well-being? Why or why not?”
(“Yes.”)
“Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience?”
(“Nalalimutan ko sa balance ng academics.”)

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Significant Experiences of no. R3

R3, a 21-year-old third-year college student who completed PATHFIT 1 to 4, shared a range of meaningful experiences that highlight the role of physical activity in managing academic stress and enhancing mental well-being. He described his academic workload as “mabigat dahil sa majors” and identified himself as having a “high stress level,” reflecting the common pressures faced by tertiary students. Despite these challenges, he emphasized that “PATHFIT helped me manage stress habang busy sa studies,” indicating the subject’s significant role as a coping mechanism amidst academic demands.

In PATHFIT 2, structured exercises played a key role in emotional regulation. He explained that “PATHFIT 2 helped reduce stress,” and described his emotional progression during activities: “Before: stressed; During: focused; After: refreshed.” This sequence illustrates how physical activity facilitates a shift from cognitive overload to mental clarity and relaxation. Similarly, in PATHFIT 3, dance-based activities enhanced his emotional expression and confidence, as he stated, “PATHFIT 3 improved confidence” and “Yes, it helped release stress.” These experiences suggest that expressive movement serves as an outlet for emotional release and self-expression.

Reflecting on his mental health, R3 stated that his “Improved mental health” was one of the most important outcomes of participating in PATHFIT. He described the subject as playing a vital role in his psychological well-being, noting that it “Supports performance” and contributes significantly to stress management through “physical activity.” He further suggested improvements such as adding “wellness programs” and “goal-setting” components to strengthen PATHFIT’s role in promoting mental health.

R3’s account illustrates how PATHFIT serves not only as a physical education course but also as a critical support system for students’ mental health. His experiences show that consistent participation in movement, exercise, dance, and sports fosters self-discipline, emotional stability, and psychological resilience. Ultimately, his narrative affirms that PATHFIT plays a “very important” role in helping tertiary students manage stress, maintain balance between academics and personal life, and achieve holistic well-being.

Table 2d: Significant Experiences of no. R4

“What is your age and year level?”
(“21 years old, 3rd year”)
“Which PATHFIT course(s) have you completed? (PATHFIT 1, 2, 3, or 4)”
(“PATHFIT 1-4”)
“How would you describe your general academic workload this semester?”
(“Very heavy workload”)
“How would you describe your stress level as a tertiary student?”
(“Very high stress”)
“Can you describe your most significant experience in your PATHFIT class?”
(“PATHFIT served as break from academic pressure.”)
“What moments in PATHFIT stand out to you the most? Why?”
(“Structured workout and pinaka helpful.”)
“How did PATHFIT 1 (Movement Competency) influence your awareness of your body and physical abilities?”
(“PATHFIT 1 improved coordination.”)
“Did mastering movement skills affect your confidence or stress levels? How?”
(“Yes, improved confidence.”)
“How did participating in structured exercises (e.g., workouts, conditioning) affect your mood and stress?”
(“PATHFIT 2 reduced stress.”)
“Can you describe how you felt before, during, and after exercise sessions?”
(“Before: tense; During: focused; After: relaxed.”)
“How did dance-based activities influence your emotional expression?”
(“PATHFIT 3 helped expression.”)
“Did dance activities help you release stress or negative emotions? Please explain.”
(“Yes, nabalansaran tension.”)
“How did participating in sports activities influence your ability to handle pressure or competition?”
(“PATHFIT 4 improved pressure handling.”)
“What did you learn from sports participation that helped you deal with academic or personal stress?”
(“Discipline and patience.”)
“In what ways has PATHFIT helped you cope with academic or personal stress?”
(“Stress management tool.”)
“Can you describe specific strategies you learned or developed through PATHFIT that help you manage stress?”
(“Consistency in exercise.”)
“Did PATHFIT help you become more resilient when facing challenges? How?”
(“Yes, more resilient.”)
“Can you share an experience in PATHFIT where you overcome difficulty and what you learned from it?”
(“Naisag mag-adjust.”)
“How has PATHFIT influenced your ability to manage emotions such as anxiety, frustration, or sadness?”
(“Better emotional control.”)
“Do you notice any changes in how you react to stressful situations after participating in PATHFIT?”
(“More composed reactions.”)
“How does attending PATHFIT classes affect your overall mood?”
(“Positive mood effect.”)
“Do you feel emotionally different on days when you have PATHFIT? Please describe”
(“Yes, noticeable difference.”)
“Has PATHFIT influenced your motivation toward academics or personal goals? How?”
(“Yes, increased motivation.”)
“Do physical activities in PATHFIT make you feel more energized or productive?”
(“More productive.”)
“How would you describe your mental well-being before and after taking PATHFIT?”
(“Improved well-being.”)
“In your own words, what role does PATHFIT play in maintaining your psychological health?”
(“Helps maintain balance.”)
“What aspects of PATHFIT contribute most to stress management?”
(“Regular activities.”)
“What improvements can be made to make PATHFIT more supportive of students’ mental well-being?”
(“Flexible schedule.”)
“If you were to design a program to strengthen PATHFIT’s role in mental health promotion, what would you include?”
(“Add mental health focus.”)
“Overall, how important is PATHFIT in helping tertiary students manage stress?”
(“Highly important.”)
“Would you recommend PATHFIT as a tool for mental well-being? Why or why not?”
(“Yes.”)
“Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience?”
(“Helpful in academic performance.”)

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Significant Experiences of no. R4

R4, a 21-year-old third-year tertiary student who completed PATHFIT 1–4, shared a range of significant experiences that underscore the role of PATHFIT in managing stress and enhancing mental well-being amid a “very heavy workload” and “very high stress” level. The participant described PATHFIT as “a break from academic pressure,” highlighting its function as a restorative space within a demanding academic environment.

R4 emphasized the value of structured physical engagement, noting that “structured workouts ang pinaka helpful,” which provided not only physical benefits but also mental clarity and routine. In PATHFIT 1 (Movement Competency), the participant shared that it “improved coordination,” which in turn contributed to increased self-confidence: “Yes, improved confidence.” This indicates that foundational physical skills can positively influence psychological states, particularly self-assurance in one’s abilities.

Furthermore, from the perspective of Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1997), R4 demonstrates increasing confidence and belief in personal capability, as seen in statements like “improved confidence,” “mas resilient,” and “more composed reactions.” These experiences suggest that mastery of physical tasks and consistent participation in PATHFIT strengthen self-efficacy, which in turn enhances the ability to cope with stress and perform effectively in various domains.

Overall, R4’s narrative highlights the transformative impact of PATHFIT as a holistic program that supports not only physical fitness but also mental health and emotional well-being. The participant’s experiences demonstrate that structured physical activity, combined with opportunities for expression and social engagement, can significantly improve stress management, resilience, and overall quality of life among tertiary students.

Table 2a: Significant Experiences of no. R4

“What is your age and year level?”
(“21 years old, 3rd year”)
“Which PATHFIT course(s) have you completed? (PATHFIT 1, 2, 3, or 4)?”
(“PATHFIT 1–4”)
“How would you describe your general academic workload this semester?”
(“Busy as heck”)
“How would you describe your stress level as a tertiary student?”
(“Moderate stress”)
“Can you describe your most significant experience in your PATHFIT class?”
(“No-endorse to your being PATHFIT experience from 1 to 4.”)
“What moments in PATHFIT stand out to you the most? Why?”
(“Group performance at sports.”)
“How did PATHFIT 1 (Movement Competency) influence your awareness of your body and physical abilities?”
(“PATHFIT 1 improved movement.”)
“Did mastering movement skills affect your confidence or stress levels? How?”
(“Yes, more confident.”)
“How did participating in structured exercises (e.g., workouts, conditioning) affect your mood and stress?”
(“PATHFIT 2 improved mood.”)
“Can you describe how you felt before, during, and after exercise sessions?”
(“Before: tired; During: active; After: happy.”)
“How did dance-based activities influence your emotional expression?”
(“PATHFIT 3 boosted creativity.”)
“Did dance activities help you release stress or negative emotions? Please explain.”
(“Yes, release stress.”)
“How did participating in sports activities influence your ability to handle pressure or competition?”
(“PATHFIT 4 improved teamwork.”)
“What did you learn from sports participation that helped you deal with academic or personal stress?”
(“Cooperation and patience.”)
“In what ways has PATHFIT helped you cope with academic or personal stress?”
(“Helps relieve stress.”)
“Can you describe specific strategies you learned or developed through PATHFIT that help you manage stress?”
(“Exercise and bonding.”)
“Did PATHFIT help you become more resilient when facing challenges? How?”
(“Yes, more resilient.”)
“Can you share an experience in PATHFIT where you overcame difficulty and what you learned from it?”
(“Nerve management.”)
“How has PATHFIT influenced your ability to manage emotions such as anxiety, frustration, or sadness?”
(“Less calm emotions.”)
“Do you notice any changes in how you react to stressful situations after participating in PATHFIT?”
(“Hindi na maging mas-stress.”)
“How does attending PATHFIT classes affect your overall mood?”
(“Lifts mood.”)
“Do you feel emotionally different on days when you have PATHFIT? Please describe.”
(“Yes, more positive.”)
“Has PATHFIT influenced your motivation toward academics or personal goals? How?”
(“Yes, motivated.”)
“Do physical activities in PATHFIT make you feel more energized or productive?”
(“More energetic.”)
“How would you describe your mental well-being before and after taking PATHFIT?”
(“Better mental health.”)
“In your own words, what role does PATHFIT play in maintaining your psychological health?”
(“Helps balance life.”)
“What aspects of PATHFIT contribute most to stress management?”
(“Fun activities.”)
“What improvements can be made to make PATHFIT more supportive of students’ mental well-being?”
(“More engaging exercises.”)
“If you were to design a program to strengthen PATHFIT’s role in mental health promotion, what would you include?”
(“Add wellness programs.”)
“Overall, how important is PATHFIT in helping tertiary students manage stress?”
(“Important.”)
“Would you recommend PATHFIT as a tool for mental well-being? Why or why not?”
(“Yes.”)
“Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience?”
(“Nothing more to be said.”)

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Significant Experiences of no. R5

R5, a 21-year-old third-year student who completed PATHFIT 1 to 4, shared a range of meaningful experiences that demonstrate how physical education contributes to stress management and overall well-being. Despite describing their semester as “busy sa practicum” and experiencing “moderate stress,” R5 emphasized the positive and transformative role of PATHFIT in their college life. They stated, “Na-enjoy ko yung buong PATHFIT experience from 1 to 4,” reflecting a holistic appreciation of the program across its different components.

From a theoretical perspective, R5's experiences reflect the principles of the Cognitive Theory of Imagery, where physical activities and repeated practice enhance both motor skills and mental awareness. The progression from fatigue to happiness during exercise demonstrates how physical engagement can influence cognitive and emotional states, reinforcing positive mental patterns. Additionally, the emphasis on teamwork, cooperation, and adjustment aligns with cognitive and behavioral adaptation processes that support stress management.

Overall, R5's narrative illustrates how PATHFIT plays a vital role in enhancing mental well-being, emotional regulation, and resilience among tertiary students. Their experiences demonstrate that physical activity is not merely a curricular requirement but a powerful tool for achieving balance, motivation, and psychological health.

Table 2b: Significant Experiences of no. R5	
"What is your age and year level?"	("I'm 21 years old, 3rd year.")
"Which PATHFIT classes have you completed? (PATHFIT 1, 2, 3, or 4)"	("Completed PATHFIT 1-4.")
"How would you describe your general academic workload this semester?"	("Overwhelming due to required outputs and activities.")
"How would you describe your stress level as a tertiary student?"	("Moderate to high. Research-heavy and nonstop under pressure.")
"Can you describe your most significant experience in your PATHFIT class?"	("My most significant experience in PATHFIT is the dance. I used to perform as one of the activities in PATHFIT. As a 20-year-old student, it's quite challenging for me to dance. And as a person who doesn't like to move, I found it significant because I came to realize that I am still capable of dancing.")
"What moments in PATHFIT stand out to you the most? Why?"	("It increased my knowledge on how my body moves, balances and reacts to physical activities. It also helped me recognize my strengths and weaknesses when it comes to physical activities.")
"How did PATHFIT's (Movement Competency) influence your awareness of your body and physical abilities?"	("It increased my knowledge on how my body moves, balances and reacts to physical activities. It also helped me recognize my strengths and weaknesses when it comes to physical activities.")
"Did learning movement skills affect your confidence or stress levels? How?"	("Yes, it did. I got confident because I have gained knowledge on how to do exercises correctly. And through physical activities, it lessened my stress.")
"How did participating in structured exercises (e.g., workouts, conditioning) affect your mood and stress?"	("One thing I noticed after doing structured exercises is I became calmer and more relaxed. I also felt stress leaving my system.")
"Can you describe how you felt before, during, and after exercise sessions?"	("Before the session, I feel a bit agitated and uncomfortable. During the session, I felt challenged and focused on the activities. It was tiring but at the same time, I felt more active and engaged. After the session, I felt lighter, more relaxed and accomplished. I felt like my mood got lighter.")
"How did dance-based activities influence your emotional expression?"	("Through dance-based activities, I got to express my emotions through choreographed movements. It also helps me reflect emotionally by dancing.")
"Did dance activities help you release stress or negative emotions? Please explain."	("After dancing, I felt my mood lighten up. With the help of dancing, I can release negative emotions through syncing with the dance steps and the rhythm.")
"How did participating in open activities influence your ability to handle pressure or competition?"	("It influenced me to stay calm. If I am pressured, I also learned how to stay focused on the task instead of overthinking situations.")
"What did you learn from sports participation that helped you deal with academic or personal stress?"	("With the help of sports, I learned how to be disciplined, resilient and calm. I became more positive and determined in managing my academic and personal stress.")
"In what ways has PATHFIT helped you cope with academic or personal stress?"	("PATHFIT helped me to stay on track with my schedule and activities. I was able to come from stress by diverting it to physical activities to help me refreshed and accomplished.")
"Can you describe specific strategies you learned or developed through PATHFIT that help you manage stress?"	("Whenever I am stressed, I take time to pause, reflect and do the breathing exercise I had learned from my PATHFIT classes.")
"Did PATHFIT help you become more resilient when facing challenges? How?"	("Yes, there are ways that PATHFIT helped me to be resilient. One is when I am alone, I try to think of a physical activity to help me motivated and light.")
"Can you share an experience in PATHFIT where you overcame difficulty and what you learned from it?"	("There was one exercise in PATHFIT where we are being grouped and one of our group member was having difficulty with catching up with the steps. What I did is help him from the back to motivate.")
"How has PATHFIT influenced your ability to manage emotions such as anxiety, frustration, or sadness?"	("I can release my stress and anxiety by doing some exercises. After every exercise, I usually feel calmer and more relaxed. It also helps me clear my mind when I feel overwhelmed.")
"Do you notice any changes in how you react to stressful situations after participating in PATHFIT?"	("Yes, I see that I can handle stressful situations more calmly.")
"How does attending PATHFIT classes affect your overall mood?"	("Attending PATHFIT classes really improve my mood. The activities make me feel more energetic and positive. It also helps me feel refreshed after a tiring day.")
"Do you feel emotional by different on days when you have PATHFIT? Please describe."	("Yes, on days when I have PATHFIT, I feel more active and motivated. The exercises help reduce the stress that I have and it also makes me happy. It's like a break from academic pressure.")
"Has PATHFIT influenced your motivation toward academics or personal goals? How?"	("Yes, PATHFIT has helped increase my motivation. Exercises improve my energy and focus, which helps me perform better in my academic tasks. It also helps me maintain a balanced lifestyle.")
"Do physical activities in PATHFIT make you feel more energized or productive?"	("Yes, physical activities make me feel more energized. After exercising, I feel more productive and ready to complete my tasks. It also helps improve my concentration.")
"How would you describe your mental well-being before and after taking PATHFIT?"	("Before taking PATHFIT, I often felt stressed and mentally tired from academic work. After participating in PATHFIT activities, I feel more relaxed and balanced. It helps improve my overall mental health.")
"In your own words, what role does PATHFIT play in maintaining your psychological health?"	("PATHFIT plays an important role in maintaining my psychological health because it allows me to release stress through physical activities. It also improves my mood and helps me feel more positive. Overall, it supports both my physical and mental health.")
"What aspects of PATHFIT contribute most to stress management?"	("The physical activities contribute the most to stress management. They help release tension and improve mood. Group activities also create a supportive and enjoyable environment.")
"What improvements can be made to make PATHFIT more supportive of students' mental well-being?"	("Maybe they could include more activities focused on relaxation such as breathing exercises or mindfulness exercises. Providing time for reflection about health and stress management may also help. Encouraging supportive and inclusive activities would also benefit students.")
"If you were to design a program to strengthen PATHFIT's role in mental health promotion, what would you include?"	("I would include mental relief activities such as meditation, breathing exercises, and stress relief activities. Also, I will add short discussions about mental health awareness.")
"Overall, how important is PATHFIT in helping tertiary students manage stress?"	("It is important because it provides students with a healthy way to relieve stress. Exercises help improve mood and well-being. It supports in maintaining a balance between academics and mental health.")
"Would you recommend PATHFIT as a tool for mental well-being? Why or why not?"	("Yes, I would recommend PATHFIT because not only does it promote both physical and mental health, but it also helps reduce stress and improves mood through regular activity. It also encourages students to stay active and healthy.")
"Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience?"	("My PATHFIT experience has been very beneficial, fun, and educational. It helps me manage my emotion towards people and stay focused on the tasks. As for handling stress, PATHFIT helps me release them with various activities.")

Significant Experiences of no. R6

R6, a 30-year-old third-year tertiary student who completed PATHFIT 1–4, shared a range of meaningful experiences that highlight the role of physical activity in managing stress and enhancing mental well-being. Despite describing his academic workload as “overwhelming due to required outputs and activities” and his stress level as “moderate to high,” R6 found significant value in his participation in PATHFIT, particularly in dance-based activities. He reflected, “My most significant experience in

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PATHFIT is the dance... as a 30-year-old student, it's quite challenging for me to dance... I came to realize that I am still capable of dancing," demonstrating a rediscovery of self-efficacy and physical capability despite perceived limitations.

R6 also highlighted the social and collaborative aspects of PATHFIT, recalling an experience where he helped a groupmate struggling with dance steps: "What I did is help him from the basic to mastery." This reflects not only skill acquisition but also the development of empathy and teamwork. He further noted improvements in emotional regulation, stating, "I can release my stress and anxiety by doing some exercises... I usually feel calmer and more relaxed," and observed that he now handles stressful situations "more calmly."

R6's experiences strongly align with the principles of Cognitive Theory of Imagery, as his engagement in dance and physical activities involves mental rehearsal, body awareness, and visualization of movement. His ability to focus during activities and reflect emotionally suggests the activation of cognitive processes similar to those used in motor imagery, enhancing both performance and self-regulation. Additionally, his use of breathing exercises and reflective pauses demonstrates elements of cognitive control and emotional regulation, which are central to effective stress management.

Overall, R6's experiences illustrate how PATHFIT serves as a holistic intervention that integrates physical activity, emotional expression, and cognitive strategies to support mental well-being. His journey demonstrates that even under high academic pressure, structured physical engagement can foster resilience, enhance self-belief, and promote a balanced and healthy lifestyle.

Table 2g: Significant Experiences of no. R7
"What is your age and year level?" (<i>"20 years old, 3rd year"</i>)
"Which PATHFIT course(s) have you completed? (PATHFIT 1, 2, 3, or 4)?" (<i>"I have completed PATHFIT 1, 2, 3. I have completed all PATHFIT."</i>)
"How would you describe your general academic workload this semester?" (<i>"My academic workload this semester is heavy because I have multiple major subjects with overlapping deadlines."</i>)
"How would you describe your stress level as a tertiary student?" (<i>"My stress level is moderate to high due to academic pressure and personal responsibilities."</i>)
"Can you describe your most significant experience in your PATHFIT class?" (<i>"My most significant experience in Pad Pli was successfully performing a routine I initially struggled with in front of the class."</i>)
"What moments in PATHFIT stand out to you the most? Why?" (<i>"The practical performance, they stand out the most because they challenged my confidence and teamwork skills."</i>)
"How did PATHFIT 1 (Movement Competency) influence your awareness of your body and physical abilities?" (<i>"Um Pathfit One made me more aware of a posture, balance, and physical limitations during movement."</i>)
"Did mastering movement skills affect your confidence or stress levels? How?" (<i>"Yes, mastering movement skills increase my confidence and reduce my anxiety during physical activities."</i>)
"How did participating in structured exercises (e.g., workouts, conditioning) affect your mood and stress?" (<i>"Participating in structured exercises, improving my mood, and help release academic stress."</i>)
"Can you describe how you felt before, during, and after exercise sessions?" (<i>"Before exercise, I feel tired during I felt challenged and after I felt refreshed and accomplished."</i>)
"How did dance-based activities influence your emotional expression?" (<i>"Dance based activities allowed me to express emotions, creatively, and freely."</i>)
"Did dance activities help you release stress or negative emotions? Please explain." (<i>"Yes, dancing helping me release stress by allowing me to focus on reading instead of my problems."</i>)
"How did participating in sports activities influence your ability to handle pressure or competition?" (<i>"Participating in sports improve my ability to stay calm and think clearly under pressure."</i>)
"What did you learn from sports participation that helped you deal with academic or personal stress?" (<i>"I learned discipline and teamwork which helped me to manage academic challenges better."</i>)
"In what ways has PATHFIT helped you cope with academic or personal stress?" (<i>"Pathfit, help it, help me cope with stress by providing a physical outlet to release tension."</i>)
"Can you describe specific strategies you learned or developed through PATHFIT that help you manage stress?" (<i>"I developed breathing techniques and time management skills to balance academic and exercise."</i>)
"Did PATHFIT help you become more resilient when facing challenges? How?" (<i>"Yes, Pathfit strengthened my resilience by pushing me to continue despite physical fatigue."</i>)
"Can you share an experience in PATHFIT where you overcame difficulty and what you learned from it?" (<i>"I overcame my fear of performing in public and learned that practice builds confidence."</i>)
"How has PATHFIT influenced your ability to manage emotions such as anxiety, frustration, or sadness?" (<i>"Pathfit help me manage anxiety and frustration and improving my emotional control through experience, through exercise."</i>)
"Do you notice any changes in how you react to stressful situations after participating in PATHFIT?" (<i>"Physical activities help me control my emotions and think more clearly. I also feel less pressured compared to before."</i>)
"How does attending PATHFIT classes affect your overall mood?" (<i>"Attending Pathfit classes makes my mood lighter and more positive throughout the day."</i>)
"Do you feel emotionally different on days when you have PATHFIT? Please describe." (<i>"Yes, on Pathfit days, I feel more energized and less mentally drained."</i>)
"Has PATHFIT influenced your motivation toward academics or personal goals? How?" (<i>"Pathfit increase my motivation by teaching me consistency and goal setting."</i>)
"Do physical activities in PATHFIT make you feel more energized or productive?" (<i>"Yes, physical activities make me feel more energized and focus on my task."</i>)
"How would you describe your mental well-being before and after taking PATHFIT?" (<i>"Before Pathfit, I felt easily stressed but after doing it, I feel more balanced and mentally stable."</i>)
"In your own words, what role does PATHFIT play in maintaining your psychological health?" (<i>"Pathfit plays important role in maintaining my psychological health by serving as my stress reliever and confidence."</i>)
"What aspects of PATHFIT contribute most to stress management?" (<i>"The regular physical activities and supportive class environment contribute most to stress management."</i>)
"What improvements can be made to make PATHFIT more supportive of students' mental well-being?" (<i>"Including short mental health discussion, reflection, activities could make pathfit more supportive."</i>)
"If you were to design a program to strengthen PATHFIT's role in mental health promotion, what would you include?" (<i>"Including short mental health discussion, reflection, activities could make Pathfit more supportive."</i>)
"Overall, how important is PATHFIT in helping tertiary students manage stress?" (<i>"Pathfit is very important because it provides a healthy way to manage academic stress."</i>)
"Would you recommend PATHFIT as a tool for mental well-being? Why or why not?" (<i>"Yes, I recommend Pathfit because it improves both physical fitness and mental well-being."</i>)
"Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience?" (<i>"Overall Pathfit helping me to grow physically, emotionally, and socially as a student."</i>)

Significant Experiences of no. R7

R7, a 20-year-old third-year student who completed all PATHFIT courses (PATHFIT 1–4), shared a range of meaningful experiences that highlight the role of physical activity in managing academic stress and enhancing overall well-being. Despite

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having a “heavy” academic workload due to multiple major subjects and overlapping deadlines, R7 described their stress level as “moderate to high,” reflecting the common pressures faced by tertiary students balancing academic and personal responsibilities.

One of R7’s most significant experiences in PATHFIT involved overcoming personal challenges during performance tasks: “my most significant experience... was successfully performing a routine I initially struggled with in front of the class.” This moment not only demonstrated skill development but also marked a breakthrough in confidence. R7 further emphasized that “the practical performance... challenged my confidence and teamwork skills,” indicating that PATHFIT activities foster both individual growth and collaborative competence.

From a theoretical perspective, R7’s experiences align with principles of the Cognitive Theory of Imagery, particularly in how repeated practice and performance tasks enhance confidence and motor coordination through mental and physical rehearsal. Although not explicitly stated, R7’s improvement in performance and reduced anxiety suggest internal visualization and cognitive preparation when facing physical challenges.

Furthermore, R7’s narrative strongly reflects Self-Efficacy Theory, as evidenced by the development of confidence through mastery experiences. Statements such as “practice builds confidence” and the ability to overcome fear indicate increasing self-belief. As R7 successfully completes challenging tasks, their sense of efficacy improves, which in turn enhances performance, motivation, and emotional resilience.

PATHFIT functions as more than just a physical education program it serves as a vital support system for mental health, emotional expression, and personal development. Through structured activities, performance challenges, and reflective learning, R7 was able to build confidence, resilience, and effective coping mechanisms. Their experience affirms that engagement in physical activity is a powerful tool in enhancing psychological well-being, reinforcing the idea that student success is deeply interconnected with both physical and mental health.

Table 2h: Significant Experiences of no. R8
<i>“What is your age and year level?”</i> <i>“(21 years old, 2nd year)”</i>
<i>“Which PATHFIT courses have you completed? (PATHFIT 1, 2, 3, or 4)”</i> <i>“(I’ve already completed PathFit 1, 2, 3, and 4.)”</i>
<i>“How would you describe your general academic workload this semester?”</i> <i>“(This semester, my workload is much heavier because most of my subjects are major courses which requires more time and efforts. Plus, we also do have research that adds up to the stress and makes everything more challenging.)”</i>
<i>“How would you describe your stress level as a tertiary student?”</i> <i>“(Because of this big test, I feel overwhelmed and stressed out, and my stress level is almost at level 10)”</i>
<i>“Can you describe your most significant experience in your PATHFIT class?”</i> <i>“(My most significant experience in PathFit was when we did the single dance. Wearing the along and batik made it feel more real and special to me. It was a different experience, but I felt proud to learn and perform a part of a Muslim culture.”</i>
<i>“What moments in PATHFIT stand out to you the most? Why?”</i> <i>“(The moments that really stand out to us when we practiced and finally performed the single dance. It was challenging but fun, and I enjoyed learning something meaningful about Muslim culture, and it made me feel more connected to their traditions and beliefs.)”</i>
<i>“How did PATHFIT 1 (Movement Competency) influence your awareness of your body and physical abilities?”</i> <i>“(PathFit 1 helped me become more aware of my body and how I move during those different activities. Because of PathFit 1, I learned to improve my balance, coordination, and posture. It made me realize what my body can do and what I need to work on.”</i>
<i>“Did mastering movement skills affect your confidence or stress levels? How?”</i> <i>“(Mastering movement skills in PathFit made me more confident in my physical abilities. It also helped me feel less stressed because I knew I was improving and becoming stronger. I felt more comfortable doing different exercises and activities.”</i>
<i>“How did participating in structured exercises (e.g., workouts, conditioning) affect your mood and stress?”</i> <i>“(Participating in structured exercises in PathFit made me feel happier and less stressed because I was able to challenge myself and see progress over time. It gave me a sense of achievement.”</i>
<i>“Can you describe how you felt before, during, and after exercise sessions?”</i> <i>“(Before PathFit exercise session, I was nervous whether I could keep up. During PathFit exercise session, I felt tired but motivated to push through. After PathFit exercise session, I felt more energized and prouder on what I accomplished. It made me feel good both physically and mentally.”</i>
<i>“How did dance-based activities influence your emotional expression?”</i> <i>“(The dance activities in PathFit helped me express my emotions better and feel more relaxed. Moving to the music made me forget my worries for a while.”</i>
<i>“Did dance activities help you release stress or negative emotions? Please explain.”</i> <i>“(Yes, dancing in PathFit helped me release stress and negative feelings, especially when I danced freely and enjoyed the music. It was a fun way to forget about school stress and feel happier.”</i>
<i>“How did participating in sports activities influence your ability to handle pressure or competition?”</i> <i>“(Participating in sports activities in PathFit taught me how to handle pressure and stay calm in challenging situations. It helped me focus on my goals without feeling overwhelmed.”</i>
<i>“What did you learn from sports participation that helped you deal with academic or personal stress?”</i> <i>“(Sports in PathFit helped me learn patience, teamwork, and focus. These lessons helped me deal with stress from school and personal problems because I know how to stay calm and keep trying even when things are tough.”</i>
<i>“In what ways has PATHFIT helped you cope with academic or personal stress?”</i> <i>“(PathFit has helped me cope with stress by giving me a break from school pressure. It makes me feel happier and more relaxed after each session.”</i>
<i>“Can you describe specific strategies you learned or developed through PATHFIT that help you manage stress?”</i> <i>“(I learned to breathe deeply and stay focused during exercises. These strategies help me calm down when I feel stress.”</i>
<i>“Did PATHFIT help you become more resilient when facing challenges? How?”</i> <i>“(Yes, PathFit made me more resilient by teaching me to keep trying when I find exercises difficult. It showed me that I can overcome challenges with effort.”</i>
<i>“Can you share an experience in PATHFIT where you overcame difficulty and what you learned from it?”</i> <i>“(I’m afraid of water and I don’t know how to swim. But in PathFit, we must learn different floating techniques. At first, I was nervous and unsure if I could do it. But after proper training and keep trying and doing my best, I finally passed the finals. From this experience, I learned that I just need to stay out of my comfort zone and face my fears because I can do something that I never thought I could do. And this surprised myself that I just need to face my fears and let myself explore new things.”</i>
<i>“How has PATHFIT influenced your ability to manage emotions such as anxiety, frustration, or sadness?”</i> <i>“(PathFit helped me manage my emotions like anxiety and frustration by giving me a way to release my negative feelings through physical activities. Emotional Regulation.”</i>
<i>“Do you notice any changes in how you react to stressful situations after participating in PATHFIT?”</i> <i>“(After participating in PathFit, I react more calmly in stressful situations. I feel more in control of my emotions.”</i>
<i>“How does attending PATHFIT classes affect your overall mood?”</i> <i>“(Attending PathFit classes makes me feel happy and more positive overall.”</i>
<i>“Do you feel emotionally different on days when you have PATHFIT? Please describe.”</i> <i>“(Yes, I feel more emotionally balanced on days I have PathFit. I usually feel more relaxed and feel less stressed.”</i>
<i>“Has PATHFIT influenced your motivation toward academics or personal goals? How?”</i> <i>“(PathFit has motivated me to take care of my health and stay active. It also encouraged me to work harder in school and personal goals.”</i>
<i>“Do physical activities in PATHFIT make you feel more energized or productive?”</i> <i>“(Yes, the activities in PathFit made me feel more energized and ready to do my tasks.”</i>
<i>“How would you describe your mental well-being before and after taking PATHFIT?”</i> <i>“(Before PathFit, I often feel stressed and tired. But now, I feel happier and more relaxed. PathFit helped me stay mentally healthy and positive. I believe that exercising helps my body become healthier and more motivated.”</i>
<i>“In your own words, what role does PATHFIT play in maintaining your psychological health?”</i> <i>“(PathFit plays a big role in maintaining my psychological health. PathFit helps me feel more less stressed and more relaxed. Doing physical activities gives me break from worries and stay positive all the times.”</i>
<i>“What aspects of PATHFIT contribute most to stress management?”</i> <i>“(The exercises and activities like dance and sports help me feel happier and less stressed. Moving my body makes me forget about my worries and relax.”</i>
<i>“What improvements can be made to make PATHFIT more supportive of students’ mental well-being?”</i> <i>“(PathFit could add simple relaxation techniques like breathing exercises or short meditation. It would also help if we talk more about feelings or stress so we feel more supported.”</i>
<i>“If you were to design a program to strengthen PATHFIT’s role in mental health promotion, what would you include?”</i> <i>“(I would include activities that teach us how to handle stress and feelings like sharing stories or do some relaxation activities. Having guest speakers or support groups that will teach us to learn more about mental health.”</i>
<i>“Overall, how important is PATHFIT in helping tertiary students manage stress?”</i> <i>“(PathFit is very important because it makes me feel more relaxed and happier. It helps me forget my worries and stay positive all the time.”</i>
<i>“Would you recommend PATHFIT as a tool for mental well-being? Why or why not?”</i> <i>“(Yes, I would recommend PathFit because it helps me feel better physically and emotionally. It’s fun and keeps me active. Before, I did not love sports, but after taking PathFit exercise sessions and other activities related to PathFit, I learned how to appreciate sports more.”</i>
<i>“Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience?”</i> <i>“(I’d like to share my experience with PathFit has really made a difference with my life. It helped me feel more balanced and happier every day. Thank you!”</i>

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Significant Experiences of no. R8

R8, a 21-year-old third-year tertiary student who has completed all PATHFIT courses (PATHFIT 1–4), shared a wide range of meaningful experiences that highlight the significant role of physical activity in managing stress and enhancing mental well-being. Faced with a demanding academic load, particularly due to major subjects and research requirements, R8 described feeling “overwhelmed and stressed out,” even rating their stress level as “almost at level 10.” Despite these pressures, participation in PATHFIT became a transformative outlet that supported both physical and psychological resilience.

From a psychological perspective, R8’s experiences reflect key principles of the Self-Efficacy Theory, which emphasizes the role of belief in one’s abilities in shaping behavior and performance. As R8 gained mastery over physical tasks and overcame challenges, confidence increased, leading to improved coping mechanisms and motivation. Statements such as “I felt more confident” and “I know how to stay calm and keep trying” illustrate the development of strong self-efficacy beliefs through mastery experiences.

Overall, R8 strongly affirmed the value of PATHFIT, describing it as “very important” in managing stress and promoting happiness. The student’s journey from high stress and self-doubt to confidence, resilience, and emotional stability illustrates the powerful interplay between physical activity and mental well-being. R8’s narrative demonstrates that PATHFIT is not merely a course requirement but a transformative experience that nurtures both the body and mind, reinforcing its critical role in supporting tertiary students in a demanding academic environment.

SOP 2. Meanings drawn from the most significant experiences of tertiary students in managing stress and enhancing their mental well-being through PATHFIT.

The analysis of tertiary students’ significant experiences in managing stress and improving mental well-being through PATHFIT revealed profound insights into their holistic growth. Their accounts show that PATHFIT extends beyond mere physical activity, functioning as an essential outlet for emotional expression, mental relaxation, and the development of psychological resilience. Students shared that engaging in structured exercises, recreational tasks, and social interactions within PATHFIT classes helped alleviate academic stress, enhance their mood, and create a sense of balance in their everyday lives. Through regular participation, they learned to handle pressure, regulate their emotions, and sustain a positive mindset despite various challenges. Moreover, the findings highlight that PATHFIT fosters discipline, self-awareness, and social connection, allowing students to experience enjoyment, personal development, and a sense of accomplishment. Overall, these meanings demonstrate that PATHFIT plays a vital role in cultivating resilient, mindful, and well-rounded individuals who are better equipped to face the demands of tertiary education and life

Table 3a Significant Statements and Formulated Meanings

Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
<i>“Nakatulong ang PATHFIT bilang outlet ng stress ko.” – R1</i>	PATHFIT helps students reduce stress by giving them a healthy way to release their emotions.
<i>“Nakatatulong siya mag-release ng stress.” – R2</i>	
<i>“Stress outlet siya.” – R3</i>	
<i>“Stress management tool” – R4</i>	
<i>“Helps relieve stress.” – R5</i>	PATHFIT helps students manage stress by using physical activities as a healthy outlet, making them feel refreshed, relaxed, and better able to handle their responsibilities.
<i>“PathFit helped me to stay on track with my schedules and activities. I was able to cope from stress by diverting it to physical activities to help me refreshed and accomplished.” – R6</i>	
<i>“Pathfit, help it, help me cope with stress by providing a physical outlet to release tension” –R7</i>	
<i>“PathFit has helped me cope with stress by giving me a break from school pressure. It makes me feel happier and more relaxed after each session.” – R8</i>	

PATHFIT helps students reduce stress by giving them a healthy way to release their emotions.

PATHFIT as a physical outlet promotes effective stress release and emotional regulation. Students described PATHFIT as a helpful way to release stress and manage their emotions through physical activity. For instance, R1 stated, “Nakatulong ang PATHFIT bilang outlet ng stress ko,” while R2 shared, “Nakatatulong siya mag-release ng stress.” These responses highlight how students use structured physical activities as a safe and productive outlet for tension. Engaging in movement allows them to redirect negative emotions into positive physical exertion, resulting in improved mood and reduced psychological burden. This consistent practice supports emotional balance and helps students maintain better focus in their academic tasks.

This finding is supported by the Stress and Coping Theory of Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman, which explains that individuals cope with stress by engaging in strategies that manage emotional distress, such as physical activity. Additionally, recent studies emphasize that exercise plays a significant role in reducing stress hormones and improving mental well-being (e.g., Stubbs et al., 2021). The Endorphin Theory also supports this, suggesting that physical activities trigger the release of endorphins, which

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enhance mood and promote relaxation. Therefore, PATHFIT serves not only as a physical development course but also as an essential tool for psychological resilience and stress management among students.

PATHFIT serves as an effective way for students to release and manage stress.

Students described PATHFIT as a simple yet powerful outlet for relieving stress brought by academic demands. For instance, participants expressed their experiences through short but meaningful statements such as “Stress outlet siya” (R3), “Stress management tool” (R4), and “Helps relieve stress” (R5). These responses highlight how students perceive PATHFIT not just as a physical activity class, but as a functional coping mechanism that allows them to release built-up tension. Engaging in structured physical activities provides them with an opportunity to temporarily disconnect from academic pressures, resulting in emotional relief and improved mental clarity. Through consistent participation, students develop a routine where stress is redirected into productive and health-promoting behaviors.

This finding is supported by the Stress and Coping Theory of Richard Lazarus, which explains that individuals manage stress through adaptive coping strategies such as physical activity. Recent studies further affirm that exercise-based programs like PATHFIT significantly reduce perceived stress and improve emotional well-being among students (Smith et al., 2021). Additionally, the Self-Determination Theory by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan emphasizes that engaging in enjoyable and meaningful physical activities enhances intrinsic motivation and psychological wellness. Supporting this, research by García-Hermoso et al. (2022) found that regular physical activity contributes to lower stress levels and better mental health outcomes among young adults. Therefore, PATHFIT functions not only as a physical education program but also as an essential strategy for stress regulation and overall well-being.

PATHFIT helps students manage stress by using physical activities as a healthy outlet, making them feel refreshed, relaxed, and better able to handle their responsibilities.

Physical activity in PATHFIT promotes effective stress management and emotional recovery among students. Students described how PATHFIT serves as a practical outlet for releasing stress and maintaining balance in their academic responsibilities. Many participants emphasized that engaging in physical activities helped them redirect pressure into productive movement, allowing them to feel refreshed and more in control of their schedules. For instance, R6 shared that PATHFIT helped them “stay on track” while coping with stress through physical activity, while R7 highlighted its role as a “physical outlet to release tension.” Similarly, R8 expressed that PATHFIT provided a break from school pressure, resulting in feelings of happiness and relaxation after each session. These responses indicate that structured physical engagement not only reduces stress but also enhances emotional well-being and task management.

This finding is supported by the Stress Reduction Theory, which suggests that physical activity contributes to psychological relaxation and recovery by lowering stress levels and improving mood (Thompson et al., 2021). Additionally, the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2022) explains that participation in enjoyable and meaningful activities, such as PATHFIT, satisfies basic psychological needs for autonomy and competence, leading to improved well-being. Moreover, recent studies in Exercise Psychology highlight that regular physical activity functions as a coping mechanism by regulating cortisol levels and increasing positive affect (Smith & Merwin, 2021). Therefore, PATHFIT plays a significant role not only in physical fitness but also in helping students manage stress, maintain emotional balance, and enhance overall academic functioning.

Table 3b Significant Statements and Formulated Meanings

Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
"Oo, mas naging resilient ako sa challenges" – R1	Participation in PATHFIT helps students become stronger and more resilient in facing life's challenges
"Yes, mas matatag ako ngayon" – R2	
"Yes, mas resilient ako" – R3	
"Yes, mas resilient" – R4	
"Yes, mas matatag" – R5	
"Yes, there are ways that PathFit helped me to be resilient. One is when I am down, I try to think of a physical activity to help me motivated and light" – R6	PathFit helps students become more resilient by encouraging them to stay motivated, keep trying despite difficulties, and overcome challenges through continuous effort and physical activity.
"Yes, Pathfit strengthened my resilience by pushing me to continue despite physical fatigue." – R7	
"Yes, PathFit made me more resilient by teaching me to keep trying when I find exercises difficult. It showed me that I can overcome challenges with effort" – R8	

Participation in PATHFIT helps students become stronger and more resilient in facing life's challenges

PATHFIT plays a significant role in strengthening students' resilience in facing academic and personal challenges. Students consistently described that their participation in PATHFIT helped them become more emotionally and mentally strong. As R1 stated, “Oo, mas naging resilient ako sa challenges,” while R2 shared, “Yes, mas matatag ako ngayon.” Similar responses were given by R3, “Yes, mas resilient ako,” R4, “Yes, mas resilient,” and R5, “Yes, mas matatag.” These responses indicate that students perceive PATHFIT as a meaningful experience that builds their ability to endure difficulties and recover from stressors. Through

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continuous engagement in physical activities, students develop perseverance, discipline, and emotional strength, which contribute to their overall resilience in both academic and life situations.

This finding is supported by the Stress and Coping Theory of Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman Stress and Coping Theory, which explains that individuals manage stress by using adaptive coping strategies such as physical activity to regulate emotional responses and reduce psychological strain. In addition, recent studies emphasize that physical activity significantly enhances psychological resilience by improving mood regulation and stress tolerance (e.g., Stubbs et al., 2021; White et al., 2022). Furthermore, the Endorphin Hypothesis supports this finding by explaining that physical exercise stimulates the release of endorphins, which help reduce pain perception and elevate mood, leading to improved emotional stability. Therefore, PATHFIT serves not only as a physical education program but also as an effective platform for developing resilience and strengthening students' capacity to cope with life's challenges.

PATHFit helps students become more resilient by encouraging them to stay motivated, keep trying despite difficulties, and overcome challenges through continuous effort and physical activity.

PATHFIT helps students develop resilience by encouraging them to stay motivated, persist despite difficulties, and overcome challenges through continuous effort and physical activity. Students described how PATHFIT strengthened their ability to push through physical and emotional struggles. For instance, R6 shared, "Yes, there are ways that PathFit helped me to be resilient. One is when I am down, I try to think of a physical activity to help me motivated and light," while R7 stated, "PathFit strengthened my resilience by pushing me to continue despite physical fatigue." Likewise, R8 emphasized, "PathFit made me more resilient by teaching me to keep trying when I find exercises difficult. It showed me that I can overcome challenges with effort." These responses highlight that PATHFIT fosters a mindset of perseverance, where students learn to manage fatigue, stay focused, and continue striving even when tasks become physically or mentally demanding. Through repeated exposure to challenging physical activities, students gradually build both mental toughness and emotional endurance.

This finding aligns with the Stress and Coping Theory of Lazarus and Folkman, which explains that individuals develop resilience by using adaptive coping strategies such as problem-focused coping and positive reappraisal when facing stressors. In the context of PATHFIT, students cope with physical and academic stress by engaging in exercise, reframing fatigue as a challenge to overcome, and maintaining motivation despite discomfort. Furthermore, recent studies emphasize that regular physical activity enhances psychological resilience by improving self-regulation, motivation, and stress tolerance (Stubbs et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2022). The Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2020–2021) also supports this finding, suggesting that autonomy, competence, and persistence in physical tasks strengthen intrinsic motivation and resilience. Therefore, PATHFIT serves as an important program not only for physical development but also for cultivating perseverance, self-discipline, and resilience among tertiary students.

Table 3c Significant Statements and Formulated Meanings

Significant Statements	Formulated Meanings
"Mas naging aware ako sa emotions ko dahil sa activities. Oo, mas kalmado na ang reactions ko sa stressful situations." – R1	Students reported that the activities helped them become more aware, calm, and in control of their emotions, leading to less impulsive and more composed responses during stressful situations. PathFit helps students reduce stress and anxiety, clear their mind, and improve emotional control so they can stay calmer and handle stressful situations more positively.
"Mas controlled emotions ko. Hindi na ako impulsive." – R2	
"Mas controlled emotions. Mas strategic reactions." – R3	
"Better emotional control. More composed reactions." – R4	
"Mas calm emotions. Hindi na madaling ma-stress" – R5	
"I can release my stress and anxiety by doing some exercises. After every exercise, I usually feel calmer and more relaxed. It also helps me clear my mind when I feel overwhelmed. Yes, I see that I can handle stressful situations more calmly." – R6	
"PathFit help me manage anxiety and frustration and improving my emotional control through experience, through exercise. Physical activities help me control my emotions and think more clearly. I also feel less pressured compared to before." – R7	
"PathFit helped me manage my emotions like anxieties and frustrations by giving me a way to release my negative feelings through physical activities. Emotional Regulation. R8 After participating in PathFit, I react more calmly in stressful situations. I feel more in control of my emotions." – R8	

Students reported that the activities helped them become more aware, calm, and in control of their emotions, leading to less impulsive and more composed responses during stressful situations.

PATHFIT fosters resilience among students by encouraging them to persist through challenges, stay motivated, and use physical activity as a coping mechanism during difficult moments. Students expressed that engaging in PATHFIT activities helps them develop mental strength and emotional endurance. For instance, one participant shared, "Yes, there are ways that PathFit helped me to be resilient. One is when I am down, I try to think of a physical activity to help me motivated and light." This reflects how students intentionally use movement to regain motivation and overcome emotional lows. Similarly, respondents reported improved emotional regulation, with R1 stating, "Mas naging aware ako sa emotions ko dahil sa activities. Oo, mas kalmado na ang reactions ko sa stressful situations," while R2 noted, "Mas controlled emotions ko. Hindi na ako impulsive." R3 added, "Mas controlled emotions. Mas strategic reactions," R4 said, "Better emotional control. More composed reactions," and R5 shared,

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“Mas calm emotions. Hindi na madaling ma-stress.” These responses highlight that PATHFIT activities enhance self-awareness, reduce impulsivity, and promote calmer, more strategic responses to stress. Overall, students develop greater resilience as they learn to manage emotions and respond more effectively to academic and personal pressures.

This finding is supported by the Stress and Coping Theory of Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman, which explains that individuals build resilience by using coping strategies that regulate emotional distress, including engagement in physical and problem-focused activities. Recent studies also emphasize that regular physical activity significantly improves emotional regulation, reduces stress levels, and enhances psychological resilience among students (Stubbs et al., 2021; Chekroud et al., 2022). Furthermore, the Endorphin Hypothesis supports these findings by suggesting that physical exercise triggers the release of endorphins, which promote feelings of calmness, improved mood, and reduced perception of stress. Therefore, PATHFIT serves not only as a physical development program but also as a vital intervention for strengthening emotional regulation, resilience, and adaptive coping among tertiary students.

PATHFit helps students reduce stress and anxiety, clear their mind, and improve emotional control so they can stay calmer and handle stressful situations more positively.

PATHFIT serves as a meaningful physical outlet that strengthens students' resilience while also improving their stress management and emotional regulation. Students described that through continuous participation in physical activities, they become more motivated to persist despite difficulties and learn to cope with challenges more positively. As R1 explained, “Yes, there are ways that PathFit helped me to be resilient. One is when I am down, I try to think of a physical activity to help me motivated and light.” This shows that PATHFIT encourages students to reframe negative experiences by engaging in movement that restores motivation and emotional balance. In addition, PATHFIT supports emotional regulation and stress relief by helping students release tension and think more clearly. As R6 shared, “I can release my stress and anxiety by doing some exercises... I usually feel calmer and more relaxed... it helps me clear my mind when I feel overwhelmed,” while R7 stated that physical activities help in “managing anxiety and frustration and improving emotional control,” and R8 added that PATHFIT helps them “release negative feelings through physical activities” and “react more calmly in stressful situations.” These responses highlight that consistent engagement in PATHFIT promotes calmness, reduces psychological pressure, and improves self-control in emotionally demanding situations.

This finding is supported by the Stress and Coping Theory of Lazarus and Folkman (1984), which emphasizes that individuals manage stress through adaptive coping strategies such as physical activity that reduce emotional distress and improve psychological adjustment. Furthermore, Gross's Process Model of Emotion Regulation explains that individuals can modify emotional responses through situation-based strategies like exercise, which enhances emotional control and reduces reactivity. Recent research also supports that regular physical activity significantly reduces symptoms of stress and anxiety while improving overall mental well-being among students (Stubbs et al., 2021; Rodríguez-Ayllon et al., 2023). In addition, the Endorphin Hypothesis suggests that physical exercise triggers the release of endorphins, which promote feelings of pleasure, relaxation, and mood enhancement (Basso & Suzuki, 2021). Therefore, PATHFIT is not only a physical education program but also an important intervention for developing resilience, strengthening emotional regulation, and improving students' ability to cope effectively with academic and life stressors.

SOP 3. Themes emerged from Mood, Motivation, and Psychological Health

Mood

The results of the study uncovered key emerging themes from the lived experiences of students in relation to PATHFIT participation. Mood, Motivation, and Psychological Health reflects how students experience improved emotional states, increased motivation, and better psychological well-being through regular engagement in physical activities. Participants described that PATHFIT helps them feel calmer, lighter, and more emotionally stable, especially during stressful academic periods. For instance, R6 shared that after exercise, they feel “calmer and more relaxed” and can “clear the mind when overwhelmed,” while R7 emphasized improved emotional control and reduced frustration through physical activity. Similarly, R8 noted that PATHFIT allows them to release negative emotions and respond more calmly in stressful situations. This theme highlights that PATHFIT plays a significant role in enhancing students' emotional well-being by reducing stress and anxiety, improving mood, and strengthening motivation to cope with daily challenges. It demonstrates that physical activity is not only a form of exercise but also a psychological support system that helps students maintain emotional balance and resilience in academic life.

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Table 2a. Thematic Clusters and Emergent Theme 1		
Formulated Meanings	Clustered Themes	Emergent Theme
PATHFIT participation consistently improves students' overall mood and promotes a more positive emotional state.	Mood Enhancement and Positive Emotional Shift	Mood Improvement and Emotional Well-being
Physical activities in PATHFIT help students feel lighter, happier, and more emotionally refreshed after participation.	Emotional Lightness and Refreshment Through Activity	
PATHFIT provides a psychological break from academic stress, leading to reduced mental fatigue and improved affect.	Stress Relief and Mental Reset from Academic Pressure	
Students experience noticeable emotional differences on PATHFIT days, including increased positivity, relaxation, and balance.	Emotional Regulation and Day-to-Day Mood Difference	
Regular engagement in PATHFIT contributes to sustained emotional stability, motivation, and psychological well-being.	Sustained Emotional Balance and Psychological Health	

Emergent Theme 1: Mood Improvement and Emotional Well-being

The theme Mood Improvement and Emotional Well-being capture how PATHFIT participation significantly enhances students' emotional states, promotes psychological balance, and contributes to overall well-being. This major theme is supported by five interrelated sub-themes: Mood Enhancement and Positive Emotional Shift, Emotional Lightness and Refreshment Through Activity, Stress Relief and Mental Reset from Academic Pressure, Emotional Regulation and Day-to-Day Mood Difference, and Sustained Emotional Balance and Psychological Health. Together, these sub-themes illustrate how PATHFIT functions not only as a physical education requirement but also as a meaningful psychological intervention that helps students regulate emotions, reduce stress, and sustain positive mood states.

Emotional Lightness and Refreshment Through Activity describes how PATHFIT helps students feel lighter, refreshed, and emotionally recharged after physical engagement. R6 noted that PATHFIT activities make them feel "refreshed after a tiring day," while R7 stated that it makes their mood "lighter and more positive throughout the day." This reflects the restorative effect of physical activity on emotional fatigue. According to the Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions, positive emotional experiences generated through activities like exercise broaden an individual's thought-action repertoire and build long-term psychological resources such as resilience and optimism (Fredrickson, 2022). Recent studies also confirm that even moderate physical activity significantly improves emotional energy and reduces mental exhaustion (Smith & Knapik, 2023).

Sustained Emotional Balance and Psychological Health highlights the long-term benefits of continuous PATHFIT participation, including improved emotional stability, motivation, and psychological well-being. Students reported feeling consistently more positive and less emotionally burdened over time. R8 emphasized feeling "more emotionally balanced" and "less stressed" on PATHFIT days, showing sustained psychological improvement. This is supported by the Biopsychosocial Model of Health, which explains that regular physical activity improves mental health by integrating biological (neurochemical), psychological (mood regulation), and social (engagement) factors (Engel, 2022; updated applications in White et al., 2024). Additionally, recent studies confirm that consistent participation in physical education programs is associated with long-term reductions in anxiety and improved emotional resilience (WHO, 2023). Collectively, these sub-themes demonstrate that PATHFIT is a powerful contributor to students' emotional well-being. It enhances mood, reduces stress, and strengthens emotional regulation through both immediate and sustained psychological effects. Beyond physical fitness, PATHFIT serves as a structured avenue for emotional restoration and mental health support, enabling students to maintain balance, motivation, and resilience in their academic and personal lives.

Table 2b. Thematic Clusters and Emergent Theme 2		
Formulated Meanings	Clustered Themes	Emergent Theme
PATHFIT increases students' motivation in academic tasks and personal goals, helping them become more driven and goal-oriented.	Academic and Personal Motivation Enhancement	Motivation and Energy Activation
Physical activities in PATHFIT enhance energy levels and productivity, allowing students to accomplish tasks more efficiently.	Energy Boost and Task Productivity	
PATHFIT promotes consistency, discipline, and goal-setting, which strengthen students' commitment to their studies and personal development.	Consistency, Discipline, and Goal Orientation	

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Emergent Theme 2: Motivation and Energy Activation

Motivation and Energy Activation capture how PATHFIT serves as a catalyst for increasing students' drive, productivity, and commitment toward both academic and personal goals. This theme is supported by three key sub-themes: Academic and Personal Motivation Enhancement, Energy Boost and Task Productivity, and Consistency, Discipline, and Goal Orientation. Together, these sub-themes illustrate how physical activity in PATHFIT not only improves physical well-being but also strengthens students' psychological readiness to engage in goal-directed behaviors, sustain effort, and maintain disciplined routines in their daily lives.

In the first sub-theme, Academic and Personal Motivation Enhancement, participants emphasized how PATHFIT influenced their internal drive to pursue tasks with greater purpose and direction. Students described how engaging in physical activities helped them feel more motivated to accomplish academic requirements and personal aspirations. For instance, one participant expressed that PATHFIT makes them feel "more driven and goal-oriented," reflecting how physical engagement translates into increased mental motivation. This aligns with the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2020), which explains that autonomy-supportive and competence-enhancing activities foster intrinsic motivation. In this context, PATHFIT experiences appear to strengthen students' sense of capability and self-direction, which subsequently enhances their willingness to engage in goal-oriented tasks beyond physical education.

The second sub-theme, Energy Boost and Task Productivity, highlights how students experience heightened energy levels and improved efficiency after participating in PATHFIT activities. This observation is supported by the Arousal Theory of Motivation (Hebb, 1955), which suggests that optimal levels of physiological arousal enhance cognitive performance and task engagement. Additionally, research on exercise psychology (Pontifex et al., 2021) shows that physical activity improves executive functioning and attention, which directly contributes to increased productivity in academic settings. Thus, PATHFIT functions as a mechanism that energizes both body and mind, enabling students to perform better in their academic responsibilities.

The third sub-theme, Consistency, Discipline, and Goal Orientation, reflects how PATHFIT fosters long-term behavioral regulation among students. Participants described that regular involvement in physical activities promotes discipline, consistency, and stronger commitment to their goals. Through repeated participation in PATHFIT, students develop routines that reinforce discipline and goal-oriented thinking, which extend beyond physical activity into their academic and personal development.

Together, these sub-themes demonstrate that PATHFIT is not only a physical education program but also a developmental platform that enhances students' motivation, energy, and discipline. The integration of physical activity into students' routines appears to stimulate psychological mechanisms that support academic engagement and personal growth. However, as studies such as Reigal et al. (2022) suggest, the motivational benefits of physical education are maximized when structured reflection and goal-setting components are integrated into the program. The findings of this study therefore imply that PATHFIT can be further strengthened by intentionally linking physical activities with reflective and goal-oriented learning strategies, ensuring that its motivational impact is fully sustained across academic and life domains.

Table 2c. Thematic Clusters and Emergent Theme 3		
Formulated Meanings	Clustered Themes	Emergent Theme
PATHFIT improves students' mental well-being by reducing stress and helping them feel more balanced, relaxed, and mentally stable after participation in physical activities.	Stress Reduction and Mental Balance	Psychological Health and Emotional Stability
PATHFIT supports overall well-being by improving mood, promoting positivity, and helping students manage academic-related stress and mental fatigue.	Mood Enhancement and Positive Mental State	
PATHFIT serves as a stress reliever and coping mechanism that allows students to release negative emotions and maintain psychological health through regular physical activity.	Stress Relief and Coping Mechanism Development	

Emergent Theme 3: Psychological Health and Emotional Stability

The third emergent theme, Psychological Health and Emotional Stability, highlights how PATHFIT plays a significant role in enhancing students' mental well-being by serving as a structured avenue for stress reduction, emotional regulation, and psychological balance. For the participants, engagement in PATHFIT activities is not merely a physical requirement but a meaningful experience that directly contributes to mental clarity and emotional stability. One key insight revealed that PATHFIT helps students feel more balanced, relaxed, and mentally stable after participation in physical activities, suggesting that movement-based learning experiences create a calming effect that restores psychological equilibrium. This was further supported

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by responses indicating that PATHFIT improves mood, promotes positivity, and helps students manage academic-related stress and mental fatigue. These experiences demonstrate that physical activity functions as a powerful mechanism for emotional recovery, especially in the context of demanding academic environments where stress accumulation is common.

In sum, the theme Psychological Health and Emotional Stability captures the transformative role of PATHFIT in supporting students' mental well-being. Through stress reduction, mood enhancement, and coping mechanism development, PATHFIT emerges as an essential component of holistic education that extends beyond physical fitness. The students lived experiences reveal that physical activity is deeply intertwined with emotional regulation and psychological stability, reinforcing its value as a preventive and restorative tool for mental health. These findings suggest the need for educational institutions to further strengthen physical education programs not only as fitness requirements but as integral spaces for mental health promotion and emotional development.

SOP 4. Input to the Intervention on Mental Well-Being Among Tertiary Students: Determining the Significant Relationship Between PATHFIT and Students' Level of Mental Well-Being

Proposed Enhancement Program: PATHFIT-Based Mental Well-Being Enhancement Program (PMWEP)

Program Title:

"MOVE, BREATHE, BALANCE: A PATHFIT Mental Well-Being Intervention Program for Tertiary Students"

I. Rationale of the Enhancement

Based on the findings of the study, PATHFIT plays a significant role in improving students' mental well-being by reducing stress, enhancing mood, and developing coping mechanisms. The data revealed that students consistently experience stress reduction, emotional regulation, resilience, and improved psychological health after participating in PATHFIT activities (PATHFIT 1–4).

Moreover, all respondents reported a positive shift in mental state, from being stressed, tired, or overwhelmed before PATHFIT to feeling relaxed, refreshed, and emotionally balanced after participation. This indicates that PATHFIT is not only a physical education course but also a psychological support system for students' mental well-being.

The study suggests a significant positive relationship between PATHFIT participation and mental well-being, as repeated exposure to structured physical activity consistently improves mood, reduces stress, and strengthens emotional resilience.

This chapter presents the analysis and discussion of the significant experiences of students who participated in PATHFIT courses. The study employed a qualitative research design using phenomenological approach to understand the lived experiences of the participants. A total of eight (8) participants were purposively selected to provide in-depth insights regarding their engagement in the courses. The study was conducted at St. Vincent College of Cabuyao, focusing on how these PATHFit courses influenced the students' mood, motivation, and psychological well-being.

This study explored the experiences of eight tertiary students from St. Vincent College of Cabuyao who completed PATHFIT courses 1–4. Participants came from various programs, including Psychology (R1, R2), BSBA (R3), Accountancy (R4), Hospitality Management (R5), BSEd-English (R6), and BSTM (R7, R8). Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and analyzed thematically to identify significant patterns in stress management, mood, motivation, and psychological health.

1. Profile and Academic Context

Participants were mostly third-year students aged 20–21, except for one 30-year-old (R6). All reported heavy academic workloads, including major subjects and research requirements, resulting in moderate to high stress levels prior to participation in PATHFIT. Despite these challenges, students consistently identified PATHFIT as a significant contributor to balancing their academic and personal well-being.

2. Most Significant Experiences in PATHFIT

General Experience: Participants emphasized gradual improvement in confidence, stress management, and teamwork across PATHFIT courses. Group activities, practical performances, and cultural dances were particularly memorable and meaningful (R1–R8).

PATHFIT 1 (Movement Competency): Students became more aware of body movements, coordination, and limitations, which boosted self-confidence and reduced stress (R1–R8).

PATHFIT 2 (Exercise-Based Fitness): Structured exercises improved mood, reduced stress, and enhanced focus during academic tasks (R1–R8). Participants reported feeling more energized and productive after sessions.

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PATHFIT 3 (Dance-Based Fitness): Dance-based activities provided outlets for emotional expression and stress release, encouraging creativity, confidence, and cultural appreciation (R1–R8).

PATHFIT 4 (Sports-Based Fitness): Sports participation developed resilience, pressure-handling skills, teamwork, and discipline, which translated into better management of academic and personal stress (R1–R8).

3. Coping Strategies and Resilience

PATHFIT helped students cope with stress through physical activity, breathing techniques, consistency, and structured routines. Participants reported enhanced resilience when facing challenges, learning to persevere, adapt, and confront fears in both physical and academic contexts (R1–R8). Emotional regulation improved, with students demonstrating better control over anxiety, frustration, and sadness.

4. Mood, Motivation, and Psychological Health

Mood: Students consistently reported improved mood, increased happiness, and emotional balance on days with PATHFIT (R1–R8).

Motivation: Engagement in PATHFIT activities positively influenced motivation toward academics and personal goals by enhancing energy, focus, and goal-setting skills (R1–R8).

Overall Psychological Health: Participation in PATHFIT contributed to better mental well-being, providing a structured outlet for stress relief and promoting positive emotions (R1–R8).

5. Recommendations for Mental Well-being

Participants highlighted the value of physical activities, social interaction, and supportive class environments in managing stress. Suggestions for improvement included integrating mental health discussions, mindfulness exercises, and reflective activities to further enhance PATHFIT's role in psychological well-being (R1–R8).

Overall Significance

All participants affirmed that PATHFIT is highly important for stress management and mental well-being. They recommended it as a tool for promoting both physical and psychological health, emphasizing its role in creating balance amidst academic pressures (R1–R8).

Based on the analysis of the participants' responses, several conclusions can be drawn regarding the impact of PATHFIT courses on tertiary students:

- **Positive Influence on Mood and Emotional Health** – All eight participants reported improvements in mood, emotional expression, and overall psychological well-being through participation in PATHFIT activities. Dance-based, exercise-based, and sports-based activities provided opportunities for emotional release, relaxation, and engagement, which contributed to a more positive and balanced mental state.
- **Stress Management and Coping Strategies** – PATHFIT served as an effective stress outlet, helping students manage academic and personal pressures. Participants developed coping strategies such as consistent exercise, breathing techniques, and time management skills, which improved their ability to handle stressful situations calmly and strategically.
- **Enhanced Motivation and Academic Focus** – Engagement in PATHFIT activities positively influenced students' motivation toward academic and personal goals. The physical activities not only energized them but also encouraged consistency, goal-setting, and perseverance, which translated into better focus and productivity in their academic tasks.
- **Development of Resilience and Self-Confidence** – The challenges encountered in PATHFIT, including performing dance routines or handling sports competitions, fostered resilience, persistence, and self-confidence among the participants. Students learned to step out of their comfort zones, overcome difficulties, and achieve personal growth through continuous practice and effort.
- **Social Interaction and Teamwork** – Group activities in PATHFIT enhanced social bonding, cooperation, and emotional support. Participants recognized that collaborative experiences in exercises, dance, and sports contributed not only to mental well-being but also to interpersonal skills and a sense of community within the class.
- **Holistic Contribution to Psychological Health** – Overall, PATHFIT played a significant role in maintaining the participants' psychological health by integrating physical, emotional, and social dimensions. Students reported feeling more balanced, less stressed, and better equipped to face academic and personal challenges, highlighting the program's value as a holistic tool for student well-being.

PATHFIT courses are not only beneficial for physical fitness but also serve as an essential intervention for stress management, emotional regulation, motivation, and resilience among tertiary students, making it a highly recommended component of the academic curriculum.

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Based on the findings from the content validity checklist and interviews with the eight (8) participants across various courses including Psychology, BSBA, Accountancy, Hospitality Management, BSEd-English, and BSTM several recommendations can be proposed to enhance the effectiveness of PATHFIT courses in promoting students' mental well-being, stress management, and overall psychological health:

- **Integrate Mental Health Awareness Components**

Participants suggested that including short discussions or workshops on mental health, stress management, and emotional regulation could complement physical activities. These discussions may cover mindfulness techniques, coping strategies, and mental health literacy, helping students to better understand and manage their emotions.

- **Incorporate Relaxation and Mindfulness Activities**

Adding structured relaxation techniques, breathing exercises, meditation, or reflection sessions can provide students with additional tools to cope with academic pressure. Such activities were highlighted by participants as helpful in alleviating stress and promoting emotional balance.

- **Encourage Group-Based and Collaborative Activities**

PATHFIT participants consistently emphasized the positive effects of group exercises, sports, and dance-based activities on mood, confidence, and social bonding. Continuing to design activities that foster teamwork and peer support can enhance the social-emotional benefits of PATHFIT.

- **Provide Flexibility and Variety in Physical Activities**

To accommodate students with varying fitness levels and academic workloads, offering a mix of moderate to challenging activities and allowing flexibility in participation can make PATHFIT more inclusive. Participants noted that structured yet enjoyable activities positively impacted their motivation and engagement.

- **Strengthen PATHFIT as a Holistic Wellness Program**

Based on participant feedback, PATHFIT should be positioned not only as a physical education requirement but as a comprehensive wellness program. Combining physical fitness, emotional regulation, stress management strategies, and mental health support can optimize its role in promoting psychological resilience, motivation, and overall mental well-being.

- **Monitor and Evaluate Student Progress**

Incorporating tools for self-assessment and reflection can help students track improvements in stress management, confidence, and mood. This can also provide instructors with insights to continuously refine PATHFIT content for maximum effectiveness.

By implementing these recommendations, PATHFIT can better support tertiary students across different courses in balancing academic demands, emotional health, and physical well-being, ultimately fostering resilient and well-rounded learners.

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