



New Physical Education and Active Teacher Development: Examining the Role of General Physical Education in Shaping Student-Teachers' Professional Identity, Attitudes, and Lifestyle at Farhangian University

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Article Info	Abstract
Article type: Research Article	This study explores the lived experiences of student-teachers, faculty members, university administrators, and sports instructors in the Farhangian Training University campuses of Khorramabad, Aligudarz, and Borujerd, focusing on the role of general physical education (GPE) in strengthening professional identity, fostering active attitudes, and shaping the lifestyle of students. Employing a qualitative design grounded in hermeneutic phenomenology, the research population included stakeholders in physical education at Lorestan's Farhangian University. Purposive and snowball sampling continued until theoretical saturation was achieved. Data were collected through 25 semi structured interviews and analyzed using Van Manen's (2016) six-phase thematic analysis. Data were managed in MAXQDA 2024. Credibility was ensured through participant checking, peer debriefing, and thick description. Findings revealed three core dimensions of identity formation through (GPE): physical and psychological self-awareness, belonging to the teaching profession, and redefinition of the professional role from passive to active teacher. Active attitudes toward physical activity were reinforced through enhanced intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy in designing movement-based educational activities, and positive perspectives on student health. In terms of lifestyle, themes of stress management and resilience, sustainable physical and mental health, and role modeling within society were emphasized. Facilitating factors included infrastructure, innovative teaching methods, and cultural support, while barriers encompassed limited resources, weak planning, and cultural resistance. Overall, the study shows that when designed and implemented with an identity-driven approach, (GPE) can transcend physical fitness, shaping the professional identity and active lifestyle of future teachers.
Received: 16 October 2025	
Accepted: 23 December 2025	
Published online: 1 May 2026	
Keywords:	Active Attitude, Farhangian University, Hermeneutic Phenomenology, Identity Formation, New Physical Education, Professional Lifestyle
Cite this article:	Tatari, E. (2026). New Physical Education and Active Teacher Development: Examining the Role of General Physical Education in Shaping Student-Teachers' Professional Identity, Attitudes, and Lifestyle at Farhangian University. <i>Archives in Sport Management and Leadership</i> , 4(1), 132-143. doi: 10.22108/asml.2025.147074.1112



Introduction

The education system in any country serves as the cornerstone of sustainable development and socio-cultural progress, holding an irreplaceable and fundamental role in shaping the nation's future. In this context, Farhangian University, as the specialist and reference institution for the preparation and empowerment of the country's teachers, assumes a strategic and decisive responsibility. The quality of an educational system depends not only on its curricula and learning resources, but also on the competencies, attitudes, and lifestyles of the teachers who stand in classrooms (Tatari et al., 2025; Tavakoli, 2011; Afrouzeh et al., 2025). Teachers are not merely transmitters of knowledge; as living role models, they also convey moral and social values and lifestyle patterns to their students, indirectly shaping the thinking of future generations (Razavi et al., 2020). This underscores the necessity of developing teachers with physical and psychological well-being, positive attitudes, and active, sustainable lifestyles. Research has shown that GPE courses not only improve physical fitness, but also play a pivotal role in strengthening athletic identity, enhancing physical self-concept, and developing students' social skills. For instance, Alborz et al. (2020) highlighted the positive impact of this course on students' athletic identity, while Moghadam et al. (2013) demonstrated that yoga training can enhance body awareness and self-concept among female students. Other studies (Moharramzadeh & Noori, 2020; Razavi et al., 2020) emphasized the role of active lifestyles and exercise in shaping social identity and optimizing leisure time.

Nevertheless, at national and global levels, serious challenges persist in health and lifestyle: widespread physical inactivity, rising prevalence of chronic diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular disorders, psychological pressures, and unhealthy habits impair both personal and social functioning (Saatchian et al., 2023; Tatari et al., 2025). University life—marked by lifestyle shifts and academic stress—often coincides with reduced physical activity and negative changes in diet and sleep. Student-teachers, due to the intersection of their academic and future professional roles, are especially vulnerable. Any inactive lifestyle they adopt may have long-term effects on the generations they will teach; a teacher lacking adequate health and a positive attitude toward physical activity is unlikely to inspire students to lead active, healthy lives.

International research has similarly emphasized psychological, social, and organizational factors in shaping the professional identity of physical education teachers and improving teaching quality. Yan, Dai, and Xuecui (2025) found that faculty support significantly enhances job satisfaction and strengthens professional identity. Other evidence (Sun et al., 2025) confirms a positive association between self-efficacy, life meaning, and self-esteem with the professional identity of pre-service physical education teachers. This suggests that GPE courses can serve as a platform not only for physical fitness, but also for personality growth, self-awareness, and soft skills development.

Recent research further enriches this view. A study published in Sun et al (2025) demonstrated that self-efficacy strongly predicts professional identity formation through the mediating roles of life meaning and self-esteem. These findings indicate that identity development in pre-service physical education teachers is a phenomenological process rooted in reflective awareness of body, purpose, and social connection, resonating with the hermeneutic orientation of the present study.

Khatibzadeh et al. (2025) utilized grounded theory to model GPE quality enhancement, identifying key causal factors such as teacher competence, infrastructure, and student engagement. The study pinpointed socio-cultural and policy issues as contextual determinants, with economic factors acting as intervening variables. Recommended strategies heavily emphasize teacher professional development and innovative pedagogical approaches to achieve improved physical health and psychosocial benefits. These findings underscore that improving GPE outcomes requires addressing systemic, professional, and environmental barriers within the educational context.

A critical synthesis of this literature reveals that while prior studies emphasize diverse determinants of professional identity, ranging from social support to innovation, most treat identity formation as a linear or behavioral outcome. In contrast, hermeneutic phenomenology conceptualizes identity as a dynamic process of meaning-making, calling for interpretive inquiry rather than descriptive measurement. This theoretical distinction guided the current study to bridge the gap between behavioral and interpretive perspectives.

However, the traditional view of physical education—as merely a set of physical activities—may neglect its psychological, social, and identity-related dimensions. The “New Physical Education” approach advocates for the parallel cultivation of life skills, stress management, self-regulation, and resilience alongside physical readiness (Aboramadan et al., 2021; Dyngeland et al., 2025). It regards physical activity as a tool for holistic personal development, directed toward building a healthy, active, and dynamic identity. Within Farhangian University, this perspective could transform GPE from a peripheral course into a core driver of student-teachers’ identity formation (Tatari et al., 2025; Farhadian et al., 2022).

International evidence reinforces this concept. Dyngeland, Resaland, and Mandelid (2025) found that integrating physically active learning (PAL) into teachers’ professional development promotes curricular goals and fosters dynamic professional learning communities. Building on this, Dyngeland et al. (2025) further revealed that physically active learning stimulates self-efficacy and creative engagement among teachers, serving as a catalyst for reflective and collaborative professional cultures. This finding aligns directly with the “New Physical Education” paradigm that integrates embodiment with professional growth (Dyngeland et al., 2025). Chen & Peng (2018) identified teacher innovation as a key driver of student motivation and learning quality, while Aboramadan et al. (2021) demonstrated that organizational creativity boosts innovative behavior and job motivation in teachers. Such findings show that a creatively designed, supportive university environment can shape future teachers’ active engagement and positive attitudes toward physical activity. Despite this significance, there is limited knowledge about the lived experiences of Farhangian University student-teachers in GPE, and how it influences their attitudes and professional lifestyles. Existing studies, often quantitative, tend to measure observable outcomes without probing participants’ personal meanings and interpretations. Consequently, it remains unclear how the course shapes student-teachers’ personal and professional identities or how these effects carry over into their future careers (Afrouzeh et al., 2025). This gap hinders the design of programs truly aligned with student-teachers’ actual needs and capacities. For example, research by Yan et al. (2025) and Aboramadan et al. (2021) shows that supportive environments and organizational creativity can strengthen identity formation, while Almusawi et al. (2021) emphasize technology-based, game-oriented, and group activities as effective strategies for innovation in physical education. In Iran, Farhadian et al. (2022) demonstrated that social skills training directly improves student-teachers’ professional identity.

A critical synthesis of this literature reveals that while prior studies emphasize diverse determinants of professional identity, ranging from social support to innovation, most treat identity formation as a linear or behavioral outcome. In contrast, hermeneutic phenomenology conceptualizes identity as a dynamic process of meaning-making, calling for interpretive inquiry rather than descriptive measurement. This theoretical distinction guided the current study to bridge the gap between behavioral and interpretive perspectives. Further strengthening the need for contextualized qualitative modeling, recent research by Khatibzadeh et al. (2025) successfully designed a model for enhancing the quality of school physical education by identifying causal factors such as teacher competence, student engagement, and infrastructure, all through a rigorous grounded theory approach. This suggests that effective quality enhancement requires unpacking the underlying contextual and structural conditions, a task best achieved through deep interpretive inquiry into the lived experiences of stakeholders, which directly supports the phenomenological orientation of the present study.

In Lorestan Province, home to Farhangian University campuses in Khorramabad, Aligoudarz, and Borujerd, there is a pressing need for a nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of student-teachers and other key stakeholders (including faculty members, instructors, and educational administrators) to determine if current (GPE) programs align with a modern, identity-oriented vision, and how real-life experiences can guide essential program redesign and quality improvement. Conceptually, this inquiry is framed by the New Physical Education for active teacher development, which posits that GPE initiates embodied pedagogical experiences leading, through hermeneutic meaning-making, to three critical emergent pathways—professional identity, active attitude, and professional lifestyle—all moderated by identified facilitators and barriers, ultimately culminating in integrated active teacher development. Addressing this complex, multidimensional phenomenon therefore necessitates a qualitative approach, specifically the adoption of hermeneutic phenomenology, which is vital for uncovering these meaningful experiences and enabling the formulation of policies and operational programs rooted in authentic empirical data rather than solely theoretical assumptions,

thereby ensuring the applicability of the findings not only within Farhangian University of Lorestan Province but also across broader national teacher education policy contexts.

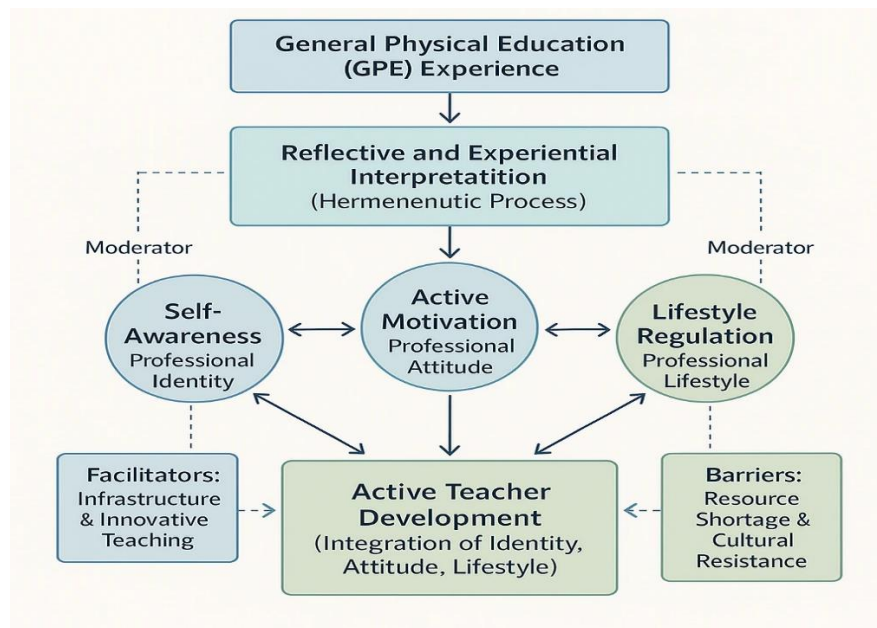


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of New Physical Education for Active Teacher Development

In this study, we propose a conceptual model illustrated in Figure 1, titled “Conceptual Framework of New Physical Education for Active Teacher Development.” This model was developed by the authors based on the identified research problem and reflects the dynamic interactions within (GPE). The figure provides a visual representation of the hierarchical flow of pedagogical experiences. At the top layer, the “(GPE) Experience” is connected by an arrow to the “Reflective and Experiential Interpretation (Hermeneutic Process)” at the center. This process branches into three parallel pathways leading to three circular nodes labeled ‘Self-Awareness → Professional Identity’, ‘Active Motivation → Professional Attitude’, and ‘Lifestyle Regulation → Professional Lifestyle’, indicating the interrelated nature of these elements. The bidirectional arrows between these nodes illustrate the interactions among self-awareness, motivation, and lifestyle regulation, which collectively contribute to the larger integrating concept of ‘Active Teacher Development’ (Integration of Identity, Attitude, Lifestyle). Additionally, the model acknowledges the external factors influencing this development, depicted by the small rectangular boxes labeled ‘Facilitators: Infrastructure & Innovative Teaching’ and ‘Barriers: Resource Shortage & Cultural Resistance,’ which are connected to the hermeneutic process with dashed moderator arrows. This comprehensive framework aims to inform policy and practice in teacher education, underlining the need for a holistic understanding of how GPE experiences can foster active teacher development in the integrated domains of identity, attitude, and lifestyle.

Research Methods

In terms of nature and purpose, this study is a qualitative inquiry employing a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, grounded in an interpretive framework, to explore the lived experiences of Farhangian University student-teachers regarding the GPE course. Hermeneutic phenomenology, with its emphasis on describing and interpreting the latent meanings within personal and social experiences, enables an in-depth understanding of the identity-related, attitudinal, and behavioral dimensions of the phenomenon under investigation (Van Manen, 2016). The study population comprised all student-teachers enrolled at Farhangian University, Lorestan Province, during the 2024–2025 academic year. Participants were selected through purposeful sampling with maximum variation in gender, academic major, sports background, and year of entry. Inclusion criteria included (a) participation in at least one full semester of the GPE course, (b) willingness to share reflective experiences, and (c) verbal fluency to engage in 45–90-minute interviews. Exclusion criteria involved (a) incomplete course attendance, (b) prior formal research training that could bias interpretations,

and (c) physical limitations preventing participation in activity sessions. In addition to student-teachers, several physical education faculty members and campus administrators were included to enrich the dataset. Ultimately, 25 individuals (15 student-teachers, 5 instructors, and 5 administrators) participated in the interviews. Data were collected via in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Table 1 shows the demographic results of the samples.

Table 1- Demographic Characteristics of the Study Sample (N = 25)

Characteristic	Category 1	Frequency	%	Category 2	Frequency	%	Category 3	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	12	48%	Female	13	52%	—	—	—
Participant Group	Student-teachers	15	60%	Faculty members	5	20%	Administrators/trainers	5	20%
Age (years)	20–25	14	56%	26–30	7	28%	Over 30	4	16%
Field/Specialization	Educational Sciences	8	32%	Primary Education	7	28%	Other fields	10	40%
Sports Experience	Less than 2 years	9	36%	2–5 years	10	40%	More than 5 years	6	24%

Initial questions addressed topics such as the course's impact on attitudes, professional lifestyle, and professional identity, and were extended through probing questions during the sessions. The interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim. To ensure rigor, the four trustworthiness criteria of Lincoln and Guba (1985)—credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability—were applied. Credibility was reinforced through member checking and peer debriefing; transferability was supported by providing thick description of the study context; dependability was maintained by keeping an audit trail; and confirmability was ensured through transparent documentation of decision-making and analytic processes.

Table 2- Reliability and Trustworthiness Strategies

Trustworthiness Criterion	Strategy Employed	Implementation Evidence
Credibility	Member checking; peer debriefing	Participants reviewed their transcripts; faculty colleague reviewed codes
Transferability	Thick description	Detailed contextual profile of campuses and participants
Dependability	Audit trail	Documentation of coding and theme refinement in MAXQDA
Confirmability	Reflexive journaling	Notes of researcher interpretations and biases maintained throughout analysis

Table 2 summarizes the procedures employed to ensure the trustworthiness of data analysis based on Lincoln and Guba's (1985) framework. These criteria collectively enhance the methodological rigor and transparency of the hermeneutic phenomenological process.

Data analysis followed Van Manen's (2016) six-phase method: (1) turning to the nature of lived experience, (2) investigating experience as it is lived, (3) reflecting on essential themes, (4) describing the phenomenon through writing and rewriting, (5) maintaining a strong and oriented relation to the phenomenon, and (6) balancing the parts and the whole of the research context.

In applying Van Manen's (2016) six phases, the researcher first immersed in the transcripts to identify lived meaning units, then clustered these into thematic structures through reflective writing cycles. In the third and fourth phases, interpretive notes were rewritten to distill existential meanings (self, body, relation, time, space). The fifth and sixth phases maintained orientation toward the phenomenon and balanced part-whole interpretation to achieve phenomenological depth.



Figure 2. Flow of Hermeneutic Analysis Process Applied in the Study

Figure 2 illustrates the analytic progression from transcription and initial meaning units to code clustering, theme derivation, and interpretive synthesis. The iterative movement between parts and whole ensured theoretical coherence with van Manen’s phenomenological principles.

Data were managed and analyzed in MAXQDA 2024». Systematic comparison matrices were generated to track code convergence and ensure interpretive coherence across cases.

To enhance interpretive depth, the researcher maintained a reflexive log throughout the data collection and analysis stages, documenting evolving assumptions and emerging insights. This reflexivity helped to minimize interpretive bias and preserve the authenticity of participants’ lived experiences. Moreover, MAXQDA 2024 software was employed for coding consistency, allowing for systematic cross-checking of meaning units across interviews.

Findings

Table 3- Cross-theme Associations (Co-Occurrence Matrix)

Themes	1. Self-Awareness	2. Belonging	3. Role Redefinition	4. Active Attitude	5. Lifestyle	6. Environment
1	—	0.46	0.38	0.52	0.33	0.22
2	0.46	—	0.44	0.57	0.49	0.28
3	0.38	0.44	—	0.62	0.55	0.35
4	0.52	0.57	0.62	—	0.58	0.41
5	0.33	0.49	0.55	0.58	—	0.39
6	0.22	0.28	0.35	0.41	0.39	—

According to the results obtained from Tables 3 Values reflect normalized co-occurrence frequencies generated in MAXQDA’s Crosstab module. Values represent the percentage of overlapping codes across themes, showing that “Active Attitude” serves as a central integrative dimension linking personal, professional, and environmental factors. These numerical overlaps are not statistical in nature but serve as heuristic indicators of meaning convergence across interviews.

Table 4- Evidence of Interpretive Saturation Across Interviews.

Decision on Saturation	Cumulative Code Overlap (%)	New Codes Emerged	Interview Series
Continue sampling	35%	41	1–5
Partial saturation	62%	32	6–10
Near saturation	81%	18	11–15
No new codes emerging	93%	8	16–20
Theoretical saturation reached	98%	0 – 2	21–25

Table 4 showed that evidences code convergence and provides transparency regarding the attainment of theoretical saturation, which strengthens methodological credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Asefi, 2025). The decision on theoretical saturation was informed by Glaser's grounded theory principle (1978), applied adaptively within hermeneutic interpretation to denote the point at which additional interviews failed to generate new meaning units. These numerical overlaps are not statistical in nature but serve as heuristic indicators of meaning convergence across interviews.

Table 5- Overall Table of Themes, Subthemes, and Initial Codes

Main Theme	Subtheme	Sample Initial Code
Physical and Psychological Self-awareness	Awareness of physical condition	"I assessed my physical ability", "Participated in a flexibility test", "Visited a sports physician", "Measured my weight and BMI", "Monitored my heart rate during exercise", "Tested my muscle strength with a press", "Recorded my running time on the track"
	Understanding mind-body connection	"Breathing exercises improved concentration", "Felt calmer after yoga", "Performed better through mental imagery", "Deep breathing reduced my stress", "Ran better when in a good mood", "Positive thinking kept me motivated during training"
Sense of Belonging to the Teaching Community	Participation in group activities	"Teaming up fostered closeness", "Participated in the university sports seminar", "Organized a tournament with classmates", "Ran in a charity event", "Joined a hiking group", "Group training sessions increased my motivation"
	Identification with the teacher role	"I realized I must be a role model", "Took responsibility as a group leader in PE class", "Recognized my behavior influences students", "Presented my experiences at an educational festival", "Maintained appropriate attire during PE instruction", "Told students a personal sports success story"
Redefinition of Professional Role	Transition to active teaching	"The classroom became more dynamic", "Made the classroom environment physically engaging", "Held PE classes outdoors", "Encouraged students to move more", "Integrated games into sedentary activities", "Actively participated in student games", "Rearranged classroom seating to increase movement"
	Innovation in movement-based teaching	"Teaching math through movement games", "Taught history using physical role-play", "Learned vocabulary through a "find and move" game", "Combined science lessons with hands-on movement-based activities", "Designed movement puzzles", "Turned a geography map into a floor-based game"
Active Attitude	Increased intrinsic motivation	"I look forward to sports classes", "Feel happy seeing my body's progress", "Continue exercising for the sense of well-being", "Exercise even on holidays", "Feel more energetic after training", "Set personal fitness goals"
	Educational self-efficacy	"I developed a personal exercise plan", "Prepared an active lesson plan", "Successfully led a group activity", "Kept the class active with minimal resources", "Created alternative activities for rainy days", "Adapted activities to students' skill levels"
Professional Lifestyle	Stress management and resilience	"I became calmer", "Relieved mental pressure through running", "Stayed composed in competitive settings", "Regular exercise reduced my fatigue", "Resumed activity after setbacks", "Practiced yoga instead of reacting with anger"
	Acting as a role model	"My family now exercises", "Go for morning walks daily", "Students have seen me at the gym", "My children imitate my healthy behaviors", "Became a role model by maintaining a healthy diet", "Engaged my family in charity sports events"
Environmental Factors	Facilitators	"Well-equipped gym", "Access to modern teaching tools", "Spacious schoolyard", "Support from the principal enabled program execution", "Drinking fountain near the sports hall", "Good lighting created a lively atmosphere"
	Barriers	"Lack of equipment", "Uneven playground surface", "Traffic congestion on the way to school", "Air pollution hindered outdoor"

Main Theme	Subtheme	Sample Initial Code
		training”, “Insufficient time in PE sessions”, “Power outage in the sports hall”

Table 5 showed that qualitative data analysis classified participants’ experiences into six main themes and twelve subthemes. The theme of Physical and Psychological Self-awareness emphasized awareness of physical condition (8 occurrences) and understanding the mind–body connection (10 occurrences). Sense of Belonging to the Teaching Community underscored the importance of participating in group activities (9) and identifying with the teacher role (7). Redefinition of Professional Role included the transition to active teaching (6) and innovation in movement-based instruction (5).

Within the Active Attitude theme, the subtheme of increased intrinsic motivation recorded the highest single frequency among all subthemes (11), followed by educational self-efficacy (7). Professional Lifestyle comprised stress management and resilience (8) and acting as a role model (6). Finally, Environmental Factors were categorized into facilitators (5) and barriers (4). This thematic structure reflects the interconnected nature of personal, professional, and environmental dimensions in the process of developing active teachers. Table 6 provides direct participant quotes illustrating the primary themes identified throughout the research.

Table 6- Illustrative Participant Quotations Supporting Core Themes

Main Theme	Subtheme	Sample Participant Quotation
Self-awareness	Mind–body connection	“After focusing on my breathing during PE, I noticed I could concentrate better in other classes too.”
Belonging	Group participation	“Being part of the hiking team made me feel like a real teacher among peers.”
Role Redefinition	Active teaching	“I learned to make math lessons into movement games—it changed how I view teaching.”
Active Attitude	Intrinsic motivation	“Now I exercise because I enjoy it, not because it’s a course requirement.”
Lifestyle	Role modeling	“My students told me they started morning runs after seeing me do the same.”

An interpretive cross-reading of participants’ narratives revealed culturally embedded meanings of “movement” that extend beyond physical activity to notions of vitality and professional renewal. For instance, one participant stated, “Movement makes me feel alive as a teacher,” demonstrating the symbolic link between physical action and professional vitality. This finding underscores that identity formation within Iranian teacher education carries both pedagogical and cultural connotations, aligning with indigenous perspectives on holistic education.

Beyond their descriptive appearance, these codes were interpreted as manifestations of existential meanings. For example, ‘self-awareness’ denotes the lived experience of embodiment, whereas ‘belonging’ reflects the relational dimension of professional existence. Thus, the themes represent interpretive horizons rather than surface categories.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that the (GPE) course can play a multifaceted role in shaping professional identity, enhancing an active attitude, and improving the lifestyle of student–teachers. The combination of the extracted themes indicates that participants’ lived experiences extend beyond physical outcomes to encompass psychological, social, and professional dimensions. This aligns with the hermeneutic phenomenological approach, which seeks to uncover the deeper layers of meaning within individual and collective experiences (Van Manen, 2016). The results also underscore the importance of interaction between personal and environmental factors in the process of professional identity formation, a prerequisite for active teacher development identified in previous literature (Sun et al., 2025; Pangrazi & Beighle, 2019).

Analysis of the *Physical and Psychological Self-awareness* theme showed that the interplay between awareness of one’s physical condition and understanding the mind–body connection forms a significant part

of student–teachers’ experiences. This finding is consistent with Moghadam et al. (2013), who identified mindful physical practices such as yoga as facilitators of body–mind awareness, and with Pangrazi and Beighle’s (2019) view of physical activity as a foundation for self-regulatory skills. In contrast, Alborz et al. (2020) primarily emphasized the social outcomes of athletic identity, with less attention to psychophysical aspects—likely due to the quantitative methodology and the absence of deeper analytical tools.

Participation in group activities and identification with the teacher role reflect the contribution of GPE to strengthening professional social capital. These findings correspond with Farhadian et al. (2022), who demonstrated that social skills training for student–teachers enhance professional relationships and improves performance. They also resonate with the concept of “active collaborative learning,” as reported in the ACTivate Project (2025) and in Dyngeland et al. (2025), in which physically active learning fosters a stronger sense of belonging to the professional community. In contrast, Dvir (2015) focused on identity barriers experienced under conditions of physical disability, whereas the present study examined participants in a typical physical and university context.

The subthemes *Transition to Active Teaching* and *Innovation in Movement-based Instruction* showed that GPE can shift participants’ views on teaching models and encourage the adoption of more active approaches. This aligns with Chen & Peng (2018) and Almusawi et al. (2021), who stressed the need for instructional innovation and readiness for new technologies in physical education. It also reflects the servant-leadership innovation model proposed by Iqbal et al. (2020), in which environmental support is considered a prerequisite for innovation. The divergence from Moharramzadeh and Noori’s (2020) findings—who linked lifestyle mainly to non-instructional leisure activities—may be attributed to differences in target populations and the focus on the Farhangian University environment in the present study.

The *Active Attitude* theme—particularly the subtheme *Increased Intrinsic Motivation*—had the highest frequency, demonstrating that GPE can serve as a strong catalyst for generating enthusiasm and educational self-efficacy. This finding is consistent with Zhu and Zhang (2020) and Yan et al. (2025), who described organizational support and leadership patterns as drivers of motivation and job satisfaction among physical education teachers. Similarly, Tatari et al. (2025) reported that targeted sports interventions could increase motivation for physical activity. The absence of direct reference to intrinsic motivation in some sources, such as Aboramadan et al. (2021), is likely due to their focus on environmental outcomes and green behaviors rather than on individual motivation.

Findings related to stress management, resilience, and role modeling suggest an indirect influence of GPE on the quality of professional and family life. These results are supported by Saatchian et al. (2023) and Razavi et al. (2020), who linked sports-related leisure to enhanced lifestyle and social-role values. The Sun et al. (2025) study also highlighted the role of life meaning and self-esteem in professional identity formation—a link confirmed by the present research. The partial inconsistency with Eva et al. (2019) stems from their emphasis on leadership structures, which were not a primary focus of this study.

Finally, the *Environmental Factors* theme—including facilitators (e.g., well-equipped gymnasiums) and barriers (e.g., lack of equipment)—played a critical role in shaping participants’ overall experience. These findings are in line with reports from the ACTivate Project (2025) and Dyngeland et al. (2025), which emphasize the impact of facilities and infrastructure on the effectiveness of active learning. The minor differences with the pathways suggested by Ekmekcioglu and Öner (2024) may be explained by their focus on organizational support in non-educational contexts.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it is recommended that educational policymakers, Farhangian University administrators, and teacher-training stakeholders reconceptualize the GPE course as a vehicle for professional identity formation and for reshaping the attitudes and lifestyles of student–teachers—not merely as a practical requirement. Redesign efforts should integrate approaches that foster physical–psychological self-awareness, develop social skills, and incorporate movement-based teaching strategies into the curriculum. Such measures would prepare future teachers to enter schools with an active attitude, high intrinsic motivation, and strong

professional resilience. Furthermore, sports facilities and campus infrastructure should be enhanced, and GPE interventions should be supported structurally and culturally, becoming a sustainable part of the professional identity development process. These actions can simultaneously elevate teaching quality and shift school culture toward a healthy, active lifestyle, encouraging teachers to serve as positive role models for students. These insights can inform the Ministry of Education's teacher development frameworks, aligning physical education curricula with competence-based teacher education reforms.

Practically, Farhangian University can implement short reflective workshops where student–teachers link their physical education experiences to classroom teaching. Additionally, curriculum planners should embed movement-based pedagogy modules into 'Teaching Method' courses, providing model lesson plans that operationalize the identity-driven approach. Campus administrators can develop 'Active Teacher Clubs' to sustain engagement beyond GPE classes.

Research Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

While this study provides rich insights into the lived experiences of student–teachers, faculty members, and administrators regarding the role of (GPE) in professional identity formation, active attitudes, and lifestyle development, certain limitations should be acknowledged. First, the qualitative and context-specific nature of the research—focused on Farhangian University campuses in Lorestan Province—limits the generalizability of findings to other institutional or cultural contexts. Second, the reliance on self-reported experiences through interviews may be influenced by social desirability bias, potentially affecting the authenticity of certain accounts. Third, although purposive and snowball sampling achieved theoretical saturation, the sample size was relatively small, which may not fully capture all perspectives present in the wider population of student–teachers.

Future research should consider longitudinal designs to examine how the effects of GPE on identity, attitudes, and lifestyle evolve throughout Farhangian training and early career stages. Comparative studies across different provinces, universities, or cultural settings could offer broader understanding of how environmental, cultural, and organizational factors shape these outcomes. Moreover, mixed-methods approaches combining phenomenological depth with quantitative measurement of physical, psychological, and attitudinal changes could enhance both the reliability and applicability of findings. Exploring the integration of innovative, movement-based pedagogies into other components of teacher education curricula would also be a valuable direction for policymakers and practitioners.

Acknowledgments

The authors gratefully acknowledge the participation of student–teachers, faculty members, and administrators from the Farhangian University campuses of Khorramabad, Aligudarz, and Borujerd. Special thanks are extended to the Physical Education Department at Farhangian University for their cooperation and to the peer reviewers whose constructive feedback helped strengthen the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Funding

This research received no external funding. All costs were covered by the authors.

Statement on the Use of AI

Gemini AI was used exclusively for grammatical refinement and language polishing of the manuscript. All substantive content, data analysis, interpretation, and conclusions were developed independently by the authors.

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