

Physical Education as a Foundation for Grassroots Sport in Primary School in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

The importance of physical education in primary schools has been realised worldwide. It is through the teaching of Physical Education (PE) in primary schools that children have been exposed to play and sporting activities at grassroots level. Notably, the delivery of PE varies from one school to the other. Issues of availability of equipment and facilities, resource and assessment procedures influence the teaching of PE. The research set to develop an appreciation on the role and contribution of teaching PE as a foundation for skills development at primary school level amongst stakeholders, universities and colleges. A quantitative approach was used to gather information from participants that comprised teachers of primary schools on the role of PE. Stratified random sampling technique was used and participants were voluntarily selected while confidentiality of the collected data was ensured. Six females and five males of age 31 and above participated in the study. Findings from the questionnaire which targeted teachers point at resources and availability of expertise in schools. 90% of participants point at resources and availability of equipment in schools as a major drawback. On the other hand, 85% of respondents indicate challenges of competent teachers with expertise. Moreover, 100% of respondents allude to PE as a subject that is likely to develop the child holistically. Recommendations put forward were that of government availing both human and financial resources to schools so that PE programmes are implemented effectively. Furthermore, schools should explore ways in which teachers are empowered with innovative skills that will improve delivery strategies and community involvement thereby developing sport at grassroots level. There is a likelihood of having a sport-oriented nation if foundational skills are strongly cultivated.

Key words: physical education, primary school, educators, grassroots, sport development

INTRODUCTION

The education system in Zimbabwe comprises of three distinct levels, primary, secondary and tertiary learning. This structuring was done with a progressive and developmental mind. Primary education provides a foundation for all learning in a nation. Recently, Early Childhood Education (ECE) and kindergarten has found its place in the education structure in Zimbabwe and India respectively. In Zimbabwe, ECE provides a preparatory phase for motor skill development in the primary schools. The realisation of the role of primary education as a base for learning calls for a comprehensive curriculum that allows for a wholesome development of the child. The success of a nation's education system hinges on its foundation, thus primary education is very important. Physical education as a subject in the curriculum has the potential of developing and linking the child with the societal needs later in life.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Physical education (PE) is a broad subject that encompasses all aspects of human and maintenance development (Orunaboku & Ogulu, 2011). Curse, Jesse and Keay (2017) view PE as a holistic subject that develops the learner's physical, cognitive, social, affective and psychomotor skills. Research has revealed

that P.E. is considered as the only subject that is crucial for motor skill development in children (Masarykova, 2021). In the same vein, the introduction of PE activities is a cornerstone for childhood development (Roux,2020). Moreover, the mastery of P. E skills lay a foundation in the acquisition of prerequisite lifelong skills that are crucial in sport participation later in life (Kirk,2013). Notably, education becomes incomplete without the inclusion of PE in the curriculum (Roux, 2020; Masarykova,2021). The later allude to primary school educators as having a mammoth task of creating a learning environment that promotes high quality PE lessons with the aim of promoting sport at grassroots level (Roux, 2020)

Countries that have implemented physical education at grassroots level have realised its importance in sports development. Orunaboka & Ogulu (2011, pg. 138) aver that” today, the strength of nations is not judged by its wealth or military capacity but the position in which they are placed in sports, thus PE becomes an important subject at primary school level”. The benefits of physical education in primary schools can never be underestimated. Pope (2011) is of the opinion that the introduction of PE in primary schools has the potential of availing opportunities to experience sport. Notably, physical education programmes in school are treated as a foundation for sport in most South African schools (Hollander, 2017; Roux, 2020). Moreover, sport is viewed as a product of PE (Siedentop, 1990). This therefore, calls for a broader PE curriculum in which teaching of games and sport skills form the basis for children’s learning thus promoting involvement in sport participation later in life, (Siedentop, 1990; Kirk, 2013, Burnett, 2020). It has been argued that there is an overlap of PE and sport in the schools (Gallahue & Donnelly, 2003), this interrelatedness was further endorsed by South African School Sport Act (84 of 1996). According to the Act, PE becomes the precursor for participation in sport.

Participation in sport requires a comprehensive programme that begins at a tender age. Similarly, the Indians broadened their primary education to begin at kindergarten level where focus is on fundamental motor skill development (Arockiaraj, 2017).It has been observed that excelling in sport is a process that requires grooming and nurturing starting from five years orless to primary level (Orunaboka & Ogulu,2011; Adejumo, 2020). Supportively, Coakley (2001) remarks that children should be insulated rather isolated. The later further adds to say talent identification should be done at primary level while pupils are actively involved in PE, thus the catch them young concept that is emphasised in grassroots sport. Grassroots sport by definition begins at five years or less as long as pupils are able to acquire skill (Russel, 2013). Research indicate that these are primary school going children who are energetic and amenable to skill acquisition as is the case in South Africa, Nigeria and Zimbabwe(Roux, 2020; Orunaboka & Ogulu, 2011; Mudekunya & Sithole, 2011). Moreover, in Nigeria it was observed that most of children attend primary education thus learning PE affords them the opportunity to acquire skills that could be of use later in life (Orunaboka & Ogulu,2011). Survey conducted indicate that most primary schools have playgrounds where PE lessons are conducted and all form of play (Orunaboka & Ogulu, 2011; Roux, 2020).Conversely, Gabriel (2013) cited in Daniel et al. (2022) reports that “although most schools in Africa have open pieces of grounds that serve as multi-purpose sport fields, the condition of these fields is usually in poor states. Many of such fields are sloppy, uneven, overgrown or unturned, which render them less suitable in inclement weather”. On the other hand, Green (2005) reiterates that schools receive funding to support grassroots sport activities thus a fertile ground for mass participation. Thus, PE becomes the base for acquisition of skills and an extension of the society. Eady (1993)’s pyramid of sport development begins with the foundation stage where primary school children are taught basic movement skills required in the mass participation stage, thus the catch them young approach at grassroots level. It is at this level that pupils acquire skills that are needed at the second and third level of the sport development pyramid. Sport development is about facilitating opportunities for participation in sport (Task et al., 2014). On the other hand, Sotiriadou, Shilbury & Quick (2008.p.247) contend that sport development “is a process where effective opportunities, process, systems and structures are set up to enable people or particular groups and areas to take part in sport and recreation or improve their performances to whatever level they desire’

The role of PE as a foundation of sport is emphasised by Murdoch (1990)'s five distinct models that looks at the contribution of PE in primary schools and sport development. The five models include substitution, versus, reinforcement, sequential and integration (Pope, 2011). Subsequently, the substitution model looks at sport and PE lessons as closely related. The underlying perception being that if pupils are engaged in a PE lesson some people might assume its sport (Pope, 2011; Currie, 1990). New Zealand is one country that has adopted the concept through Kiwi sport, PE lesson resemble sport (Currie, 1990). On the other hand, the versus model differentiates PE from sport. Put clearly, PE and sports supplements each other though developing and perfecting skills in various ball games (Department of Education 1980; Flint off, 2010). The reinforcement model looks at PE and sport as reciprocally in nature (Pope, 2011). Furthermore, Smith (1974, pg. 59) posits that 'although PE and sport may have different ends, their means will be shared and a working relationship between the two can be established for the benefit of sports and not the detrimental of PE'. In this regard PE lessons should include components of sports and games during delivery (Hardman & Marshall, 2006; Donovan et al., 2006). Moreover, the sequence model looks at PE as an introductory to sport participation (Talbot, 1988; Taggart, 1988; Kirk & Gorely, 2000; Pope, 2011). Lastly, the integration model which has been adopted by countries such New Zealand advocates for policy and practice change, putting pupils' need first, and involvement of stakeholders for the betterment of PE delivery in schools with the aim of promoting sport at grassroots level (Pope, 2011).

Aluko (2011) propounds that children who engage in a variety of movement activities in PE lesson are likely to experience play which is a necessary ingredient in skill acquisition. Furthermore, play develops the child's inner understanding enabling the child to participate in social activities and relate well with the outer world even outside the school environment (Aluko, 2011; Taggart, 2003). Through play the child's motor skills are perfected. Aluko (2011) reiterates that primary learning is a period that shapes the child's life. Suggestively, Ojeme (2010) maintains that sports emanate from PE and promoting PE at foundation level helps develop future athletes capable of having a career in life. Similarly, Adedeji (1985) classified play into two categories directive and non-directive. Directive play involves situations where children as they play wish to be like high profile athletes in various disciplines. g., JJ Okocha. Non-directive is an intrinsic drive from the child to do better (Orunaboka & Ogulu, 2011). To sum it, Mudekunye & Sithole (2011) contend that the subject PE is important to primary school children because of the need to play therefore, it has to be taught.

The teaching of physical education requires teachers that are knowledgeable, skilled, dedicated and interested in professional growth (Orunaboka & Ogulu, 2011). The later observe that for the success of PE programmes schools should provide adequate equipment and facilities and teachers should teach and assess both theory and practical. However, Nhamo (2012) opines that the teaching of PE is affected by so many barriers. There are some indications that in Zimbabwe the status of PE in school varies from one school to the other, and the commitment of teachers as well (Gouws et al., 2020; Amusa, Toriola & Onyewandume, 1999; Mudekunye & Sithole, 2012). Some primary schools in Zimbabwe lack reading material, while teachers in some instances struggle to come up with relevant activities and more so detailed schemes of work, with very little equipment to support teaching of PE (Nhamo, 2012). Supportively, while all primary teachers do PE during their training, this does not make them specialists in the subject as they lack necessary competencies to teach (Nhamo & Swazi, 2014; Nziramasanga, 1999). To add on, Beddoes et al. (2014) buttress the point to say that in some countries primary school teachers are inadequately or inappropriately prepared to teach PE. In the same vein, a study by Morgan & Bourke (2008) maintain that classroom teachers require more extensive teacher training in PE with greater exposure to teaching the subject adequately. Daniel et al., (2022) postulate that it takes a competent teacher to development a learner holistically. Research has demonstrated that teachers who lack subject mastery find it difficult to handle PE lessons effectively (Morgan & Bourke, 2008; Daniel et al., 2022). Subsequently, other challenges observed in South Africa and Ghana, were student –teacher ratio was too big, lack of proper facilities and over

emphasise on assessment when teachers are not familiar with Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS)(Roux, 2020; Quay, 2014). The increase in class size has worsened the problem as teachers are not able to handle large numbers in PE besides lack of expertise (Daniel et al., 2022.) Furthermore, the Zimbabwe New Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary schools 2015-2022, introduced Continuous Assessment Learning Activities (CALA) earmarked at improving quality access to education as well as assisting learners with diverse learning and skill acquisition (Zimbabwe MoPSE, 2016; Gasva & Phiri, 2020). Thus, at this point PE became an examinable subject after the launch of the new curriculum in 2016 (Gouws et al., 2020).

The afore mentioned evidence surrounding the positive impact that PE has prompted this study to demystify challenges that stakeholders, universities and colleges might have around physical education teaching in primary in schools.

Aim

The study aims at developing an appreciation on the role and contribution of teaching PE as a foundation for skills development at primary school level amongst stakeholders, colleges and universities

Research questions

1. Establish the contributions of teaching physical education in primary schools
2. Examine the delivery strategies, and
3. Determine challenges posed in the teaching of PE at primary school's level

METHODOLOGY

The study utilised a questionnaire to collect quantitative data on the current thinking around physical education in schools amongst stakeholders, universities and colleges. Closed ended questions were designed to solicit information from primary trained physical education teachers. The questions for the questionnaire were adopted and adapted from literature review and Orunaboka & Ogulu (2011). The questionnaire had two parts in which demographic information (questions 1-4)was sought among participants their age, sex, qualifications and number of teaching experience years. The other part had 14-itemquestions (5-18) designed to collect data regarding views on the teaching of PE in Primary schools as a foundation for grassroots sport. Each respondent answered the same questions by ticking the choices given. Choices were designed based on the five-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4) Neutral (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree-(1). Likert scale is assumably reliable when dealing with issues of attitudes in research (Stockmer, 2019).This was done so that stakeholders, universities, colleges and schools could have a rethink on the current status of physical education in schools.

The population of this research comprised of all primary schools in Bulawayo. Bulawayo Metropolitan Province has three distinct educational districts. Clustering technique allowed for the use of five schools in one district. Permission was sought from Bulawayo Education Officers and selected schools and physical education teachers were approached for participation. With the approval of the head of each school, PE teachers were used in this study. Stratified random sampling technique was used to come up with eleven teachers that voluntarily answered the questionnaire. The technique allowed the researcher to deal with teachers that have background information on the topic understudy. Ethical issues were addressed prior to answering the questions.

Data analysis

Data was analysed descriptively using SPSS version 27 together with parametric statistics of mean and

standard deviation, and further presented in tables for easy interpretation. The content validity of the questionnaire items was established by relating the content of each question to the literature. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha. Creswell (2014) avers that Cronbach’s Alpha index estimates the internal consistency by determining how the questions in the instrument relates to each other. The degree of internal consistency of the questionnaire gave a Cronbach Alpha coefficient index of 0.85. Hence the questionnaire items were deemed to be internally consistent and suitable for use in this study.

FINDINGS

The demographic data of participants was sought in terms of the following variables, gender, age, educational qualification and working experience. The biographical data of eleven participants is tabulated in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Demographic information of participants

	n	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	5	45.5
Female	6	54.5
Total	11	100%
Age range		
31-35years	2	18.2
36-40 years	4	36.4
>41	5	45.4
Total	11	100%
Educational qualification		
Certificate in Education	1	9
Diploma and Degree in Physical Education and Sport	10	91
Total	11	100%
Teaching experience		
>5years	2	18
<5years	1	9
>10 years	8	73
Total	11	100%

Six females and five males whose age ranged from 31years and above participated in this study. From the data collected only one(9%) of participants had a Certificate in education, while ten (91%) had both Diploma in education and a Degree in Physical education and Sport. From the information in table 1above, there is a possibility to assume that participants have the prerequisite knowledge and policy issues relating to teaching PE in primary schools. There were two (18%) participants who had>5 years, one (9%) had<5years while eight (73%) had >10years of teaching experience (Table1).

Table 2: Questionnaire Analysis

The mean scores for each item on the questionnaire were calculated. A mean >3.00 indicate that participants agree with the given statements while <3 a disagreement (see Table 2 below). The questions had a mean

score ranging from 1.64 to 5(see Table 2 below).

Question	S A (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	MEAN	Standard Deviation
5. Physical education develops children holistically	100	–	–	–	–	5	0
6. Teaching PE at primary level gives pupils the opportunity to acquire basic movement skills	91	0	0	0	9	4.64	1.20
7. In Zimbabwe all pupils go through primary education	46	27	0	27	0	3.91	1.30
8. PE lessons resemble sport	46	27	0	27	0	3.91	1.30
9. Primary school pupils grasps concepts easily	36	36	18	10	0	4	1.00
10. Learning through play makes pupils enjoy PE	100	0	0	0	0	5	0
11. Using a variety of PE delivery strategies caters for individual differences in skill mastery amongst pupils	91	9	0	0	0	4.90	0.30
12. Primary school teachers are able to teach PE lessons	18	18	18	28	18	2.91	1.45
13. As pupils learn PE, talent is identified, nurtured and developed for the future	36	46	9	0	9	4	1.18
14. Primary schools are fertile grounds for grassroots sport	91	9	0	0	0	4.90	0.30
15. Schools have adequate facilities and equipment for teaching PE.	0	0	10	45	45	1.64	0.64
16. PE lessons in primary schools consists of theory and practice	36	18	36	10	0	3.82	1.08
17. Making PE an examinable subject improves its status	64	9	0	27	0	4.09	1.38
18. CALA in PE helps teachers monitor pupils' skill development	27	27	19	27	0	3.55	1.21

Key: SA-Strongly agree, A-Agree, Neutral, D-Disagree, SD- Strongly disagree

DISCUSSION

There was a 100% response rate with a mean score of 5 on the question ‘physical education develops children holistically’ It would seem participants agree on the role physical education play amongst primary school children. A similar establishment was noted by Curse, Jesse & Key (2017 and Masarykova (2021) where PE is viewed as a holistic and crucial subject responsible for development of learners. As rightly put, PE is an all-encompassing subject (Orunaboku & Ogulu,2011).There were 91% and 9% participants with a mean of 4.64(>3.0)who agree and disagree that teaching PE gives pupil the opportunity to acquire basic movement skills respectively (Table 2above question 6). The findings are in line with what Orunaboku & Ogulu (2017), Kirk (2013) and Roux (2020) observed. There is a likelihood of mastery of crucial skills during PE lessons these might be useful in other sporting activities later in life.

Seventy-three percent of the respondents agree that in Zimbabwe children attend primary education while 27% thought otherwise and a mean score of 3.91 with a SD of 1.30. It would seem the majority of children have access to primary school education implying that teaching PE maybe beneficial at this stage. Of interest however, is the Nigerian setup which is almost similar (Orunaboku & Ogulu, 2017). The question on learning PE through play had a 100% response rate with a mean of 5 (question 10 in Table 2). There is a widely held view that as children play their skills are perfected. Research findings by Aluko (2011) and Taggart (2003) might imply that lack of play is likely to affect the child's social development.

As can be seen from the table above, 82%, 9% and 9% participants agreed, disagreed and some remained neutral on the fact that as children learn PE talent is identified, nurtured and developed respectively. Similarly, a mean score of 4 and SD 1.18 was recorded. It would seem that most respondents agree that as pupils learn PE talent is identified and nurtured accordingly. The findings of this research are in line with what Coakley (2001) observed grassroot sport begins at an early age. This could however, imply that children who were not exposed to PE at primary level might fail to showcase their areas of strengths in terms of skill execution. Furthermore, there is a likelihood of affecting their sport career development as well as interaction patterns outside school environment and worldwide. There is a widely held view that the 'catch them young' concept is the foundation for grass root sport and this might be possible if PE is part of primary education curriculum.

A total of 91% with a mean response of 4.90 (which is >3.00) and SD of 0.30 participants strongly agree that PE in Primary Schools is a fertile ground for grass roots sports (question 14 in table above). It would seem that teaching PE at primary level is likely to develop sport at grassroots level. A similar establishment was observed by Coakley (2001) Orunaboka & Ogulu (2011); Green (2005) and Adejumo (2020).

There were 36%, 18% and 46% participants who agreed, were neutral and disagreed with the statement that teachers in Primary schools are able to teach PE lessons respectively. It would appear that though primary training institutions teach PE to students' trainees, they are not comfortable to teach PE. A figure of 46% and 36% disagree and agree might imply that teachers are not equipped with adequate skills to handle PE lessons after graduation. Nhamo (2012) had the same establishment in which teachers failed to come up with relevant PE activities. There is a widely held view that competent teachers are very productive in imparting skills and developing pupils holistically (Daniel et al., 2022). The findings of this study are in line with what Nhamo & Muswazi (2014); Nhamo (2012), Beddoes et al. (2014) and Nziramasanga (1999) established.

It is important to note that, 90% and 10% participant disagreed and agreed respectively that schools have adequate facilities and equipment for teaching PE. The mean score of 1.64 (<3.00) and a standard deviation of 0.64 shows a great disparity of inadequacy of relevant infrastructure and equipment for the effective delivery of PE lessons in schools. There is a widely held view that teaching PE requires relevant material, expertise and friendly environment, without adequate resources learning is restricted. There is also a possibility of affecting the wholesome development of the child as alluded to by Daniel et al. (2022). This might also imply that skill acquisition is likely to be affected as pupils lack basic infrastructure for a foundation at grassroots level. A similar establishment was noted by Nhamo (2012) where schools lack basic equipment to support learning of PE

CONCLUSION

The study has shown the importance of teaching physical education at primary level. The research has also established that teaching physical education at primary level has the potential of developing the child holistically thereby empowering them with societal needs. A mean score of 5 (>3) SD of 0 and 100% response rate from participants sum it all. The implication of this is that children who are not taught physical education at primary level might lag behind in terms of growth, and latter fail to integrate well within the

community. The second major finding was the inclusion of play during teaching and learning of PE. Generally, it would seem that the environment and delivery strategies that teachers use in PE lessons makes children relax and enjoy what they are doing. This has the possibility of giving children the opportunity of showcasing their skills, identify talent and seemingly place them accordingly. The mean score of 4(>3) and 4.90(>3) and SD of 1.18 and 0.30 respectively may seemingly reinforces that teaching PE in primary schools might be a foundation for grass root sport development. Three significant findings that emerged from the study are lack of equipment and specialist teachers to handle PE lessons and having the majority of pupils accessing primary education. There is a widely held view that sports emanate from PE and teaching PE equips children with foundational skills that could be used later in life.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the study. In general, it seems the curriculum is incomplete without the inclusion of Physical education. This observation provides an important insight to the government which may wish to develop sport and thus, a need to provide necessary resource for the betterment of the country's sporting development. Taken together these findings may suggest the role of PE in promoting grass root sport through the concept of catching them young. Primary school children by virtue of their age easily master skills and in Zimbabwe the majority go through primary school education.

Recommendations put forward to the Ministry is that of making teaching of physical education compulsory at primary level starting from Early Childhood Development (ECD) in Zimbabwe. Secondly, to the school heads, PE as a subject should be conducted in a friendly environment with relevant resources. Thirdly, primary teacher training colleges in Zimbabwe to revisit their training strategies so as to produce a complete teacher capable of teaching all subjects. Lastly, some teachers could be retrained and specialise in physical education.

LIMITATIONS

The study has few potential limitations. Nonetheless, these results must be interpreted with caution and a number of limitations should be borne in mind. The study could not cover a wider area due to financial resources thus it was confined to one district which could have a limited number of PE teachers and thus a sample of eleven participants was used. As a result, findings of this research might not be generalised to other districts and provinces in Zimbabwe.

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