

*Full Length Research Paper*

# **Challenges in promoting physical education and sport activities in Zimbabwean primary and secondary schools**

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**Physical activity specifically in relation to Physical Education (PE) forms a crucial part of total education of primary and secondary school learners. The aim of this paper is to explore various challenges in promoting PE and sport activities in Zimbabwean primary and secondary schools. This paper reviewed and content examined curriculum documents for the determination and identification of the challenges of teaching PE in Zimbabwean primary and secondary schools as well as possible solutions for the identified challenges. Content breakdown identified main thematic areas which can clarify the challenges educators face in teaching PE in various Zimbabwean schools. There is need to be an increase in the knowledge of the teachers and the learners, and to see the important benefits of PE.**

**Key words:** Physical learning, primary and secondary schools, sport activities.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Physical activity (PA) specifically in relation to Physical Education (PE) forms a crucial part of total education of primary and secondary school learners (Holdstock, 1991). It enables them to realise their mind-body-soul potential. It creates the capacity for a child to have the ability to seek victory while managing defeat and to become citizens of the world without foregoing the citizenship of their own country (Holdstock, 1991). PE assists learners to find their own solutions for their physical movement and PA problems, and it is recognised worldwide as being extremely important in the

school environment (Wuest and Bucher, 1995; Theodoulides and Armour, 2001; Bailey et al., 2009).

For a growing number of children, school is the main environment for participating in PA through either PE school programs or after-school activities (Musangeya et al., 2000). It is well-established that regular participation in PA (especially in relation to children) ensures a longer and better quality of life, as well as a decrease in the probability of contracting a variety of diseases such as coronary heart disease and obesity (Musangeya et al., 2000; Góis Junior, 2014). There are however a number

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of challenges that PE faces, which include general attitudes of the children, discipline, class sizes as well as resources, and level of support. PE is seen as a frill and not a priority, and as a consequence children become disinterested and do not treat it with the relevant respect. The situation, especially in developing countries seems bleak, and we may not see PE in the school system within the next few years (Musangeya et al., 2000).

The teaching of PE and sport in Zimbabwe specifically seems to be suffering from both local and global historical influences. Zimbabwe went through three major periods in its political transition to independence (World Health Organization, 1998; Sallis et al., 2012). These included indigenous period, colonial period and post-colonial period. As political transitions manifested, so did evolution of PE and sport (Sallis et al., 2012). Like any other African country, PE and sport in the indigenous period was dominated by PA embedded in everyday activities such as hunting and gathering of fruits. However, swimming was also done in rivers as past time PA and also for survival reasons (Sallis et al., 2012). The argument is that PE and sport was not systematically structured and planned whilst other scholars disagree suggesting that the activities were structured in the African context. It is the protection of the values and ethics inherent in indigenous knowledge that African scholars fear could be eroded if they refer to the period of the indigenous game as primitive and to the games as unstructured (Sallis et al., 2012). What is apparent though is that the subject of PE and sport was not included in the curriculum for African primary and secondary school learners in both the indigenous era and the colonial period (Sallis et al., 2012).

In the colonial period, Africans in Zimbabwe participated in association sport in the form of soccer and athletics. A few other sports regarded as 'elite' were preserved for the colonial master's children; they adopted a PE curriculum that closely resembles that of the British. Africans continued with their indigenous games outside the schooling system and association sport in companies such as mines. The privileged Africans, enrolled in mission schools would participate in sport for the purpose of maintaining good hygiene and orderliness (Sallis et al., 2012). The 20th century saw the development of association sport in Zimbabwe with a very few occasions of competition between a whites only soccer team and blacks only soccer team (Sallis et al., 2012).

On attainment of independence in 1980, multi-racial sport was introduced to the amusement of all the people in the country and world, as Zimbabwe could now be allowed to compete at the Olympic Games. This came along with the introduction of the New Curriculum which promoted reconciliation, multi-racial sport and an inclusive and relevant education (Sallis et al., 2012). The subject PE and Sport was introduced as a co-curricular activity and not as main and examinable one. However, physical participation continued in the schools though

with inadequate human resources among other challenges (Sallis et al., 2012).

It was not until 2016 that PE, sport and mass displays was introduced as a priority and examinable subject in the primary and secondary school curriculum of Zimbabwe. The launching of the new curriculum was marred by shortage of resources and until now, the status of the subject is not known prompting a research into the challenges being faced to successfully position PE, sport and mass display (Sallis et al., 2012).

The aim of the paper is to investigate challenges in promoting PE and sport activities in Zimbabwean primary and secondary schools. Due to the aforementioned evidence surrounding the positive impact that PE has, not only from a health point of view, but also a psychological point of view, and the lack of understanding that exists (especially in developing countries) it seems crucial to investigate the challenges that exist to promote PE in a developing country such as Zimbabwe.

## METHODOLOGY

This paper reviewed the content analysis of the curriculum document, relevant literature and policies for the purposes of identifying the challenges of teaching PE in Zimbabwean secondary schools and also recommended possible solutions to the identified challenges.

### Inclusion criteria

The inclusion criteria for this review paper were (a) Zimbabwe Schools Physical Activity; (b) Zimbabwe Schools Physical Education; (c) Zimbabwe Schools Sport; (d) Zimbabwe primary and secondary school learners of Physical Education; (e) African Countries Physical Education; and (f) available studies done and completed in English.

### Exclusion criteria

The exclusion criteria for this review were (a) Developed Countries Physical Activity; (b) Developed Countries Physical Education; (c) Western Countries Physical Education. We conducted 20 searches, out of which we identified 13 articles according to the inclusion criteria relevant to this review (limited research available).

## RESULTS

This review and content analysis led to the following main thematic areas which can explain the challenge educators face in teaching PE in Zimbabwean secondary schools. According to Sallis et al. (2012) and Egan et al. (2019) to help children develop the knowledge, skills and character, they need PE which is essential to build a physically active life. The status of PE in Zimbabwe varies from one school to another, as some schools have a high status as it reflects on their school timetable, where other schools have a low status as it is almost

non-existent (Musangeya et al., 2000). With this said, the aim of the present paper was to identify challenges of teaching PE in Zimbabwean secondary schools and also recommend possible solutions to the identified challenges. The main challenges that were identified were firstly, that PE facilities and equipment particularly in the rural, farming and high density areas are insufficient and inadequate (Nziramasanga, 1999). Two other challenges that were identified are the syllabus and the fact that it is a non-exam subject. The last challenges that were identified were the teacher's attitude toward physical education and the implications it has on the learner's attitude.

## DISCUSSION

### Infrastructures and equipment

The main reason for the lack of PE infrastructure and equipment is that there is little financial provision or too little support for the development of these programmes (Nziramasanga, 1999; Nhamo and Muswazi, 2014). Research conducted by the Nziramasanga (1999) commission of inquiry into education and training in Zimbabwe revealed that most PE and sport facilities in primary schools especially in rural, farming areas and high density suburbs are substandard and inadequate. This is a great concern, as this has been found to also influence the development of a PE syllabus (Musangeya et al., 2000), with this said, PE syllabus was identified as the second challenge of teaching PE.

### Syllabus

It was found that some of the schools, did not even have a copy of a PE syllabus or teaching materials, which made it difficult and frustrating to teach as the teacher does not know what is expected in the subject, what to teach and at what level of education (Nhamo and Muswazi, 2014). According to Katzenellenbogen (1999), some teachers are committed in relevant, enriching, progressively planned, dynamic taught programmes to learners, whereas others interpret PE in a negative light, where learners have to run and keep busy. PE is considered as a non-productive activity, and is seen as a less important for your future, as you cannot build a career on it. Although there is overwhelming evidence that you can make money out of sport, many regions of the world still believe that the other academic subjects are the future (Mudekunya and Sithole, 2012).

According to Mudekunya and Sithole (2012), Mathematics and English are seen as useful subjects, as the students are equipped to solve problems which they could not solve beforehand, whereas PE is seen as lacking.

### Non-exam subject

The third challenge of teaching PE is that it is not an examinable subject (Rathedi, 1997). The reason for this challenge, is that PE is not compulsory in most countries worldwide including Zimbabwe (It is now compulsory and examinable since 2016 but still lacking resources). The first PE, sport and mass display exam was written in November 2018), because it was believed not to be an important academic subject (Nhamo and Muswazi, 2014). This is in contrast to Mudekunya and Sithole (2012), which found that learners doing PE and which is physically active had a higher result on their tests, were less absent from school and were more discipline at school. The problem is that teachers see PE only as a physical and not an intellectual activity (Amusa et al., 1999).

### Teacher's attitude

The fourth challenge of teaching PE, is that some teachers have a negative attitude towards PE, as they do not have the knowledge to teach it and do not understand the positive benefits related to the subject (Musangeya et al., 2000; Mudekunya and Sithole, 2012; ACSM, 2014). Furthermore, it is seen as a waste of time in comparison to academic subjects (Mudekunya and Sithole, 2012).

The final challenge is that there is a misconception about PE. There are people that believe that PE is for "dull" learners and the teachers teaching PE are also classified as "dull". The reason for this is that these people only see the physical component and not the intellectual, social and emotional part of PE (Nhamo and Muswazi, 2014). Another misconception is that girls can develop unattractive muscles and also make them unattractive (Nhamo and Muswazi, 2014). The other misconception is that it is linked to misbehavior, and that a learner will need to do PE for punishment (Nhamo and Muswazi, 2014).

In relation to the challenges mentioned, it is clear that a mind shift is required and to educate the teachers and learners on the importance and benefits of PE.

## Conclusion

It can be concluded that PE in Zimbabwe's schools is affected by negative challenges, where most are interlinked. The challenges include PE equipment and infrastructure, PE teacher's negative attitudes due to the syllabus and lack of knowledge misconceptions regarding PE.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Minister of Education should keep PE compulsory (it

is already compulsory since 2016), assist with finances with facilities and equipment and assist the schools to interpret and implement the newly developed PE syllabus in Zimbabwe, which will change the negative attitudes of the teachers. This will also increase the knowledge of the teachers and the learners, and to see the important benefits of PE, excluding the social, emotional and academic benefits; it can assist in reducing lifestyle or non-communicable diseases such as cardiometabolic, stress, anxiety and depression, furthermore, reduce blood pressure and maintain or lose weight in school children (Nhamo and Muswasi, 2014; ACSM, 2014).

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## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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