

# Primary School Physical Education Instruction. What are Teachers Doing?

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## Abstract

This study sought to evaluate the implementation of physical education policy by primary school teachers in Mashonaland West province of Zimbabwe. A descriptive survey was applied to collect data from a cluster sample of 310 primary school teachers from Zvimba, Makonde and Kariba Districts in Mashonaland West Province. Questionnaires and focused group discussions were used to capture teachers' views. Circulars, class timetables and schemes of work were analysed for documentary evidence. The study revealed that; teachers were not instructing children in physical education as required by Regional Director Circular Number 15 of 2005 point (3, 1) which require physical education to be compulsory. Teachers' instruction was more on a voluntary basis rather than compulsory. Time for physical education was used to complete mathematics homework or teach examinable subjects. Teachers ranked physical education at the bottom of their subject priority list. In some schools physical education resource teachers took children for sports during the time for physical education leaving teachers to complete planning, scheming and marking. Factors affecting the teaching of physical education included: lack of teacher expertise, no textbook or teachers' guides for physical education. Teachers consider physical education as sport. The study recommends, resource teachers re-orientation with emphasis in them assisting teachers not relieving them their physical education instructional responsibilities. Physical education questions can be included in the content examination papers to encourage teachers to teach the theory part of physical education. Cluster workshops and demonstration lessons on physical education instruction for teachers are encouraged. Replication of study to establish the physical education teaching situation nationwide is strongly recommended for feedback to the Ministry of Education Sport and Culture.

**Keywords:** physical education, instruction, primary school teachers

## Introduction

When Primary School children are asked to name subjects they are doing, they can state English, Social Studies, Environmental Science, Religious Studies and Moral Education. They will rarely include physical education. This observation implies that, from the child's perception and knowledge of the actual curriculum physical education is not one of the school subjects. The absence of physical education or its sidelining contradicts the contents of the Secretary's circular minute number 2 of 1994 point 11, which states that, "Physical Education is one of the subjects of the school curriculum whilst sport is dealt with during extra or co-curricular activities." The unsynchronized situation motivated the current study to evaluate the teaching of physical education in primary schools. This is a critical teacher variable for the implementation of any instructional policy in schools.

There are different angles from which to consider curriculum. According to Bishop (1985), curriculum refers to any experiences that the child acquires within the school environment. This view covers the intended, actual and hidden curriculum. From the Secretary's Circular (1994), physical education is part of the intended primary school curriculum. According to Gatawa (1990:50) curriculum evaluation is the process of defining, obtaining and using relevant information for decision making. It is concerned with the identification of deficiencies in the implementation of syllabus content for the purpose of effecting revision and improvement.

Nixon and Jewett (1980), regard physical education as the moral, social, psychological and physical activities. This is much more than the observable action, it also includes cognitive aspects such as the development of personality and self realization, alleviation of social stress and promotion of social interaction. It should be noted that, physical education is not sporting. Unfortunately sporting which is the observable end result of physical education the focal point in schools. Sporting is traced to Athens in Greece. Its cardinal indicative function was the development of the mind, spirit and body. Kanhukamwe (2000) explains that the curriculum was entirely military training. In Africa, the Genesis of physical education was in Egypt.

In Zimbabwe, formal physical education can be traced to the army and police. It took the form of drills for physical development, conformity and loyalty. It incorporated cognitive and affective aspects though the main emphasis was on drill (Musangeya et al, 2000). In schools physical education took the form of physical training (P.T). It was on every class timetable in primary schools and each teacher was responsible for his/her pupils.

The Ministry of Education in Zimbabwe acknowledged the need for physical in the school curriculum

after independence and the Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) produced the first Physical Education Syllabus in 1994. The handbook for school heads (1993:6) accorded physical education one hour on the primary school timetable. To compliment the initiative, teacher –training curriculum included physical education in the primary school teacher-training curriculum program as an applied subject. At secondary school level, Teachers' colleges like Hillside Teachers' College offered physical education as a main subject. The only disappointing observation is that, student teachers who majored in physical education were those who would have failed to secure places in academic subject areas (Nziramasanga's commission report 1999:363). Such student teacher selection criterion tended to sideline physical education, it was not among the main subject areas, hence had limited chances of gaining recognition in teacher training.

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

The researcher's interest in educational policy implementation motivated him to evaluate the teaching of physical education because it is a compulsory subject imposed on teachers through the Secretary's Circular Minute Number 2 of 1994. In Zimbabwe, it is the Ministry of Education Sport and Culture's mandate to promote physical education. No such evaluation has been carried out in Zimbabwe, specifically Mashonaland West Province. The problem focuses the study on the teacher variable. It cannot be ignored because a wide gap between the intended and actual physical education curriculum affects pupils' social, moral intellectual and physical development. These are key result areas of any serious primary school, which aims for total development of the child.

### **Research Questions**

The scenario calls for answers to the following pertinent questions:

1. What is the nature of physical education instruction in primary schools?
2. What factors contribute to the nature of physical education instruction?
3. How can physical education instruction be improved in primary schools?

### **Significance of the study**

This study deserves recognition on the following grounds: First it seeks to improve the instruction of physical education in primary schools. Secondly, it is a source of feedback to educational policy designers on the implementation of the Secretary's Circular Minute Number 2 of 1994 already alluded to. Being one of the few, if not the first, studies on the instruction of physical education in primary schools, the study contributes to literature on physical education and is a source of insights for further research in physical education instruction.

### **Literature Review**

Curriculum experts like Hewes (1979) and Sternhouse (1975) advocate for a functional decentralized curriculum. This perception is debatable in Zimbabwe, which uses a centralized education system guided by centralized syllabuses, teacher training and examinations system.

The Curriculum Development Unit (C.D.U), whose task is to structure and approve school syllabuses, considers physical education as a practical subject (Musangeya et al, 2006). Syllabuses for teachers' colleges are approved by the department of Teacher Education at the University of Zimbabwe. A critical eye can identify two professional boards, Curriculum Development Unit and Department of Teacher Education crafting a physical education syllabus for children they have limited knowledge about, to be implemented by teachers that they did not consult. The argument is not for or against a centralized school curriculum but to show the marginalized position of the teacher during curriculum planning as a basis for an objective assessment of factors influencing his/her role at the implementation stage. The second Millennium Development Goal (MDG) that Zimbabwe intends to achieve (provision of primary education) is based on the understanding that, education is a basic human right. From this angle, Machingaidze's (2005), Director's Circular Number 15, classified physical education as a human right. It justifies physical education instruction on the basis of its contribution to the child's physical fitness, health, moral and social development. The sport component is appraised for its contribution to the promotion of traditional games.

The subject of this study is physical education (P.E) and not sport. To synchronize the reader and researcher's perception, Musangeya et al (2000:74) Versus Model is ideal. It identifies attributes of each end of the Physical Education and Sport role as illustrated in Table 1, below:

**Table 1, Versus Model of Physical Education and Sport: (Musangeya et al, 2000:74).**

Physical Education	Sport
Focus on Education	Focus on competition and recreation
Done in classrooms	Done in sports fields
Instruction by teachers	Developed by coaches
Process oriented	Product oriented
Learning activity	Performance activity
Child centred	Sport centred
Compulsory	Voluntary

From this analysis one can safely conclude that, there can be shortages of personnel (coaches) for sport and no shortage for physical education (teachers). The set up facilitates the integrated subject approach to pupil instruction encouraged at primary school level.

Mbizvo (2001), Secretary's Circular Minute Number 5, classified physical Education as a non-examinable practical subject. Its aim is to provide a background and stimulate learner interest and creativity at the formative stage. One gets disturbed by the observation that, physical education was ranked at the bottom of the practical subjects list on Appendix 'A'. One wonders whether the ranking reflects the priority that the Secretary placed on physical education since the subjects are not in alphabetical order. If the ranking reflects priority, then physical education is a least refereed practical subject. The encouraging point is that the Secretary's Circular (2001) allocated one hour per week to physical education at primary school level, Appendix 'B'. It is interesting to note that Machingaidze's (2005), Regional Director's Circular Number 15 portrays a serious government position on physical education. Point (3,1) stresses that physical education instruction shall be compulsory in all primary and secondary schools. Two words that require highlighting are "compulsory and instruction." These make it mandatory for each school and class teacher to be scheming and teaching physical education as emphasized by Nziramasanga's commission report (1999:362).

Gatawa (1990) advised that, for successful curriculum innovation, teachers should be involved from the conceptual, model and material design, testing and implementation stages. Unfortunately, in Zimbabwe teachers are not visible at the conceptual stages although Bishop (1979) illustrated that, teachers interpret the syllabus, select what to teach, how to teach it, reinforce and certify learning outcomes they consider appropriate. Such a critical role requires an understanding of the curriculum innovation and its rationale as a whole.

A child centred perception was provided by Musangeya et al (2000) who suggested that, pupils should be motivated by the curriculum to participate with interest. Child motivation is also a teacher variable. Teachers can demotivate pupils by teaching poorly or teaching wrong concepts altogether.

An analysis of the Primary School Education and Sport Syllabus (1997) reveals that, the syllabus covers grades 1 to 7 core study areas and provides a grade-by-grade content progression. It is designed to ensure equality of opportunity and appropriate delivery. Equality of access is debatable since there are no sections for the physical education of the disabled and special children. The syllabus encourages participatory methods, group formation to be carried out by random selection and assignment of pupils. The Physical Education syllabus (1997:4), statement "The whole curriculum must be planned from grade scheme is to be done termly and lessons derived from it. These are teacher activities forming the current study's implementation indicators. The syllabus points out that, theory is compulsory. The practical is essential and must be taught by a qualified teacher or instructor. These instructional suggestions imply that, ideally two teachers are required. The teacher for theory qualifies by virtue of being on the teacher's payroll and authorized to be in charge of a class. Another, teacher for the practical lessons qualifies by being a skills expert.

The following extracts from the primary school physical education syllabus (1997:8) illustrate the difference between theory and practical lessons.

Topic	Theory	Practical
Grade 1	Safety and Action in and near water	Developing confidence with water, floating and basic propulsion
Grade 2	Action when drowning	Basic strokes, front crawl and propulsion
Grade 3	Action to save someone drowning	Different ways of entering water
Grade 4	Water hazards in schools	Techniques of arms and legs crawl, back and breast strokes
Grade 5	Water hazards in different locations	Developing strengths, efficiency and speed in the strokes
Grade 6	Methods of resuscitation	Butterfly strokes
Grade 7	Revision of all areas	Diving techniques

An interesting assumption here is that, all teachers are aware of the safety measures and can save those

drowning. The content can also be linked with environmental science topic of water, its properties, safety and treatment. As expected for theory lessons, discussions, note taking and group presentations can be used to capture local contexts and pupils' experiences.

Practical lessons assume that qualified teachers, swimming pools and floaters are available. The study seeks to find how teachers in Mashonaland West are implementing such instructional policies. The topic aquatics reflect one of the disadvantages of a centralized curriculum. It is a reflection of what the middle-class considers to be worth knowledge for children in a school with a swimming pool. It contradicts the reality of Matebeleland and part of Midlands where water is a scarce commodity. Anyway, this is a compulsory content to be taught in all schools. The researcher is aware of Mapfaka (1994) who pointed out that; teachers should not be slaves of the syllabus. They are encouraged to implement those aspects, which generate pupils' interests and community expectations. The provision offers a leeway for teachers to redefine worth knowledge and implement the actual curriculum, which is the focus of this study.

At district level, the Ministry of Education Sport and Culture introduced physical education resource persons. Mashonaland West got six, one for each district. According to Marambanyika (2001), the resource teachers are to share expertise in the teaching of physical education in each district.

While physical education practical lessons require specialist teachers, there is no subject specialization at primary school. The secretary for education, Sibanda (1993) explained that, Ministry encourages integrated learning so that experiences a child gains in one subject area is reinforced in other subjects. The researcher did not overlook the fact that, primary school teacher training has a main subject. Its purpose is to provide resource teachers for these subjects (Mukorera, 2001).

## **Research Methodology**

### **Research Design**

The study used a descriptive survey to gather information about teachers' characteristics, identify their views and practices during physical education time. Surveys are frequently employed to establish prevailing conditions and factors influencing them. In addition, descriptive surveys enjoy the use of multiple methods of data collection (white, 2005). This facilitates data triangulation to validate findings.

### **Population and Sampling**

The population of this study is composed of primary school teachers. These are expected to implement the primary school physical education. The researcher considered that, teaching practices differ from district to district depending on local conditions but are homogenous within districts. The instructional variable distribution called for cluster sampling.

To apply cluster sampling, the researcher used teacher establishment figures from staffing officers in each district. Proportional sampling was applied from district to district, then simple random sampling of schools and teachers as recommended by Malville and Goddard (1996). Sampling was continued until a sample of size 310 teachers was considered large enough for the variable (implementation of physical education policy) to be normally distributed and findings generalized.

### **Instruments**

The researcher designed a self-reporting questionnaire. It sought teachers' demographic data, priority ranking of subjects, main subject done at college, what is done during the time for physical education and factors influencing teaching of physical education in their schools.

The questionnaire was found ideal after considering that, teachers are literate, individual views and practices were required and data from a large population was collected within a short time. The same question wording is used for each respondent thereby enhancing instrument reliability.

The second set of instruments for documentary analysis comprised of: policy documents and syllabus for the national intended curriculum, time tables and teachers' scheme-books for teacher intended and teacher evaluation reflecting the actual curriculum and factors influencing policy implementation.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The researcher sought the assistance of three physical education resource persons. An orientation workshop was held to familiarize assistant researchers with the instrument. Permission was sought from Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture district offices. A pilot study was carried out in Banket cluster to test instrument and population suitability.

The physical education resource persons facilitated the researcher's entry into schools. First visit was to familiarize researcher with school heads and teachers. Questionnaires were administered during second visits. Researchers took the time to check on time tables and schemes of work. The researcher facilitated district cluster meetings on the teaching of physical education after preliminary questionnaire analysis. During such meetings,

focused group discussions were held to identify challenges and strategies for improving physical education instruction.

Completed questionnaires were screened for completeness and completing of key questions. Responses on practices, challenges and instructional improvements were coded according to research questions and frequency tables generated.

### Validity and Reliability

In this study, validity and reliability were catered for by; first, the use of a large sample (n=310): which is statistically large enough for variables to be normally distributed and findings generalized. The second strategy was through data source triangulation where findings from questionnaires were tallied with those from documentary analysis and compared with those from interviews and focused group discussions. The technique was the involvement of assistant researchers unfamiliar with settings in the other districts to reduce the effect of semi-consciousness, which overlooks findings from what seems obvious. Last but important was involving participants at three levels, data collection, focused group and verification of recorded information.

### Findings and Discussions

**Table 1, Teacher Distribution by Age (N = 310)**

Age Group	25-30	31-35	36-40	41 plus
Frequency	90 (29%)	43 (14%)	62 (20%)	115 (37%)

The majority of respondents (37%) are above 41-years. This is a physically inactive group who would not be keen to participate in physical education and sport. The second largest group (29%) is in the active age (25 – 30) years. This teacher distribution in primary schools can be accounted for by the brain drain, which attracted a large number of young teachers out of Zimbabwe.

**Table 2, Teacher Distribution by Highest Qualification (N = 310)**

Qualification	Untrained	C/E or D/E	Degree
Frequency	90 (29%)	158 (51%)	62 (20%)

Holders of certificates in Education (C/E) or Diplomas in Education (D/E) (51%) are the majority and the degree holders are expected to have the content and theory to enable them to teach physical education in primary schools. Study is keen to find how they are interpreting syllabuses and implementing it.

The 62 (20%) degree holders have administration degrees. They are in supervisory posts to be able to interpret, implement and supervise the teaching of physical education in their schools. A comparison of table 1 and 2 seem to suggest that (29%) in the age group (25 – 30) years are temporary teachers. These can be affected by both lack of content and pedagogical skills to teach physical education. The situation is compounded by lack of teachers' guides on physical education for this group of teachers to rely on.

**Table 3, Teacher Distribution by College Main Subject Choice (N = 245)**

Subject	Frequency
English	29 (12%)
Mathematics	10 (4%)
Shona	68 (28%)
Environmental Science and Aids	20 (8%)
Religious and Moral Education	39 (16%)
Social Studies and Home Economics	29 (12%)
Music	20 (8%)
Physical Education	10 (4%)
African Studies	20 (8%)
African Studies	20 (8%)
<b>Totals</b>	<b>245 (100%)</b>

Table 4, shows that physical education and mathematics had the lowest subscribers (4%) each. If the main subject was chosen on the basis of interest, then primary school teachers in Mashonaland West had no interest in physical education. According to Mukorera (2001), this province is starved of resource teachers in physical education.

Although the Physical Education and Sports Policy (1994:4) subsection 2 (a) reads: “teachers with the appropriate training shall be deployed equitably to both urban and rural area schools.” Point 2b, reads, “In-service training programmes shall be mounted for those teachers who need them.” Mashonaland West has only six resource teachers (Machingaidze, 2005). No workshops for physical education instruction were done from 2006 to 2013. Resource persons attributed it to lack of financial resources.



**Table 4, Teachers' subject priority rank (N = 310)**

Subject	Frequency	Rank
English	266	1
Mathematics	230	2
Shona	221	3
Environmental Science and Aids	186	4
Religious and Moral Education	177	5
Social Studies and Home Economics	168	6
Music	106	7
Physical Education	80	8
Art	62	9

Of interest is the finding that teachers ranked examinable subjects high on their priority list. This can be attributed to the strong influence examinations have on what teachers prioritize or sideline in their teaching. Physical education is ranked 8 out of 9 despite the fact that, Physical Education and Sports Policy (1994:3), subsection (iv) point 1 a, states that, "physical education instruction and practice shall be compulsory in all primary and secondary schools."

Teachers supported their subject ranking by pointing out that; the focus of all schools is on good examination results. They also reported that, the purpose of primary school education is to develop literacy and numeracy hence ranking the two languages and mathematics at the top. One can contest these teachers' perceptions basing arguments on The Handbook on School Administration for Heads (1993:8) section 2.4 which reads: "The primary school curriculum attempts to cater for the following broad areas of child development:

Aesthetic and creativity, Human and Social, Linguistics and Literacy, Moral and Spiritual, Physical, Scientific and Technological."

The extract suggests that, the purpose of a primary school to be total child development. It has little to do with specific subjects like mathematics and English; this is why subject content integration is encouraged.

Teachers reported that they ranked music, physical education and art at the bottom because they are not examined at grade seven and are not included on the end of term reports. Teachers did not study the subjects at college hence they lack the necessary content and skills competencies to teach physical education. These findings concur with those reported by Nziramasanga's commission (1999) which shows that the ten years period had no effect on the teaching of physical education in schools.

**Table 5, Teachers' activities during physical education time (N = 310)**

Activity	Frequency
Mathematics exercises	174 (56%)
Corrections	65 (21%)
Covering syllabus in exam subjects	167 (54%)
Watching P.E resource teacher coaching pupils from my class	43 (14%)
Tests	68 (22%)
Complete scheming and Planning	118 (38%)
Complete marking exercise books	177 (57%)
Traditional indoor – games	109 (35%)

Of interest is the observation that, physical education was on the timetable. The majority (61%) schemed for it but did not know exactly what to teach. Some (17%) had photocopies of model schemes provided by cluster resource teachers. It was deduced that there is no uniformity or school scheme – cum plan as suggested by the syllabus (1997:4).

Findings in Table 5, reveal that the majority of teachers are not instructing pupils in physical education. The (35%) who teach traditional games like "Nhodo, Chidhange" complained of there being no textbooks on physical education to support the syllabus.

In schools where resource teachers are stationed, teachers (14%) reported that the resource teachers coached athletics and games leaving teachers to do what they found fit. In some schools teachers only saw physical education resource teachers at cluster sports competitions. This is contrary to Marambanyika's (2001) expectations, when he said, "the purpose of physical education resource teachers is to share expertise in the teaching of physical education in each of the districts."

## Conclusion

The study's major findings were:

1. Primary school teachers incorrectly implement the physical education policies. There is individual rather than school scheme-cum planning. Physical education time slots exists on class time –tables but teachers either continue teaching examinable subjects or surrender pupils to resource teachers for

athletics coaching or ball games. Teachers choose either to join the resource teacher or remain in class marking, planning or scheming. Physical Education is taught as voluntary rather than compulsory subject. Resource teachers took the coaching rather than instructional facilitator's role.

2. Factors contributing to the described scenario are: Teachers rank physical education lowly due to its unperceived activity value as an un examinable subject. Teachers have little interest in physical education; the majority did not choose it as a main subject at college. The majority of teachers are either untrained (lack pedagogical skills) or old (lack interest in physical education) being synonymous with sport. Teachers have no content and skills for physical education instruction. There are no textbooks or teachers' guides to assist teachers. The few resource teachers' coach sports and games instead of helping teachers teach. Physical education does not appear on pupils' reports, and its content is not included in grade seven examinations, which portrays physical education as an insignificant subject.

### Recommendations

3 On the basis of these findings, the study recommends that:

1. Orientation workshops at provincial level for the job description of physical education resource persons to be held to help them understand their functions as instructional facilitators rather than sport coaches or inspectors.
2. Physical Education resource persons to be trained by Curriculum Development Unit (CDU), to write instructional materials for teachers to provide the content and instructional methods.
3. Cluster workshops and demonstration lessons can be held to assist teachers acquire content and pedagogical skills for delivering physical education lessons.
4. Physical education can be included on pupils' reports as a subject.
5. Questions from physical education syllabus can be included in the grade seven content papers.
6. A nation wide study can be carried out to determine the physical education teaching and learning situation at national level.

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