The Status of Physical Education and Its Relation to Attitudes towards the Teaching of the Subject in Masvingo Urban Primary Schools

Jenet Mudekunye and Josiah Chaonwa Sithole

Great Zimbabwe University,
Teacher Development Department.

Corresponding Author: Jenet Mudekunye

Abstract
The study aimed to determine the status of Physical Education and its relation to the teaching of the subject in Masvingo urban primary schools. The study adopted the descriptive survey design in which a questionnaire and the structured interview were used as data collection instruments. Five degree primary school Heads and thirty teachers were purposively sampled from a population of three hundred and one teachers (301) and twelve Heads from twelve Masvingo urban primary schools respectively. The study established that Physical Education enjoyed varied statuses from one school to another. At some schools it enjoyed a low status whilst at a few schools it enjoyed a high status. Overall, Physical Education enjoyed a low status in the urban primary schools. Owing to the low status, teachers had generally negative attitudes towards the teaching of the subject though a few had positive attitudes towards it. The findings call for, among other things the desirability of teaching Physical Education seriously as an important subject on the curriculum. The research is significant in that it sensitizes teachers, school administrators and curriculum developers on challenges posed by Physical Education in the primary school system. In academia, it stimulates debate which may lead researchers to enquire into why Physical Education is neglected as a subject in the primary school curriculum in Zimbabwe.

Keywords: physical education, curriculum implementation, attitudes, status, teaching, physical education goals.

INTRODUCTION
Before and immediately after independence in 1980, Physical Education as a subject in the Zimbabwean primary school was marginalised and for that reason it was not taken seriously by teachers (Musangeya, Kuparara, Tanyongana and Munyuri, 2000). Physical Education is a spin-off from Physical Training after the Second World War (1939-1945). Physical Training was teacher-centred and had military characteristics, the emphasis being on developing physical qualities such as strength, agility, speed and other attributes which characterise a physically trained individual. Evidently, Physical Training was teacher-driven and authoritative thereby devaluing thinking on the part of the learner.

After independence in 1980, Physical Training was rechristened Physical Education in Zimbabwean primary schools and thus ushered in a paradigm shift. The National Curriculum Policy initiated by the Curriculum Development Unit came up with one of the major goals for teaching Physical Education which was to promote and develop a healthy lifestyle through Physical Education, sport and life skills education. This is closely linked to the goal of national pride and unity espoused by government then. Mandaza (1986) contends that the government’s aim was to design a curriculum which incorporated a socialist ideology, the policy of reconciliation, egalitarianism and democracy. In this regard, the first national curriculum came out in 1984 and turned the Physical Education syllabus from autocratic to democratic approaches of teaching which placed the child at the centre of the learning process.

To date, the teaching of Physical Education at primary school level in Zimbabwe is meant to develop the body, mind and soul in the context of holistic education (Nixon and Jewett, 1980). As such, the status of Physical Education has been raised in theory since it now caters for the development of the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of the learner (Pangrazi and Dauer, 1995). In view of this, Physical Education is now activity-led and forms the basis of children’s participation in sport since sport is a by-product of Physical Education [Siedentop, 1990]. To enhance the position of Physical Education at primary school level in Zimbabwe, Secretary’s Circular Minute Number 1 of 1993 and Secretary’s Circular Minute Number 2 of 1994 and the National Sport and Recreation Policy of 1996 made the teaching of Physical Education compulsory thereby making it enjoy a similar status with other subjects on the curriculum. The position adopted by government with regard to Physical Education is in line with the stipulations of the International Charter established
by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (1978) that children should have access to Physical Education because it is a basic human right just like other rights. The Charter also stipulates that Physical Education has the potential to educate the child in a holistic way thereby educating for life.

According to Musangeya et al (2000), the status of Physical Education in Zimbabwe varies from one school to another. At some schools, it has a low status whilst at others, it commands a high status signified by its featuring on the school time table. The former status is consistent with Amusa, Toriola and Onyewadume’s (1999) view that Physical Education in Africa, Zimbabwe included is in a parlous state. This may owe to lack of involvement by teachers in curriculum development. Katzenellenbogen (1994) argues that teacher attitudes play a role in the teaching of a subject. Positive attitudes towards the teaching of Physical Education result from a deep conviction of the worth of the subject on the part of knowledgeable teachers who believe that Physical Education is an essential subject which helps students improve cognitive function as they learn about their abilities, aptitudes, limitations and potential even in other subject areas (Ratey, 2000; Ratey and Hagerman, 2008). California and Texas states in the United States mandated Physical Education learning time and assessment of Physical Education learners. They found that students who attended Physical Education lessons and are physically fit scored higher on their state standardized tests, caused less discipline problems and attended school more often than their less fit peers (NASPE, 2002; Texas Education Agency, 2009; Ziegler, 2005). Amusa et al (1999) assert that traditionally, most African societies associate Physical Education with play and leisure. Such societies think of Physical Education as only involving the physical and not intellectual activities (Amusa et al, 1999). The implication is that a subject viewed as such results in teachers and society contributing negatively towards its teaching.

In Africa, teachers perceive Physical Education differently. Some teachers are committed to providing pupils with relevant, enriching, thoroughly and progressively planned, dynamically taught and effectively managed programmes. Others with negative attitudes run ‘keep them busy’ sporadic programmes manned by unqualified over-worked teachers (Katzenellenbogen, 1999).

Rathedi (1997) points out that in some African primary schools, and one might add Zimbabwean primary schools included, Physical Education is not an examinable subject. This is reinforced by the Nziramasanga Commission (1999) which established that since its recognition as a primary school subject in Zimbabwe in particular, Physical Education has always been viewed as a compulsory non-examinable subject. A survey conducted by college lecturers on the status of Physical Education in Zimbabwean primary schools revealed that the subject is timetabled for the sake of student teachers and there is little or no support from school administrators (Musangeya et al, 2000). Owing to this, the status of Physical Education remains shaky and low because teachers consider it low in their scale of values.

The Sport Journal (1999) states that in many regions of the world, Physical Education is considered as a non-productive activity, less important to a successful future than academic subjects. In other words, there is a prevailing perception that one cannot build a career on it in spite of the overwhelming evidence that sport is a money-making industry in the western world and in some African countries such as Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana and Ethiopia. The success stories of these African countries in terms of performance in sports are pointers to the fact that society’s views about Physical Education are gradually changing (Musangeya et al, 2000). Physical Education in some areas has been seen to make significant contributions to programmes designed to develop a total person, including both physical and intellectual development (Amusa et al, 1999). On a related issue, Masog, Cooper and Molfe (1997) in Amusa, Toriola and Onyewadume (1999) stress that subjects such as Mathematics and English are deemed productive because they equip students with skills to solve problems they could not solve at the beginning of the course. In other words, there is a sense of outcomes which pervades these subjects which is lacking in Physical Education. The researchers’ informal experiences in primary education during their many years of supervising student teachers was that qualified teachers did not seem to like teaching Physical Education owing to its perceived low value relative to other subjects such as Mathematics and English. Physical Education was taught by student teachers who felt obliged to teach it because they were undergoing training. No sooner had they qualified than they would follow the example of their experienced counterparts in marginalising the subject as well. It is against this background that the study sought to investigate the status of Physical Education in Masvingo urban primary schools and its relation to teachers’ attitudes towards it with a view to providing solutions to address the situation.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1 Does Physical Education have a favourable status in the primary school curriculum?
2 How does the status of Physical Education affect the attitudes of teachers towards the subject?

**METHODOLOGY**

The study employed the descriptive survey method incorporating the pluralistic approach which required
the use of both qualitative and quantitative paradigms. The descriptive survey design was used owing to the need to clarify and interpret conditions in the teaching of Physical Education as they existed in natural settings in the primary schools.

Population Sampling Procedure
The population comprised 301 teachers and 12 school Heads drawn from twelve primary schools categorized into four, namely, government, council, private and church-managed schools. Thirty primary trained and five degreed school heads were purposely sampled for their relevance to the issues being studied. The five sampled schools were two council schools, two government schools, one church-related school and one private school.

Instruments
The study used the questionnaire and interview to obtain data. A structured self-administered Likert type questionnaire was used to capture quantitative data on the respondents’ perceptions, views and opinions on the status of Physical Education and its relation to teacher attitudes towards the teaching of the subject. The questionnaire was used for its suitability for collecting a large corpus of data and for its convenience in management. Its weaknesses such as failure to appraise the non-verbal behaviour of respondents and to determine the seriousness with which respondents answered the questions were counterbalanced by a face- to -face interview which added an extra dimension. The interview was used to solicit data from Heads and teachers to establish their perspectives and attitudes towards the teaching of Physical Education. The interviews in which researchers were participants enabled them to probe for more information and observe the interviewees’ reactions, gestures and expressions which suggested additional non-verbal meaning. These interviews, in a way added to the bare bones of questionnaire responses.

Limitations of the Study
The research was confined to five Masvingo urban primary schools only. The peri-urban and rural schools were not considered. Owing to this, the results may have limited generalisability because schools in Zimbabwe have different cultures, norms, beliefs and values with respect to the implementation of Physical Education as a subject. In spite of that, the results are considered legitimate in the context of the schools which the research focused on. The other limitation was that one of the researchers, a specialist in Physical Education could have had pre-conceived ideas about the status of the subject. However, this was diluted by the co-researcher who happens to be a specialist in another discipline and therefore had no pre-conceived ideas about the subject.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
The data yielded by the questionnaire appears in Table 1 while that from the interview schedules is presented under themes which relate to the status of Physical Education in schools. The data from both instruments is picked up and discussed simultaneously to avoid repetition.

Table 1: The influence of the status of Physical Education on teacher attitudes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>13</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<td>26.7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key:  SA= Strongly Agree  A=Agree  N=Neutral  D=Disagree  SD=Strongly Disagree  %=Percent

Summary of Interview Data on the Teachers’ Views on the Status of Physical Education

1. Comments indicating high rating
   - PE has enjoyed a high rating among other subjects on the curriculum because it is a unique subject which develops the child holistically, that is, socially, physically and mentally.
   - PE is important because children need to be active and prepare for various life activities that will be encountered throughout school.

2. Comments indicating low ratings
   - Teachers have a low opinion of the subject mainly because it is not examinable like other curriculum subjects.
   - Heads coerce teachers to replace PE with other curriculum subjects.
   - Teaching PE is a waste of time for academic subjects; it is time for recess and play.

3. Teacher attitudes towards teaching Physical Education
   - Teachers have negative attitudes towards teaching Physical Education.
   - PE time is time to relax for both teachers and pupils and is nothing more than recess and play time.
   - PE has no base for the future because it is not examined.
   - Teachers regard PE as a worthless subject which should be replaced by core subjects like Mathematics and English.
   - PE is important to primary school children for they need to play, so it needs to be taught.

The data displayed in Table 1 indicates that the status of Physical Education at each particular school influences teacher attitudes towards its teaching. The data showed that 70% of the respondents believed that Physical Education was highly favoured in their
schools hence the majority of teachers timetabled and taught it. Thus teachers had positive attitudes towards teaching Physical Education and rated it highly. The positive attitudes may have been a result of its recognition as the only subject in the primary school which addresses movement and health with numerous variations (Musangeya et al, 2000). Furthermore, the possibility of Physical Education being rated highly may be due to the fact that it instills in students, at an early age, the value of self-preservation as children choose a lifestyle that is good for both the mind and the body as they take part in the various physical activities (http://www.kabbalah.com/Free-Teacher). The respondents’ data were supported by a sizeable amount of interview data which showed that Physical Education featured on the timetable to a greater extent and was rated highly in some primary schools. When a subject holds a high status, teachers may be keen to teach it and positive attitudes may develop. The positive attitudes may have been a result of a deep conviction of the worth of the subject on the part of knowledgeable teachers (Katzenellenbogen, 1999).

The data also shows that 53.2% of the respondents indicated that Physical Education was not taught in some urban primary schools. The same sentiments were expressed by the majority of the interviewees. This reflected a negative attitude towards the teaching of Physical Education. Teachers may possibly develop negative attitudes towards teaching a subject when they lack sufficient knowledge to implement it and when they misunderstand the benefits of the subject. The findings of this study are consistent with the findings by Musangeya et al (2000) which reveal that in schools where Physical Education is rated lowly and still at its infant stage, teachers might have negative attitudes towards teaching it. Negative attitudes may arise when teachers are unaware of subject matter, pedagogical knowledge and responsibilities of implementing the subject; hence the need for teachers to be involved in curriculum planning and implementation (Gatawa, 1990). The respondents’ data also indicated that 70% felt the need for Physical Education to be examined just like other curriculum subjects. Similarly, the interview data showed that teachers had a low opinion of Physical Education and regarded it as a waste of time for academic subjects. The above position is further reinforced by Rathedi (1997) who asserts that in some African primary schools, the status of Physical Education remains questionable due to the fact that the subject is non-examinable and lacks meaningful career prospects.

Furthermore, the data from interviews reveals that the low status of Physical Education among other primary school subjects negatively influenced teacher perceptions towards its teaching. The data indicated that 56% of the respondents had Physical Education associated with play and leisure in their schools. Similarly, the majority of the interviewees remarked that the teaching of Physical Education was worthless since the subject had no future due to its non-examinable nature. The above findings which perceive Physical Education as worthless could have possibly emanated from teachers with negative attitudes who felt the need for Physical Education to be replaced by core subjects like Environmental Science, Mathematics and English that are evidently productive (Amusa et al, 1999). The other reason for the negative attitudes could be that most classroom practitioners do not usually consider non-examinable subjects to be of value and place a low priority on them in relation to other subjects (www.kabbalah.com/Free-Teacher, 2008). The above findings are also supported by Masogo, Cooper and Molefe (1997) in Amusa et al (1999) who echo that subjects such as Mathematics and English are deemed as productive because they equip students with skills which enable them to solve critical problems at the beginning of the course. The inference drawn here is that a subject should have a considerable influence on the attainment of favourable outcomes for students at the end of the course. Interviewees also expressed the view that the time for teaching Physical Education was considered time for both teachers and pupils to relax and was nothing more than recess and play. Any activity perceived in this manner may never be taken seriously, hence Physical Education ranks low in society’s scale of values (Amusa et al, 1999).

In line with the findings of this study, the research established that the majority of primary school teachers viewed Physical Education as only involving the physical and not the intellectual development of the child and this resulted in negative teacher perceptions. It was also revealed in the findings that the fixed preoccupation of Physical Education among teachers is that it is recreational in nature and in turn prevents the actualization of its educative value. Thus the findings seem to imply that when teachers fail to understand the value and benefits of a subject, negative attitudes which may hamper its teaching may develop. Another key issue revealed in the findings of this study was that Physical Education was still not given its true identity in the primary school curriculum and was still looked down upon; hence this contributed to negative teacher attitudes resulting in its unsuccessful implementation.

**Implications**

The status of Physical Education at the primary school level and the perceptions it generates on the part of teachers has implications for the classroom practitioner at that level. Physical Education enjoyed a high status at some urban schools and a low status at others. To address the low status of Physical Education among other subjects in the primary
curriculum, the Ministry of Education Sport and Culture should come up with a clear policy which spells out the value and role of the subject to the pupils. This would allow the subject to gain greater national exposure, public recognition and better professional image. This should be coupled with making Physical Education compulsory not only in theory but in practice and thus ensure that the subject is timetabled and examined at the end of the primary course like other subjects such as Mathematics, English and Shona. Teachers have a tendency induced by habit and perception to teach examinable subjects seriously and less so non-examinable ones because in the Zimbabwean education system, a teacher’s value and competency are measured by the quality of results he or she produces. In the informal experience of the writers during their Teaching Practice supervision stints, non-examinable subjects such as Art, Home Economics, HIV and Aids and Physical Education were not taught by experienced teachers but by student teachers at some schools because college and university requirements stipulated so, yet the official position is that all subjects should be taught. Therefore, that Physical Education is not taught at some schools is due to administrators (the Heads) who either do not supervise their teachers or ignore the subjects because they, like their teachers, are personally convinced that the subjects are not valuable. Therefore, District Education Officers and Education Officers should supervise teachers in schools paying due attention to neglected subjects among which is counted Physical Education.

Some teachers may have a thin knowledge base for teaching Physical Education. This can be addressed by deepening the curricula at teachers’ colleges and universities which develop teachers to give sufficient grounding in the subject to enable teachers to possess the requisite efficacy in teaching Physical Education. Also, the common sense view that not all subjects done at school have an immediate relevance in determining career paths should be emphasised not only at teachers’ colleges and universities, but through workshops mounted at school level. The bottom line is that all subjects are supposed to be taught with an equal degree of seriousness. Choosing a career path is a future development where a decision is made by the learner at the appropriate time. Above all, teachers sometimes feel that they do not own a curriculum because they are not consulted during its designing. They only become useful agents at the curriculum implementation stage. As a result, they see the curriculum as a top-down project in which they do not play a part in its origination except as implementers. Accordingly, there is need to involve teachers in the designing of the Physical Education curriculum so that teachers feel they own the programme. This will have the desirable effect of raising the status of the subject and thereby generate positive perceptions towards it.

REFERENCES


