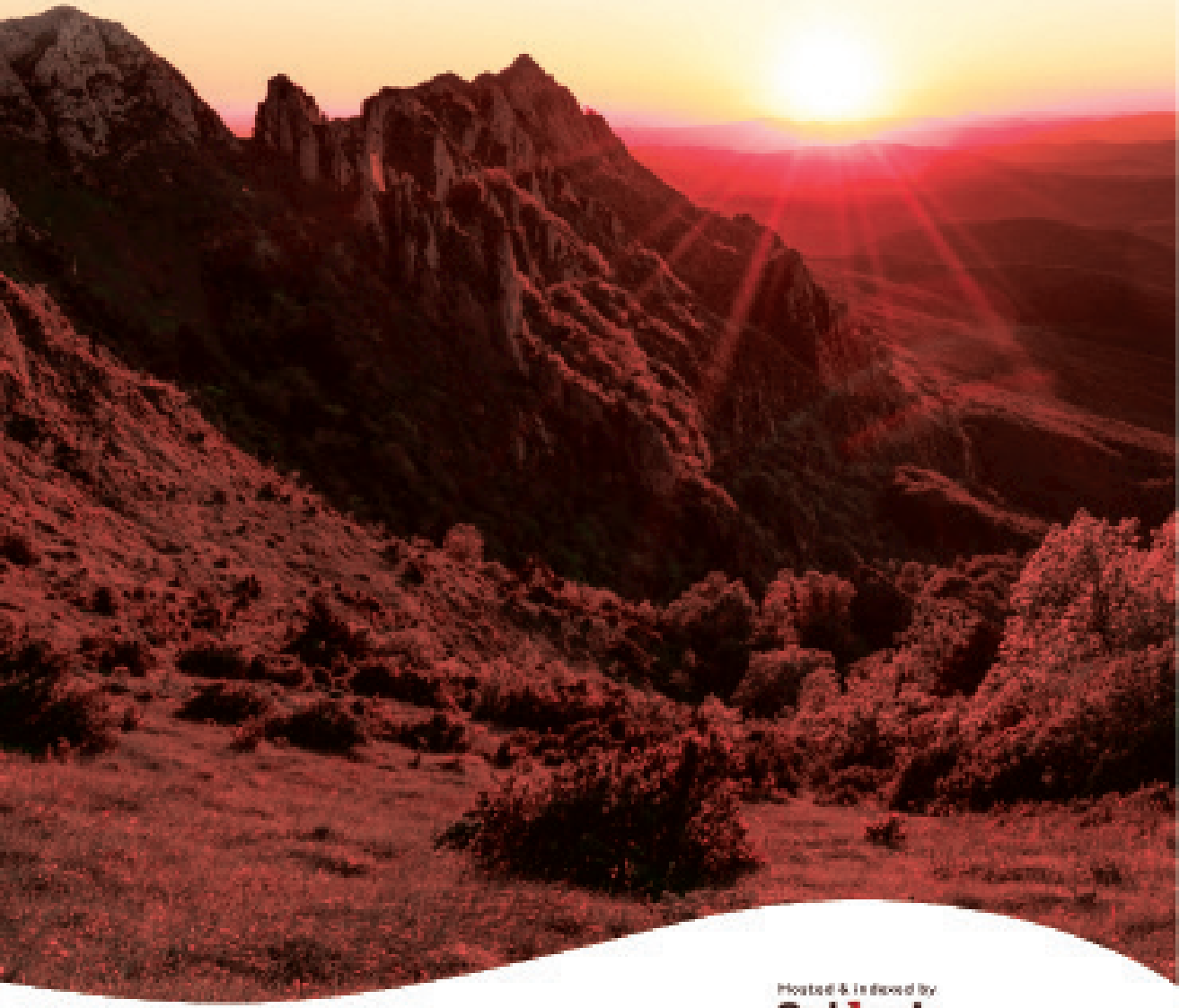
The Dyke

Volume 18 No.2
Education



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The Dyke
www.thedyke.msu.ac.zw
https://journals.co.za/loi/dyke

ISSN 1815-9036 (Print)
ISSN 2790-0940 (Online)

Redirecting physical education curriculum priorities at ECD Level: A leeway towards sustainable education in Mkoba, Zimbabwe.

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Abstract

This study examines how Physical Education (PE) curriculum priorities can be strategically reoriented at the Early Childhood Development (ECD) level to promote sustainable education in Mkoba Primary Schools, Gweru. The research is underpinned by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which provided a conceptual lens for understanding the complex interplay of societal systems influencing the implementation of the PE curriculum within ECD settings. Adopting an interpretivist paradigm and a qualitative research approach, the study employed a phenomenological design to elicit and interpret the lived experiences of participants in relation to the delivery of the PE curriculum. Data were gathered using a triangulated method comprising questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions. A purposive sampling strategy was utilised to select 10 primary schools within the Mkoba area. The research sample comprised 15 ECD teachers, 5 parents, and 20 ECD learners, yielding a total of 40 participants. Findings revealed that the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic significantly disrupted the delivery of PE due to the inherently practical and embodied nature of the subject. During lockdown periods, traditional face-to-face instruction was suspended. While a minority of privileged learners accessed virtual learning platforms, the practical component of PE remained largely inaccessible and difficult to deliver through digital means. The study established that the effective implementation of the PE curriculum at ECD level yields a range of developmental and pedagogical benefits, including enhanced cognitive focus and retention, motor skill development, socio-emotional competence, physical health, positive behavioural adjustment, and improved academic performance. The benefits position PE as a foundational component of holistic education, particularly in the formative years. In light of these findings, the study advocates for a paradigm shift in PE curriculum priorities, moving away from an overemphasis on academic-centric practices towards a more integrative and developmental approach. Specifically, the curriculum should foreground talent identification and enhancement, motor skill acquisition, and the provisioning of safe and adequate physical resources to support experiential learning. Such realignment is crucial to fostering sustainable education in Mkoba Primary Schools and holds broader implications for ECD policy and practice in similar contexts.

Keywords: Curriculum reorientation, Early Childhood Development (ECD), Physical Education (PE), Sustainable education, Mkoba Primary Schools

The Dyke
www.thedyke.msu.ac.zw

18(2):388-405
ISSN 1815-9036 (Print)
ISSN 2790-0940 (Online)

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Introduction

Historically, global education systems have prioritised the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills in early learning, often marginalising practical domains such as Physical Education (PE). In Zimbabwe, the Early Childhood Development (ECD) curriculum has mirrored this trend by emphasising cognitive skills over physical, creative, and socio-emotional development. As a result, areas such as talent identification, creativity, physical skills development, and character formation, crucial for addressing social inequality, health challenges, and unemployment, have received insufficient attention (Buliliwa, Jabonete, & Buliliwa, 2022; Mupfumira, 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic (2019–2021) further exposed systemic weaknesses in Zimbabwe's education system. PE, being inherently practical and reliant on physical interaction, was particularly disrupted. Virtual learning, accessible only to a privileged few, was poorly suited to subjects requiring experiential engagement. This period prompted a critical reassessment of the country's education priorities. There is now a pressing need to move beyond a compliance-driven focus on the "three Rs" (reading, writing, and arithmetic) and re-evaluate the role of practical subjects in fostering holistic development. The World Health Organisation (2023) stresses the importance of inclusive, developmentally responsive curricula at all levels of education to ensure long-term sustainability.

The continued marginalisation of PE has partly contributed to the production of graduates who are ill-equipped to apply knowledge creatively or address real-world challenges. Zimbabwe's education system must pivot towards cultivating learners capable of using their talents and practical competencies to solve problems, particularly in contexts where formal employment is limited (Abizanda, 2022). PE holds transformative potential as a vehicle for social interaction, critical thinking, physical exploration, and emotional development (Burnett-Louw, 2020). Recognising this, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) in 2023 initiated consultations to review the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), with stakeholders highlighting the need to strengthen the teaching of practical subjects at ECD level (Ndlovu, 2023). This study emerges in response to these concerns, aiming to explore how PE curriculum priorities can be redirected in Mkoba Primary Schools to support sustainable, inclusive, and developmentally appropriate education.

Literature Review

Physical Education (PE) is increasingly recognised as a foundational component in holistic early childhood development. Recent scholarship underscores the value of PE in promoting motor skills, cognitive development, emotional regulation, and social interaction (Burnett-Louw, 2020; Mupfumira, 2023). In the context of Early Childhood Development (ECD), PE offers children opportunities to engage in active play, which is essential for neurological development, kinaesthetic awareness, and the cultivation of interpersonal skills (Abizanda, 2022). Moreover, scholars like Falihah, Rahmawati, and Baihaqi (2022) argue that engaging young learners in structured physical activity contributes to self-discipline, perseverance, and resilience, traits vital for long-term academic and life success.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory, which frames this study, has been widely adopted to explore how various societal layers influence children's learning experiences, including PE. The theory foregrounds the interaction between learners and their environments, suggesting that factors such as family, school, community, and policy collectively shape learners' access to and experience of PE (Sun & Dong, 2020).

Despite its significance, PE remains marginalised within many ECD curricula, especially in contexts like Zimbabwe, where the education system maintains an academic-heavy focus on the '3Rs'—reading, writing, and arithmetic (Sibanda & Herman, 2024). This focus sidelines developmental domains supported by PE such as creativity, motor coordination, and socialisation. Studies by Attakumah (2020) and Logan (2022) report that the undervaluation of PE is prevalent across several developing nations, where educational success is narrowly measured through literacy and numeracy scores.

The COVID-19 pandemic further amplified these disparities. As highlighted by UNESCO (2022), the pandemic caused significant disruptions in education globally, with practical subjects like PE being the most affected. In Zimbabwe, where digital infrastructure is limited, the pivot to online learning during lockdowns rendered PE almost non-functional. Learners from low-resource environments, such as those in Mkoba, were disproportionately affected (Buliliwa, Jabonete & Buliliwa, 2022), revealing systemic inequities and the fragility of traditional PE delivery models in times of crisis.

The concept of sustainable education emphasises equity, inclusion, and the holistic development of learners, goals that align closely with the objectives of PE at the ECD level (WHO, 2023). Integrating PE into the sustainable education discourse requires a shift from tokenistic inclusion to strategic prioritisation within curriculum planning and implementation. According to Gibbons (2021), a well-designed PE curriculum can foster environmental awareness, promote health literacy, and instil lifelong values such as teamwork, fairness, and personal responsibility, key pillars of sustainable development.

Recent calls for curriculum reorientation in Zimbabwe, including the ongoing review of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (Ndlovu, 2023), present a timely opportunity to reimagine PE's place in the ECD framework. Ndlovu argues that sustainable education can only be achieved when the curriculum reflects the diverse developmental needs of learners, integrating academic rigour with practical skills and values-based education. Moreover, studies by Pretorius and Stoffelsma (2017) and Wissing et al. (2016) highlight how PE, when correctly implemented, contributes to improved academic outcomes. This is due to its positive effects on concentration, memory, and emotional regulation, all crucial for effective learning. Similarly, Torterelli (2019) and Wright and Cervetti (2016) report that learners with regular exposure to PE show improved reading and numeracy performance, thereby dispelling the false dichotomy between PE and academic success.

While the benefits of PE are well-documented, several challenges hinder its implementation, especially in low-income and resource-constrained settings. These include insufficient training for teachers, lack of infrastructure, and policy inconsistencies (Yulianto, 2019; Trowbridge, Bybee & Powell, 2000). Additionally, PE remains under-theorised in many educational frameworks, often treated as a non-core subject with limited assessment metrics and pedagogical resources (Heydari, 2012; Jeone & Yamashita, 2014). However, this study argues that these challenges are not insurmountable. Strategies such as community engagement, teacher capacity building, integration of local games, and the use of low-cost resources can enhance PE implementation even in underfunded schools (Masrai, 2019; Nation & Anthony, 2013). Furthermore, adopting an inclusive curriculum that acknowledges learners' social and cultural contexts can enhance the relevance and impact of PE (Shen, 2022).

Theoretical Framework

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory provides the theoretical underpinning for this study. The theory posits that human development is shaped by multiple, interrelated environmental systems that interact dynamically with the individual across time. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), there are five concentric systems that collectively influence a child's growth, learning processes, and overall development: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. Each of these systems exerts a distinct yet interconnected influence on the child, ranging from immediate, face-to-face interactions with caregivers and teachers (microsystem) to broader socio-cultural, economic, and historical contexts (macrosystem and chronosystem). The theory acknowledges that development does not occur in isolation but within a nested architecture of environments that evolve over time. This conceptual framework is particularly pertinent in examining how systemic factors, including educational policy, home environments, socio-economic conditions, and institutional structures, influence the implementation and prioritisation of PE in ECD contexts.

Figure 1 below provides a simplified visual representation of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model and their relevance to child development:

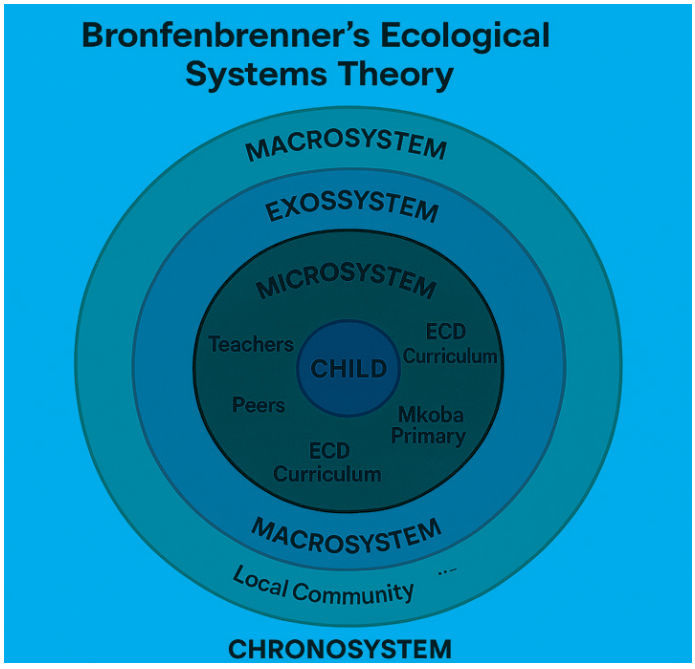

Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how environmental influences shape child development. The theory posits that human development occurs within a complex system of relationships affected by multiple levels of the surrounding environment, ranging from immediate settings such as family and school to broader societal contexts and temporal changes. These are categorised into five interconnected systems: the *microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem,* and *chronosystem.*

Microsystem

The microsystem, the closest system to the child, includes direct relationships and immediate environments such as home, school, peers, and religious institutions. Carse, Jess, and Keay (2017) assert that these direct interactions significantly shape children's development, behaviour, and learning. Li and Cheong (2022) reinforce this view, noting that the microsystem exerts the most profound influence on a learner's educational experience, including how Physical Education (PE) lessons are taught and perceived. In the context of Early Childhood Development (ECD), educators and parents play a pivotal role in shaping learners' attitudes towards PE and in facilitating its implementation through everyday routines.

Mesosystem

The mesosystem encompasses the interactions between two or more microsystems, such as the relationship between home and school. Parvin and Alam (2022) explain that this interface influences the child's learning outcomes by shaping expectations, support systems, and consistency in educational messaging. For instance, if teachers and parents share similar values regarding the importance of PE, it enhances the child's engagement with the subject. Roux (2020) supports this, arguing that strong teacher-parent collaboration cultivates a more enabling environment for physical and social development through structured PE activities.

Exosystem

The exosystem comprises social settings that indirectly impact the child's development, such as parental workplace environments, media, and local governance structures. Arockiaraj (2017) posits that if parents work in supportive environments, they are more likely to engage in their children's education, including co-curricular subjects like PE. Furthermore, Li and Cheong

(2022) highlight the role of mass media and digital technologies in influencing parental and community perceptions of subject relevance. During the COVID-19 lockdowns, academic subjects were transitioned to virtual platforms and heavily promoted, while practical subjects like PE received minimal attention, leading to their devaluation in the eyes of both parents and communities (Ndlovu, 2023).

Macrosystem

The macrosystem consists of overarching cultural, socioeconomic, and political contexts, including societal values, norms, and policy frameworks. Bakken, Brown, and Downing (2017) assert that government support in the form of curriculum policy and funding greatly influences public acceptance of subjects like PE. Where educational policies emphasise practical subjects and allocate resources accordingly, stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and administrators, are more inclined to support their inclusion in the school curriculum. Conversely, in settings where such support is lacking, PE continues to be marginalised.

Chronosystem

The chronosystem relates to the dimension of time, capturing life transitions and historical events that influence development. Recent global disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic had significant repercussions on education delivery, particularly in ECD contexts. PE was one of the most severely affected subjects, as its experiential and interactive nature proved incompatible with virtual teaching modalities. Studies by Mupfumira (2023) and Daniel, Haford, Sorkpor, and Frimpong (2022) underscore the adverse effects of pandemics on learner development and highlight the need to re-evaluate curricular priorities to ensure educational resilience and inclusivity in the post-pandemic era.

Bronfenbrenner's theory is particularly relevant to this study as it highlights the dynamic and reciprocal relationships between the child and their environment, acknowledging the cumulative and interactive nature of developmental influences. While each system contributes uniquely to the learner's experience, the microsystem tends to exert the most immediate and profound impact, whereas the chronosystem reflects broader societal shifts over time. Richards et al. (2020) emphasise that global phenomena such as digitalisation, climate change, and global health crises continue to shape educational landscapes, thus necessitating a paradigm shift in curriculum design and implementation. Ndlovu (2023) concurs, advocating for adaptive strategies to redress the

disruptions caused by COVID-19 and to reposition PE as a vital component of sustainable early childhood education.

Despite its developmental significance, the teaching of PE in ECD contexts remains fraught with challenges, particularly in developing nations such as Zimbabwe. According to Ndlovu (2023), PE instruction is minimal in rural and marginalised areas due to infrastructural deficiencies, lack of teaching resources, limited government support, and negative perceptions among educators and parents. These challenges are further compounded by budgetary constraints that deprioritise non-examinable subjects. Gumbo, Munemo, and Bhebhe (2017) highlight the lack of specialised training for primary school teachers as a major impediment to effective PE delivery. Many ECD practitioners possess limited content knowledge and pedagogical skills specific to PE, which diminishes their confidence and willingness to teach the subject. Furthermore, the shift to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic created insurmountable barriers for PE instruction, which relies heavily on physical presence and interaction (Vaera & Gonzalo-Calvo, 2020; Li & Cheong, 2022).

Curricular rigidity also poses a significant barrier. Gumbo et al. (2017) and Kirk et al. (2018) criticise the overly academic and inflexible nature of existing curricula, which leaves little room for experiential or embodied learning. Additionally, Roux (2020) notes that negative teacher attitudes and insufficient parental support contribute to the marginalisation of PE. Where parents view education solely in academic terms, subjects like PE are often dismissed as recreational rather than educational.

Richards et al. (2020) and Ndlovu (2023) both argue that such systemic devaluation of PE has created an environment in which the subject is seen as optional or even irrelevant. In many low-income communities, parents and teachers prioritise subjects perceived as gateways to economic advancement—such as mathematics, science, and languages—while PE and similar disciplines are regarded as luxuries. As a result, implementation of PE in foundational levels such as ECD remains inconsistent and underdeveloped.

Methodology

This study adopted an interpretivist paradigm and qualitative phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of ECD teachers, parents, and learners regarding the teaching of PE in Mkoba Primary Schools. Rooted in the belief that reality is socially constructed, the interpretivist approach enabled in-depth understanding of subjective meanings attached to PE within ECD settings

(Creswell, 2017). Data were gathered from 40 purposively selected participants, 15 ECD teachers, 5 parents, and 20 learners, across 10 schools using questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions, thereby allowing for methodological triangulation to enhance trustworthiness (Shamoo & Resnik, 2020). Thematic analysis was used to extract core insights, providing nuanced perspectives on PE implementation. Given persistent challenges around PE delivery, resource constraints, and undervaluation in early education, this methodological framework was critical to uncovering context-specific realities and advocating for urgent curriculum redirection towards sustainable education (Bak, 2020).

Results

This study set out to explore how the PE curriculum is implemented at the ECD level in Mkoba Primary Schools (Zimbabwe), focusing on redirecting curriculum priorities toward sustainable education. The findings reveal systemic and pedagogical shortcomings that must be urgently addressed if PE is to serve as a catalyst for holistic child development, health promotion, and long-term social and economic sustainability.

Resource constraints and equity implications

A dominant theme across the data was the acute scarcity of PE-specific resources in ECD settings, ranging from infrastructure and equipment to trained personnel. This systemic neglect is echoed in Carse et al.'s (2017) assertion that "most schools do not have proper and enough resources to facilitate proper implementation of the PE curriculum." In the current study, teachers revealed that their resource needs are consistently overlooked. One respondent noted:

> ***We are usually not considered during resource allocation on school budgets as the ECD department. At times when we make requests on resources for PE lessons, our requests are turned down, while priority is given to upper grades and academic areas.***

The absence of essential facilities like child-sized playgrounds and swimming pools was repeatedly cited. One teacher shared:

> ***We don't have facilities to teach some topics in the PE curriculum in ECD settings, for example: aquatic skills. The curriculum requires us to teach learners aquatic safety, safe entry in water, water play and water exit. How can this be possible without swimming pools, and yet reliable water sources in schools?***

This aligns with Gumbo, Magonde, and Nhamo (2017), who highlight the absence of swimming facilities even in urban schools due to ongoing water crises.

Parents also acknowledged the limits of improvisation, stating:

> ***Though ECD teachers can improvise some resources and materials for teaching PE lessons at ECD level, one cannot improvise a swimming pool or bring a water tank to school for use in a lesson.***

The result is often theoretical instruction in place of practical engagement. According to Alam (2023 p. 56), such inadequacies "kill the desire to play, creativity and innovation among learners," particularly in contexts where children possess surplus energy requiring physical release.

Additionally, large class sizes, reportedly up to 80 learners in some settings, undermine the utility of the few resources that are available. The Leave No Child Zimbabwe Report (2020) confirms this, noting that in most primary schools and ECD centres around the country, the teacher-pupil ratios are not favourable. This flouts Statutory Instrument 106 of 2005, which limits ECD classes to 25 pupils, resulting in severe strain on existing infrastructure and reduced teaching quality.

Curricular inconsistencies and pedagogical disparities

There was significant variation in how the PE curriculum is implemented across Mkoba, with private schools providing comparatively better PE opportunities. One teacher stated:

> ***PE lessons are effectively taught in few and private ECD centres and primary schools, of which only the elite families can afford to send their children there.***

Public and council schools, in contrast, focus primarily on literacy and numeracy. This is particularly problematic for students who possess natural physical talents. One learner revealed:

> ***We sometimes go for PE lessons and our colleagues who failed to read or write are left behind in the classroom, while others go out for fun.***

Alarmingly, the study found that PE is often delegated to student teachers, while qualified teachers focus on core academic subjects. One respondent observed:

> ***Mentors usually punish learners who do not perform well in academic areas and remain with them in the classroom while the rest go out for PE with student teachers.***

This practice undermines the subject's status and denies learners the right to a holistic education. Gumbo et al. (2017 p. 15) confirm this trend, stating that "a number of primary school teachers in Zimbabwe teach PE on their spare time… [and] sacrifice PE slots on the timetable." Furthermore, administrators are implicated in the marginalisation of PE. One PE-trained teacher noted:

> ***School administrators are also to blame because they merely supervise teachers teaching PE lessons. They usually choose to supervise teachers teaching academic subjects and their motto is always on numeracy and literacy skills.***

These findings underscore the need to integrate Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences into ECD pedagogies, especially for learners whose strengths lie in bodily-kinesthetic domains (Zabeli & Gjelaj, 2020).

Teacher competence and training gaps

Another critical barrier is the limited training and expertise of ECD teachers in PE instruction. A parent noted:

> ***The school administrators usually allocate ECD classes to the elderly staff members. These old teachers no longer have the physical energy to run around in the playground doing PE lessons as required by ECD learners, hence they prefer staying indoors with their ECD classes.***

This sentiment is supported by Richards et al. (2020), who argue that teacher preparation programmes offer only basic exposure to PE pedagogy. This lack of depth compromises teacher confidence and effectiveness, particularly in specialised topics like gymnastics and aquatic safety (Daniel et al., 2022). One key insight from the study was that "a number of para-professionals do not have adequate knowledge and pedagogical skills to effectively deliver PE lessons in ECD environments" (Leave No Child Zimbabwe Report, 2020). As such, learners are denied meaningful engagement in lessons designed to support their motor development and health literacy.

Cultural negativism and structural devaluation

The study identified widespread cultural and institutional negativism towards PE. Taimur and Sattar (2020) argue that "a number of stakeholders… do not value PE as an important subject due to their ignorance about the direct benefits it has to the learners." One teacher remarked:

> ***A number of parents in Mkoba do not offer all the anticipated support for their children to progress in PE and sport-related areas than what they do in academic subjects.***

This attitude trickles down to learners who inherit these beliefs, thereby entrenching systemic neglect.

Examinations policy also plays a role. One parent observed:

> ***Since PE has limited time on the timetable, it means that its value in the education of ECD learners is rendered minimum.***

The prioritisation of theory over practice by ZIMSEC sends the wrong message about the role of PE in child development (Edwards, 2021). Moreover, administrators' desire to improve school rankings, based exclusively on academic results, leads them to marginalise PE and other practical subjects.

PE as a site for talent development and employability

The role of PE in fostering career pathways was also highlighted. One ECD teacher observed:

> ***PE as a subject has so much to offer in life. Most athletes around the world are earning and living large.***

Parents echoed this potential, noting that many learners in Mkoba had athletic talents that were never identified or nurtured. Hollander (2017) and Burnett (2020) contend that education systems in developing countries fail to capitalise on sports as a site of opportunity. A teacher indicated in an interview that:

> ***If all the ECD educators can identify at least one learner who has a physical talent and groom him/her into a great athlete, some of the unemployment challenges… might be a thing of the past.***

Redirecting PE priorities: Towards holistic, inclusive education

There was broad agreement among respondents that redirecting PE priorities is essential for holistic development. Zabeli and Gjelaj (2020) confirm that well-implemented PE helps learners to develop confidence and a sense of autonomy in their learning. Proper PE implementation can also tackle rising childhood obesity by facilitating physical activity in a structured, enjoyable context (Vaera & Gonzalo-Calvo, 2020). Teachers who participated in the study indicated that PE has health benefirts. In other words, PE supports not just the physical, but has a hand in cognitive development as well. Physical activity increases the circulation of oxygenated blood crucial for cognitive functioning" (Chekure, 2018). This is consistent with Ozugur, Kunz, and Strata's (2020) finding that the brain consumes up to 25% of the body's total oxygen supply. Alam (2022)

highlights that deprivation of oxygen can impair cognition or even result in death, affirming the physiological importance of physical activity from an early age.

PE also fosters social cohesion and emotional resilience. A parent observed that:

> ***PE provides opportunities for ECD learners to interact, cooperate, and develop social skills in a non-academic, relaxed and enjoyable environment.***

A teacher also added:

> ***PE practical activities are key in eradicating egocentrism among ECD learners as they learn to share ideas and a common sense of belonging.***

According to the American College of Sports Medicine (2013), PE is thus therapeutic as it offers learners a means to express and regulate emotions naturally.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the implementation of PE at the ECD level in Mkoba Primary Schools is critically undermined by systemic, infrastructural, and pedagogical constraints. Firstly, the time allocated for PE within the ECD curriculum is demonstrably insufficient. Considering that young learners require prolonged and repeated engagement with physical tasks to internalise motor skills and develop kinaesthetic awareness, the current scheduling inadequately supports the developmental needs of children. The compressed time slots marginalise PE as a subject of lesser value, further perpetuating its neglect in practice.

Secondly, the absence of appropriate, child-specific facilities significantly hampers the practical delivery of PE. The majority of ECD environments in Mkoba operate without dedicated spaces for physical activities, both indoors and outdoors, and lack essential resources such as soft gymnastic equipment, child-sized mattresses, and protective surfaces. The overcrowding of classrooms and play areas exacerbates the situation, making it physically unsafe and pedagogically unproductive to conduct meaningful PE sessions. Given that ECD learners are highly energetic and depend on movement-based learning for both cognitive and physical development, these limitations have far-reaching implications on their holistic growth.

Thirdly, the current ECD PE curriculum in Zimbabwe exhibits a disproportionate emphasis on academic learning outcomes, with minimal integration of practical, play-based, and embodied pedagogies. A significant number of teachers and school leaders appear to undervalue PE, often due to misinformed perceptions that equate educational success solely with literacy and numeracy performance. This has led to a systemic deprioritisation of PE, evidenced by the reallocation of PE time slots to academic subjects and the denial of requests for physical activity resources. The research revealed that even when PE is timetabled, it is either neglected or tokenistically implemented, undermining its potential contribution to sustainable child development and well-being.

Overall, the study point to the urgent need to reframe PE not as a peripheral or auxiliary subject, but as a critical domain for nurturing physical literacy, health, emotional resilience, and social competence in early learners. Addressing these gaps will require not only curricular reform, but a broader cultural and administrative shift in how stakeholders perceive and support early years physical education.

Recommendations

In In light of the study's findings and the conclusions drawn, the following recommendations are proposed to facilitate the redirection of Physical Education (PE) curriculum priorities at the Early Childhood Development (ECD) level in Mkoba Primary Schools, thereby contributing to sustainable and inclusive education:

Reconceptualise PE curriculum priorities

- *It is imperative to reposition PE as a foundational pillar of lifelong learning by integrating health literacy, physical competence, and entrepreneurial skills into the ECD curriculum. These elements should not only support holistic child development but also lay the groundwork for sustainable education and inclusive socio-economic participation.*

Establish clear developmental mandates within the ECD curriculum
The national ECD curriculum should articulate explicit developmental jurisdictions that promote learner growth, health, and well-being. PE must be given parity with core academic subjects, supported by policy frameworks that recognise its role in fostering equitable and inclusive learning outcomes.

Increase government and institutional budgetary support

- *The Zimbabwean government, through the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, and local school administrators must allocate dedicated funding for PE infrastructure, equipment, and resource mobilisation. Special attention must be given to the ECD department, which is frequently overlooked during financial planning, thereby perpetuating inequity in resource distribution.*

Foster multi-stakeholder collaboration for PE integration

- *Strengthening partnerships among key stakeholders, such as parents, educators, local authorities, non-governmental organisations, and private sector actors, is vital. Collaborative efforts should aim to institutionalise PE across all ECD environments by enhancing community ownership, resource mobilisation, and curriculum integration.*

Invest in continuous teacher capacity building

- *Targeted professional development initiatives must be implemented to enhance teachers' pedagogical and technical competencies in delivering developmentally appropriate PE instruction. Drawing from the precedent set in Science, Technology, and Inclusive Education, government-sponsored in-service training and scholarships should be extended to PE teacher training programmes at national and international levels.*

Strategic allocation of ECD teaching personnel

ECD classes should be entrusted to vibrant, energetic, and professionally prepared educators who possess both the physical capacity and pedagogical expertise required to facilitate active, play-based learning. Systematically assigning older or less physically capable staff to ECD classrooms without considering their fitness to deliver practical components such as PE undermines the integrity of the learning experience.

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