

The teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward Physical Education as a subject in Namibian secondary schools

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Abstract

This paper reports on the teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward Physical Education as a subject in Namibian secondary schools. The paper presents the curiosity surrounding whether Physical Education to be strictly implemented within the educational curriculum at Secondary phases or not. Drawing from the newly designed Namibian curriculum policy during the covid-19 pandemic, some of the subjects were regarded valueless and Physical Education (PE) was part of that, although it has a big role to play as it enhances life-long health amongst the children. This study sought to answer the following questions: What are the perceptions of teachers towards PE as a Secondary school subject in the O-regions in Namibia? What are the attitudes of teachers regarding the inclusion of PE as a subject in Secondary schools in the O-regions in Namibia? And what are the challenges faced by PE teachers in Secondary schools in the O-regions in Namibia? The study adopted a qualitative research approach while snowballing was employed for the selection of the participants. Data was collected through telephonic interviews with selected Physical Education teachers in four regions of Namibia. These were the central northern regions of Namibia namely; Oshana region, Ohangwena region, Omusati region, and Oshikoto region (also known as the four O-regions). The data gathered were interpreted through the theoretical lens of reasoned action theory with the study's main focuses that were extracted from the interpretation to formulate conclusions and recommendations. The findings revealed that secondary school teachers perceive Physical Education as an important subject that lacks implementation and qualified teachers to teach it. The study has also revealed that majority of the teachers have positive attitudes regarding incorporating Physical Education into the secondary school curriculum during the pandemic, while a minority of teachers suggests a total removal of the subject from the curriculum at secondary level. Following this, teachers recommended that the Ministry train and employ qualified teachers to teach and incorporate multi-disciplinary subjects.

Keywords: *Physical Education, curriculum, four regions, implementation*

Introduction and background

This paper's aim was to analyse the view of the teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward PE as a school subject in the Namibian secondary school curriculum. Kyriakides et al. (2013) emphasizes that many scholars revealed that teachers have the greatest influence on learners' academic success at their schools. Arguably, the essence of education in learners enables one to show the complexities of the underlying in the educational fraternity. Crucial to this paper are the real concerns and issues affecting teaching and learning especially teachers teaching Physical Education at secondary schools. Thus, one can argue that for learners to be successful in education, there are teachers behind them. Therefore, it is safe to say that educators must

ensure that Physical Education is taught as designed in the Namibian curriculum, despite the high demands on teaching time during the Covid-19 pandemic. It appears that the pandemic brought an impact on both teaching and learning, resulting in some subjects being neglected in schools. Physical Education (PE) is one of the subjects that has received little attention in Namibian schools. Historically, numerous transformational changes happened after Namibia gained independence in 1990.

Zeichner et al. (1998) post that the new transformational curriculum was reformed based on the equity and quality of education for all. Most subjects both promotional and non-promotional were transformed to be part of the new curriculum. Although Physical

Education was an important subject in pre-independence, it was reformed as a non-promotional subject. Barboza et al. (2019) contend that Physical Education plays an important part in the development of a child as it provides cognitive development, social development, physical development, and emotional development. PE needs to be supported considering that it is the only subject in the Namibian school curriculum that has the potential to promote learners' physical development. As such, stakeholders, policymakers, and educators in education should work together to develop a support system to address the challenges that teachers face when teaching PE in schools. Physical activity is the primary outcome of lifelong education and thus, it is an important component of public health (WHO, 2019). The Namibian school curriculum is constantly evolving, putting great demands on both teachers and learners. As a result, some school subjects, particularly non-promotional subjects are neglected. Even though PE has numerous benefits for some learners, it seems that most of the learners are left out because teachers often concentrate on promotional subjects.

An overview of PE in Namibian schools

Namibia is a sporting country, with more than ten different sport codes taught in Namibian schools through Physical Education (PE). Physical Education is a school subject that is included in the school curricula that were specifically designed to develop body fitness (Kanamy, 2017; Johnson, 2016). Historically, at the end of the 18th century, religious leaders who were responsible for the well-being of the local communities introduced PE in Namibia for leisure activities (Fredrick, 2010). As a result, local communities were taught to be self-sufficient in games like netball, and football (Stergiadis, 2014). Besides that, field sports such as hockey, rugby, tennis, soccer, netball, athletics, golf, and cricket were only taught in Namibian German language schools (Namibia Athletics Federation, 2015). It appears that the majority of teachers were untrained and uncommitted to teaching PE, which is the beginning of the subject's neglect. The number of PE specialists teaching in schools is minimal hence, the majority at the primary level do not implement PE lessons as

designed in the educational curricula (van Deventer, 2011). Furthermore, PE was identified as one of the important subjects to be included during the reform of new curricula by the National Curriculum for Basic Education in 2015 (Nghihalwa, 2018).

Drawing from and interrogating the Namibian curriculum policy on the current situation, some of the subjects are being neglected. Physical Education is one of the subjects that received little attention in Namibian schools. Although there is less time allocated to PE on the timetable, some teachers proposed removing Physical Education from the curriculum or reducing the amount of time allocated to it. van Deventer (2011) asserts that even though PE is part of the school curriculum, some teachers teach promotional subjects during the PE period, claiming that PE is not an "exam" subject. However, PE, in general, should not be viewed as merely a tool for sports but for all educational purposes that form parts of learners learning. The situation of PE in Namibia is ubiquitous to the rest of African countries. Kela (2016) states that the shortage of qualified teachers to teach PE is a current issue in Namibia. Most Namibian schools lack the necessary equipment for PE teachers, and as a result, the subject has a low educational status. Most educators appear to be oblivious to the importance of this subject, so little time is allotted and the curriculum does not accommodate the diverse interests of Namibian learners. As a result, teachers in Namibian schools are forced to teach subjects in which they have no interest, and learners are sent outside to play (Hango, 2012). The current situation among teachers is a lack of knowledge, grounding and implementation of PE in Namibian schools.

Chatoupis (2018) notes that PE is a stepping-stone subject that provides a future for the learners in career sports. This means that PE without a strong foundation at the primary and secondary school level, the future of learners with PE might be compromised at school. However, there are numerous challenges associated with the implementation of PE in Namibian schools. For example, lack of responsibility and accountability for program implementation, a loss of time to other competitive school subjects, a lack of subject evaluations, and a shortage of qualified

trained personnel. Teachers must implement the curriculum that was designed by the Ministry of Education so that learners achieve the learning goals, however, many Namibian teachers seemed to fail the implementation. Additionally, some teachers feel that the curricular innovation undervalues the learner's recognition and role in PE as a subject. What remains to be seen is what may be done to improve the PE current state of affairs in Namibian schools?

The importance of PE to learners

The physical and psychosocial well-being of learners are largely determined by the PE activities taught in school (Cronin et al., 2018). PE is the only subject in the Namibian curriculum that is dedicated to the physical development of children. PE, according to Hardman (2016), improves heart blood circulation, stimulates muscles, and bone development. Furthermore, when learners engage in physical activities, they have the opportunity to be taught the fundamentals of living a healthy lifestyle. Although PE contributes to the development of self-esteem in learners through appreciation and enjoyment, it appears that some Namibian teachers are still incognizant of PE in schools.

Furthermore, consistent participation of students in physical activity may assist in the creation of a positive conducive environment at school while also instilling discipline in them. Most learners from disadvantaged backgrounds may benefit from having access to physical equipment, which may improve their performance in other subjects. The majority of skills are identified from the learners through Physical Education. Mboma and Masilinga, for example, are two Namibian athletes who were identified via their engagement in Physical Education as sports such as athletics (Kenya, 2021). Moreover, Masilinga and Mboma continued to set world records while at school and represented Namibia at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics (Kenya, 2021). The two athletes' achievements may motivate other Namibian youngsters to participate in Physical Education at the primary school level and to view athletics as one of the greatest sports. PE may assist learners in avoiding alcohol and drug abuse since most learners are involved in activities

that boost their moral development (Stergiadis, 2014). Besides that, children need the opportunity to learn to live active lifestyles both inside and outside of the school premises. PE classes should be held regularly in all Namibian schools to provide opportunities for learners to appreciate their social environment during the learning process. As such, most learners would be given the mandate to participate in their desired physical activities such as soccer, athletics, tennis and rugby. Taukeni (2015) asserts that although Physical Education relates to how the body operates, it also comprehends the content for both PE and other exam subjects.

Physical Education activates the learner's skills to receive information aligned with the curriculum, providing ample opportunities for the learner to actively engage and connect their prior experiences with new skills. In addition, a well-organised education creates a diverse educational system that includes domains like cognitive, physical, social, and ethical development. The purpose of the Physical Education curriculum is to educate learners who will contribute to society's growth through an understanding of and involvement in a variety of sports codes that may provide them with a livelihood. This may allow learners to enhance at striking a balance between studying and relaxing through PE. It is safe to say that schools have, for example, different sport codes, spiritual, and cultural activities, therefore, policymakers and teachers should see PE as an investment in the learner's future.

Theoretical framework

The central term in this paper, which serves as the theoretical buffer for the study is the theory of reasoned action (1975), which has been defined by deep thinkers. Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen developed the theory of reasoned action, which focuses on human attitudes and behaviours (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). According to Kiera (2009), the theory of reasoned action assumes that our attitudes arise from our perspectives, which result in our intentions and behaviours. Additionally, the theory's objective is to define desired behaviours. The description is made in such a way that it does not imply a diverse range of behaviours, such as those that are impulsive,

customary, and spontaneous, the outcome of or simply scripted or unthinking (Dillard & Shen, 2002).

Moreover, our perceptions are formed by our perspectives on truth. Mental images are formed by the way we perceive things from our vantage points; they shape our attitude toward everything we do. It is the foundation of what we truly believe is critical; intimate relationships are typically formed, and as a result, morals and standards are established. Daniel (2011) explains that our work code of behaviour and ethics, assisting us in regulating our levels of satisfaction. By applying the theory of reasoned action, a framework for the current study was established, allowing for the collection of comprehensive data and an understanding of the intentions and actions elicited by teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward Physical Education as a subject in Namibian schools. In the behaviour of reasoned action theory, a person who has strong control over specific ideas will translate those beliefs into a strong desire to perform that behaviour (Rammule, 2009). In this study, it is hypothesized that teachers who hold a particular idea or view about Physical Education as a subject will most likely communicate, speak, or even impart that belief or view to their learners or colleagues.

Research questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of teachers towards PE as a Secondary school subject in the O-regions in Namibia?
2. What are the attitudes of teachers regarding the inclusion of PE as a subject in Secondary schools in the O-regions in Namibia?
3. What are the challenges faced by PE teachers in Secondary schools in the O-regions in Namibia?

Methodology

This study was qualitative which focuses on understanding social experiences and interpretations by people or groups (Creswell, 2009; Bhatacherjee, 2012). This study used a qualitative technique to describe, interpret, and explore teachers' perceptions of PE and its

integration into the Namibian curriculum. In this study, the qualitative approach allows researchers to explore and understand PE teachers' perspectives on the compulsory implementation of PE into the school curriculum. The sample comprised 57 randomly selected participants from Namibian secondary schools in the Ohangwena, Omusati, Oshikoto, and Oshana regions (also known as four O-regions). The 45 qualified Namibian teachers teach Physical Education with other subjects on the school curriculum in the township and rural schools in the northern part of Namibia participated in the study. All participants received theoretical and practical training in education and participated in ongoing professional development and curriculum implementation training offered by the regional department of education. Participants have an average of 14 years of teaching experience.

In addition, 11 PE teachers were interviewed in each of Namibia's four O-regions. The interviews were conducted via telephone using a purposively selected sample of 57 participants that is 29 males and 28 female participants from the list provided by the selected school principals. The regional education departments and principals of all four schools granted permission to conduct this study. Ethical considerations of participants such as protection from injury, the right to confidentiality, consent from the participants, respect and withdrawal were all adhered to in this study (Maree, 2016). Equally, the paper also lied on both documents and content analysis that were obtained from the schools. The paper contributes significantly to the sparse literature on PE teachers and could be utilised as a strategic tool to motivate teachers, especially those willing to become PE teachers.

Procedures

Appointments with all of the selected participants who were easily accessible by phone were made before the telephone interviews. The interviews lasted approximately twenty minutes. Throughout the interviews, the researchers took detailed notes on the responses supplied by the respondents to probe further, and audio recordings were made to verify the interviews' veracity.

Data analysis

An inductive content analysis was utilised to elicit emergent themes from the data. To ensure familiarity with the data and what is included, an iterative and recursive coding technique was used. The data analysis procedure was as follows; firstly, the recordings were listened to several times before transcription, and then the transcribed data were read. Secondly, transcription errors were identified and corrected during the data analysis procedure. Throughout this data analysis, the descriptive comments were highlighted and underlined in the margins. Due to the qualitative nature of the study, data from the interviews were manually categorised and then developed into themes that addressed the study objectives.

Findings and discussion

The study interviewed 45 PE teachers from government secondary schools in the Oshana,

Ohangwena, Omusati, and Oshikoto regions. All the teachers interviewed had teaching qualifications. 11 teachers in the Ohangwena region hold a four-year Bachelor's degree in education, 6 of them are males and five of them are females. 7 male teachers from the Oshana region hold a four-year Bachelor's degree in education, while 4 female teachers hold a B. ED honours degree in education. Furthermore, the researchers interviewed 12 teachers from the Omusati region; 3 male teachers hold Bachelor's degrees in education, 5 female teachers hold B. ED honours degrees in education, and 3 male teachers and 1 female teacher hold Master's degrees in education. In the Oshikoto region, 5 female teachers hold a Bachelor's degree in education, 5 male teachers hold a B. ED honours degree in education, and 1 female teacher has a Master's degree in education. The following figures have reference:

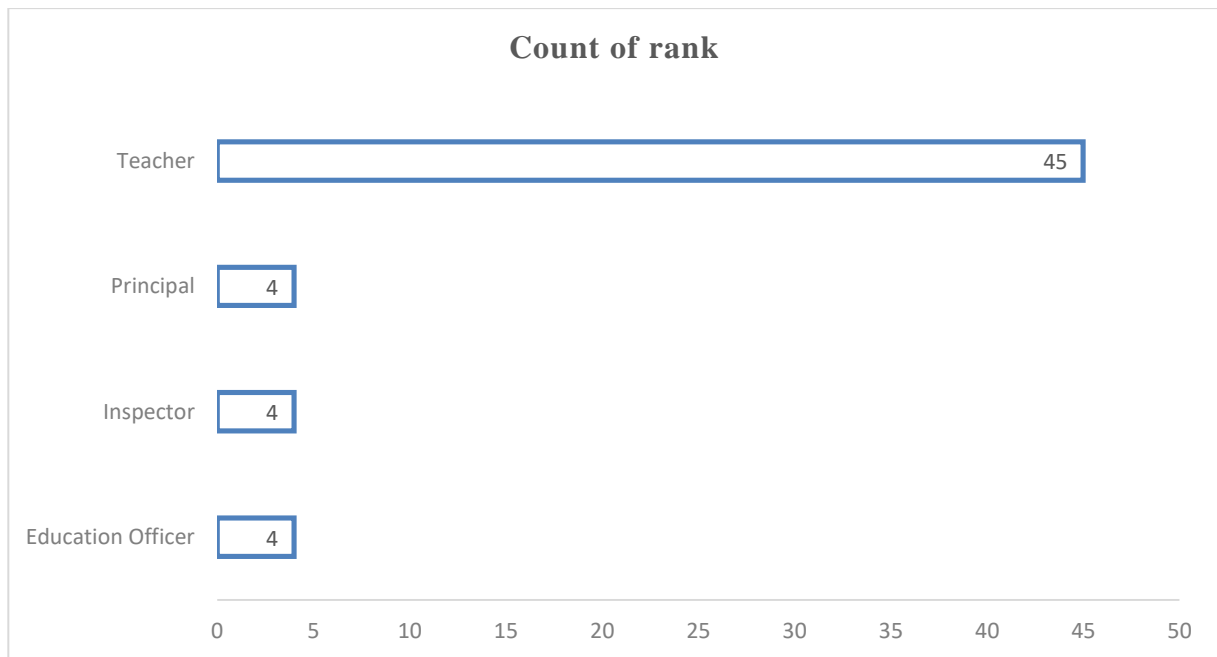


Figure 1: Depicts the rank of the interviewees

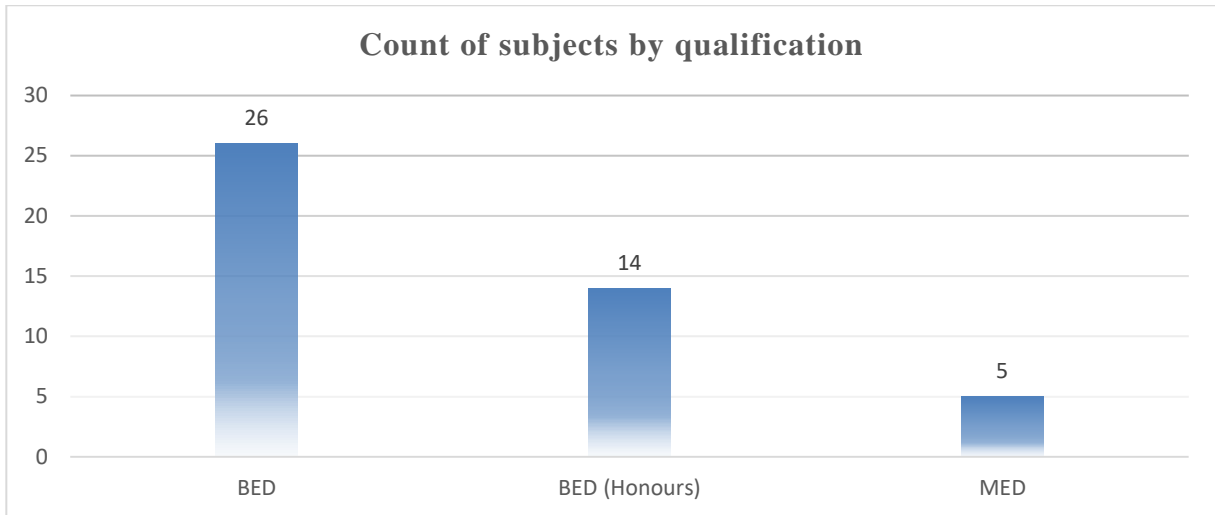


Figure 2: The qualifications of the teachers

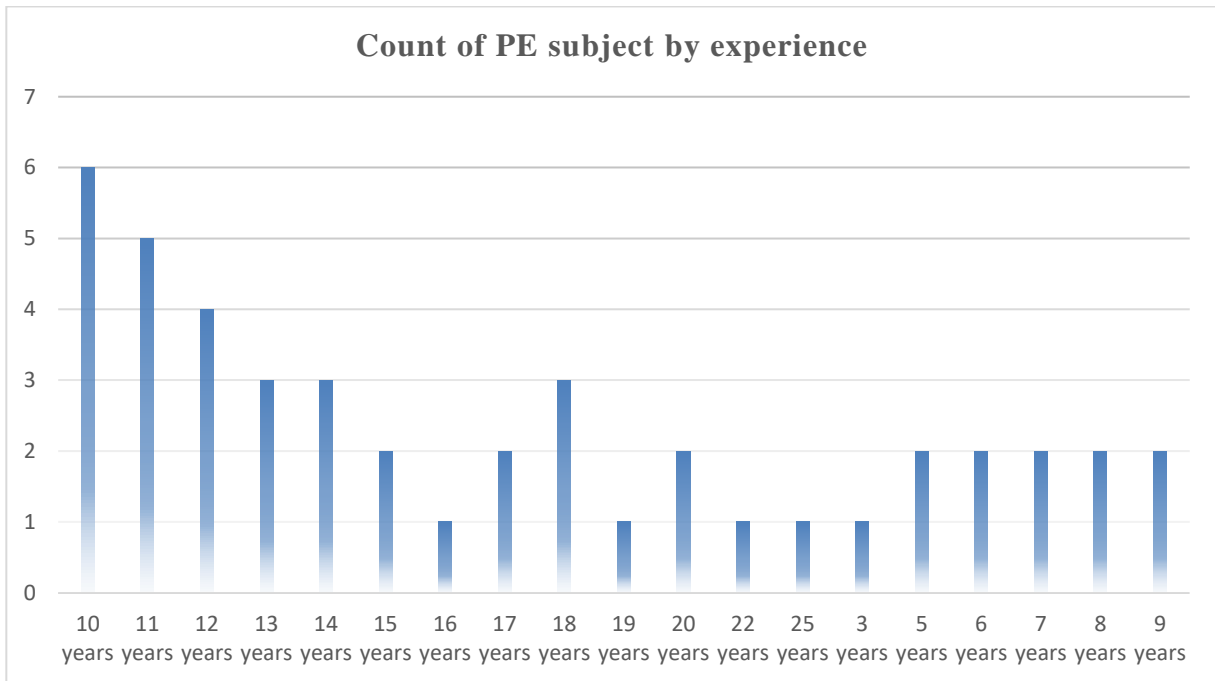


Figure 3: Number of PE individuals classified by experience

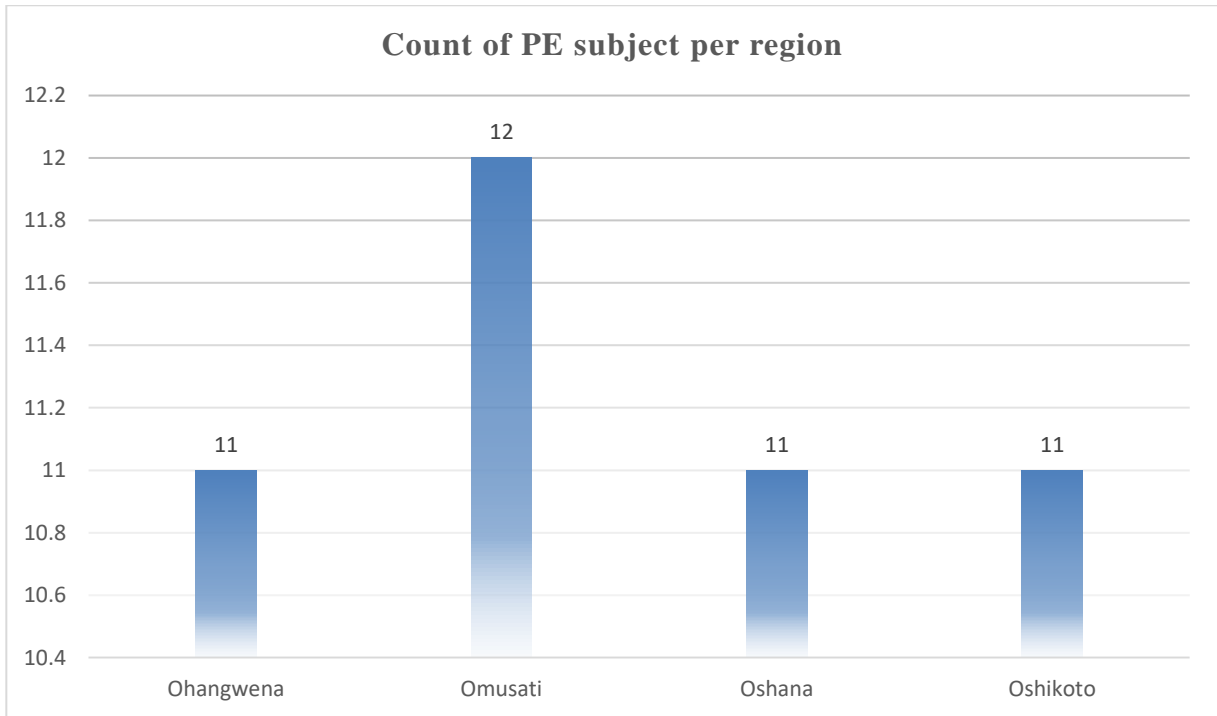


Figure 4: The count of PE per region



Figure 5: Experience numbers by gender

Figure 1 depicts the rank of the interviewees. It demonstrates that the majority of participants (45) were teachers. The qualifications of the teachers are represented in Figure 2; All PE teachers in the four O-regions appear to have a

teaching qualification either a four-year Bachelor's degree in education, a B. ED honours degree in education, or a Master's degree in education. This qualifies them to teach in government schools. Figure 3

illustrates the number of PE individuals classified by experience. All the teachers who were interviewed have at least ten years of teaching experience, with only a few having less than ten years. The count of PE per region is depicted in Figure 4 in which Omusati had the most PE teachers (12), followed by Oshana, Ohangwena, and Oshikoto, which each had 11 PE teachers. Figure 5 depicts experience numbers by gender. There were significantly more experienced male PE teachers (23) than female PE teachers (22) in the regions where the study was carried out.

Furthermore, individual-level factors towards the perceptions and attitudes to PE as a subject were identified amongst some teachers. The transcribed data obtained from the respondents gave contextual knowledge that at times spanned numerous topics. The results are given in the following sections including actual quotations from teachers that were selected to illustrate the data's prevalent headings.

Teachers' perspective towards Physical Education

Only 30 teachers of the 45 respondents from the four regions were ineligible to teach PE (9 from Oshana; Omusati 5; Ohangwena 8, Oshikoto 8 respectively). Respondents who are now teaching PE confirmed that they hold a Bachelor of Education degree from the University of Namibia, both of which are unrelated to PE. Only 10 male teachers and 5 female teachers with PE qualifications were obtained from the University of Namibia. However, the aforementioned teachers were not allocated PE to teach since they were given promotional subjects to teach. This was evident when the 15 teachers combined responses from the four regions remarked that:

“PE at our schools are given to teachers with fewer lessons on the timetable and not according to qualifications or subject (majors). Qualified teachers have better self-esteem, a high degree of competence, and are motivated to be a task with learners since they are oriented by their previous knowledge. However, we were not given this opportunity by the principals to do what we qualified for”.

Even the school principals acknowledged that promotional teachers were scarce, leaving the school with little choice except to deploy PE teachers into promotional subjects. In addition, four of the circuit Inspectors from all four regions stated that there were only a few advisory teachers that provided in-service training to PE teachers. However, three advisory teachers from Ohangwena, Oshana, and Omusati indicated that workshops and training for PE teachers were completed in previous years, so all that was needed now was for the teachers to put all of the pieces together and go forward. Contrary to that, 20 participants from all four regions responded that the PE subject was omitted from the timetable owing to Covid-19 restrictions. Furthermore, four teachers from the Oshana region argued that:

“PE subject was withdrawn from the timetable to most of the schools even before the Covid-19 epidemic when the curriculum was transformed. Those in the authority must not use Covid-19 as a scapegoat.”

Teachers' understanding of Physical Education

40 of the teachers interviewed appeared to have knowledge and understanding of PE; however, there was one teacher who appeared to know little about PE. Although most of the participants understood and knew PE, four participants from all four regions with the opinion that PE is removed from the curriculum and substituted with promotional subjects. They believed that if PE was incorporated into the curriculum, both learners and teachers would find it tedious to learn and teach. Then, 8 teachers together from Oshikoto and Ohangwena made the following comments:

“It is time-wasting and teacher's energy to teach PE as most learners hate to take it since it is a non-promotional subject. The subject does not contribute anything important at secondary schools as most learners are shy to participate in PE activities citing that they are grown up. It will be in the best interest if PE can be taught at grade 4-7 only where talents learners are”.

On the contrary, 15 teachers from the four regions argued that Physical Education should be taught in schools as a subject. They noted that physical activity provides a variety of health benefits and also helps learners perform better academically. The teachers remarked that:

“PE subject should be taught at school as it can improve learner’s consciousness. It is an important subject as some learners might want to continue with PE at the high institution of learning or even take it up as a career that offers employment. Children need to learn the skills and shape them”.

It is worth mentioning that some of the participants agreed that PE was a subject that teaches learners to be physically and mentally healthy. Although PE is a non-promotional subject, most of the participants stated that its key aims were to include components of physical fitness, physical literacy, and sports activities. Furthermore, 5 participants from Oshikoto and Omusati regions stated that PE positively contributes to healthy living among learners. Some of their comments were as follows:

“PE deals with physical fitness, gymnastics and many sports to enhance physical fitness. When I teach traditional dance, for example, I usually approach some members of the community to come and demonstrate to my learners. I do that to encourage learners to cultivate a love for PE as it teaches them to be physically active”.

Teacher’s views on PE at secondary school levels

During the interviews, teachers were asked if PE should be included in the secondary school curriculum. 35 teachers from the four regions revealed that PE should be included in the secondary school curriculum. The teachers provided different explanations; including that PE dealt with contact sports and that it might assist learners who did not perform well academically sought professions in athletics. PE teachers who taught for a long time said

that the subject helped learners to realize the importance of physical fitness and enabled them to live healthy lifestyles. 3 teachers from Ohangwena regions strongly support PE at the secondary school level notated that:

“PE provides a springboard to the future careers of learners in sports. PE alters learners’ attitudes to think positively thus promoting a sense of discipline through sportsmanship. It is also significant to the curriculum at the secondary level as it enhances some learners discover their careers in the sport that may give them bright future for example as seen in Mboma and Masilingi. In addition, PE may improve the learners’ academic performance in the class”.

Most teachers agreed that most secondary school learners lacked discipline and that they would gain discipline through PE. Furthermore, it is worth emphasizing that the advantages that PE provides to the lives of learners could not be underestimated. However, the study discovered that, even though PE should be incorporated into the school curriculum, most teachers did not promote this practice, especially when the promotional subjects were too demanding. 25 teachers stated that this was a bad practice since all subjects were given equal time on the timetable and were equally essential. The teachers also stated that the practice might have an impact on learners who wished to learn professions sports. 2 teachers from Oshikoto strongly condemned the practice stated that:

“This is a habit that has grown ingrained in teachers’ minds and must be eradicated. This is mostly due to the notion that support subjects are irrelevant since they do not appear on the Exit Grades certificates. This, however, is not the case. PE must be handled with the same respect as any other subject since it helps significantly to the holistic upbringing of children, which supports them in their other subjects. This also occurs in most situations because school administration does not care to monitor the success of teachers in support

subjects, including PE; once teachers recognize this flaw in school administration, they tend to exploit it”

On the other hand, 10 teachers from all four regions feel that, while the practice was wrong, they had the little option since teachers were not motivated to teach PE and the intense pressure from promotional subjects might be overwhelming at times, particularly during the Covid-19 epidemic. Teachers also stated that they were forced to focus on promotional subjects owing to a lack of training, equipment, and facilities in schools. 10 teachers from all four regions remarked that:

“Because teachers have little training in PE, it is difficult for them to teach the subject that they do not comprehend. Another issue that discourages instructors from participating in the subject is a lack of facilities”.

The challenges faced by PE teachers at secondary schools

Teachers from all four regions encounter a variety of problems when it comes to PE. 40 teachers noted one of the difficulties they were faced with was a shortage of competent PE teachers in secondary schools. It was also observed that some learners did not like participating in PE, reasoning that PE was intended for those who performed badly academically. The study also found that most teachers preferred to ignore PE. Those who were attempting to overcome the obstacles stated that they utilized school regulations to enforce discipline on learners who might not want to engage in Physical Education courses. 4 teachers from every four regions provided the following:

“One of the most significant challenges is the unavailability of resources at schools. Because of the poor reputation of the subject, the school administration is hesitant to invest in PE resources. Another prevalent issue is a lack of training. Teaching PE without any sort of training is difficult since some of the content may be unfamiliar to the teacher. Learners are not always sufficiently motivated to take the subject seriously.”

The sentiments of one teacher from Omusati were also worth noting:

“One of the most difficult issues I have found is that few teachers attend PE sessions. This problem is exacerbated by a lack of skills to teach Physical Education. Teachers must be informed that Physical Education is more than simply soccer and netball and that it should encompass all facets of the sport”.

Teachers were asked to explain how the Covid-19 epidemic affected their PE classes. PE subject seems to have suffered greatly as a result of covid-19. PE sessions were completely halted due to the covid-19 requirements of social distancing and the ban of physical sports. PE was also substituted with promotional subjects to consolidate the less time that was allocated for promotional subjects. Furthermore, one of the problems found in this study was a lack of Ministry support for PE. Although the Ministry provided schools with Universal Secondary Education Grants (USE), the four principals from the four regions interviewed stated that the Ministry did not supply schools with equipment for PE, however, the principals acknowledge following the guidance given by the line Ministry to purchase equipment with the school funds allocated to the schools. This was a big issue with PE curriculum implementation.

Conclusion

The aim of the study was to explore teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward PE as a school subject in the Namibian secondary school curriculum. Responses from the interviews revealed that participants from all four regions perceive PE as an important subject. Many issues experienced by Namibian PE teachers in the four O-regions were lack of support for PE as a subject at school and wrong placements of teachers with PE qualifications to teach other subjects. Furthermore, the study revealed that PE teachers were eager to implement the curriculum; nevertheless, due to the subject's reputation, the school administration is hesitant to invest in PE resources. Participants from the four O-regions also voiced concerns and frustration with the lack of support from the

subject advisory of both township schools and rural schools.

Moreover, this study recommends that PE should be treated as a subject with prestigious status together with other promotional subjects in government schools. PE provides essential benefits for many areas of learner's health, development, psychological well-being and social skills. As a result, physical activity can build a solid foundation for lifetime healthy habits for learners. The study also recommends that schools should allocate PE to teachers who specialised in Physical Education. In doing so, this will not only benefit the learners in acquiring the right sport skills, but also allow teachers to practice what they have learned during their trainings. This also kept these teachers updated with the new developments in the subject area unlike whereby the PE being given to any teacher whose timetable which is not full just to complete the lessons as stipulated in the National Curriculum for Basic Education.

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